

WHEN THE KING COMES

OR

PROPHECY IN PARABLES

A SERIES OF STUDIES FROM
THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

BY

ARCHIE PAYNE

Author of "FOOTSTEPS OF THE MASTER," "WISE MEN'S GIFTS,"
"BETHANY ABOVE"



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CHAPTER I.

CHRIST THE PROPHET

IN the manifold ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ we oftentimes overlook the important position which He occupies as Prophet. His Kingly office is the predominant theme of the Old Testament Scriptures, and the future glories surrounding that office are defined by the inspired writers of those pages.

As a Royal Priest “after the order of Melchizedec,” we may also trace His footsteps and rejoice as we meditate upon His abounding grace, finding sweet comfort to our hearts in His never-failing compassions. But it was not only Kingship and Priesthood that were to be combined in one glorious personality; in Him was to be the sum total of all offices delegated by God to man. As King He shall exercise authority and all shall bow beneath His righteous rule; as Priest He mediates between God and man, in Himself meeting all the claims of God, and satisfying all the needs of man. Added to these He is the incarnate Spirit of Prophecy, the Living WORD OF GOD, and so, in His own person, PROPHET, PRIEST and KING.

That this is no strange office is evident, for the Apostle Peter tells us that, though human lips delivered the message of the Old Testament prophets, it

Christ the Prophet

was in reality "The Spirit of Christ which was in them" which "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Peter i. 11).

But that He was not always to remain the unseen Spokesman for God is also evident, for Moses, the first of the great Prophets, foretells the coming of Messiah in these words : "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken" (Deut. xviii. 15-19).

The prophetic office is twofold in its object. Primarily, the thought is that the prophet is God's man, and as such speaks words to the people which they could not bear coming direct from the mouth of Jehovah (Deut. xviii. 16-18). He is in the secret of the Lord, and comes forth to the people charged with the Word of the Lord. The secondary thought flows from that position. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God" (Deut. xxix. 29), and only by direct revelation from Him can we know what lies hidden behind the veil of futurity, whilst it is through the prophet that we receive, as a gift, the sure knowledge of the secret things which belong unto the Lord our God. The prophets lift for us the darkness caused by sin, and reveal, as clearly seen, living realities, the eternal purposes of God in the sufferings of Christ, and the Glory overshadowing all in triumphant victory. We do not need the vision of the prophet to envisage the black horror of sin, or the deadly conflict waged around us by Satan, but, for the comfort and assurance of the lonely warrior, the vision

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is given, and we see a victorious Lord—the defiant Satan utterly defeated—and a perfectly fulfilled will of God “on earth as it is in Heaven.”

A careful examination of the Old Testament prophecies will prepare us for the coming of Christ Jesus as the King of the Jews. Around that great central fact is clustered nearly all prophetic vision. The ministry of each succeeding prophet brought increasing clearness of knowledge concerning that glorious era when the kingdom of darkness should be overthrown, and the glorious Kingdom of God and His Christ should stand unquestioned and supreme from Zion to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Hence it was no strange thought that thrilled the hearts of the hearers when John Baptist raised his voice in the wilderness and cried, “Repent ye : for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,” nor, as a Kingdom implies a King, when he adds, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight” (Matt. iii. 2-3). As a babe in a lowly manger Christ was born “King of the Jews” (Matt. ii. 2), and now, heralded by John Baptist, the King stands ready to receive His Kingdom. As the promised Messiah He acts as King in His first visit to the Temple (John ii. 13-17), safeguarding the glory of His Father God, the significance of which was recognised by the Jewish rulers. As the King He declares the laws of His Kingdom in the “Sermon on the Mount,” so emphasizing the claims of God upon His people. As the King He acts the shepherd part towards Israel, bringing glad tidings to the poor, healing the broken-hearted, delivering the captives of Satan, opening the

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eyes of the blind, and unbarring the door of mercy to those who had been rebellious. A glorious ministry indeed is the Kingly ministry of Jesus Christ. Unhindered, it might have stretched unbroken through the scenes of Millennial glory unto the day “when He (Christ) shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father, when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power” (1 Cor. xv. 24). But here the deadly hatred of Satan is encountered, and, with ready tools to his hand, he raises a spirit of determined opposition, the first climax of which is recorded in Matt. xii., where the kingly claim of Christ, supported by the mighty power of God, is met by the definite opposition of the Jewish Elders. Their first action is to take counsel how they may best destroy Him, and from that council they proceed to undermine His power with the people by attributing His miraculous power to the indwelling of Beelzebub—the most loathsome and terrible of Satanic names.* At this point (Matt. xiii.) a marked change is seen in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. The Kingly office merges into the Prophetic office, and His gaze now lifts the veil and shows a King indeed, but crowned with thorns, and with a shameful cross for a throne, and a kingdom rejected by the very ones who should have received Him gladly. In the full exercise of that office He takes up the same lofty strain which had

* BEELZEBUB lit. BAAL-ZEBUB.—“The Lord of the Flies.” In all Eastern lands the fly is popularly supposed to breed direct from filth. The terrible torment caused by them to man and beast had suggested also a link with the Devil. The horrible inference of the words spoken by the rulers is plain, imputing, as it does, uncleanness as the life source of Christ, as well as devilish cruelty in His ministry.

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occupied the prophets before Him—"The Kingdom of Heaven." In one Whose slightest action is full of significance, it is interesting to note that at this very stage it is recorded that "the same day went Jesus out of the house" (Matt. xiii. 1), an action symbolising the effect of His rejection. And they who would hear His word followed where He led.

At the very opening of His prophetic ministry He uses a new vehicle to convey the spoken Word of God. It is true that Old Testament prophets had used parable and illustration to point their message, but never as it is used by the Lord Jesus. Each parable is an artistic gem, perfect in every detail, and so arranged as to produce a two-fold effect upon the hearers. To the unbeliever it was "A Mystery"—a dark saying (Matt. xiii. 13-15), but to those who were in the counsels of their Lord, they were, and are, direct revelations of the purposes of God which before had been hidden, or dark (Matt. xiii. 35).

From the Old Testament prophets we hear of the Kingdom and its glories, but nothing was known of a Kingdom postponed and a King in rejection. These events form a hiatus in the story of the prophets.

Parallel with this "Mystery," but never crossing its line, commencing later and concluding its earthly history sooner, runs "The Mystery" revealed by the Holy Spirit to Paul the Apostle, of "The Church of God." If we would have a correct conception of the purposes of God, we must keep our minds clear as to the line of cleavage between these two great Mysteries. The first relates to the King—His Kingdom, rejection and final glory, and is earthly in its setting;

Christ the Prophet

the second relates to a Christ in rejection, His present possession and inheritance in the saints, and the Eternal Glory which He shares with them, His Bride—a heavenly picture of a heavenly people. If this is clearly realised we shall not turn to the prophets, or to the parables, for light concerning the Church and her destiny, but to the Epistles, in which the Apostle Paul, by the Spirit, has made known to us that Mystery. For light concerning the Kingdom we naturally turn to the prophets, and for the special period covered by the rejection of the Kingdom, to the prophetic parables of the greatest of Prophets—Jesus Christ our Lord.

CHAPTER II.

MESSAGE OF THE GOSPELS

BEFORE entering upon a detailed study of the prophetic parables it will be helpful if we consider briefly the relationship which evidently exists between the Gospels and the Parables they contain.

It will be clearly seen that the parabolic teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ may be divided into two distinct classes—those which are directly prophetic, and a secondary class which has a spiritual or moral basis bearing upon the laws of the Kingdom. As noteworthy examples of the latter we may notice “The good Samaritan” and “The prodigal son”; but as these do not come within the range of our present study it will be sufficient to note their relative position in the Gospels.

The Harmony of the Gospels

The four Gospels are designed by the Holy Spirit to give us a perfect record of the ministry of Jesus Christ. Their very differences are all designed to produce, in perfect balance, the wondrous glories of “the Man Christ Jesus.” As in the process of colour printing, a perfect reproduction of a landscape, with all its varying colour shades, is produced by three or

Message of the Gospels

more prints, each differing from the other in outline and colour, and only reaching the desired effect when in perfect register and viewed as one, so we only receive the perfect impression from the spiritual portrait of Jesus Christ as we balance the likenesses and differences of the four Gospels into one mental picture.

In Matthew's Gospel the form of the King is seen dominating all other thought. Everywhere and in each action we see the King acting in Kingdom relationship to Israel. The Wise Men bring their homage and gifts to the young child who is "born King of the Jews." As "King of the Jews" He stands before Pilate, and as "King of the Jews" He is proclaimed on Calvary's Hill.

In Mark's Gospel we witness in all its beauty "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ Who though He was rich, yet for your sakes became poor" (2 Cor. viii. 9). He passes through the picture drawn by Mark as the perfect Servant, bowing His neck to the yoke of service, and moving slowly but surely to the altar of sacrifice—a story intensely powerful in its pathos.

Luke, the only Gentile writer, widens out the picture, forging a link, not with Israel alone, but with the whole race of man. In beginning he goes back far beyond "The Son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. i. 1), and rests not until he reaches the earliest foundations, "which was of Adam, which was of God" (Luke iii. 38). The outstanding impression left upon the mind is that of "the last Adam"—the Executor of God in perfection.

Message of the Gospels

Into the record of John is woven the heavenly blue of the divine origin and being of Christ. God incarnate, that most wonderful of all mysteries, is the outstanding topic of John's Gospel, a fitting seal to the message and the Messenger Who is the Word of God, and as such the only Revealer of God to mankind.

So we see, focussed into a perfect composite picture, Christ the King, yet the Servant of Jehovah; the Man of Sorrows hastening to the place of sacrifice, yet always and for ever the Son of God ineffable and glorious.

In accordance with the character of these Gospels we might expect to find, as we do, a startling difference between their records of the ministry of Jesus Christ. Matthew gives us the King and the Kingdom, and all the prophetic parables are found here. In Mark and Luke a selection only of prophetic parables is found, but a very prominent place is given to the parables of spiritual or moral teaching. In John the veil is taken away, and no parable, or "dark saying," is discovered. Instead, "we behold His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John i. 14).

Noting these facts, for the study of prophecy in parables, we may concentrate our thoughts upon Matthew's Gospel, remembering, as a fixed rule, that in the interpretation of parable or prophecy we must never allow an inference from the one or the other to contradict the plain declarations of Church doctrine, i.e., the Pauline Epistles, which are, for this age, the key to the mysteries of God. The importance of this rule we shall see as we pass onward.

Message of the Gospels

The Three Prophetic Periods

Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of the parables we might notice the curious fact that all the parabolic prophecies of Jesus Christ are divided into three clearly-marked periods. The first (Matt. xiii.) was the immediate result of the first council of the rulers to destroy Him, and contains a complete set of seven parables, giving an outline sketch of the Kingdom from its inception to "the end of the Age." The second (Matt. xxi. and xxii.) is also associated with a determined rejection by the rulers, and contains two intensely interesting parables covering the period of the rejection. The final period (Matt. xxiv. and xxv.) is introduced by the Lord's lament over Jerusalem. Only a few hours would elapse before that city would be stained by the greatest crime the world will ever know, and the shadow of the Cross would lay heavily across its history, and the black threatenings of the wrath of an outraged God.

Under the pressure of those pregnant moments the final prophetic period is reached, which contains four parables covering the period of the end of the Age—the whole message forming a profoundly important link between Daniel's vision of the Old Testament and the Revelation of Jesus Christ given to John in the closing of the New Testament.

CHAPTER III.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

- A { Topic . . THE KINGDOM PROPAGATED.
Parable . THE SOWER.
- B { Topic . . THE KINGDOM DEFILED.
Parable . THE TARES, MUSTARD SEED AND LEAVEN
- C { Topic . . THE KINGDOM IN MYSTERY.
Parable . THE HID TREASURE AND PEARL.
- D { Topic . . THE END OF THE AGE.
Parable . THE DRAG NET.

The above analysis will give us the scope of the prophecy, and show its essential unity, each parable forming a part of the whole, and being necessary to its cohesion. To the first and second parables is added the key, the Lord thus clearly marking the process of interpretation.

We notice first that the great topic of the prophecy is "The Kingdom of Heaven," and the first essential to the clear understanding of the prophecy is that we apprehend what is meant by that phrase.

By many this title is applied to the Church of God, by others it is applied to Christendom, and by yet others it is used still more loosely as symbolising the Gospel of the Grace of God. But no one of these applications will completely solve the problem, each failing at one or more points when tested.

We need here to make a distinction between the

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use of the parables as illustrations, and the interpretation of them as prophecy. As an illustration to point either the Gospel message or a moral teaching it is not necessary that every point should fit, but, as a prophecy, every detail is needful to a right interpretation.

What then is "the Kingdom of Heaven"? As we have seen, the Old Testament is full of reference to it. From David's day especially, the promises continually expand toward the fruition of a glorious Kingdom which shall have no end. In the darkest days of Israel's history it was the hope and song of the Godly remnant, and their vision continually leapt forward to the day when the Rod of Jesse should appear, into whose capable hands should be placed the sceptre of God, and Who should impose the rule of God from Zion to the ends of the earth. The whole prophetic scheme is dominated by the figure of the Messiah, the bringer not only of righteousness, but of universal peace.

The Kingdom is, without a shadow of doubt, the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ—the scene of His earthly rule and dominion, a period culminating in what is generally known as the Millennium.

The prophetic Scriptures of both Old and New Testaments are alike emphatic that that Kingdom radiates from Jerusalem as its centre, and Israel as a people. Outward it spreads to the ends of the earth, until at last the consummation is reached in the answered prayer of Matt. vi. 9-10 : God's Kingdom come, and His will done in earth as it is in Heaven.

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It is surely an unwarrantable wresting of the Scriptures to seek to present the Church of Christendom as "the Kingdom of Heaven." At no part of the Church's history is Christ spoken of as her King. He is spoken of as her Bridegroom, as Head of the body, as her Saviour and Lord. As the Church was a "secret," hidden in God, until after the final rejection of the Holy Spirit, manifested by the stoning of the martyr Stephen, and was unknown until revealed by the same Spirit through the Apostle Paul, whilst the Kingdom is the plain revelation of all the prophetic Scriptures, it should be impossible to confuse their histories and destinies.

The common thought which confuses the Kingdom with Christendom is even more unwarrantable, for it is utterly impossible to produce any evidence that Christendom, or the nations of the earth which compose that mysterious body, have ever received, or expressed any desire to receive, Christ as King. On the contrary, Scripture clearly describes Christendom as a system utterly opposed to God and His Christ, and already doomed to awful destruction.

To turn from these far-fetched theories to the plain simple answer of the Word is a relief. The Kingdom of Heaven is that which was covenanted by God to David and confirmed to Jesus Christ, the King of the Jews. In spite of all the ragings and evil devices of the kings of earth and the rulers, there will yet dawn the glorious day when Jehovah "shall speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure," for, says He, "Yet have I set My King upon My Holy Hill of Zion" (Psalm ii. 5-6).

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So we may safely conclude that the “ Kingdom of Heaven ” is an earthly Kingdom centred in Zion, and governed by the Messiah—Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER, OR THE KINGDOM PROPAGATED (Matt. xiii. 1-9, 18-23).

Here then is the Kingdom, foreknown and foretold by God. And here in the Gospels is the King, presented to His people by the accredited herald—John Baptist. The materials are all at hand for the Kingdom, but how is that Kingdom to be propagated? The land was overrun by cruel enemies, the people were bowed beneath a foreign yoke, and the natural expectation was toward a hero-prince after the pattern of David.

From earliest days Kingdoms had been founded and destroyed by the sword, but this Kingdom is not as other kingdoms—the only unsheathed sword is the two-edged Sword of the Word. “ A sower went forth to sow ”: What a striking foundation for a Kingdom! Throughout all ages men have sought to make the Word of God of none effect, but vain is all their striving. Acceptance of that Word is the prime necessity in all the dispensations of God. Here also we learn that only by reception of the Word can admission to the Kingdom be gained. Christ Himself is the sower, even as He is also Himself the seed, and only by the laying down of His own life in the place of death can the harvest of the Kingdom be gathered.

Then we may notice the express statement that the

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seed is "the word of the Kingdom," thus limiting it, prophetically, to the Scriptures directly associated with that promised Kingdom, and most emphatically to the words of Christ spoken during His earthly ministry. These words, all based on Law, are widely different from the Gospel of the Grace of God, which, based upon the finished work at the Cross, is the message for this present dispensation, though they will yet form the very basis of the Kingdom when it shall soon be manifested.

The soil is next dealt with in a manner which is perfectly true to life. There were many hearers, but all were not ready for the Kingdom and its claims, for the Kingdom has claims which are clamant. The seed received must bring forth fruit, and the fruit is always a reproduction of the Word received.

