

THE SECT EVERYWHERE SPOKEN AGAINST

Reprint of a Lecture by Robert Roberts



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INTRODUCTION

The Christadelphians are becoming more known every day, and where known, they are “everywhere spoken against.” This fact stumbles many. It need not, and will not stumble men who look at things as they are in themselves, and not as they appear, through the medium of popular rumour.

The community developed by the labours of the apostles in the first century were in a precisely similar position, as we learn from words the Jews of Rome addressed to Paul on his arrival there: “As concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against” (Acts 28:22). Not only so, but Jesus gave his disciples expressly to understand that this would be their lot. “The time cometh” he said, “that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” (John 16:2). He further said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you . . . The servant is not greater than his Lord” (15:18, 20). No term of opprobrium could be more severe than the one applied to him: “He hath a demon and is mad; why hear him?” (10:20), concerning which, Jesus said his servants were to expect no better treatment; “If they have called the Master of the House Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household” (Matt. 10:25). So far, therefore, as this feature of being spoken against is concerned, it is in favour of the Christadelphians, and not against them.

All depends, doubtless, upon the reason why they are spoken against. In some cases, the reason may be such as can afford no satisfaction. It may be that a contentious, harsh, and arrogant spirit on the part of some bearing the name Christadelphian has given occasion for unfavourable speech. This will be regretted by none more than the true Christadelphian, who disowns everything not in harmony with the spirit of the Scriptures, which, though a spirit of faithfulness and firmness, and courage in the maintenance of the faith once delivered to the saints, is, nevertheless, a spirit of true kindness, and courtesy, and gentleness, so far as the polemics of the truth in a hostile world allow. It is not, however, excessive zeal carried to the point of harshness on the part of a few that has led to the Christadelphians being everywhere spoken against. The cause of the antipathy is much deeper and more far-reaching than that. It lays hold of several reasons. We shall soon find some of these.

NOT A NEW SECT, BUT THE OLD APOSTOLIC SECT REVIVED

But, before entering upon them particularly, it is well to realise, in passing, that the Christadelphians are not a new sect in the ordinary sense of that phrase. They have not originated in any new inspiration or notion, nor in the strict sense, do they owe their existence to a new leader. They are not a new sect in the sense in which the Swedenborgians were so, and, the followers of Joanna Southcote. They have no Swedenborg, no Joanna Southcote. They claim to have received no new revelation: they profess no new principle: they own to no new teachership. They are simply and purely the result of Bible study, thoroughly conducted. They owe their development to the application of a principle, in which it has been customary for all Englishmen to boast--the right of private judgment in the discernment of religious truth. Men rejoice in the work of Martin Luther because they rejoice in this, that the Bible is the word of God, and that God intended men to make themselves acquainted with it, and to embrace what it teaches, and reject what it denounces, however many may be arrayed against the conclusions to which the study of it may lead them.

Now, Christadelphianism is nothing more nor less than the result of that principle strictly carried out. Christadelphianism takes its stand on the Bible. It maintains that the Bible can be proved to be divine, and that it is the only source of divine ideas at present in the earth on the subject of religion; and that all systems and doctrines are to be discarded that conflict with what is to be found in the Bible, however ancient or popularly supported such systems or doctrines may be. In maintaining this, they only maintain what the bulk of the English people profess to believe. If they go a step further, and say that the popular

systems of the day are in conflict with the Bible, they raise an issue which may disturb complacency, but which ought to receive a sympathetic attention at the hands of so ultra-Protestant a nation as the British. It is a plain, intelligible and debatable issue, in which there is no fanaticism, or anything to offend the highest culture, or the purest reason.

It is the result of the issue that excites the offence, and causes the Christadelphians to be everywhere spoken against. The ordinary neighbour says he could do with the Christadelphians holding the Bible up; he may even go to the length of saying he admires the fidelity of the Christadelphians on this point; but what he cannot do with is their pulling down everybody else as wrong. Well, this is not exactly the right way of putting it. The Christadelphians put down nobody. It is natural for our good-humoured neighbours to feel in just this way about it; but the question is, are the Christadelphians right in what they say the Bible teaches? Because, if so, it follows that those who reject the teaching must be wrong; and that it is a pity to divert attention from the main issue by questions of style.