The practical experience of the Great Sower proves the truth of the parable. Many were "the wayside hearers," with no heart understanding, who only heard the Word to speedily forget. Many, too, were "the stony-ground hearers," rejoicing with great delight at the gracious words He spoke, until the heat of persecution found them with no real root in themselves, and so, offended, they turned away back. Others gathered around and for a time listened eagerly, but deep in their hearts lay the thorny growth of worldliness and covetousness, and in the struggle between the opposing growths, the tender, good seed was soon choked. But some there were whose hearts were opened, who manifested true repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. In such good soil "the Word of the Kingdom" found a congenial hid-

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ing place, and sprang up bringing forth fruit in varying degrees. Such is, and ever will be, the Divine plan in the propagation of the Kingdom, by the sowing of the good seed of the Word of God.

It will not be out of place at this point to notice that this, with others of this series of parables, appears in the Gospel of Mark and Luke, but with one striking difference which gives an important key into our hands. Instead of the "Kingdom of Heaven" we get in each case the "Kingdom of God." Also in the Acts of the Apostles we find Paul speaking several times of the Kingdom, but always it is the "Kingdom of God." Many have concluded that these are synonymous terms, but the different titles are used so regularly that that position can hardly be maintained. The distinct character of the Gospels and of Paul's ministry points the difference between the two Kingdoms. Matthew holds a unique position as "the Gospel of the Kingdom." In Mark, Luke and John we have the wider ministry of the Lord Jesus unfolded, whilst through Paul we reach the heights and depths of that ministry, and in them all we discover the "Kingdom of God." May we not deduce from its setting that "the Kingdom of Heaven" relates only to the earthly rule of the Lord Jesus, being purely Jewish in its character; whilst "the Kingdom of God" relates to the over-rule of God, embracing even "the Kingdom of Heaven," as the greater always includes the lesser.

In 1 Cor. xv. 24-26, we discover that the Kingdom of Christ reaches its conclusion, when all rule and authority and power are subject under Him, "for

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He must reign TILL He hath put all enemies under His feet." "Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father." And again, in verse 28, "When all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all." Surely we see in these wonderful words "the Kingdom of Heaven" presented as an interim merging into the Eternal Kingdom of God. We should surely expect to discover the same great principles underlying both Kingdoms, and the only outstanding difference should be that which relates to the prophetic, or earthly, portion of the parables. The following table of occurrences may help us to realise the force of this :—

PARABLE.	MENTIONED IN—
" Sower."	Matthew, Mark, Luke.
" Mustard-Seed."	Matthew, Mark, Luke.
" Leaven."	Matthew, Luke.

In each case Mark and Luke use the term "Kingdom of God," and we discover in these parables principles which find a perfect fulfilment when applied to either of the Dispensations; but they do not contain an absolute prophetic connection. It is a striking confirmation of this, that the parable of the Tares is not repeated by either, and bears the only seal, "the Kingdom of Heaven," the reason being that it contains a direct prophetic view of the end of the Age.

From this digression we go back to the second stage of the prophetic scheme, which deals with

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THE KINGDOM DEFILED (Matthew xiii. 24-48).

The second stage in the progress of the Kingdom is told in three parables : the Tares, the Mustard-Seed, and the Leaven, the first of which carries the historic, the remaining two the spiritual aspect of that progress. In them is told out the course and the final end of the declension which marked the Kingdom, and which in measure marks every spiritual movement. The defilement is three-fold, and may be marked thus :—

A.—Tares : Defilement by evil men.

B.—Mustard-Seed : Defilement by Spiritual Pride.

C.—Leaven : Defilement by Formalism.

PARABLE OF THE TARES (Matt. xiii. 24-30, 36-43). DEFILEMENT BY EVIL MEN.

It is interesting to notice that the parable of the Tares is expounded by the Lord Himself, so that the first of both forms of parable receives a key by which the following ones may be explained.

The Sower is still “the Son of Man,” a title specially used in connection with the Kingdom relationship of Jesus Christ. The scene of His activity is “the World,” from which we may well deduce the expansion of the Kingdom, or the world-wide dispersion of Israel. Both may well be in view.

Even as far back as Abraham the promise of blessing did not cease with Israel, but in ever-widening circles the promise grows until we read, “In thy Seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. xxii. 18).

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A careful study of the writings of Isaiah and other prophets who wrote of the millennial glory, of John in the Revelation (chap. xxi. 24-26), and Paul in Rom. xi., reveals the fact that all dwell upon the thought of universal blessing, always dependent upon subjection to the Messiah. But this enlargement of blessing is the result of the prior acceptance by Israel of their King.

We next see a striking change in the symbol used. In the parable of the Sower the Seed was "the Word of the Kingdom," but here "the good seed are the children of the Kingdom," and "the tares are the children of the Wicked One" (Matt. xiii. 38), so that we have here the first evident sign of the corruption of the Kingdom. The children of Israel had not been long out of Egypt before "the mixed multitude" made themselves felt disastrously for Israel. In earlier days the same spiritual evil was manifested in Abraham, whose fulness of blessing was hindered for many years by the presence of Terah and Lot. The same characteristics clearly mark the days of Noah, which ended in a dreadful harvest of judgment.

In the parable, the Lord lifts the veil and enables us to see the hand of Satan at work, his object always the same—the hindering or defiling of the work of Christ. Even in the twelve disciples we find a Judas, "a son of perdition."

Though there are many evidences of the presence of evil men from the beginning of the Kingdom, we are here reminded that its full manifestation will only be seen at "the end of the Age." All the prophets are agreed as to the dark spiritual condition of Israel

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in the period directly preceding the Millennium. The terrible days of "Jacob's Trouble"—the great Tribulation—are the culminating point of God's controversy with them nationally, and the severity of the judgment correctly measures the progress of the corruption. Even to-day Judaism is rapidly losing its boasted orthodoxy, and is becoming saturated with rationalism and gross infidelity, whilst in every portion of the world-field there are found, growing together in Israel, nationally, the wheat and the tares.

"The harvest is the end of the Age, and the reapers are the angels" (verse 39). This cannot represent the home-call of the Church, but is evidently an event that happens at some later period—"The end of the Age." At the home-calling of the Church the Saints are taken up from the world, which is left behind for judgment, but at "the harvest," the first action of the Angels is to gather the Tares, to bind them in bundles and to burn them (verse 30). Afterward, the Children of the Wicked One being removed, "the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father" (verse 43). To-day, righteousness is eclipsed by the black shadow of wickedness, but when the wickedness is removed, then shall the righteous reign as the unclouded sun in the Heavens.

To sum up—the children of the Kingdom are prophetically the godly remnant preserved by the Lord in Israel, as in all past ages. The children of the Wicked One are apostate Israelites; e.g., "Ye are of your Father the Devil" (John viii. 44); and finally revealed as followers of Antichrist.

The Harvest is the Age-end, which is definitely

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attached, throughout the Scriptures, to that period which immediately precedes the manifestation in glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings.

The Judgment is not from men, but they are gathered by the Angels and their end is the Fire—evidently not the Lake of Fire, which is not opened, except for Antichrist and the false prophet, until after the thousand years. Into that period “The children of the Kingdom” enter, as sharers of the Glory of the Lord. (Compare also Rev. vii. 1-8.) From the prophetic we turn to the moral outline of the defilement of the Kingdom as foreshown in the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven (Matt. xiii. 31-33).

PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED (Matt. xiii. 31-32).

DEFILEMENT BY SPIRITUAL PRIDE.

The first leaves an impression upon the mind of a rapid but unsubstantial growth from a very small beginning. In its full growth it becomes a habitation for the birds of the air. There is a curious likeness between this parable and the vision of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. iv. 20-22). From a small beginning that monarch was exalted by God, but pride filled his heart, and though the tree was exalted to the Heavens, yet the axe was laid to it, so that by the direct judgment of God his pride was humbled. Whether in the history of Israel or of Christendom, both alike reveal the terrible havoc wrought by spiritual pride, the first cause of the fall of Satan himself. How often might the words be used which revealed

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the heart condition of King Saul, "When thou wast little in thine own sight" (1 Sam. xv. 17), as we gaze up at the mighty edifice erected by the spirit of presumption, which always provides a resting-place for every unclean fowl. It was spiritual pride that nailed Israel's Messiah to the shameful tree; it was spiritual pride that rejected the ministry of the Holy Spirit and stoned Stephen, even as it is spiritual pride that has filled the earth with all the abominations of the Scarlet Woman, and who may speak of the awful brood of unclean birds that have sheltered beneath her branches? But, despite appearances, that mighty tree shall yet be brought low, and "the end of the Age" shall VIOLENTLY DISTURB HER INHABITANTS.

PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN (Matt. xiii. 33).

DEFILEMENT BY CORRUPT TEACHING.

The companion picture of the leaven carries the thought of corruption still further. We shall do well to notice first that the common interpretation which uses this parable to illustrate the penetrating power of the Gospel until the whole world is converted is quite untenable, and is indeed a complete reversal of the Truth. It contradicts the plain evidence of the Scriptures, which nowhere teach the regeneration of the world by the preaching of the Gospel, but rather that the world rapidly develops in wickedness as the Day of the Lord draws near (2 Tim. iii.). Also it does violence to the plain words of the Lord Jesus which directly declare that leaven is an evil principle, a truth taught also in the Epistles (1 Cor. v. 6-8).

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Using the key provided by the Lord, the parable contains no difficulty, but is seen to be in perfect agreement with the whole scheme of prophecy.

Leaven is, in itself, a principle working by means of corruption. It is introduced into meal which, in itself pure, becomes corrupt and inflated by means of the gases liberated in the process of corruption. Unless the process is stayed by heat, the whole mass of meal becomes utterly corrupt and offensive.

This then is the picture, containing somewhat the same root thought as we find in the parable of the Tares.

The evil principle is introduced by an outside person. The woman (of this parable) is a striking figure. The Jezebel of the Old Testament history comes to the front of the picture again in the Revelation and is discovered at the same deadly work by which she wrought such havoc in Israel—the work of corruption. The three measures of meal spoken of are the pure doctrine, perfect and complete. In the Old Testament it symbolised Christ the Word of God, the food of the priestly people. We should notice well that it is not only to the Kingdom of Heaven that this parable applies. It is equally true of each of the Dispensations, and is seen as a principle working mightily around us to-day.

At the back of the Woman is the unseen Enemy—Satan. His object remains always the same, the overthrow of the testimony of God. To attain that end he always seeks to break down the wall of separation divinely erected between “the children of the Kingdom” and “the children of the Wicked One.” Then,

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by fostering the spirit of pride with its resulting unclean life, corruption rapidly spreads. Then, lastly, his attack is upon the vital support of the children of God—God's own pure Word.

In Matt. xvi. 6-12 and Mark viii. 15 the Lord describes the leaven, warning His disciples against it. It is threefold in character, and is marked as follows : Pharisaism, Sadduceeism, and Herodianism, and around these three principles is always gathered the corrupting influence of "the woman Jezebel," whether in the Kingdom or the Church of God.

The Pharisees, we are told, had made the Word of God of none effect by their traditions (Matt. xv. 6). Outward forms and ceremonies had been emphasised, whilst the Truth of God and honesty of life had been completely overlooked. The letter of the Word was worshipped with almost idolatrous fervour, but the spirit of the Word was scrupulously denied. From that to skilful juggling with the Scriptures, twisting and warping their meaning until they lost all semblance to the original sense was but a small step, fatally easy to take.

We do not need to flatter ourselves that the day of the Pharisee is past. On every hand, in these very days, we see the Woman's hand busy with this brand of leaven.

The Sadducees have very much in common with the Pharisees, especially in their determined opposition to the Christ of God. But the special form of evil doctrine adopted by them was that of religious unbelief. These men would be terribly offended if labelled as infidels or as heathen. They occupied the

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most prominent positions in the religious world, and were the spiritual teachers of the people, and yet in their doctrine they denied all that could not be explained by their laws of human reason, including the Resurrection and final judgment of sinful men. They knew not the Scriptures neither the power of God (Mark xii. 24).

As a sect they also are very long-lived. In these days their descendants occupy offices of the highest religious rank, whilst themselves openly denying the Word of God. Professing themselves to be Ministers of God, they openly give Him the lie, and bitterly attack all the eternal verities of the Most High.

In character they are unaltered from the Sadducee of Jerusalem, and are still busily engaged in the same devilish work of corruption.

The third party is mentioned only in Mark's Gospel—the Herodians. They were the Court party—frankly engaged in the lucrative business of getting the most out of both worlds.

Herod, the Idumean, the direct descendant of God's bitterest foes, held the throne by favour of the Emperor of Rome—that throne which was Christ's by right. Herod represented the World power and prosperity by favour of the throne, a fit leader of a supple-backed crowd. The World, with its smiling face and heart of a tiger, the bitter enemy of God and His Christ, has still its religious votaries who pander to its crimes in the name of God, and reap a Balaam's reward in the favour of a king, though it may be but for a season. Their day is short, and their end is figured forth in the awful destruction of Jezebel and

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her companions, in the vision of John (Rev. ii. 20-23), which shall indeed cleanse the world of them, and of their awful corruptions, before the King is seen in His glory.

This section concludes with the picture of a Kingdom corrupted, the progress and character of which is clearly marked, as is also the origin of that corruption. From this dark picture we now turn to a bright interlude IN THE STORY OF SIN AND JUDGMENT.

PARABLES OF THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL (Matt. xiii. 44-46), OR THE KINGDOM IN MYSTERY.

As the bow of God is stretched across the black forebodings of judgment, telling with silent voice of the faithfulness of Jehovah, and of His mercy, which endureth for ever, so, against the darkly-drawn picture of the preceding parables, these two perfectly-drawn word-pictures stand out in brightest relief.

No matter how one may judge by human reasoning, we see nothing evident but failure, coupled with the apparent success of Satan's dark designs.

But this double gem opens the very counsels of Heaven before us, revealing what is unseen and unknown to all the wisdom of the world. They can but judge by puny sense, and even Satan with all his diabolical cunning knows not, and never can know, the mysteries of God, but to us it is given to know, or understand, these wondrous mysteries.

The common interpretation of these parables covers the following ground—that the Treasure is the Gospel

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and the Pearl is Christ. Also that the seeking soul, to find Christ as Saviour, must sell all to gain Him. On the very surface of such teaching, one sees its failure. The very essence of the Gospel is its Grace. Christ is God's gift to a poor sin-stricken world; Salvation is "not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph. ii. 8-9). Eternal Life is the free gift of God (Rom. vi. 23), and it is an insult to the very thought of Grace to suggest that we may purchase what is so freely given, and that by God Himself.

Further, what have we to sell of sufficient value to produce an equivalent for such a treasure, when our very righteousnesses are as filthy rags (Isaiah lxiv. 6)?

No! The Lord of Glory is not in the market at the bid of a purchaser, whilst all His gifts are obtainable "without money and without price."

A second interpretation goes much nearer the truth, and is not in itself wrong, though it does not convey all the truth. In that we are taught to see in the Treasure and the Pearl a composite picture of the Church of God in this present dispensation, having been purchased at so great a price by the Son of God, "Who loved the Church and gave Himself for it" (Eph. v. 25).

There is here, undoubtedly, a parallel line of truth, but the prime interpretation must still be kept true to the key-word, "The Kingdom of Heaven." That will not lessen the value of its secondary application to the Church, but it should deepen and enlarge our appreciation of the Grace of our Lord Jesus, and preserve us from the unconscious selfishness which often besets us, and which causes us to mentally shut out

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all others but ourselves from the enjoyment of the loving kindness and favour of God.

What then is the direct teaching of this twin parable? Let the Treasure and the Pearl stand in the same place as the wheat, and you have then described as "the children of the Kingdom" the righteous ones who shall shine in the Kingdom of their Father. They are hidden from sight, but with this difference. The wheat was hidden by the rank growth of the tares—the children of the Wicked One. But the Treasure is found by the Lord and hidden by Him. The uninformed pass them by, but, whatever their circumstances, "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. ii. 19).

From the very earliest days of Israel's history this parable has been verified, and it is but the continuance of that history throughout the present Age until the King comes, and His Kingdom be manifested. In Rev. xii. we get a curious but striking commentary on these parables. The Woman clothed with Heavenly insignia of whom the Man-Child is born, is clearly intended to envisage the spiritual element—the real Israel, from which Christ according to the flesh was born. Christ, the Man-Child, was delivered from the devices of the Dragon at Calvary and "was caught up unto God and unto His throne." So far we have plain statements which to-day are history. But from that point the chapter deals with Satanic enmity against the woman (who cannot be the Church, for the Church did not produce Christ), who flees into the wilderness and is hidden in "a place prepared by God." That place is again spoken of in verse 14 as

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“ her place where she is nourished . . . from the face of the serpent.” Evidently the latter period refers to the time of “ Jacob’s trouble,” or “ The Great Tribulation,” and speaks of miraculous interposition on behalf of a godly remnant that shall yet remain in Israel. The former period spoken of may well refer to the present portion of time, during which Israel is nationally in the wilderness. One thing is very certain, that God has always had “ an elect remnant according to Grace ” in Israel. Even when Jezebel’s fury swept Israel like a destroying flame, and Baal’s worshippers were countless on every hill; when Elijah bowed his head in shame and said “ I, even I only am left ” (1 Kings xix. 10), the Lord was not left without witness and could put His hand upon 7,000 men who were His hidden treasure. Not only were they hidden from Elijah, who knew nothing of that remnant, they were safely hidden from the cruel hatred of Jezebel. Indeed, the history of Israel is largely the history of a remnant. To the natural eye all the descendants of Abraham are Israelites, but the Word of God emphatically denies that, teaching instead “ that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham,” and again that “ they are blessed with faithful Abraham ” (Gal. iii. 7-9). Such then are the ones described in these parables.

Unseen and unknown by the world, and often by their own brethren according to the flesh, they have been discovered by the Man Christ Jesus, and hidden until the Day when He shall publicly wear the priceless Pearl, manifesting, with joy, His treasure openly.

Dare we say that God has not a remnant in Israel

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to-day, that there are none of "the children of the Kingdom" hidden in the world amongst the Scattered People? Surely such a statement would be far-fetched and would commit us to the same error as that of Elijah. Israel is still dear to God for their fathers' sake, as we learn in Rom. xi. 28, and in that same chapter the Apostle Paul directly declares that "at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of Grace" (verse 5). God has not cast away Israel although they are sown like corn amongst the nations, and are down-trodden of the peoples. Amongst them are still those who look up, even though the veil is yet upon their faces, and in faith seek God—the God of their fathers, knowing not, until that veil is taken away, that He is indeed the One Whom they pierced.

There is a twofold testimony for God running throughout this age. They are concurrent but not the same. They are the Church in Christendom, and a godly remnant hidden in Israel. God is not left without a witness even in the darkest of ages.

Let us now consider the two words used : Treasure and Pearl. The first is a multiple word implying spending power, usefulness. The second produces the thought of spiritual unity, beauty untouched by human hands, and value. In these words the eternal purpose of God is revealed in connection with His people. It is good to realise here that these thoughts are equally true whether applied to the Israel of God or to the Church. The day is surely coming when the vision of Malachi shall be true, and, from the stock of Israel, Jehovah shall make up His jewels, and they

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shall be manifestly His in that day. But equally precious is the thought contained in the prayer of Paul in Eph. i. 18, "that ye may know . . . what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the Saints." Israel the earthly people, and the Church a heavenly people, each in its own sphere, is precious in the sight of the Lord. May that same Lord help us to apply the truth to our own hearts as it is unfolded for us here.

We have been bought with a price, set apart for the ministry of Jesus Christ as treasure for His spending. As the Pearl of great price His people will form the brightest gem in His diadem in the day of His glory. As His people we seek to spend and be spent for Him now, but our present service is but the prelude to a sphere of service that staggers all imagination. As the Pearl our beauty is seen by Himself alone now, but in that day He will exhibit our beauty to His own glory before all principalities and powers.

At present we have been discovered by Him in all our degradation, we have been redeemed at so great a price, and then we have been hidden because the day of the manifestation of the Sons of God (Rom. viii. 16-23) is not yet fully come. But, hidden though we be, let us not forget Whose we are, and Whom we serve.

What a relief to turn from the dreadful work of the woman spreading corruption everywhere to the outstanding figure of these parables, "The Man Christ Jesus." His infinite love and desire toward the children of men, the boundlessness of His grace, shine out in wonderful beauty. Twice we are told that He sold

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all that He had, and, mark you, not because He valued the world, but for you, for me, He gave all that He had. Can you measure that price? Can you reach the highest heights of Heaven, and there count His riches, or pass to the ends of the universe and number the contents of His treasure house? Can you span in your thought the awful chasm that gapes between the joy of Heaven and the dark horror of the Cross? If so, you may calculate something of the awful immensity of the price He paid for you, the eternal value He has placed upon you, and the glory of the future you shall share with Him.

It is indeed fitting that our hearts should bow down in Worship at the feet of that blest merchantman Who loved not His life, but freely gave Himself up for us all.

That vision fades away, and one more picture is opened before our eyes, a picture that is heavy with doom, bringing before us the

PARABLE OF THE DRAG-NET (Matt. xiii. 47-50), or "THE END OF THE AGE."

Here we are in the atmosphere of prophecy pure and simple, and in very few words we get some most interesting details concerning events which are to fill the last days of this present Age. We again need to disabuse our minds of the effects of popular application which can only see the Gospel in the Drag-net, and the multitude of fishes, bad and good, representing a professing Christendom, to be sorted out at the coming of Christ. As an application, or illustration, we need

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not complain at such a usage, but there are vital difficulties in the way of such interpretation.

The coming of the Lord for the Home-call of the Church is never spoken of as, and indeed cannot be, "the End of the Age"; neither are we taught that the angels are to be a separating Agency at His Coming. The tremendous change, whether in quick or dead, and the upward flight to Glory, are directly ascribed to the power of God. Also, at the coming of the Lord it is the redeemed who are severed from the wicked, whilst here we are told, as in the parable of the tares, that it is the wicked who are severed by angelic hands from among the just. Hence we need to look further for the key which shall unlock this one of the "Mysteries of the Kingdom."

The first thing we should notice is that there are some common factors between this parable and the parable of the tares, and in these we may discover the needful key. Amongst these are the following: "The Kingdom of Heaven," "the end of the Age," the angels who divide, and the judgment of the wicked. The points are all unfolded by the Lord Himself, so that their value, as terms, is fixed, and any interpretation must use those terms as fixed by the Lord.

That the Church, or Christendom, or the Gospel, is not here in view, is plainly evident, for neither of these can fill the picture. On the contrary, that the earthly kingdom of Jesus Christ is meant is as clearly proved, for every detail instantly falls into place.

We may now examine the parable, looking first at the prophetic use of the phrase "into the sea." In

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the Revelation we are told it represents “Peoples and Nations and Tongues,” and it is “out of the sea” that the *Beast* arises, evidently speaking of His uprising from the people. In that same sea of peoples, covering the whole world, God has scattered His earthly people Israel throughout this Age—described as “the times of the Gentiles.” As a corporate people, they have no existence, but before God they still exist as a “Lo Ammi” people, awaiting the day, so often foretold, of their national resurrection. In that day God shall no longer call them “Lo Ammi,” but shall speak comfortably to them, and say, “They shall be my people, and I will be their God.”

That day is speedily coming, and we see the prophet Jeremiah using the very word-picture afterward used by the Lord in this parable, as he describes that day thus : “The Lord liveth that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the North, and from all the lands whither He had driven them : and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. Behold, I will send for MANY FISHERS, saith the Lord, and THEY SHALL FISH THEM for Mine eyes are upon all their ways, they are not hid from My face, neither is their iniquity hid from Mine eyes. And first I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double ” (Jer. xvi. 15-18).

Put these words by the side of the parable, and the interpretation is at once sure. The land of the North—Russia, with its greatest Jewish population of all the countries, the Gog and Magog of the future, and, with Russia, all other nations are pictured as a well-stocked sea, through which the Jews are always mov-

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ing aimlessly, as restless as the finny tribes of the ocean. But to-day their eyes are turned as one to the land of their Fathers, an instinctive longing impelling the whole nation with the great Homing-call of Israel.

In political circles, preparations are already in being for the bringing to land of the loaded drag-net, and to this end many nations, even in the midst of the burden of a war, were planning ways and means. May not these be "the many fishers" sent for by the Lord, though unconscious of their divine mission? And do we not see the great waters disturbed to-day as the great drag-net gathers together from every land that people so long homeless and hopeless, but now repeating with keener zest than ever the Passover cry: "This year here, next year Jerusalem!" Soon, as a corporate nation, Israel will populate her own land and rebuild her cities, but the Scriptures are emphatic as to one feature of that return—that it is in unbelief and still, nationally, in the bond of iniquity. Before the Kingdom can be set up, and the King of Israel manifested, the nation must be purged by the Lord from the presence of the children of the Wicked One. There will surely be a re-echoing of the preparation cry of John Baptist, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," with its terrific warnings of the axe, the fan and the unquenchable fire of judgment. Here again we are brought to the "time of Jacob's trouble," followed by the day when "The Lord Whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple. . . . But who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appeareth?"

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For He is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap, and He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver : and purge them that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. . . . I will come near to you to judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and those that fear not Me, saith the Lord of Hosts " (Mal. iii. 1-6). From that day of " the vengeance of the Lord " " the children of the Wicked One " are cast into the fire unquenchable, where there is " wailing and gnashing of teeth," but for the godly remnant who mourn because of sin, the Lord Himself comes " to comfort all that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified " (Is. lxi. 2-11). So the parable fitly ends a prophecy foretelling the history of the Kingdom in this Age, from its inception through the preaching of Christ, to the terrible Day of the Lord.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO COMINGS

Before attempting to analyse the second set of parables it will be decidedly helpful if we get a clear conception as to the teaching of Scripture relating to the second coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ. That should in itself prevent us from misconstruing the concluding parables.

All schools of thought are agreed as to the first appearing of Christ, how that, "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman . . . to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. iv. 4-5). There is something very definite about that coming of Jesus Christ, easily grasped by the feeblest of minds. From the Gospel point of view we clearly understand the phrase "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"; there is a definiteness and certainty of aim in that coming which fixes and centres the mind.

But when we speak of the "Second Coming of Christ" we are at once faced with the fact that, in the majority of cases, there is not that definiteness of thought and certainty of aim which alone can make the coming of Christ the same living reality as is the first coming.

Of course we must realise that past events form of necessity a clearer impression upon the mind than do

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future events, however clearly foretold. But it is of the very nature of the Word of God that it speaks of future things as though they were already past, and it is also of the very essence of the ministry of the Spirit that He, through that Word, should make those future events instinct with life for us.

That the Lord *did* come, and that He *did* die for our sins, and that He *was* buried and rose again, all according to the Scriptures, we do most surely believe.

That He ascended up on High “to God and to His throne” is also an assured fact to all true children of God. But from that point we get a long-drawn gap.

Christ is absent! That He will return we know—sometime, somewhere, somehow. But to many that return is hopelessly veiled in mystery, oftentimes caused by the vain guesswork of prophetic students with conflicting schemes of their own. Yet we know that the Word of God has been the unfailing guide in all past ages, and will prove to be that same “Sure Word” to us who believe.

It is we who have failed, and the cause of our failure has been largely due to the fact that we have not sought to read the mind of God behind His evident acts. Too often we have been like the Israelites of old to whom God could only reveal His actions whilst He made known His ways to Moses (Ps. ciii. 7).

WHY MUST CHRIST COME?

The prime question, then, that we need to ask is, **WHY** is Christ coming again? What saith the Scripture? Any other answer but one drawn from that

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fountain head will be liable to error. To get a plain and definite answer to the question we need to pick up the link at the place where it was broken—the ascension of the Lord Jesus. A group of upward-gazing men stood upon the Mount of Olives. A moment before, their Lord and Master had been with them, with hands outstretched in blessing, and then with open eyes they saw Him received into the clouds of Heaven—the King was gone, the link was broken. But at that very moment the angelic message was given, “Why gaze ye up into Heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven” (Acts i. 9-11). Nearly 2,000 years have rolled by since those memorable words were spoken, and “Why tarry the wheels of His chariot?” must often have been the heart-cry of the weary watchers. Succeeding years have seen the stricken world plunged ever more deeply into ocean-like depths of sin with woeful present results; the power of Satan threatens almost a strangle-hold upon the people, but from the Throne has come no word, no sign! Why does He not come? Are the Scriptures silent too?

No. There is a period fixed to the tyranny of sin, though it be backed by all the thrones of the universe with all their mighty armaments. The Spirit lifts the veil of Heaven, and we see Christ, the absent Lord, stationed at the right Hand of God, “henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool” (Heb. x. 13).

Centuries have rolled by since He was rejected by “His Own.” The throne of His father David has

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remained empty, and the diadem unworn, but He is expectant there in the Heavens, and His hopes are certainties as they go forward to the sure end, when His enemies shall be subdued before Him.

There is an empty throne upon God's hill of Zion, and on that throne He must sit ruling all Nations with a rod of iron (Ps. ii; Rev. xii.).

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But, associated with that scene of triumph we find a regenerated Israel in the midst of whom Christ reigns as King, and through whom He extends His Kingdom to the ends of the earth.

For nearly 2,000 years Israel, the rejecter of her Messiah, has reaped the terrible fruit of her sin, and is still the off-scouring of the world. The prophetic words of Moses in Leviticus xxvi., and in Deut. xxix. and xxx., with the succeeding words of the later prophets, have been literally fulfilled in judgment, but they speak not only of judgment : they have a refrain of mercy which must also be literally fulfilled. Though Israel has rejected her King, He has not rejected His people—He still remains her only Hope and King ; and the term of His period of “ expectation ” is bounded by an occupied throne upon Zion's holy hill. The glorious results which shall cover the whole earth with Millennial blessing, flow directly from the positive fact of Christ crowned by His own earthly people who are the first to bow, nationally, beneath His sway. It is needless here to go into details as to the glory of that reign, the Scriptures abound with them,

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but what we do need to emphasise is the fact that the great prophetic object of the second coming of Christ is as clearly defined in Scripture as was His first coming, and is indeed the common topic of the whole Word of God.

Summed up briefly, it is the manifestation in glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, toward Israel as King of Righteousness and King of Peace, but toward the world as the righteous Judge acting as Executor for God. Truly to many it will be "The great and terrible Day of the Lord," but to "the children of the Kingdom" it will be as the coming of the "Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings" (Mal. iv. 2).

The Lord's second coming is variously described in Scripture as being "From Heaven" (2 Thess. i. 7), "In Glory" (Col. iii. 4), "As the lightning" (Matt. xxiv. 27), unexpectedly "as a thief in the night" (1 Thes. v. 2-4, Rev. xvi. 15), and as causing great consternation amongst His enemies (Rev. vi. 15-17).

The place of His coming is also clearly described. His emblem, or sign, is seen in the Heavens, His feet then stand upon the Mount of Olives (the direct fulfilment of the angelic message in Acts i.), and then He comes to His Temple, all centering in and over Jerusalem.

The time of His coming is also definitely fixed; it will be at the very apex of human achievement in Antichrist, who is described in 2 Thes. ii. 8, as being destroyed by "the brightness of His coming." Also it will be at the direst extremity of human need in Israel—the time of her "Great Tribulation." Indeed, it will only be the appearing of the Lord that

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will save alive any of the race of Israel (Matt. xxiv. 21-22).

The object of His coming is also clearly revealed : The subjection of His enemies (Ps. ii.), the deliverance of Israel (Joel ii. 18-21 ; Zec. ix., xii. 1-9), and the setting up of the Kingdom of God with its attendant blessing to the whole creation (Is. xi. 1-9, xxxv., lxv. 17-25 ; Rom. viii. 18-23 ; Rev. xxii. 1-7). He shall Himself be “ King of Kings and Lord of Lords,” reigning supreme and unquestioned, Sovereign Lord not only over Israel, but receiving the homage of the universe (Rev. xix. 16, Phil. ii. 9-11).

Then He shall indeed “ save His people from their sins ” (Matt. i. 21), and His Name shall be in truth, “ Emmanuel—God with us ” (Matt. i. 23), and “ He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David, and He shall reign over the House of Jacob for ever ; and of His Kingdom there shall be no end ” (Luke i. 32-33).

This, then, is the point to which, as shafts of light, all prophetic Scriptures focus attention.

It is “ the Hope of Israel ” (Acts xxvi. 6-7 ; xxviii. 17-24), the “ earnest expectation of Creation ” (Rom. viii. 19-22), and the eager anticipation of Christ (Heb. x. 13). It is variously described in Scripture as “ The Day of the Lord ” (Joel i. 15 ; ii. 1-11 ; 2 Pet. iii. 10), implying a period. “ The Glorious Appearing,” or Manifestation (Titus ii. 13 ; 2 Tim. iv. 1), and “ The Revelation (or Unveiling) of Jesus Christ ” (1 Pet. i. 13, also ver. 7).

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Here then we have that coming of the Lord around which all the prophecies centre, and, with that coming, the Kingdom of Heaven will no longer be a mystery, but a recognised fact. The King will no longer be rejected, but enthroned. To Him "every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God the Father."

That this does not exhaust the thought of Christ's second coming is plainly evident as we read the New Testament.

THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH.

There is another descriptive phrase found several times in the Epistles which has, in almost every case, a distinctive reference to the Church: "The Coming (Parousia) of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes. iii. 13; v. 23). The Greek word carries the thought of "presence with," or "nearness to," the person named, and conveys the idea, not so much of a sudden appearance of the Lord Jesus, as of an appearance followed by prolonged companionship. This thought is beautifully enlarged upon as we meditate upon the revelation of the purpose of God in the Church. In every way the Church differs from Israel, or "the children of the kingdom." "They have Abraham as their Father," but the Church rejoices in the Fatherhood of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord (Gal. iii. 20). The Calling of Israel is entirely earthly, whilst the Calling of the Church is not of the earth, her citizenship being in Heaven (Phil. iii. 20). The hope of Israel is, as we have already seen, the promised Kingdom with its accompanying glory, but the

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hope of the Church is centred in Christ Himself, and especially in His immediate return with the Glory to follow (1 Tim. i. 1; Titus 2-13). Their final destiny is also widely different : Israel appearing as the centre and distributor of Divine blessing to the nations, whilst the Church is directly associated with Christ Himself as "Heirs of God, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. viii. 17).