THE GROUNDS OF OFFENCE

Now, what have the Christadelphians to say about the teaching of the Bible which gives such mortal offence? They affirm two things which the Old and New Testaments separately sustain, though also sustaining both in a general way. The Christadelphians affirm that mankind is separated from God, not only as regards their moral condition, but as regards

what may be called their legal relation to Him: that is, they are all under condemnation-all under sentence of death,-a sentence written in their very constitution, and that they cannot by any contrivance of their own escape from, or alter, this position. The Christadelphians point, in proof of this view, not only to the garden of Eden, where sentence of death was passed on Adam (and, in him, on all men), but to the system of the law of Moses, which, in all its details and significances, teaches one thing above all others: that man is an exile from God, whom we cannot approach, even afar off, except under the most stringent appointments which uphold the authority and greatness of God and abase man to the very dust.

Now, this contention is naturally very unacceptable to the mass of the people. They prefer to take the humanitarian view, that God is a Being of unconditional goodness, who embraces all mankind in His bosom as a Father, and that although men are sinners, God's goodness is equal to the overlooking of all their sins, and giving salvation somehow or other to all at last. If this view is the truth, let us accept it and rejoice in it by all means; but how is the question of its truthfulness or otherwise to be determined? It is not to be settled by what men think or prefer. It is to be settled by what God has declared: for He only knows. Now, the Bible contains His declaration, and by this the Christadelphians maintain we are bound. They bind themselves by it: they say it is binding on others, whether they submit or not. Christ's resurrection sets at rest all question as to the authority of the Old Testament: for he endorsed it unreservedly as the Word of God which could not be broken: and if he rose from the dead, his endorsement proves all: and therefore this, that man is alien from God and cannot restore himself. This is an unpopular doctrine, but true. It is one of the doctrines which cause the Christadelphians to be "everywhere spoken against."

Jesus says, "I am the Way"

The second thing which they maintain, and which, if possible, gives more offence than the first, is this, that God has appointed a way by which man may return from his alienated position, and obtain the forgiveness of his sins, and the hope of life everlasting. They say there is no other than this one way. They say that this "way" centres in one man-Jesus Christ, the Son of God: apart from whom, no man can be saved, however estimable he may be or consider himself in a moral sense. Are they to be considered "uncharitable" for believing and maintaining this, if it be true? Who can deny its truth that

believes the Bible? Has not Jesus proclaimed himself “the Way?” Has he not said: “No man cometh unto the Father but by me?”-(John 14:6)-and “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins”. (John 8:24). Has not Peter, his leading apostle, proclaimed, “There is: none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved”? (Acts 4:12). And Paul, “Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38). It may be considered narrow; it may be stigmatised as uncharitable; but it cannot be proved unscriptural, for the Christadelphians to maintain that there is only one way to salvation, and that way is in Christ, and in Christ alone.

BELIEF OF THE GOSPEL NECESSARY FOR SALVATION

But here comes another point of objection. Our opponents, some of them, do not object to Christ being held up as the way of salvation. They say, “We rather admire that, and would say ‘Amen’ to that; but we object to the idea that Christ will save none but those who hold Christadelphian doctrines.” Here there is a little unhappiness in the way of putting the objection. It obscures the issue to put it in that way, and raises needless prejudice. The question is, “Will any be saved but those complying with Christ’s own conditions?” To this, there can be but one answer on the part of those who believe the Bible, and that answer is, No, however harshly it may appear to bear. The ways of God are unimpeachable, however hard they may seem sometimes from a human point of view, as when He destroyed the antediluvians, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, the army of Pharaoh in the Red Sea, seven nations of Canaan by the sword of Israel; or as when He required His own dear Son to submit to crucifixion. It may seem to men hard, but it cannot be held unreasonable that Christ should dictate the conditions on which alone men will be saved.

The question is, what are the conditions? In answer to this, nothing is more undeniable than the fact that the very first condition is a belief of the Gospel. Friends may object to the condition, but they cannot deny that it is the condition as laid down both by Christ and his apostles. What did Christ send out his apostles to do? To preach the gospel. To what end did he wish them to preach the gospel? He answers this in what he said to them when sending them: “He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved: he that believeth not shall be condemned.” You must be aware how distinctly the apostles themselves reiterated this view, Paul speaks of the gospel as “the gospel of your salvation” (Eph. 1:13). He says men are saved by it “they keep in memory the things” constituting it (1 Cor 15:2). He says, “It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16), and that “it hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching (it) to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21).

Why, then, should the Christadelphians be spoken against, for maintaining that men cannot be saved without believing in the gospel? They maintain only what the apostolic writings reveal. It is popular objection that is in fault. It opposes what the apostles teach.

WHAT IS “THE GOSPEL”?

But, here again comes our well-meaning, religious-minded friend. He says: “It is not your contention for the necessity of the gospel, that we object to. We object to your version of the gospel.” Well, let us see. It comes to this: What is the gospel, as apostolically proclaimed for the salvation of men? When the apostles speak of the gospel, they speak of a definite conception of truth, of course. It is not an indefinite phrase in their mouth. In the abstract, it means glad tidings: but glad tidings, before they can be glad tidings, must be definite. This is their very character-definiteness. Without definiteness they cannot be glad tidings: for who can be glad about that which is indefinite? Glad tidings are definite of some sort, that on account of their intelligibility in some direction of goodness, make the believers of them glad.

Now the apostles not only preached glad tidings, but they spoke of them as “the” glad tidings-the Gospel which makes the necessity for definiteness more imperative still. The question is, what was the Gospel they preached?

Before ascertaining the New Testament answer to this question, let us ask for a moment, what is the gospel preached in the churches and chapels? Is it not this, that Christ died to save immortal souls from the torments of hell? No one will demur to this as a correct definition of the gospel, as understood by all denominations of Christendom. Now, the Christadelphians say that this is not the gospel the apostles preached. This assertion of theirs may stagger people, and offend them; but it certainly ought also to arouse them, for, if it is true, of what overwhelming importance is the fact to all who believe the popular gospel-and there are thousands upon thousands who do so without considering for a moment whether it is apostolic or not. The assertion can be disproved, if it is untrue. On what grounds do the Christadelphians advance it? On a variety of grounds.

HOW THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF “SOULS” AND “IMMORTALITY”

First, they say the popular gospel cannot be the true gospel, because the Bible nowhere speaks of “immortal souls,” upon whose supposed necessities the popular gospel is based. “Immortal soul” is an unscriptural collocation of terms altogether. It belongs to Greek philosophy, not to apostolic Christianity. Search and see. You will not find “immortal soul” in the Bible anywhere. You will find “immortal” and you will find “soul,” but the words together -never. You may think, at first, the words being apart makes no difference; it makes all the difference in the world. Hunt up all the cases in which you find the word “immortal,” and you will find it is never applied to man at all. God only is said to be “immortal” (1 Tim. 1:17); He only is said to have “immortality” (6:15). If “immortality” is ever spoken of in connection with man, it is always as a thing he has to “seek for” (Rom. 2:7), a thing put on as a clothing of his mortal nature at the resurrection-if he be accepted (1 Cor. 15:53; 2 Cor. 5:4). As for “soul,” you will find this word hundreds of times; but you will find it used in a way that excludes the idea of its being an immortal thing. It is used of beasts (Gen. 1: 20; Num. 31:28); of bodies (Josh. 11:11); of fishes (Rev. 16:3); of living men (Lev. 5:2); and of the mind (Psa. 6:3; 33:20). The last is the only use of the word that you may think favours the popular idea; but on reflection you will find this is empty as well. You must first prove the mind immortal before you can logically see immortality in a term applied to the mind. Now, concerning the mind of man, it is said that it ceases to act when a man dies (Ecc. 9:5,10; Psa. 146:4), which is a complete disproof in itself of the idea that the mind is an immortal thing.