We need, then, to carefully discriminate, as we read the Scriptures, between the coming of the Lord for the Church, and His glorious appearing on the behalf of Israel. The difference is easily discerned by noting closely the context in each case. In broad outline we see that the Church is caught up into the air, to be for ever with the Lord (1 Thes. iv. 17), whilst in the other event we see Christ descending from Heaven to earth, attended in that descent by His glorified Saints (1 Thes. iii. 13; 2 Thes. i. 7-12).

As the Church is not the subject of prophecy it is a vain thing to search Old Testament prophecies for light on this Parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ. In neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke can one find even a vague reference to this event. It is not until the Lord reaches the final stage of His ministry on earth, and knows that His hour is come to depart to the Father from Whom He had come, that He gathers the little company of "His Own" around Himself for His last words. In John xvii. His thoughts leap forward beyond the little group before Him and contemplate all who should hereafter believe on Him through their testimony. It is in this atmosphere, surcharged with heart-breaking sorrow at the thought of His ap-

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proaching departure, that we get the first clear word of the message which should afterward become the watchword of the Church. Like a balmy healing wind stealing over the bruised spirit come the words, "If I go I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John xiv. 3).

In John xxi., the dark shadow of death for ever past, in the glory of resurrection life the Lord again states the truth, especially as it referred to John, "If I will that he tarry till I come." The immediate result is that the disciples held, as an established fact, that Christ meant a literal return, at least in John's lifetime, necessitating the safeguarding statement by John, when he emphasises the word "If." In these words of Christ we have a concentrate of the whole doctrine, as enlarged by the Apostles, thus proving that it was not, as has been alleged, an invention of Paul's. We see Christ in His present ministry "within the veil" as "the Forerunner for us" (Heb. vi. 17, 20), as the perfect Redeemer and Representative of His people before God (Heb. ix. 12-24). His own lips have spoken the words, "I go to prepare a place for you."

But the veil will not hide Him for ever; His work there for us accomplished, He then comes forth for one specific object—not the completion of His glorious work on earth and the overthrow of His enemies—that may wait His convenience—"then," says He, "I will come to receive you unto Myself." In that phrase we get the fulness of the word "Parousia" strengthened still further by the addition

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of the words, "where I am there ye may be also." Whilst we may expand the thought by following it through the Epistles, we get the whole truth told out here.

At this point we may well notice how marked is "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." There are no differences made between one and another of the disciples. The one word "you" covers them all—Judas having gone out. Yet chap xiii. brings Peter before us with great, boastful words, ending with his Lord's assurance that he, Peter, should publicly deny Him before many hours had passed; and Thomas, the doubter, sat a close companion with him. Surely the Lord will divide between them and the beloved John, who cleaves so closely to Him! Strike the division mark out between the two chapters, and chap. xiv. 1 reads remarkably like a message to Peter: "Let not Your heart be troubled." It would seem that Peter, with all others who are like him, has a very welcome place in the big word Your. Salvation begins with Grace, and Glory will not undermine it.

The Hope of the Church, as it is seen in the doctrine unfolded by the Apostles, ever increases in brightness. As a star dimly twinkling in a twilight sky is seen gloriously shining in the midnight darkness, so that Hope is thrown into more brilliant contrast by the revelation of the deepening horror of the night, and we, who are "His Own," see not the darkness of that midnight sky, with its awful threatenings, but that Star of Glorious Hope.

The Church is composed of living members, all of whom are in living contact with Christ Himself. They

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are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, separated from the world, and are spoken of as "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. i. 7), whilst they are, in the meantime, occupied in Holy Ghost ministry to and for Himself. They are described as being "the riches of the glory of His inheritance" (Eph. i. 18), though, on earth, they share in His reproach and live in an atmosphere of tribulation. But though despised by the world, they are to Christ "a people possessed," to be for ever with Himself and sharers of His eternal glory.

The marks of His coming for His people are as clearly revealed in the Epistles as are those of His manifestation to Israel in the Prophets. It is described as a descent from Heaven into the air, and not to the earth.

The time of His coming is unrevealed, no times or seasons having been given as guides, which again marks a difference from "The Glorious Appearing" which is directly associated with the pre-manifestation of Antichrist. The normal attitude of the Church throughout all ages has been that of continual expectancy and immediate readiness to meet her Lord in the air.

THE RESULT OF HIS COMING.

When we come to the object of His coming we are not left in any doubt. Briefly stated, it is the full accomplishment of the work of Salvation commenced upon Calvary's Cross. There the penalty of sin was met and the debt for ever cancelled in

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His precious blood, an act of boundless grace. In resurrection life, He gave to those who had been rebels the gift of the Holy Spirit, so ensuring victory in the present conflict against sin and Satan; a present salvation also based upon boundless grace. But the third phase of salvation yet remains to be told, "to wit, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. viii. 23), when Christ shall complete the work of salvation in the Church, which is His body, bringing it into perfect likeness to Himself. Then we shall be saved from the very presence of sin, and He will get the glorious victory, whilst in His changeless, boundless grace He will share with us the fruits of it. Salvation is all of grace from the Cross to the Glory, and the last stage of salvation will be as dependent upon the work of Christ as was the first. Since the death and resurrection of Christ, myriads of saints have paid the physical penalty of sin. They have died, and their flesh has seen corruption in the darkness of the grave. But they, the inhabitants of those bodies, have passed from those frail tabernacles "to be with Christ." That this is a state of conscious enjoyment of His presence is evident, if only on the ground that it is described as "far better" (Phil. i. 23) than any earthly experience of such fellowship could be. They are consciously enjoying the first fruits of the Cross work of Christ. They are saved from sin's penalty, and also its presence, and are with Him. But yet the work of Christ on their behalf is not complete. Corruption must put on incorruption, and the whole man stand complete: spirit, soul and body at His coming. Hence, before the work of Christ can be

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completed in the Church, the sleeping bodies of the saints must be raised incorruptible and again indwelt by spirit and soul, whilst the bodies of living saints must be changed from their present mortal condition (and therefore must be sinless) into the glorious likeness of Christ Jesus. This is magnificently described by the Holy Spirit in the following words :—"Behold, I show you a mystery : we shall not ALL sleep, but we shall ALL be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump ; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and WE shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality " (1 Cor. xv. 51-53). And again, " I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that WE which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first ; then WE which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall WE ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words " (1 Thes. iv. 13-18). But some will say, is not this blessedness, with all its attendant glory which is brought to us at the coming of the

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Lord a reward for faithfulness? Is there not a possibility that some may not attain to that glorious estate?

To such questions the Spirit gives plain and emphatic answers. In the years that have rolled by, the Church has been marked by the same faults and failings as are seen in her to-day, but every failing, faulty saint has been redeemed, regenerated, and possessed for Christ by the Holy Ghost. In dying, they slept in Christ as to their bodies, whilst they "departed to be with Christ" as touching their spirits. The Scripture is emphatic when it declares that "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him" (1 Thes. iv. 14), and again, when we are told that "they that are Christ's" shall be made alive "at His coming." There is no room for exception here. If they are Christ's, bought with His precious blood; if they have slept in Jesus, then God will bring them—their real selves—back with Jesus, whilst their bodies will be raised, by the power of God, incorruptible and inhabited once again. There will be no gaps in that mighty army.

But, it may be asked, did not the Apostle pray earnestly that by any means he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead? (Phil. iii. 8-14). To what is the Apostle referring? There is no evidence that he expected to die, although he was almost ready to wish to die for the sake of the realised presence of his Lord. It was not until the very end of his pilgrimage that he received the knowledge that the time of his departure was at hand (II. Tim. iv. 6, 7). Until then, every epistle vibrates with the

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hope that he might not be unclothed, but clothed upon at the coming of the Lord. Always he links himself with the "We who are alive," and never with them who are dead. As he was evidently not expecting to die, he could not have expected a literal resurrection from the grave. Indeed, in the very passage he says, "Not as though I had already attained," which is a ridiculous statement if he spoke of what would happen at the Lord's coming.

And yet he was striving after something to which he had not attained, and that something is clearly unfolded by himself. It was that he might apprehend, or receive clearly, the object for which he had been apprehended by Christ. What is that object, and what is the prize of the high calling of God but that we shall be eternally like our Lord? The Apostle was consumed by a holy ambition to attain, even in this life, to that blessed likeness to our Lord. How earnestly he craves that Christ may be formed in him. Yet with what holy humility he pens the words, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended . . . but I press toward the mark."

From those who sleep in Jesus we turn to those which are alive and remain, and here again the Spirit leaves no room for doubt. How often the word "ALL" is used, and there seems no possibility of dividing the ranks of the Redeemed if the testimony of the Spirit is to be believed. To make it even more certain, we have in 1 Thess. v. two classes of believers mentioned, sleeping ones and watching ones; but in verses 9 and 10 we read that "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain Salvation by our

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LORD Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that whether we WAKE or SLEEP, we should LIVE together with Him." Any critical concordance will clearly prove that the word WAKE (Gr. GREGOREO) is only used in the sense of vigilance, whilst the word SLEEP (Gr. KATHEUDO) is never once used of death (indeed, in its first use, (Matt. ix. 24) it is directly in contradiction to death), but is *always* used in *the sense of drowsiness, or slumbering*. So that here the Spirit of God directly states that our condition, whether watchful or drowsy, is not the decisive point when the coming Lord shall save His people from the wrath which overhangs that great and terrible day of the Lord.

Yet let us watch earnestly against a tendency to sin that grace may abound. Though the salvation of Christ will be completed perfectly at His coming, and will be the crowning of His work of grace, yet we do well never to forget that we must then be manifested individually before Him as He sits upon His Judgment Seat. That may well be a great and terrible day for some when all things shall be "naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do" (Heb. iv. 12, 13). In His presence all uncleanness, or sin, will be seen in its true colours, and also then there will be a just balance to estimate our service. In that day we may well be ashamed before Him when we might have received His "Well done." "Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thes. v. 6).

CHAPTER V.

THE REJECTED KING

(Matt. xxi. 33-46; xxii. 1-14).

We may now pick up the thread of the story as it is revealed in the acts and words of the Lord Jesus. The interval between the parables of Matt. xiii. and this present group is full of events of the deepest interest.

The opening scene is laid around the death of John Baptist, following upon his noble testimony against the wickedness of the Herodian party. Against this wicked act not a word is raised by either the Pharisee or Sadducee. By their silence, they condoned and became partakers of Herod's iniquity, so advancing a great stride along the road to the day when, not as silent abettors of Herod's wickedness, but as active agents, they force the hands of both Herod and Pilate against the Lord of Glory. Once again the Lord is seen in symbolic action, separating Himself from the people. As we see Him departing "by ship into a desert place apart," we are reminded of the action of Moses removing the tabernacle from a defiled camp with a like result, for "when the people had heard, they followed Him on foot out of the cities" (Matt. xiv. 18). And it is here, "outside the camp," and in a desert place, that the Good Shepherd spreads a

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table and satisfies the hungry ones with bread from His Own Hands. Then, alone, He spends the night upon the mountain top in prayer.

In chapter 15, the Scribes and Pharisees came out to Him, not as those who hunger to be fed, but as fault finders, who see evil only in others. To them Christ bares the sharp, two-edged Sword of the Word, cutting them to the quick with words which revealed the hypocrisy of their hearts.

It would almost seem as though from that point the Lord deliberately piles evidence upon evidence in proof of His Messiahship, thus removing the last excuse from those who should reject Him. Again He feeds the multitude, and heals them of all their sicknesses until the whole countryside rings with the glory of the God of Israel. But, like Pharaoh, they had hardened their hearts, and are only stung with jealousy as they see the multitudes mightily moved at His gracious words and mighty deeds. And then again the fateful words are spoken, "And He left them and departed" (verse 4).

The ministry then develops toward His disciples, strengthening their faith in Himself. Peter's marvelous confession of faith is drawn from him, which in turn produces what may well be the first direct statement of the Lord in relation to His Church of the future.

Once only is this word used in connection with the Old Testament (Acts vii. 38). The word, beautifully expressing the double thought of separation from and unto, was strictly true of Israel in the wilderness. They were no longer Pharaoh's people, but, gathered out

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from Egypt, they were known as JEHOVAH's people, the only people ever claimed by JEHOVAH for Himself.

But here it is Christ Who says, "I will build My Church," so emphasising the fundamental fact that, whilst Israel is for all time JEHOVAH's people, the Church of the New Covenant is essentially His.

That the Church is neither Jew nor Gentile is plainly stated in Scripture; she neither shares the future blessing of the one nor the woes of the other. She is a living organisation apart from both, having her origin and destiny alike in Christ her Head.

The failure to recognise her separate place in Scripture is undoubtedly the most fruitful cause of the prevalent failure to rightly divide the Word of Truth.

It is also helpful to remember that the Church, which is described as "the Body of Christ," remained a mystery until revealed by Christ Himself to the Apostle Paul, and has little in common with—though over-lapping—the early days described in the Acts of the Apostles.

The Church of the early days was Jewish in character, meeting in the Temple, maintaining obedience to the Mosaic law, and waiting for the Messiah; whilst the Church of Christ was typically Gentile in character, having no Temple ritual as a centre, claiming perfect freedom from the bondage of the Law, and is waiting for her Lord from Heaven, in Whom, and not the earthly kingdom, all her hopes are set.

The "I will build" (Matt. xvi. 18) is emphatically future, and the Church here evidently stands in contrast to the Kingdom of Heaven. The keys are always an expression of governmental authority.

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which we never find Peter exercising in the Church, but which is evidently promised in the Kingdom, not only to Peter, but also to all the twelve (Matt. xix. 28). From this point the Lord silenced His disciples' mouths as to His Messiahship, and also definitely speaks of His rapidly approaching death at Jerusalem. The crisis of His ministry was past, and the Kingly office was rapidly overshadowed by the rejection and the Cross.

It is interesting to notice that it was just at this moment that the Lord took Peter, James and John apart to the high mountain. There was a danger of faltering faith clearly evidenced in Peter's reply to the Lord (Matt. xvi. 22). The very thought of suffering and death brings the words with a rush to his lips, "Be it far from Thee, Lord!" So now they are shown their Lord glorified, a sight which they can never forget, a glory which all the horror of the Cross could never obliterate. There, too, they see the two great witnesses of the Old Dispensation—Moses and Elias—and listen whilst they also speak of "His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke ix. 31).

From that scene of prophetic glory the Lord returns to Judea, but before commencing that last journey He once again takes His disciples apart, and states plainly to them that at the end of that journey lies the act of treachery and death, but that on the third day He should rise again (Matt. xx. 17-19).

His approach to Jerusalem, "lowly and seated upon an ass," produced a wonderful effect, the apparent forerunner of a triumphal approach to the

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Throne of David, instead of, as it proved to be, the opening scene of the tragedy of the Cross. The multitudes acclaimed Him as "Jesus the Prophet," the children sang their Hosannahs to the Son of David in the very Temple, as He once again suddenly appeared in that building, acting as the King. At that moment their day had come if they had but repented and received Him. But their hearts were finally hardened, and they had fully determined their way. Seeing this, the Lord again fills the office of the prophet, enshrining His message in the double parable of

THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN, and
THE WEDDING FEAST,

which foretell the Kingdom in rejection and the mystic Bride.

Let us now turn to a detailed study of these two parables.

PARABLE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN, OR THE
KINGDOM REJECTED (Matt. xxi. 33-46).

This parable brings before us some striking contrasts between it and others which have preceded it. It is introduced very abruptly, without the usual preface, "The Kingdom of Heaven." It also contains the rare use by Matthew of the phrase, "The Kingdom of God," whilst its primary meaning was not hidden, but plainly revealed to the listeners chiefly concerned—the Chief Priests and Pharisees. It contained, first, a very evident warning to those wicked men that not

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only was He fully aware of their evil designs, but also that their plans, though successful, would end in utter disaster for themselves and the nation. It also contains a solemn warning, which is applicable throughout all the sphere in which the Kingdom of God operates. And, lastly, it is a direct prophetic statement pointing onward to the final Kingdom glory.

These three lines of teaching need to be clearly recognised and separated if we would learn the full lesson from the parable.

First, then, we might briefly study the plain warning given to the Elders of the people. A definite statement is made as to the ownership of the vineyard. It was Jehovah Who had planted Israel in that land, Who had hedged her round, digged the winepress, and built the tower. It was because they were His people that He fenced them in from enemies on every hand and preserved them. But the Lord had not delivered them in an objectless way. They were liberated and blessed that they might serve Him. The vineyard was hired to them, but the Lord had a claim upon the fruit.

What a sad history He reminds them of now! Servant after servant had been sent to present the claims of God upon the people, with results which were awful in their sameness. Instead of fruit toward God, they sealed their rejection of His demands in the blood of the prophets, though in strange irony, each generation builded tombs in honour of the men their fathers had killed.

Then come the words, "Last of all, He sent unto them His Son, saying, they will reverence My Son."

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What more pointed claim could the Lord make than that? His Deity and Messiahship are both clearly stated in order that they, the Rulers, might realise the heinousness of the crime they contemplated. He was God's last embassy! Never more would prophet's voice be heard beseeching and warning. John they had beheaded, and with him they had received the last message from the servants.