THE NECESSITY OF RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT

The fact is, the Bible knows nothing of immortal-soulism. Immortal-soulism is a speculation of the pagans, coming to birth first in Egypt, and afterwards imported into Greece, where “the wise of this world,” whose wisdom Paul says is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 1:21), adopted it with improvements. It is opposed to what the Bible reveals concerning man, which is expressly to the contrary effect. The Bible reveals that “death has entered into the world” because of sin (Rom. 5:12; Gen. 3:19), that it has passed upon all men (Ibid), and that consequently all men are mortal and die (Job 4:17; Psa 89:48), and when dead, it teaches they are truly dead and know nothing at all. It is here where the Bible doctrine of resurrection finds its place. If men die and dissolve in the grave, it is obvious that if they are to have another life, they must rise from the dead. And this is the very doctrine of a future life taught in the Bible. “Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:21). Christ proclaimed himself the resurrection and the life (John 11:25), and pointed to the resurrection as the time when men should receive the results of their present life (John 5:29; Luke 14:14). But in the popular system there is no need for the resurrection. According to that system, men pass out of their bodies into a state of reward or punishment.

THE GOSPEL AND THE DEATH OF CHRIST

Now, if there be no immortal soulism in the Bible, it follows that a gospel which is contrived for the salvation of immortal souls cannot be the Bible gospel. But there is another reason why the popular definition of the gospel already advanced cannot be a true one. It makes the death of Christ the essence of the gospel. Far be it from us even to seem to lessen the importance of the death of Christ. In its place in redemption, it is of an importance that cannot be exaggerated; but the question now is as to the gospel. Is the death of Christ the gospel? It cannot be so for this all-sufficient reason that the apostles preached the gospel before the death of Christ occurred, and while they were yet ignorant that it was to take place. No one will dispute the first point in view of Luke 9:6 ("The disciples departed and went through the towns, preaching the gospel"): and no one can dispute the second in view of the fact that when Jesus informed his disciples of his approaching arrest and death, "they understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them" (Luke 18:34). We ask another question, and the evidence is complete.

What was it they preached in preaching the gospel? The answer is found many times throughout the apostolic record. They preached what Jesus preached, and Jesus "preached the kingdom of God." "He went throughout every city and village preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:1). "He went about all Galilee, teaching in their Synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23). "He said, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:43). Of the apostles themselves, it is specifically declared that "He sent them to preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:2). This was all while Christ was on earth. When he had departed to heaven (after his resurrection), we find the apostles continuing to preach the same gospel: "preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12). "Preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:31; see also verse 23; also chapters 20:25; 19:8).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Now what the Christadelphians say is, that looking to this evidence, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the gospel preached by the apostles was the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and not the death of Christ. The death of Christ was afterwards (after Christ's ascension) added to the gospel of the kingdom as the sacrificial provision God made for the forgiveness of those who should approach Him in the belief of the gospel of the kingdom and faith in the shed blood of His son. But it was not proclaimed as the central idea of the gospel. It was a corollary of it: if you will, an ingredient of it; an essential supplement to it. But primarily, the gospel was the gospel of the kingdom. And the Christadelphians have to ask, what is this Kingdom of God, the announcement of whose approach is glad tidings? And in answer to this, they do not put forward their own guesses. They hold fast by the testimony of the Scriptures. They note that the apostles expounded the Kingdom of God from the prophets (Acts 28:23). They find Paul saying the gospel was promised in the prophets (Rom. 1:2): and that in preaching the gospel, "he said none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come" (Acts 26:22). Consequently, they feel themselves justified in looking to the prophets for a correct idea of the Kingdom of God—an idea which they find abundantly confirmed by the apostles. They can suggest no more expressive definition of it than is found in the prophet Daniel, who, speaking of the upshot of human history, says, "The God of Heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; it shall not be left to other people. It shall break in pieces, and consume all other kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." (Dan. 2: 44.) A kingdom to be set up by the God of heaven must be the Kingdom of God; and if it is to stand for ever when the kingdoms of history have been overthrown, it must stand for ever upon earth. They further read in the last book of the New Testament of a time when the "kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Therefore, they say the territorial groundwork and locality of the Kingdom of God is to be

sought for in the earth at present occupied by the kingdoms of men-an earth which Jesus said the meek should inherit (Matt. v. 5), which they never have done yet.