Now God's last word is spoken "by His Son," in very deed a divine ultimatum. He was "the heir of all things," and as such came unto His own, claiming His Own things by right divine. They are here warned plainly that in fulfilling their hideous plot they will bring upon themselves blood-guiltiness far transcending the guilt of their fathers, for whilst they had slain prophets, men of like passions with themselves, they were becoming murderers of their King and their God.

The simple appeal to the conscience and common sense of the multitude: "When the Lord of the vineyard cometh, what will He do unto those husbandmen?" brings an answer which should have startled those haughty priests, for, say the people, "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out His vineyard to other husbandmen which shall render Him the fruits in their seasons." It would seem that the arrow went home, for from their hearts comes the involuntary cry, "God forbid!" (Luke xx. 16). But with hammer-like force the Lord applies the answer direct to those wicked men, in prophetic words: "Therefore say I unto *you*, the Kingdom of God shall be taken from *you*, and given to a Nation bring-

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ing forth the fruits thereof ” (verse 43)—words which reached even their case-hardened consciences. But again, like Pharaoh, they only hardened their hearts, and were barely restrained, by fear of the people, from immediate action.

These words of the Lord are sufficient to utterly condemn the Rulers and Chief Priests. Whilst the multitude acted ignorantly, under the spur of emotional excitement, *they knew* that He was the Heir, and, fearing to lose their ill-gotten power, they deliberately said, “ This is the Heir, come, let us kill Him, and let us seize His inheritance ” (verse 38). From this historic point of view we may turn for a few minutes to its general setting, the moral application of the parable to all dispensations.

From the very beginning it was clearly revealed that any privilege divinely bestowed carried with it a responsibility which could not be evaded. The blessedness of Adam depended upon his obedience to the Word of God, and when his time of fruit was come the Lord God came into His garden, but found only a barren field and a rebel servant.

What a contrast is seen in Abraham, who, being blessed of God, was not found lacking when the Lord sought fruit from him on the Mount called Moriah ! There he laid his all upon the altar, withholding nothing from the Lord his blesser, and, because of this, was afterward called “ The Friend of G-d.”

Nebuchadnezzar and other mighty men all teach the same lesson. Raised up by God, they became inflated with pride, ruling selfishly and regardless of God, until they crashed to the earth, a mass of ruin.

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In the Epistle to the Romans, chapters ix. to xi. all combine to bring the same lesson home to our consciences. Blessed as none others have been in the abundant grace of God in Christ Jesus, and privileged as no other people have ever been, have we, and are we bringing forth fruit unto righteousness? Are we in very deed recognising the fact that we are not our own, that we are the possession of God? From our salvation to the uttermost of our earthly career we owe everything to the Lord. And does He not often come into His garden seeking His pleasant fruits, only to find a crabbed refusal, or a grudging gift?

The time of fruit is the time of sacrifice, the place of giving up that which may well be the darling product of our lives. But we are His, the trees of His planting, and shall the tree complain against its Planter when He seeks its fruit? And if He comes seeking vainly for fruit, or is met with the bitter spirit of rebellion, will not the old-time results be seen? The branch will wither slowly away, the fair, green leaves will wilt and drop, and the fruit become a loathsome thing and a scorning to all who pass by.

We have here assuredly a deathless principle covering all dispensations, and which we do well to note carefully, lest we, too, be removed out of the way of blessing and testimony, even though we be saved so as by fire, from the eternal judgments.

Now let us turn back to the prophetic character of the parable which has much of real interest for us. We do not need to dwell upon the direct prophecy as to the death of the Lord at the hands of the Rulers, with their rejection of the King as a corollary. That portion

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has become history. For us the important part of the prophecy is that which goes far beyond that rejection, reaching out to the end of the age.

There is a very curious light thrown upon the words quoted from Psalm cxviii. 22, 23, in an old Jewish legend, to which the Lord apparently refers. When Solomon was building the House of the Lord, every stone was brought from the quarries perfectly wrought and ready for its place in accordance with the architect's plans, so that no sound of a tool was heard in the process of building. During the work, the builders were continually discovering a stone of curious structure which could not be made to fit *their* plans in any way. No one could imagine to what use a stone so awkwardly shaped could be put, so at last the builders rejected the stone, and it was covered with rubbish and lost. The days passed by, and the building was complete except for the top-stone, which could not be found anywhere. All manner of stones were tried, but none could fit the key-marks of the architect.

Then the rejected stone was remembered, and search was made until it was unearthed, with the result that "the stone which the builders refused became the head of the corner," whilst with a great shout the people cried, "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes."

For many years those words were recognised as prophetic, but now the Lord places them in their proper historic setting. He is the rejected Stone, refused by the builders, and for a time He must be hidden from the eyes of Israel. But the building can never be completed by any other stone. Human

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government, whether in the hands of Israel or Gentile nations, will never reach perfection until it does so as headed up in Christ.

The world has seen its Nimrods, its Nebuchadnezzars, its Cæsars, and its Napoleons all seeking to fill the place of "the Chief Corner Stone." And we are yet to see the greatest attempt of all when Antichrist—the Great Beast—shall sweep his victorious way unhindered until he sits enthroned as God in the Holy City. In that day, many of the Jewish builders will try to fit that false stone into the long-vacant place. At this point we get a strong link with the prophetic words of Daniel. In chapter ii. 44, 45 we see a small stone cut out without hands, which smites the great image of world-power upon the feet, bringing the whole to the ground in irreparable ruin. Afterwards it becomes itself an everlasting Kingdom which shall never be destroyed.

Now mark the words of the Lord Jesus. "The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a NATION bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matt. xxi. 43, 44). How are these words to be interpreted?

We may go safely thus far. Israel was standing at that moment at the most critical point of her history. The Kingdom of God was in her midst in the personal presence of Jesus the Christ. To have accepted His Kingly ministry would have at once placed the top-stone upon the glorious fabric of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Smiting Stone of Daniel's vision would

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have then destroyed the World Empire of Rome, replacing it by the Everlasting Kingdom.

But Israel rejected the King, and as the echoes of the cry, "We will not have this Man to reign over us," died away, the Kingdom of God passed slowly, reluctantly from them, with saddest of results for themselves. Instead of being the centre from which all the government of God should radiate, they became the off-scouring of the earth.

So far the prophecy has become history. But has the Kingdom of God been given to another NATION? If so, which is that nation, and where does it rule?

Various answers are given by differing schools of interpretation, but mostly they are palpably wrong. To get a correct answer we must discover a NATION which corporately is bringing forth the desired fruit.

The common view that the Gentile nations became the possessors of that blessing is obviously incorrect.

It is a Nation, and not a combination of nations, that is spoken of, and at no period of history from the time of Christ, has a Gentile nation acted as a representative of the Kingdom of God. From the Cross to the present period has been an unbroken history of national rapine, robbery and cruelty, each succeeding nation acting as a fit representative of the blood-thirsty beasts or birds they carry upon their banners. One looks in vain to-day for a single nation bearing the evident marks of the Kingdom of Heaven, marks which are clearly given us in the Sermon on the Mount.

In every nation evil reigns supreme, whilst righteousness still lies a blood-stained victim, trampled

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beneath the mailed feet of force. Not in the Eagles of Rome, or the Leopards of France, or the Lions of Britain, will be found the sign of the Kingdom of God.

That Christendom became the lineal descendant of the Kingdom is, perhaps, the favourite answer to the problem, as it is also the oldest. But, again, one only needs to cite one or two facts to prove the falsity of such an answer. Christendom is not a nation, which is one of the necessary points. Again, what is the history of Christendom, either from the human or divine point of view? From the human standpoint, undoubtedly it has been a wonderful movement. It has swept the whole civilised world, conquered mighty armies, overthrown Governments, and stamped its character upon the thought of millions of people. One readily admits all that; but beneath the flaunting banner of the Cross so proudly carried by the armies of Christendom, runs a river of blood—the blood of the martyrs of God; whilst behind the walls of her gorgeous temples lie such masses of corruption as would even make the pagan blush for shame. If we would know God's estimate, we may well read it in the words of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, a picture full of solemn realities. In chapters 2 and 3 we have a progressive history of the movement, and its end is described as so utterly obscene that the Lord must spue it out of His mouth. In chapter 17, we read the awful end to which her spiritual whoredoms bring her. Not in Christendom can be found the glory of the everlasting kingdom.

But some say, is not the Church of God, which is

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in, but not belonging to, Christendom, the nation referred to? Again we must, I think, answer decidedly No! It is true that the Apostle Peter describes the Saints as a "Holy Nation" (1 Pet. 2. 9), but we need to remember that the Scripture always keeps before us the Heavenly Calling of the Church, and in no single instance does it portray the Church as an earthly nation comparable with other nations or Israel. We are "a Royal Priesthood," which directly associates us with Christ, the great Melchizedec, kingly priest, and undoubtedly when He reigns we shall also reign with Him. The Church is a body composed of members from every kingdom and nation, but never has exercised, and has no warrant from God to exercise, any national function here upon earth.

But, it may be urged, is not the Church representing God on earth to-day? We must emphatically agree to that, but with it we must also clearly realise that it is not in any sense of the word a governmental representation. "We are ambassadors for Christ," a term which sharply defines the believer's position in this world. He is always on duty in a strange country, having no business in that country's internal politics. His business is to represent and maintain the honour of his King in His absence. To this the Apostle Paul adds, that as ambassadors, "we pray in Christ's stead—be reconciled to God," a phrase which plainly indicates that the world in which we are ambassadors, is alienated from the government of God.

In life and word we are to exhibit "the virtues of

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Him Who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2. 9), a pathway which closely follows that trodden by the rejected King. The Church's association with Christ in this dispensation is that of rejection, though it shall yet be her joy to share in the glories of His restoration. In the triumphs of that day, when He shall fill the throne and reign as sovereign Lord, He will have as an intimate companion, the blood-bought Bride, robed in all her spotless purity.

This pushes our search for the key to a period which must be yet future; and to a kingdom not yet born. There is but one nation spoken of in prophetic Scriptures which can fill the outline of the picture, and that nation is the regenerated Israel. The prophets Zechariah and Joel are largely occupied with a description of the scenes which immediately surround the glorious appearing of the Lord, and in them, as also in Isaiah and Ezekiel, we discover a Nation which, in an agony likened unto birth-pangs, turns to the One Whom they had pierced, and mourn because of Him. Both nationally and individually, they confess their long-continued sin and rebellion, and what sweeter fruit does the Lord desire, than a broken spirit and a contrite heart? Such offerings He will never despise (Ps. li. 16, 17). Has He not promised that with such a people He will delight to dwell? (Is. lvi. 15). He then purges iniquity from Israel, opens the new covenant, and from that day their sins and their iniquities will be remembered no more (Jer. xxxi. 23-40). From the opened Heavens they will receive the fulness of pentecostal blessing, their sons

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and their daughters shall prophesy in the plenitude and power of the Spirit, and Jehovah shall say, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God and they shall be My people" (2 Cor. vi. 16). With what shouts of rejoicing will Christ, the once "Rejected Stone," be acclaimed as "The Head of the Corner," and, perfectly united with Israel, He will then become "the Crushing Stone" of Daniel's vision, bringing to nought all governments and powers, reigning until everything has been subjected under His feet.

Again Israel is the perfect key, and, indeed, the only key which unlocks the parable, and we do well to say, as we ponder the prophetic words, "It is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes." A brief summary of the parable may be helpful, and will give us the following points :—

Israel unregenerate was fruitless toward God;
Israel unregenerate slew the prophets;
Israel unregenerate crucified the Christ;
Israel regenerated will crown her King;
Israel regenerated will bring forth fruit abundantly;
Israel regenerated will be an everlasting Kingdom.

The Kingdom which might have been their glorious possession was taken from them and reserved for a future period, the intervening centuries being occupied by the calling out of the church—the heavenly people for His Name. The words of James in Acts xv. 13-18 state this clearly, and emphasise the fact, overlooked by many, that "AFTER this I will return,

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and will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up : that the residue of men might seek after the Lord." That day will surely dawn, and the Nation shall be born again in readiness for it.

The second parable now falls into its right place. The period of rejection is ended with its mingled sorrow and hope deferred, whilst the key-note of rejoicing is struck in the very title :—

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST, OR THE MYSTIC BRIDE (Matt. xxii. 1-14).

There will probably be but few Gospel preachers who have not revelled in the fat fields of this parable, containing as it does so many points, both of loving entreaty and solemn warning. For that very reason it is, perhaps, the most useful for our purpose as showing the difference between the illustrative and the prophetic use of the parables.

At this point it is well to emphasise one thing : that nothing that has been written weakens the use of parabolic teaching, if kept within the bounds of teaching or illustration. It is only when the parables are interpreted that we must find the right key and use it unswervingly.

As an illustration, we see in this parable the wonderful grace of God, Who makes every provision for the sinner's need, and is earnestly seeking to bring the undeserving ones into the hall of joy in happy fellowship with Himself and His glorious Son. We see also the natural heart of man displayed in the mani-

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fold refusals and excuses which they, one and all, begin to make, as also the undying hatred which maltreats the messengers of that grace. Again the gracious picture widens out, and we may follow the servants into the highways where "bad and good" are alike discovered and brought into the chamber until the place is filled with guests. Then a shadow falls across the picture, and one watches with bated breath the man with no wedding garment on, as the King in His Glory passes onward inspecting His guests, and discovers in him the self-righteous sinner untouched by the divine provision of the finished work of Christ. The door opens and closes, and through the closed door one hears the last sad cry of a soul eternally lost. Truly in this parable, from the festal hall to the outer darkness seems but a step.

Many a soul has been gripped by the power of that wonderful story, falling with adoring wonder at the feet of so blessed a Lord, whilst many another has been stricken to the heart and conscience as they have seen the likeness to themselves in those wicked men with whom the King was wroth. From our hearts we pray that still many more may be reached and blessed as the old story is repeated o'er and o'er.

But that does not interpret the parable as a prophecy; yet a prophecy it is in very deed, full of information for those who shall patiently dig it out. With this in view, we might ask a series of questions which will clear the ground and give us a right perspective :

Who is the King, and Who is His Son for Whom the marriage is made?

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Who are the servants that carry the invitations and are so spitefully entreated?

Who are the guests that made excuses and would not come, and who are the guests from the highways?

Lastly, who is the guest without a wedding garment?

As to the first question, there should be little or no division of opinion. That here we have God the Father, ever delighting in His Son, may be taken for granted. All that follows in the parable is centred in the opening thought, and is fully supported throughout the Scriptures. It is not the guests or the feast that occupies the heart of God, but His only begotten Son. All is for *His* sake, to glorify *Him*, to rejoice His great heart. The marriage was made "for His Son." All the purposes of God eternally centre in Him. And here we get one of those purposes unfolded for us, but in "mystery" form. That is, it was a dark saying when it was spoken, to be unfolded or revealed at a later period.

That purpose was the marriage for His Son.

The King had been rejected by His own people, and was to be hidden from their sight. They had said of His possession, "the inheritance shall be ours," but the Father had planned another inheritance for Him that should afterwards be described as "the riches of the glory of His inheritance" (Eph. i. 18). That possession was His Bride, prefigured in the earliest days in Eden, when the first Adam received his bride from out the jaws of a death-like sleep.

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Strange foreshadowings of this wonderful event had been seen in Israel's history. They had had a Joseph who had been cast out by his brethren, only to be exalted by God and blessed with a gentile bride in the time of his rejection. They had a Moses, who was also rejected by his brethren, though he proffered them a salvation from cruel bondage in Egypt. Away in the backside of the desert he, too, receives a bride who was a stranger to the tents of Israel, a bride who afterwards shares his glory as he leads the people through the wilderness.

In the perfect knowledge of God, the rejection of Christ was provided for, and in that foreknowledge the Church was predestined to her glorious calling—the delight of the heart of Christ in the day of His rejection, and His crowning joy in the day of His triumph.

The opening phrase of the parable gives us, then, three personages of prime importance—the King : God ; His Son : Jesus Christ ; and, implied in the word “Marriage,” the Bride, who is clearly described in Eph. 5 as the Church, but which, until the revelation given through the Apostle Paul, remains a mystery.*

*A difficulty in the minds of some has led to a denial of the Church's relationship to Christ as the Bride, owing to the use of the same title by the Old Testament Prophets in connection with Israel. Some have sought to bridge that difficulty by alleging that Israel and the Church are one body in this relationship.

The following facts, which can be easily proved by reference, should clear the issue of all doubt :—

In the Old Testament it is JEHOVAH who speaks of Israel as a wife espoused unto Himself ; afterwards put away, but finally to be restored when purged from her whoredoms.

In the New Testament it is the Lord Jesus Christ Who is spoken of as the Bridegroom, whilst the Bride is the Church—a

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We now turn to the second point—who are the servants? The common usage in Gospel work has naturally turned our minds to an answer which cannot be the correct one, that we are the servants; that is, that the Church is here represented. As the Church is already present in the person of the Bride and in the place of honour, she cannot also be represented by the servants. No bridegroom would dream of using such a title when speaking of His bride. The Lord, when speaking to His disciples, said of them: “Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends” (John xv. 15). The Bride may, in the plenitude of her love, delight to serve her Lord, but He uses terms of endearment which place her far above the position of a servant. The servant may occupy a place of honour in the service of his Lord, but of Christ and the Church are spoken the wonderful words, “We are members of His body. . . . They two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church” (Eph. v. 20-27).

Still another thing needs to be considered. The servants are charged with the message, “Come unto the marriage,” whilst point after point clearly speaks of the completion of all arrangements. “All things are ready.” Now, the feast never precedes the

company apart from both Jew and Gentile. It should be evident that JEHOVAH and the Lord Jesus Christ, though one in essential Deity, are separate in person. It is JEHOVAH Who lays upon Christ the iniquity of us all (Isa. liii.); and again it is JEHOVAH Who says unto the LORD (ADONAI), “Sit Thou at my right hand” (Ps. cx.). JEHOVAH—the Father—acts in covenant relationship with Israel, whilst Christ—the Son—finds a Kingdom in Israel, but a Bride in His Church.

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wedding; it is of necessity that which has already taken place, whilst here the guests are bidden to share in the joy of the Bridegroom. A scene still future is thus brought before us. The home-gathering of the Church, and her presentation before the Father in all her spotless beauty must precede this scene, for whilst the wedding feast is here witnessed on earth, the wedding itself is as clearly foreshown as a heavenly event.

In Luke xii. 31-40 the Lord speaks of His return to earth for this very occasion, and mentions one striking fact in connection with the feast, that He will gird Himself and act the servant's part, whilst they sit at meat. But this word of great importance is added in verse 36 : " When He will return FROM the wedding feast " (Mr. Newberry), thus fixing the time of His return, and also of the feast.

The wedding must have taken place, Christ and His Church be united, and then the whole universe is called in to share in the joy of the Bridegroom.

The setting of the parable is, then, evidently the period which overlaps the present and the next—the Millennial dispensation. The Church has been removed, but the Kingdom has not yet been manifested. The duration of that period seems to be nowhere clearly defined, but it cannot be less than seven years, whilst there may possibly be a short period added of preparation for the great events which fill the seven years of Daniel's prophecy. It is in this period that we may discover the identity of the servants.

A careful search through the Old Testament prophets reveals an interesting state of affairs during that

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interval. The re-organisation of the Roman Empire into its ten kingdom form, with the manifestation of the Man of Sin, proceeds side by side with the restoration of Israel to their national life in Palestine. Stupendous social upheavals are clearly foreshadowed, and are already commencing, and in them Christendom is finally and completely destroyed by the Socialist Infidel Power which is already seen rising from the seething masses of the people. In Israel we see prophetic visions of a spiritual revival akin to that which marked the days of John Baptist, a rising consciousness of the approaching Kingdom of Heaven. That the two witnesses of Rev. xi. will complete and head the movement seems evident, as is also their end, being killed in the streets of Jerusalem at the climax of the horrible reign of Antichrist.

This clearly indicates a fact which is paralleled by the parable. The servants who carry the message of the grace of the coming King are cruelly entreated, receiving, in fact, the same treatment as was meted out to the servants of the preceding parable.

The message is first carried to the representative leaders of the people, but they are no more ready to receive the Messiah, or to be recipients of His grace, than were those of the first century. They will not only make all manner of excuses, but will reveal the wickedness of their hearts by openly persecuting the messengers of that Gospel. Luke adds a touch to the picture which throws a light on these coming events. Before going to the "highways and hedges," the servants are sent to "the streets and lanes of the city." The Lord's own ministry plainly

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explains this phrase. Here are “the publicans and sinners,” as opposed to the self-righteous Pharisees. They are the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind. But though all these, according to Isaiah lxi., have the Gospel preached unto them, there yet remains room—God’s House must be filled, and the order is issued which extends the blessing to “the highways and hedges.” It will not be the first time that persecution has worked to the glory of God! We read in Acts 8 of a great persecution against the Church which scattered them abroad; but we are told that “they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word”—the forerunners of a mighty army that shall do that same business in a day to come. Such an event is foreseen in the Scriptures, and during the period of the Great Tribulation we find a multitude too great for numbering, saved out of every people, nation and tongue, and arrayed in white robes (Rev. vii. 9-17). “Whence came they?” greets this strange company, and the answer, surely, is given by the Lord Himself as He speaks to the Pharisees, directly referring to this feast: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves shut out. And *they* shall come from the East and from the West, and from the North and from the South, and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God” (Luke xiii. 28, 29). What more vivid description can we want of “the highways and hedges”?

Then we reach the curious appendix of the guest who was cast out. Who does he represent? As a

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Gospel preacher, he presented a difficulty to me for many years. Was it possible that one might reach Heaven and afterwards be discovered as unsaved? Could one possibly enter the courts of Heaven unclothed in the spotless robe of divine righteousness? The only escape was to evade the question, for one felt such an answer to be impossible in the face of other Scriptures. But as one realises the prophetic scope of the parable we discover that every detail of it falls correctly into place.

We need to remember that an eastern wedding-feast occupied not a single day, but always a period; longer or shorter according to the social position of the parties engaged. Undoubtedly the scene of rejoicing described in this parable also covers a period—the Millennial AGE, when joy and gladness shall replace the sorrow and the tears of this dispensation. Before that day of rejoicing is introduced, there is a judgment of those wicked servants, and all who would not accept the gracious invitation are utterly destroyed. For them “the great and terrible Day of the Lord” will be as a consuming fire. In that judgment, the outward, active principle of rebellion is broken, and Satan is bound for a thousand years; but there are yet some left who, whilst outwardly obedient, are disloyal at heart. The Messianic Psalms sometimes speak of those who yield feigned obedience (Ps. xviii. 44, and lxvi. 8), and it would seem that, during the reign of the Lord Jesus upon the earth, these will be discovered and manifested by Himself. Outwardly they are one with those who are clothed with

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His grace, but at heart they are disloyal and ungrateful. Surely such an one is figured for us here !

Not Heaven, but the earthly glory of Christ, forms the groundwork of the picture, and in the end of that wretched man is seen the awful destiny of those who, during the Millennium, are not in truth the subjects of His grace. It is a fitting commentary on the conclusion of this parable, which is drawn for us by the Apostle John, when he speaks of a released Satan at the end of the thousand years, who gathers to his banner a multitude of those who have thus yielded a pretended obedience to Christ, as filings are drawn to a magnet. For the last time, they lift puny hands against God and His Christ, only to be utterly destroyed by fire coming down from God out of Heaven. In that last dreadful scene, everything that defiles is removed and the way prepared for the eternal glory of the Kingdom of God, in which there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, because the former things are for ever passed away.

CHAPTER VI.

THE KINGDOM RESTORED

Upon the thickly wooded slopes of a hill, a little group of men are standing. It is eventide, and as the sun goes down, the hum of a great city rises to the ears of that silent group of watchers. It is but a few days to the Passover, and already the streets of Jerusalem are thronged, whilst some are camping on the slopes of the hills outside the city gates.

What strangely different thoughts were filling the hearts of that company! Before them stretched a sight well calculated to fill the heart with pride. Was not this Jerusalem, beautiful for situation, the delight of all the earth? Overhead the evening sky was darkening down, but no dreadful omens were written upon its face for all to read. Everything spoke of peace and beauty, but there was One in that company Who read with prophetic vision the scenes which lay beyond the horizon of man's short day.

He stands alone, aloof, even in the midst of His disciples, gazing down upon the city, whilst, like a picture drawn by invisible hand, He sees the gathering armies of Titus, the broken walls, the violated homes, and the blood-drenched streets of Jerusalem.

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With all the terror of a Judge, yet full of wonderful compassion, He pronounces the words of the Doom, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matt. xxiii. 37-39). Luke adds the words which speak of the coming judgments, whilst using a phrase which unveils the very heart of Christ, telling us that, "when He beheld the city He wept (wailed) over it." No dry-hearted preacher of judgment was He, but through a very veil of falling tears, and with broken voice, He pronounces the Doom of those who know not their day.

A solemn opening indeed has this closing chapter of the Lord's prophetic ministry, of which the parables form but a portion, and which is, as we have already noted, a direct link between the vision of Daniel in the Old Testament and the vision of John in the New.

It is interesting to notice how little impression had been made upon the disciples by the words of the Lord. Even as we find to-day, the presence of the material things presses so heavily upon our minds that even plainly-spoken words relating to the future, leave us apparently untouched, though they are oftentimes remembered in after days.

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In this case, the disciples seem to be filled with the wonders and glories of the material stones of a temple which, but a few moments before, had been pronounced empty and desolate by their Lord. Instantly and plainly He replies by foretelling the utter destruction of the temple, a prophecy literally fulfilled at the conclusion of the great siege by Titus.

That prophetic statement is, however, chiefly interesting as being the immediate cause of the three-fold question of the disciples, which is answered by the Lord in chap. 24 and the parables following.

We must carefully note the questions, as they form the principal key to the whole statement.

They are as follows :—"When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the age?" The first question directly refers to the events spoken of—the destruction of the city and the temple, with its accompanying sorrows. The second relates to the glorious appearing of Christ, having no reference whatever to His previous coming into the air to receive from the world His own. The third question deals with the end of this present dispensation, and the opening of the Millennial age of Kingdom rule. The prophecy directly answers all these questions, and only ordinary care is needed to rightly divide the answers given. A brief analysis of the chapter along these three lines will help us to get the concluding parables in their right perspective.

The first question, as we have seen, only concerned itself with the immediate future, that is, the destruc-

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tion of Jerusalem and the temple. The answer to the question is not given in Matthew's Gospel, whilst the Gospel by Luke gives it in full. There we read, "WHEN ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, THEN know that the desolation thereof is nigh" (Luke xxi. 20).

In Matthew, the Lord's prophetic vision overleaps the centuries, fastening upon the final sorrow of Jerusalem, and with it, Judea. Then the city shall be besieged and taken by the armies of the Beast, though afterwards delivered by the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. The destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D. forms the foreground for the more terrible scenes which shall be at the end of the age. Josephus, and other historians of Jewish events, record the complete fulfilment of this first stage of the prophecy, with the interesting additional fact that, after the armies had gathered around Jerusalem a partial retirement of the forces took place, during which many escaped to the mountains, an event which is ascribed to the warning given by Christ.

The second and third answers are curiously mixed, though in the main features they are kept separate. The two events are so intertwined that such a result might well be expected. Though stated previously, we need to remember that the sign of the end of the Age precedes in order the sign of His coming. That should be clear as we go on. "What shall be the sign of Thy coming?" they ask, and, before answering, the disciples are solemnly warned against the many false Christs which shall arise, drawing many

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after them, which is indeed one of the greatest signs of the closing age. Being earthly in their manifestation, they are not to be believed, even though they may show mighty signs and work miracles. The disciples are pointed upwards for the sign of His coming, and here we may read from verses 23-31, which clearly give the sign to be expected. "THEN shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven, and THEN shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory." These words, linked on to those recorded in Luke 21, cut directly at the root of such teaching as would make this coming identical with the Lord's return for the home-call of His Church, an event which must have preceded it. There is not a word in the chapter which relates in any way to the Church, whilst, on the contrary, every word does clearly refer to Israel and Jerusalem. The gathering of "His Elect" in verse 31 is the direct fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, and is also directly foreshadowed by the Lord in the parable of the Drag-net (see page 40).

The angels are not sent to gather the saints from the ends of the earth. The Church has no geographical centre. They are gathered together unto Him (2 Thess. ii. 1) at His coming. Again, the words, "one shall be taken and the other left," are a direct reversal of that which happens at the Parousia of our Lord. Then it will be the saints who are taken, whilst the unsaved world is left behind for the terrible days of wrath, but here it is the wicked who are taken, and the righteous are left behind to enter into

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the joy of their Lord. (See Parable of the Tares, page 26.)

In the first coming we have no evidence that the Lord will be seen by any except those immediately concerned, whilst here "every eye shall see Him," and universal mourning will be the result. It is this question with which the last three parables deal.

Finally, we get the sign of "the end of the Age," which is given us from verse 15 on. Again it is an evident sign, the understanding of which is largely helped by a careful study of Daniel and the Revelation. The phrase, "end of the Age," is apparently limited here to the three and a half years of the Great Tribulation, and the sign given is "WHEN ye therefore shall see the Abomination of Desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet stand in the Holy Place. . . . THEN let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains" (verses 15, 16). The Apostle Paul, writing to troubled saints in Thessalonica, who had heard that the Day of the Lord was at hand, reminds them of this very sign, when he writes that "that Day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that Man of Sin be revealed, the son of perdition : who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he as God sitteth in the Temple of God showing himself that he is God " (2 Thes. ii. 3, 4). Here we see that "the Day of the Lord " and "the end of the Age " are terms relating to the same period of time, the former especially being applied to the end of the period. The sign, then, is Antichrist revealed, or manifested in the rebuilt temple at Jerusalem. From that point

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the terrible judgments of the Revelation date, and as the first sign of the gathering armies gave the warning to escape, so now we have a renewed warning, not for Jerusalem only, but for the whole land. The warning is general, and the only way of escape is pointed out—"to the mountains." In that day the Valley of Achor shall be their door of hope, leading to the mountains of Moab and Edom, where they shall be miraculously preserved from all the wrath of the Dragon (Rev. xii.). One other difficulty might be noted before passing on to the parables. In verse 14 we read, "And **THIS** Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and **THEN** shall the End come." That this is not the Gospel delivered unto the Apostle Paul is evident. That Gospel, known as the Gospel of the Grace of God, is definitely associated with the testimony of the Church, and ends with the home-call of the redeemed. Its purpose will then be accomplished, a people having been gathered out of all the nations for the Name of Christ. Note, then, two emphatic words, "**THIS**" and "**THEN**." **THIS** Gospel is the Gospel of the Kingdom, the Gospel preached by Christ, by John the Baptist, by the disciples, and foreshadowed by the prophets. The theme is always the King and the Kingdom. Here the Lord refers to what is often found in the prophets—a great missionary enterprise on the part of the godly remnant during the period before, and including the Great Tribulation, when every nation shall be reached with the preparation cry, "Behold, the King cometh!" **THEN**, when that work is completed, cometh the end.

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To make the coming of the Lord for His Church dependent upon the evangelisation of the world is not consistent with the rest of Scripture, which places no time marks to that event. We have surely no warrant for ruthlessly wresting such a verse from the whole of its context, which is essentially Jewish, and strictly limited to the period named. "Then cometh the end."

That this does not justify us in any slackness in missionary effort is evident. We, too, have been put in trust with a glorious Gospel, and may well say with Paul, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel." As trustees, ambassadors, or debtors, we have a duty which is never relaxed, not only toward God, but toward the poor, needy world around us.

But we do not need to base an argument on a wrong premise for the sake of good which may come. The Scripture, rightly divided, will provide all the impetus we need in the glorious work of the Gospel.

We may now turn to the final set of parables, which may be analysed as follows :—The order is exact in point of time, and they describe events which close the old and open the new dispensation of the Kingdom.

PARABLE.	TOPIC.
THE FIG-TREE.	SIGN OF RESTORATION.
THE VIRGINS.	THE COMING OF THE KING.
THE SERVANTS.	PREPARATION FOR RULE.
THE NATIONS.	THE SOVEREIGNTY OF CHRIST.

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THE PARABLE OF THE FIG-TREE, OR THE SIGN OF RESTORATION (Matt. xxiv. 32, 33).

“Now learn a parable of the fig-tree : when his branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh ; so, likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.”

In the early hours of the morning, whilst returning from Bethany to Jerusalem, the disciples had witnessed a great sign-miracle. At the roadside stood a fig-tree covered with leaves, which promised a harvest of fruit to an expectant Lord. It was soon evident, however, that it produced nothing but fair promises and disappointment. The words the Lord spoke are dreadfully full of meaning when one realises that the tree was used as a type of Israel. Slowly and solemnly the words fell from his lips, “Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever” (Matt. xxi. 19). This was no petulant expression of spite against a fig-tree, but was the considered judgment of the Christ upon the nation which had refused Him the fruit He rightfully sought—“Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever,” and as the disciples watched, the symbolic-tree withered away to a semblance of death, whilst the leaves, so full of false promise, shrivelled and lay crackling upon the roadside, leaving the bare trunk with its naked branches a picture of blasted hope.

Who, reading the history of Israel of the past 1,800 years, could possibly have foreseen any hope of

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a national revival? Scattered to the ends of the earth, surrounded by bitterest foes, suffering the cruellest torments and violent persecutions, they appear to be the most hopeless of peoples. Bereft of both king and ephod, they possess no national or religious anchorage. Yet, standing alone, refusing stubbornly to mix with other nations, they have been miraculously preserved intact, though driven like flying leaves before an autumn wind. What an object lesson the blasted fig-tree was designed to show, and how perfectly has the sign been fulfilled! The Apostle Paul, in Rom. xi., looks upon the wreckage of his people, and asks, "Hath God cast away His people?" As a branch, violently torn from an olive tree, they lay withered and fruitless, but with great assurance of faith, in spite of all appearances, he replies, "God forbid; God hath not cast away His people whom He foreknew." From then to the conclusion of the chapter, he unfolds the purposes of God in Israel, their final restoration, and, through them, the greatness of the blessing which shall yet flow to the ends of the earth.