This is a mere rough sketching out of the ground. When the prophets are looked into in detail, a great amount of information is discoverable concerning the Kingdom of God. Its divine centre is found to be located in the land God promised to Abraham, which he will then possess-the land of Palestine (Gen. 13:14; Heb. 11:8); its first people the descendants of Abraham, whom God chose as a nation to Himself above all people (Deut. 7:6; 14:2), and which, though now scattered in punitive dispersion, is to be gathered from all lands, and restored to the land of their fathers, and made a great and glorious, righteous, humble, and God-glorifying nation; its governing dynasty, the house of David, with whom God made an everlasting covenant (2 Sam 23:5)-making the throne permanent in David's family (Psa. 89:34-37), and a covenant which has been fulfilled in Jesus, of whom the angel testified to his mother, "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32).

It is, therefore, no merely interesting fact, but the solemnly imperative corollary of the divine purpose that we are invited to consider when we read that "God shall build again the tabernacle of David that is fallen down, and raise up the ruins thereof, and build it as in the days of old" (Amos 9:11); that "He shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth" (Is. 11:12); that He "will gather them on every side, and make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be king to them all, and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms, any more at all" (Ezek. 37:22).

All the prophets speak of God's purpose to restore the Kingdom of Israel under David's promised Son-the Messiah-who is also to be king over all the earth" (Zech. 14:9), whom all people, nations, and languages shall serve and obey (Dan. 7:14). "The law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, whither all the nations shall repair to learn the ways of God, beating their swords into ploughshares, and studying war no more (Is. 11:1-4). Then shall all the nations be blessed (as covenanted to Abraham) blessed in the seed of Abraham-Christ, who shall then be manifested as King of Kings and Lord of Lords." "Men shall be blessed in him and all nations shall call him blessed."

The more this gospel of the kingdom is considered, the more it will be seen to be glad tidings. It is the good that God Himself purposes to provide for all the groaning needs of man, politically, socially, individually, spiritually. If it be asked what connection has this gospel of the kingdom with us as individuals, the answer is to be found in Paul's statement to the Thessalonians (1 Epist. 2:12), "God hath called you to his kingdom and glory." If it be asked in what sense are we called to the kingdom, we have the answer in Peter's words, that, if we please God, "an entrance shall be ministered to its abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11). Christ will say to such "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9). "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?" (James 2:5).

REIGNING WITH CHRIST

But what is it to "enter" and to "inherit" the kingdom of God? Is it not to possess the honour and glory and wield the power thereof when it comes? If there could be any doubt, it is set at rest by the express declaration that those suffering with Christ now, shall "reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:12). The exact meaning of this is placed beyond doubt by Christ's own promise to the twelve disciples: "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me, that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom,

and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29). Also by his promise to all who overcome: “He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron” (Rev. 2:26). All the parables of Christ exhibit the same feature of the giving of authority to his faithful servants at his coming. The song of the redeemed puts it forward in the strongest light. “Thou hast made us unto our God KINGS and PRIESTS, and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:10).

Those who are to be honoured with this unspeakable honour of reigning with Christ are first to be qualified for it by the transformation of their bodies into the likeness of the Lord’s own glorious body: “This mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53); “He shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body (Phil. 3:21). “We shall be made like him (1 Jno. 3:2). All these glorious things are comprised in the gospel of the kingdom, which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.

Now, what do we hear of these glorious things in the religious teaching of the present day? Not a word; not a whisper; not the shadow of an allusion. Whether it be in the most venerable cathedral, or the most elegant Nonconformist place of worship, these things might never have been written so far as what is to be heard within their walls is concerned. All denominations are alike destitute in the matter: and because they call attention to the fact, is one reason why the Christadelphians are everywhere spoken against.