In the same manner, the Lord turns from the sign of the blasted fig-tree to the parable of a restored fig-tree, in which we get a promise of hope, an evidence of the faithfulness of God, and a sure sign by which we may confidently know the nearness of the Lord's return.

How often, as we have looked upon the trees during a long winter, have our hearts been cheered by the evident swelling of the buds upon the tender branches! It is true that the skies have been overcast, that cold

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winds remind us that winter's icy grip still holds us fast, but the buds, slowly swelling, speak of a mighty power akin to resurrection, promising, not only leafage and fruit for the tree, but also the generous heat of summer.

We look around us to-day and see the nations engaged in deadly strife. Blood-lust and terror hold the peoples in a strangle-hold of death, whilst the outlook is hopeless to the extreme. But the Lord has bidden us watch the fig-tree with its tender branch, and there we find sweet comfort of hope. On every side the buds are swelling with the rising sap of national desire. From every portion of the inhabited world eyes are straining Zionward, whilst intense efforts are being made in preparation for the day when, a nation amongst nations, Israel shall dwell in her own land again. The deadly power of Mahomet is being slowly but surely drained away, and it may well be that, before these pages are read, the buds of the fig-tree may burst into life, in all the green vigour of a renewed national existence. These signs are rapidly becoming history before our eyes.

But the very essence of hope lies in the consciousness of the faithfulness of God, and this parable assures us that God will not forget His people. Though in the long winter nights we get impatient, and our hearts may fail with doubts and fears, yet God remaineth faithful, and the summer-time of redemption will surely come. We may well learn a lesson from the fig-tree when things seem to be hopeless, and the fulfilment of the promises of God appear afar off.

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Look for the buds upon the tender branches ; they are the sweetly speaking prophets of a full fruition. God is faithful, and He is the Promiser.

Does darkness cover your pathway, and sorrow, like an icy shroud, clutch the heart? Come, count the buds upon the tender branch, and know with assurance that the summer is nigh at hand. Then the warmth of His love shall enrich thee, and the hard things shall all be understood in His presence. He shall wipe away thy tears and comfort thee with the sweetest of comfort, whilst the winter shall have for ever passed away for thee !

But the prophetic side of the parable must not be neglected. The parable is the crowning point of the answer to the disciples' three-fold question. Here we have "the sign of His coming, and of the end of the age," but not so much the immediate signs—those are given in the main portion of the chapter—but the evidences which may be seen preparing the way for complete fulfilment. The immediate signs, both of Antichrist in Jerusalem, and of Christ in the Heavens, will be directly fulfilled each in its own day, but this portion of prophecy was intended to comfort and strengthen the hearts of those who should be watching and waiting.

An Israel, being revived to a national consciousness, is the sign given of the nearness of the end of the Age. From the moment when Israel began to awaken to such a consciousness, the buds have been slowly swelling, and as the sap rises in the tree, the leaves slowly form, though hidden from the eye until

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the day when the purposes of God shall be complete. Not only is He preparing the people for the Land, but the Land is also being made ready for the people. "And," saith the Lord, "when ye see these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." What is it that is near, crouching at the very door? Surely the whole chapter answers that question. It is the end of the Age, the completion of the times of the Gentiles, with all that the phrase embodies of terror and of final blessing. A re-peopled Jerusalem must yet pass through the fires of affliction; the re-built temple will yet be a seat for Antichrist and his blasphemous worship; the restored land shall yet be the scene of terrible carnage, and then cometh the end—not of the world, but of the forces of evil, headed up in the satanic trinity. At Armageddon they are overthrown in utter disaster, and meet their doom in the Abyss and the Lake of Fire. This consummation is reached, not by human effort, but by the glorious appearing of the Lord, Who descends as promised by the angels (Acts i. 11) upon the Mount of Olives.

Who may speak of the blessedness of that end? The scales, which blind Israel now, will then drop from their eyes, and they shall see Him Whom they once pierced, and mourn with a great mourning, a blessed preparation for a great rejoicing to follow. Then Pentecost shall fully come, the Spirit of God regenerating the nation as one man, whilst God Himself will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. The fig-tree shall then bring forth the fruit which shall fully satisfy their Lord, and they shall be an everlasting Kingdom which shall never be destroyed.

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Such is the message of the Fig-tree as it relates to Israel, but has it no message for ourselves? Yea, surely ! For if the signs are so manifest which speak of the near approach of Israel's restoration to King-dom blessing, let us not forget that those very signs speak of an event which must be even nearer still. The Lord must come **FOR** His saints before He can return **WITH** them in power and great glory. He must take His Bride to the Father's Home before He can return from the wedding to the feast, and if the preparations for that feast are so far advanced toward the glorious appearing, surely we should be watching and ready for our Blessed Lord, Who may come to-day(?), to-morrow(?), but must surely come quickly !

We have no signs or portents ! He is Himself our Hope, and we do well to search the heavens daily in eager expectation, meanwhile keeping our garments unspotted from the world, and ourselves busy in the glorious service of the Living God.

Learn, then, this lesson of the fig-tree. The buds are formed, the branches are tender, the leaves are ready to burst, and surely the message they bring is one which should rejoice our hearts, " He is near, even at the doors."

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS, OR THE COMING OF THE KING (Matt. xxv. 1-13).

It is evident that this chapter in Matthew, presents three stages in the development of one event, and it should also seem a common-place that that event must

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be connected with the things we have been considering in chapter 24. There is no sectional division between the chapters, so that the parables are clearly intended to form a consistent conclusion to the prophetic statement of the Lord Jesus.

There are two common interpretations, both of which have weak points, as we shall see. They produce these results : first, that the chapter represents a series covering the coming of Christ, the Judgment Seat of Christ, and the Great White Throne Judgment, or, that it represents the appearing of Christ, a general Judgment of Christendom, and the Great White Throne.

Against these I would like to place a third interpretation, which is in the direct line of the other parables, and into which every point keys truly. That will give us the Return of the King, the Judgment of Israel, and the Judgment of the nations, all of which are preparatory to the Millennial glory, and, indeed, necessary to it.

We also need to realise that these parables are splendid examples of the double intention so plainly manifested by the Lord in this ministry. They carry not only the prophetic message, but also the spiritual application which makes them of untold value for illustration and teaching in every stage of the dispensation.

One hardly needs to dwell upon the common use of this parable in Gospel work. Illustrating, as it does, the tremendous necessity of readiness, the futility of outward appearance, the need for regeneration, and

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the unexpectedness of the Lord's coming, it makes a tremendous and forceful appeal to the heart and conscience, to which has been, and still is, added the blessing of the Lord.

But if we would learn the full meaning of the parable, and read its prophetic message aright, we must again seek the key.

The main features of the parable are known to all. We have the ten virgins, the coming Bridegroom, the festal chamber, and the closed door. The key to the parable is often sought in the divided group of virgins, with the result of divergent opinions which are impossible of agreement. On the one hand we are taught that the virgins represent Christendom, divided as it is into two portions—those who are true believers indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and those who are only professors, having a form of godliness without the power of it. These are to be divided at the coming of Christ, those who are ready passing within with the Bridegroom, whilst the unready ones, seeking in vain to purchase what is surely unpurchasable, return to find the door irrevocably shut, and they themselves outside.

On the other hand, we are told that the Virgins represent the Church of true believers divided into two camps—fully sanctified ones who are described as ready ones, and others who are carnal, unspiritual, neither watching nor waiting, so being unready ones. They, too, are to be divided at the coming of Christ, with the evident result that only a portion of the Church, described by the Holy Spirit as being the

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Body of Christ, ascends to be with Himself, whilst the remaining ones are shut outside the door. Whilst we heartily agree with the facts as stated in the first portion, yet, as prophetic explanations, both statements contain difficulties which are not easily overthrown.

In the first, there is an apparent difficulty caused by the fact that the foolish virgins had evidently possessed the oil, which is generally understood as a type of the Holy Spirit. Against this lies the fact of the eternal security of the believer; also that the Spirit, once indwelling, indwells for ever (John xiv. 16). That argument may, however, be met by the fact that they had no oil IN THEIR VESSELS with their lamps. The Spirit of God has often testified through ungodly men, such as Balaam the sorcerer; and even Saul was once amongst the prophets. God may, in His sovereignty, use any instrument, but in the testing day it will be an awful awakening for those who have displayed, and trusted in, outward evidences without the possession of the inner life of the Holy Spirit. That certainly is the teaching of Matt. vii. 21-23, where this very day is spoken of. And outside the door are gathered those who have prophesied, cast out demons, and performed many wonderful works in the Lord's name.

Surely here we have the divine description of the foolish virgins' lamps. There had been a testimony, but it was not fed by the oil within.

Turning for a moment to the second interpretation, we are faced with a far greater difficulty than the

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above. In this case the virgins are all alike described as Christians, differing only in the degree of their sanctification during their earthly lives. A simple reading of the parable should be enough to completely destroy such a line of teaching. To begin with, "they ALL slumbered and slept." Their outward appearance would surely prove that none of them could be fitly described as "fully sanctified believers," as contrasted with those who are spoken of as "carnal," or not "watching ones." The only difference recorded is an unseen one—the possession, by some, of oil in their vessels with their lamps, implying a state of readiness for an unexpected crisis. Again, when the foolish ones stand at the closed door the Lord speaks a word which cannot be misunderstood, "I NEVER knew you." If these foolish ones had formerly been saved but were now in a backsliding condition, the Lord might conceivably have said, "I know you not"; but the word "NEVER" proves most emphatically that these foolish ones had never been born again, their condition, in spite of outward profession, had remained unchanged. There is nothing whatever in this parable which can sustain the teaching of some that the coming of the Lord will divide the Church; but, as we shall see, much that proves the reverse. Let us look elsewhere for the key. There are some points in the parable which are directly linked to preceding ones, and very especially to that of the wedding of the King's Son. We should first note the use, as a constant term, of the phrase, "the Kingdom of Heaven." That should suffice to definitely fix the period for the fulfilment of the pro-

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phesy.* Also, following as it does Matt. xxiv., and forming an integral part of that prophetic address on the Mount of Olives, it is clear that the parables are intended to form part of the answer to the questions raised. Therefore we may conclude that the parable relates to events at the end of the Age. That it has any relation to the coming of Christ does not seem probable. The scene is that of a wedding, and the Lord is the Bridegroom. These two facts give us the

*Since writing the above I have re-read "The Coming Prince," by Sir Robert Anderson. The following lines are quoted in full from pages 187-188. Dealing with Matt. xxiv., he writes: "After fixing the epoch, and describing the character of the great persecution of the Last Days, the Lord thus enumerates the events which are to follow at its close (verses 29-30): First, the great natural phenomena predicted; then the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; then the mourning of the tribes of the land; and finally the Glorious Advent. That there will be *no interval* between the persecution and the great signs from heaven which are to follow it is expressly stated; they are to occur '*immediately*' after the tribulation." That an interval shall separate the other events is equally clear. From the defilement of the Holy Place to the day when the tribulation shall end, and the 'fearful sights,' and 'great signs' from heaven shall strike terror into men's hearts, shall be a definite period of 1,260 days, and yet, when He goes on to speak of the Advent, the Lord declares that *that* Day is known to the Father only; it should be His people's part to watch and wait. He had already warned them against being deceived by expecting His Advent before the fulfilment of all that must come to pass. Now He warns them against apostasy *after* the accomplishment of all things, because of the delay which even then shall still mark His Coming.

Footnote to Matt. xxv. 1: "*Then* shall the Kingdom . . . at the period spoken of at the end of the last chapter, viz., the coming of the Lord to His personal reign (Alford's Greek Text). Though applicable to every age in which there is a waiting people on earth, this parable will have its *full* and special application in the Last Days to those who shall be looking back on the complete page of prophecy fulfilled. The *entire passage* from Chapter xxiv. 31. to xxv. 30. is parenthetical, relating especially to that time."

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needed key, and will explain the dark parts of the parable.

We have already seen that the Church is taken from the earth to meet her Lord in the air, and that from that point of time she is for ever with the Lord. He has presented her to the Father as His blood-bought Bride. That event closes with the glorious appearing of the Lord and the Wedding Feast, an event which exactly coincides with the end of the Age. Keep that thought in mind, and all the links fall into position.

The wedding has taken place, and the Bridegroom is the central figure, returning from the wedding to the festal scene on earth. At this point the Church is again introduced in mystery, for the bridegroom and a wedding both necessitate a bride. For that bridal party there is a waiting group, in readiness to accompany the procession to the place of rejoicing.

In eastern customs we have the counterpart of bridesmaids and groomsmen, known as "the Virgins" and "The friends of the bridegroom." In the parable, the waiting group is described as virgins, and it needs a complete mixture of metaphors if we are to place "the virgins" in the position held by the bride. It is a manifest thing that the bridesmaids cannot be the bride, but they are here introduced upon the scene in the very place fore-ordained for them by the Scriptures. Psalm 45 contains a wonderful, inspired song, evidently referring to this very event, and doubtless written to be sung in honour of this very occasion. The Royal Bridegroom with

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Deity written large across His titles, then the Bride in all her glorious apparel, and in verses 18-15 the virgins appear. After the bride has been brought to the King there follows the phrase, "The virgins, her companions that follow her, shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the King's palace."

So far, then, we may follow the parable:—The Bridegroom is Christ, and His returning is that of His glorious appearing, described as being with His saints. The feast is coincident with the opening of the millennial glory, but is preceded by the scene of this parable. Following the main line of the parable, we gather that the virgins are not, as guests, invited to the feast, but to a place of special privilege, as attendants upon the Church—the Bride—whilst, as a parallel thought, we get in John iii. 29 "the friends of the Bridegroom" attending the Lord and sharing His joy.

To discover the virgins, then, we need to look to a period following the coming of the Lord, and immediately preceding His glorious appearing. We have already seen that this period will be marked by a great spiritual revival, accompanied by a wave of terrible affliction, known as the Great Tribulation. In the Book of the Revelation we find two companies who evidently come out of that season of trial; one, a mighty multitude clothed in white raiment (Rev. vii. 9-17), evidently drawn from the Gentile nations; and a specially numbered company who precede them in Rev. vii., and are again mentioned and described in Rev. xiv. 1-5. That this numbered company are

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Israelites is plainly stated, whilst it is a striking fact that they also bear the distinctive phrase, "they are virgins."

I would merely leave as a suggestive thought that the wise virgins may possibly be represented in this latter group, for they, like the Church, are to be immediate companions of the Lord.

As to the foolish virgins, it may suffice to suggest that they are the counterpart of what is common in this age—the empty-hearted professors. It is clear from Joel and other prophets that the Spirit will bear a special testimony in that period, so that the parallel of the lamps and oil holds good. To sum up briefly: the virgins are composed of Israelites who, in the latter days, will be waiting for the Lord's Appearing. As it was in the days of His flesh, the multitudes will be divided, the difference not being external but internal, and of the Spirit. The period of waiting, being a period of tribulation, will seem prolonged, and weariness and lassitude will set in, so that many slumber and sleep. Then, at the darkest hour, the cry is heard and the Lord appears as the Bridegroom accompanied by His Bride—the Church. Those who are ready pass in with Him, most probably to a place of special dignity and honour, and the door is shut.

Afterward the cry is heard, "Open unto us!" but they are not amongst the numbered ones, and He knows them not. It is interesting, however, to note that this parable does not introduce the thought of outer darkness, or of the gnashing of teeth. There seems room for an accepted invitation to the Feast

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which apparently follows directly after. But the place of honour and close association with Christ in His glory is for ever closed to them. They may possibly enter into the Kingdom, but of that there is no word.

We now turn to the second picture in the series :—

THE PARABLE OF THE SERVANTS, OR PREPARATION FOR RULE (Matt. xxv. 14-30).

The common interpretation of this parable is, as we have already stated, that which relates it to the Judgment Seat of Christ. That there is a fitness in the order, if the previous parable refers to the coming of Christ is evident, and that the parable contains much that is of deepest spiritual significance to us in the light of the Judgment Seat is also plainly evident.

A careful study of detail, however, will soon discover that there is a tremendous difference between the scene prefigured here and that of the Judgment Seat of Christ. We may, perhaps, first turn our thoughts to the Scriptures especially connected with that Judgment Seat. They are not many, and the details are few, but amply sufficient to bring before us the essential facts. It is first mentioned by name in Romans xiv. 10, followed by 2 Cor. v. 9, 10, where the emphatic statement is made that “we must ALL appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ that EVERY ONE may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” One cannot read through the first Epistle, however, without realising that the fact of the Judgment Seat

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of Christ is one of the most prominent themes of the Epistle, of which 2 Cor. v. gives us the summary.

Perhaps the first plain statement is found in 1 Cor. iii. when the Apostle is dealing with ministry for the upbuilding of the Church with its attendant temptations to selfishness and sectarianism. Every believer is called to share in that ministry, although the forms of our service may be manifold (Eph. iv. 7-13), but, and here comes the warning, "Let EVERY MAN take heed how he buildeth thereon. EVERY MAN'S work shall be manifest, for THE DAY shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try EVERY MAN'S work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. iii. 10-15). In this connection, then, the Judgment Seat stands as the final test of our ministry or service in relation to the Church, which is here described as "The Temple of God." Much ministry may easily pass the scrutiny of our fellows, and may bulk largely in our own eyes, but "THE DAY" shall declare it; the fire destroying everything that has been of the flesh, leaving only that which has been in-wrought by the Spirit of God. Wood, hay and stubble, with all their enormous bulk, will leave but ashes and the smell of the fire; Salvation is all of grace from first to last, but the Judgment Seat of Christ is not concerned with Salvation—the accomplished fact: it is concerned with Service—good or bad, and its accompanying reward or loss. Verse 15 pictures for us a loser—a life-time of wood, hay and stubble, a man who has lived to his own gratification, and probably with the esteem of his fellow-men. Here he presents his record to Christ, his Saviour and Lord, only to see all his

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cherished designs and works destroyed in the fire; yet in wondrous grace the words are added, "but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire."

Chapter 4 deals with our stewardship, a close link in thought with the parable we are considering. The Apostle in this portion, looks forward to the Judgment Seat as the place where faithfulness, or otherwise, in any position of responsibility will be manifested. It is, indeed, a small thing to him that others should either approve or disapprove, whilst he evidently has but little confidence in even his own judgment as to his own faithfulness. He is the Lord's servant, and his Lord will judge. The Lord may have entrusted us with varying gifts or talents; then let it be a small thing to us also that we should be judged by others, because of that coming day, when we shall be judged by the Lord Himself.

In the following chapters the life of the believer is dealt with, emphasising the necessity for self-judgment, whilst the under-current of thought is always that of THE DAY when the Lord will judge His people in matters pertaining to the character and general behaviour. THE DAY is looked upon in the light of a prize-giving at a racecourse in chapter 9, whilst the life is viewed as a race which must be run according to the rules, if a prize is to be gained. The word "castaway," in verse 27, is of great interest in this light, for it is the word used of an athlete who may reach the mark ahead of all others and yet, because of broken rules, be disqualified. All believers are entered for the Race, and all may be prize-winners, but the Judgment Seat of Christ alone will declare

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the difference between those qualified for a prize and others who are disapproved, or cast away.

So we come to 2 Cor. v., where it is all summed up in the words, "wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him." The Judgment Seat is, indeed, a solemn fact which has not a sufficient grip upon our hearts and lives. It is evidently the mind of the Spirit that in all our activities we should keep our eye ever fixed upon THE DAY. Then we shall be delivered from too much occupation with surrounding events, or present results, and neither shall we be unduly elated or depressed.

Although there is no direct statement, yet we have abundance of indirect evidence which places the Judgment Seat as an event immediately following the coming of Christ for the Church. In 1 Cor. iv. 5, it is plainly connected with that coming, whilst the general tenor of Scripture agrees therewith.

At the Judgment Seat only believers are found, but there are no exceptions, for "we must ALL appear . . . that EVERY ONE may receive the things done in the body." It is quite evident, therefore, that the Judgment Seat of Christ occurs at a period between His coming for the Church and His glorious appearing, or manifestation, upon the earth, and that it is an inquisition into the life, walk and ministry of the saints, with a view to reward or loss in the eternal state, though the soul itself, in the latter case, is saved, yet so as by fire. It is also plainly established that if ALL the saints are to be

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manifested at the Judgment Seat, then ALL must have been caught up, leaving no room for the doctrine which unscripturally and unwarrantably divides the Church at His coming. As to the rewards, there is but little direct revelation, although one may infer much from such passages as Rev. 2 and 3, where "the overcomers" are doubtless the true Church in the midst of Christendom. The leading thought in the Apostle Paul's mind seems to be that the highest reward will be that we may be found well-pleasing in His sight, and counted worthy of fullest fellowship with Christ in His eternal glory. For this cause, says he, "we labour, that whether we be present or absent (living or departed) we may be accepted of Him." With these thoughts in our minds, let us now turn to the parable. One striking difference may first be noted. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, salvation manifestly stands upon the ground of grace alone. In spite of utter failure in the race, the soul is not at stake. But in the parable, we get the unprofitable servant, who is cast hopelessly "into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." On the other hand, the servants who enter into the joy of their Lord do so absolutely on the ground of faithfulness of service. Obviously the two scenes cannot refer to the same event, or to the same people. Let us next notice the character in which the Lord appears. At the Judgment Seat, He is dealing with His Church, and it is the Lord Christ Who appears, the title which associates Him always with the heavenly, as opposed to the earthly. But in the parable, He is presented as a Man who is the

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Lord of the servants, a title directly linking Him with an earthly scene.

The thought of "the Man" takes us back to the opening pages of our Bible. There "the Man" is brought upon the scene by God as the heading up of creation. Heb. ii. 6. 7 gives us a divine commentary upon that event. In the purpose of God we find man crowned with glory and honour, and set over the works of God's hands, everything being put in subjection under him. He was the Viceroy of God, and, in the absence of God, ruled supreme. But now we see not all things put under him. Man, a rebel against God, now finds the whole of creation in rebellion against himself, with results which are evident to all who have eyes to see. On every side, the results of human failure are strewn like wreckage upon a storm-driven shore, and we should be hopeless, indeed, but for the fact that by faith we may look onward and see "Jesus . . . crowned with glory and honour" as the complete fulfiller of the purposes of God. As the Man Who was perfectly subject to the Will of God, He soon shall be the Man Who shall subject all things to Himself. It is, then, in that relationship in which we find Him here, the Man Who is the Lord.

He has travelled into a far country, but, before leaving, He calls the servants and entrusts them with His interests. A long interval follows, and then comes the return. That this interval is caused by the Lord's rejection and His absence from the earth, also that it will be ended by His return to Jerusalem at the end of the Age, needs no argument. The

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parable now deals with an event which follows that return : the reckoning with His servants, upon the results of which, shall depend their future position in the Kingdom. There can thus be no question here of the Judgment Seat of Christ, for that scene is laid in Heaven, whilst this is earthly.

Yet it is as surely stewardship in earthly things that appears throughout the parable. The question arises : Who are the servants, and what is their stewardship ? There is a continual mention of servants in the ministry of the Lord, and an examination of that ministry reveals the fact that the general usage of the term, implies the exercise of authority over their fellows, whilst the same thought is expressed in the Epistles, where "the higher powers," magistrates, etc., are described as "Ministers (servants) of God" (Rom. xiii. 1-6), the reason for which is that all rule and authority are derived from God, and should only be exercised on His behalf. So the Lord was the ideal Servant, under authority, and only exercising authority as the Servant of Jehovah.

Experience and history alike testify to the misuse of authority. Cruelty and corruption are often the closest companions of the throne, whilst power is exercised to protect evil and to penalise righteousness. All this was manifested at Calvary's Cross, and may still be witnessed as the years roll by. God's Man is still absent, and in His absence the delegates of authority act as though they were the authors of power and rule. Yet they, too, must give an account of their stewardship in the Day when the Lord returns

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from the far country. They are His servants, and as such, must render an account of their stewardship.

This would seem to be the prophetic thought in its widest scope, but possibly it may be narrowed down to the thought of rule in connection with the Kingdom. That the disciples evidently expected a governmental position in the Kingdom, and that specific promises were made to that effect, is quite plain in the Gospels. It is also quite clear that such a position was dependent upon their faithfulness in minor positions of authority. The Church is nowhere promised, or taught to look for such positions; indeed, such positions, at their highest, would be immeasurably lower than that which is the birthright position of the weakest member of the Church. That some of the servants are described as wicked ones, and are cast into Gehenna, surely proves unmistakably that they cannot be believers. A wicked saint is an impossible contradiction in terms, whilst a rebel servant may easily be a commonplace. Even Satan is a servant of God, in spite of all his terrible rebellion, and as such he will finally be held to account. A servant may be faithful or unfaithful, but the fact of servitude remains unshaken. So the terms of the parable stretch out widely, and easily embrace in the widest application, any and every man as the servant of God, and liable, as such, to render account of his stewardship before the Lord. The Church having been already removed, the individuals composing it have rendered their account before the Judgment Seat of Christ, therefore the servants mentioned in the parable must be limited to those who are left; and it

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may be suggested that they may be found in three degrees, or circles : (a) Israel, the servants of Jehovah ; (b) those who exercise authority amongst men ; or (c) mankind generally, as responsible to God. The latter, of course, is paralleled by the Great White Throne, which is evidently not in view in this parable, whilst, at the return of the Lord, the prophets very definitely foretell a Judgment of the Lord upon Israel as a nation, out of which they come, purified from the dross of sin, into a position of world power and rule for God. Such certainly seems the clearest answer to the prophecy, placing it also in the right order with the following parable.

THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND GOATS, OR THE SOVEREIGNTY OF CHRIST (Matt. xxv. 31-46).

There is but little difference of opinion in the interpretation of this parable. There are but two broad lines—the first, which sees in it the Great White Throne judgment, and the second, which relates it to a judgment of the nations at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. That the first thought cannot be right is easily proved. The description of that final judgment in the Book of the Revelation contains much that is directly opposed to this scene. In point of time, the last Judgment is the closing earthly scene, following the Millennial reign and the final, hopeless rebellion led by Satan ; whilst the parable definitely refers to the coming of Christ in His glory to set up His Kingdom. Again, at the Great White

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Throne only “the dead, small and great,” are spoken of as standing before God; here it is, as clearly, living nations who are being judged. At the Great White Throne there seems no ray of hope for any; at its conclusion the awful Lake of Fire is stretched; but in this parable there is a division made, and some pass into the Kingdom, whilst others go dreadfully away. One more striking difference may be noted. In Revelation the final test is the Lamb’s book of Life, but here the test is evidently a national and not an individual one—the attitude towards Israel in the time of her terrible tribulation. Salvation, in this case, is based upon works, whilst the whole of Scripture is emphatic in describing the ground of eternal SALVATION as being “not of works lest any man should boast” (Eph. ii. 9).

A little study of the parable will, however, make the matter quite plain. We might note first the sequence of the Revelation of Christ in the three parables. In the first, He is “the Bridegroom” rejoicing over His Bride, and bringing a whole creation into fellowship with Him in that joy; then as “the Man,” representative of government and authority, He deals with Israel the nation; and now we see Him as He takes His dignity and title before all the nations of the earth he is THE KING—the Son of Man glorified.

As the Son of Man He has been rejected, lifted upon a Cross, and slain. As the Son of Man he has passed into the Heavens, where He has been received until “the times of restitution of all things.” Stephen,

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with opened eyes, witnessed to the presence of the Son of Man at the right hand of God (Acts vii. 55-57), and there He remains until the day of which the parable speaks, "when the Son of Man shall come in His glory," an event coincident with the fulfilment of Acts iii. 19-21, "when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of Jehovah, and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you, Whom the Heavens must receive until the time of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." That day, with all its subsequent blessing for Israel and the world, is the theme of the parable. No longer the Man of Sorrows, rejected of men, the Son of Man will then sit upon the Throne of His Glory in the undisputed exercise of His Royal office as King of kings and Lord of lords. The exercise of His mighty power has completely broken all the armaments of a world in arms, leaving His supreme over all.

As the Bridegroom, He has rejoiced over His Bride; as Messiah, He has delivered and judged His people Israel; and now, as universal Lord, He calls the nations before Him for judgment. It is well to notice that there are no individuals in view at this judgment. It is a collective action upon nations as nations, and the question at stake is their presence, or otherwise, in the Millennial Kingdom. A study of Old Testament prophecy is necessary if we would grasp the meaning of this parable. During the close of the present age, Israel as a nation, re-instated in their own land, will be faced by a tremendous com-

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bine of nations, under the leadership of the Beast. The sufferings of the people during that period are described as being without parallel in the history of mankind. It is evident from the prophecies, that this people will flee wildly for refuge from the far-reaching, awful power of Antichrist to the very ends of the earth, and in that flight will receive help and succour from some, whilst by others they will be delivered up to the relentless tyranny of the Beast. That many of these fleeing ones will be the Messengers of the Kingdom is plainly to be seen, and it may well be those, in the strictest sense of the word, who are spoken of in the parable as "My brethren," although it undoubtedly carries the wider application to Israel as a whole. They are still beloved of God for their fathers' sakes, and the eyes of the Lord follow them closely in all their tribulations.

It is interesting to notice that neither of the nations is actuated because of Israel's relationship to the Lord. All alike, they seem unconscious of any reason why they should be blessed or cursed. There is no outward evidence connecting that poor, suffering people with the Lord of Glory, and yet the link is there, and He calls them, even the least of them, "My brethren," and a kindly attitude toward them, or a helpful hand extended, is not forgotten by the Lord.

How beautifully this yearning heart of the Lord is foreshadowed in the life of Joseph! He, too, had been wounded by the hands of his brethren and cast out of his inheritance, but when the day of his glory

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appeared, there was nothing but grace in his heart toward those graceless men. He weeps as his heart is moved toward them in their distress, and he transmutes the black story of their treachery into the pure gold of salvation, not only for them, but for the poor Egypt-world. So the Lord, though rejected and disowned by His own, yet speaks of them in His heart as "My brethren," and enters to the account of the nations, blessing or cursing, according to their attitude towards His people.

Historically, this is proved by events that have already passed. Even before this final judgment scene of nations, the Lord has passed His verdict and sentence upon the peoples, and it is a provable fact that trouble and disaster follow closely upon the heels of any nation that maltreats the Jew; whilst, on the contrary, the friends of Israel are nationally prospered. The present disastrous condition of Russia may well be a case in point. The parable, then, is but an extension of a law which is already working.

This fact should bring home to our hearts another lesson. If the Lord displays such an intimate interest in His brethren according to the flesh, does He not take as much, yea more, interest in those whom He describes as "bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh"? As Saul of Tarsus went on his persecuting course to Damascus, he little thought that the poor, despised people "of the Way" were anything else than they appeared to be. But the Voice from Heaven asked him, "Why persecutest thou Me?"

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How careful we would be in our actions and words toward one another if we realised that they were directed toward Him, and that He was indeed deeply concerned with the joys and sorrows of His Own! We may well wish, one day, that we had bitten our tongues out rather than have spoken that cruel, bitter word to a brother or sister which embittered the fleeting moments of their lives. Kindly deeds not performed, and words not spoken may loom very largely in THE DAY, when we realise that they might have been done unto HIM, but then are for ever undone. In this lies the main spiritual thought of the parable. The interpretation of the prophetic side seems simple. Retracing the chapter, we first get the Wedding Scene preceding the restoration of the Kingdom. The enemies of God and His Christ are destroyed at Armageddon, and then the Lord turns to His people Israel and deals with them, dividing the evil from the good as a refiner sits above his furnace, purifying the precious metal from its dross. Then follows the third thought. Not only Israel, but the world is to be blessed at His coming, and the parable gives us the method by which the nations are to be selected as sharers of the Kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world. These blessed ones enter in and, with Israel, form the nucleus of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the centre from which shall radiate the blessing of the Lord to the ends of the earth.

It does not seem necessary to imagine, as some have done, that the individuals which compose all nations are gathered before the throne. The thought,

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apparently, is that of representation. Each nation will have its qualified representatives to act on its behalf. The judgment declared in both cases is national and not individual, although we do well to notice that, whilst the righteous nations enter into the Kingdom, the terrible words are spoken to those on His left hand, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels." The neuter words used for nations changes into the masculine, implying the individuals: "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." Nations are ultimately resolved into individuals, and, as individuals, enjoy either blessing or the eternal torments of the lost.

We may notice, too, that the Millennial blessing is not limited to a thousand years, but is described as "Life Eternal"; not the one glorious age, but "the ages of the ages"—the truest expression of Eternity.

The judgment of the wicked is also described by that same term.

One other thought before closing the parable: How strongly it contrasts with all that we see around us! A world of warring kings all seeking their own interests, nor caring anything for God or His claims; a rebellious world knowing no law but the law of necessity; a creation groaning in an agony of vain desire, helpless and hopeless, meets our gaze wherever we turn. Yet the prophetic word of Christ points unwaveringly onward, past the Cross with all its darkness; past the dark days of Gentile domination; beyond the horrors of Antichrist and his abomina-

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tions which overflow the world to **THE DAY**; and we see the Throne of His Glory, and Himself, though thorn-scarred with a former crown of shame, crowned **THE KING**! In that day, all the kingdoms of the earth, and the glory of them, shall be His Own, not purchased at the price of subjection to Satan (Matt. iv. 8-10), but delivered from the usurpation of Satan by the might of His own right Hand. Two phrases sum up everything, and stand out in blazing light :

THE DAY! THE KING!

Then comes a pause, a hush as of a shadow falling upon the spirit, and quietly the words fall from the lips of the greatest of all Prophets—His last prophecy :
“**YE KNOW THAT AFTER TWO DAYS IS THE FEAST OF THE PASSOVER, AND THE SON OF MAN WILL BE DELIVERED UP TO BE CRUCIFIED.**”

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