THE DEATH STATE

“But then,” say our religious friends, “it is not your doctrine of the kingdom of God that offends us: we also are inclined to receive it: in fact, many of us believe it already. It is your awful doctrine about the state of the dead. We can do with the resurrection; but we cannot do with your soul sleeping. It is your denial that the righteous go to heaven that is so awful.” Good friends, consider. We merely contend for what you yourselves would receive apart from your philosophical pre-conceptions, viz., that the dead are dead: and we say that, on this point, we have both Scripture and reason on our side. The Scriptures we have looked at already: they teach death to be the portion of mankind because of sin, and resurrection the appointed remedy, and that “the dead (when dead) know not anything.” If we say that men do not go to heaven, it is only what Jesus said.

“No man hath ascended up to heaven” (John 3:13). It is only what Peter said of David: “David is not ascended into the heavens” (Acts 2:34). It is only what Paul said of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, “They died, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off” (Heb. 11:13).

What do you say? You say these passages only mean the body. You are right, but what does this prove?-that the body is the person: that in the estimation of Jesus, and Peter, and Paul, the bodies of men, Abraham, Jacob, David, and others, were the men themselves. Why should you be shocked at this? You shout, “Dead bodies!” No: you know better than that: it is the living bodies that are the men, and when the living bodies are dead, then the men are dead, because the living bodies were the men. “But what about the life? what about the spirit?” Surely you do not mean that the life and spirit of a creature are the creature? Have the animals no life? have the animals no spirit? The Scriptures say they have both, as we have seen. Do you say that when the animal is dead, its life continues to exist as a spiritual animal entity once inhabiting a bodily animal? If not, why so much difficulty about man? “God giveth unto ALL, life and breath and all things” (Acts 17:25; Gen. 7:21, 22). God is the fountain of life (Psa. 36:9). All life is His: and when a creature ceases to possess it, it goes back to God who gave it (Ecc. 7:7). The life of Abraham and David, is not Abraham and David.

WHAT FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIANS BELIEVED WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING?

The Personal Return of Jesus Christ

A careful consideration of the foregoing lecture will without doubt have convinced the reader that the personal return of Jesus Christ from heaven is the divinely appointed means whereby God's purpose with the earth and man will be brought to fruition. That personal, physical return was promised in unmistakable terms by the angels immediately after our Lord's ascension :

“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11)

And in that day, “every eye shall see him” for “he shall come with power and great glory” (Rev. 1:7; Luke 21:27). “As it was in the days of Noah”

Jesus likened the days which immediately precede his coming to “the days of Noah” when the earth was filled with violence, and to the days of Lot when “pride, fullness of bread and abundance of idleness” led Sodom into the most infamous and vile practices-and in both cases God brought His vengeance upon them, for Noah's contemporaries “knew not until the flood came and took them all away” and the Sodomites were destroyed by fire and brimstone. (Luke 17:26-30.)

We are thus led by Jesus to expect what we who live in these “last days” actually find around us, namely godlessness, violence and vice. So prevalent were these things to be that Jesus, after referring to God's coming vengeance on the persecutors of His people, asks:

“Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8.)

It will obviously not be found in the grossly pagan or atheistic nations; nor will it be found in the large established and nominally Christian political and religious institutions and nations in East or West. Where, then, shall Jesus find faith? Only among the few who can be identified with the faith of the “Sect everywhere spoken against.”

SCOFFERS IN THE LAST DAYS

The return of the Lord Jesus Christ is rarely, if ever, found in the religious themes of Catholic and Protestant Christendom: least so among those who identify the Kingdom of God with these ecclesiastical organisations on earth! Scripture teaching plainly reveals the Kingdom of God to be a divine political kingdom, once existing as the Israelite theocracy, then overthrown because of disobedience, but to be restored by Jesus at his coming; for God by the angel promised his mother that he would give him “the throne of his father David” and that he should “reign over the house of Jacob for ever” in a kingdom which shall never end. (Luke 1:32, 33.) The apostle Peter, writing by the spirit of God, provides a description of the conditions which shall prevail on the earth just prior to the Lord's return and the restoring of this Kingdom, and he issues a grave warning to those who would neglect or presume to deny the fulfilment of God's promise. He wrote, he said, to stir up his readers' minds, from which the dross of ignorance and superstition had been purged, and reminds them of the words spoken by the prophets concerning God's purpose with the earth and man upon it. He writes of the last days-these days in which we are now living--thus :

“. . . there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” (2 Peter 3:3-4.)

The “promise” cannot be questioned. No one familiar with the Bible would be foolish enough to deny

that! It is the fulfilment of the promise that is denied. Men wrongly assume, says Peter in effect, that God never interrupts the “normal” course of human history, but these “scoffers (even if “ordained”) are “willingly ignorant” of the facts of history, such as the divine intervention in the Noachic flood of which Jesus spoke, and which destroyed all mankind, except faithful Noah and his family; and most are wilfully ignorant of the fact that by that same warning word of God (which Noah preached) the world is reserved for judgment because of the godlessness that would prevail in these closing days of Gentile domination. Says Peter:

“For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water; whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth that are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” (vs. 5-7.)

THE PROPHETS HAVE SPOKEN

The seeming delay in God carrying out His threat is misinterpreted. Man counts years by his own short span of life, and in shutting his eyes to the threatened judgments on the godless, he denies himself also the merciful opportunity to repent. The Eternal God does not measure time by man’s fleeting life, and Peter urges the recognition of this on his readers: “. . . be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (Verses 8-9.)

The political and politico-religious institutions will be abolished. The “heavens” of the Dictatorial Governments will collapse in a revolution which shall leave no vestige of former misrule; and the “earth” of roaring and seething democracy shall be swept away as though by fire, leaving neither root nor branch. In place of the present political “heavens and earth” Jesus will establish God’s Kingdom as “spoken before by the holy prophets.” There will be a “new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (vv. 2, 12, 13.) God through the prophet Isaiah paints a vivid picture of the glorious conditions then to prevail (ch. 65:18-25), and takes up the theme again in the Revelation which sums up the wondrous finality of God’s purpose (Rev. 21). There shall be no more troubled sea of nations “to cast up mire and dirt,” for there shall be One King over all the earth (Zech. 14:9), even Jesus, assisted by his then immortal faithful brethren and sisters who lived by the faith “once for all” delivered to them (Jude 3), and common to that minority constituting “the sect everywhere spoken against.” (Acts 28: 22.)

It is written that when God’s judgments are in the earth then the “inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness” (Isaiah 26:9), and then those who survive the judgments of God will confess, “Surely, our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit.” (Jer. 16:19.) The reader is urged to satisfy himself as to the pressing importance of these things by studying the context of the above quotations from Isaiah and Jeremiah. His attention is also directed to the pre-eminent sign that the times of Gentile mis-rule are drawing to a close, namely, the re-gathering in recent years of a remnant of the people of Israel from the lands of their dispersion to settle in Palestine, the land promised to their fathers—a regathering which was foretold 2,500 years ago by the Old Testament prophet as a feature of “the last days.” (Ezek. 37 and 38.) Because these things are impending, Peter’s warning comes with great force to all who read today: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens (political) shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness? Nevertheless, we according to his promise, look for NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (Verses 10- 13.)

Those who respond to the salvation offered in Jesus “look for and earnestly desire the coming of the day of the Lord” (v. 12 R.V.), and “watch and pray” that they may be accounted worthy to stand before the Son of Man in that day. (Luke 21:27-36.) To such, it will be the day of salvation, if they are faithful, for the faith brings responsibilities:

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (verses 14-15).

PRECIOUS PROMISES

The long-suffering of the Lord can be salvation to all who read if they will accept the faith of the Lord Jesus’ immediate disciples, and rejoice in what Peter called the “exceeding great and precious promises; that by these YE MIGHT BE PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE, having escaped the corruption that is in the world, through lust.” (2 Peter 1: 4.) -- A.C.



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