

# Events To Precede The Return Of The Lord

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## About the author:

Benjamin Wills Newton, (1807–1899) was an evangelist and author of Christian books. He was influential in the Plymouth Brethren. Although initially a close friend of John Nelson Darby, they began to clash on matters of church doctrine and practice which ultimately led to the 1848 split of the brethren movement into the Open Brethren and Exclusive Brethren.

## **Introduction**

That it is our duty to expect whatever the Scripture commands us to expect, is a truth too obvious to be questioned by any who reverence the Word of God. The hope of the Church is the return of her Lord. That hope He has set before us in those well-known words, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also". Until then, we are appointed to remain militant in the earth, conflicting with many dangers, and many sorrows. If, in respect of the future, the Church had been instructed only with reference to its hope; if nothing respecting its own history or the world's history during the present period had been revealed; if the time of our sorrowful militancy had been left blank and undelineated, then, it would have been sinful presumption to affirm that any one event must occur in the interval between the departure and return of the Lord. But if the Scripture has not been silent respecting the time of our militancy—if, on the contrary, it has prophesied very abundantly respecting the whole period of the Lord's absence, and more especially respecting the events that are immediately to precede His return, then, it becomes our duty to mark well what the Scripture has said, and to expect everything that it has commanded us to expect until the night of evil close. Otherwise, we despise the "light that shineth in a dark place"; we refuse to make it "a lamp to our feet".

## **Pre-Millennialism**

When the doctrine of the Lord's premillennial return was, about thirty years ago, revived in the Church, those who taught it were, for the most part, accustomed to say, that no event previous to His return was to be expected. This was taught, not because it was believed that the early Churches were forbidden to look for events that were to precede the coming of the Lord, but because we were supposed to be differently circumstanced. They, it was argued, had the whole course of the dispensation before them prophetically delineated in the Scripture, and consequently, by them, many events must necessarily have been expected; whereas we, it was said, were living at the very close of the dispensation, when every predicted event had been accomplished, and therefore, nothing any longer remained for which to wait.

But when the Scripture was searched more carefully, it was found that we had erred in supposing that all the prophecies that pertained to the present dispensation had been accomplished. It was found that Zechariah 12 and 14, and Matthew 24:15, revealed events yet to be accomplished in the Land of Israel before Israel is forgiven—that the Head of the Roman Apostasy is not The Antichrist who is to blaspheme God in Jerusalem, and to reign over all the kingdoms included within the whole Roman World—that the whole Roman World, Eastern and Western, has not yet been divided into the Ten Kingdoms that are to close its evil history—that the 1,260 days of Antichrist's blasphemy, instead of being accomplished, have not yet commenced—and that the predictions of the book of Revelation yet remain to be fulfilled. Thus we again found ourselves placed in circumstances closely resembling those of the early Churches, having a path before us prophetically marked by events intended as signs of the great approaching end.

Yet great reluctance has been exhibited by many in consenting to fall back into the place into which Truth constrains. Some, earnestly desiring the return of the Lord, are impatient of anything that implies delay. "Hope delayed maketh the heart sick." Others again, more weak in faith and timorous, and perhaps little acquainted with the Word of God, shrink from saying that there are to be events antecedent to the Lord's return, because they feel it to be a solemn thing to venture an assertion, which, to their conscience, appears almost equivalent to saying with the evil servant, "My Lord delayeth His coming".

## **Truth is of First Importance**

But although I would desire to respect the feelings that severally characterize each of these classes, we must, nevertheless, remember that everything inconsistent with Truth must be of the flesh and not of the Spirit. It was

not the Spirit, but nature, slow to receive what the Prophets had spoken, that brought the women with spices to the sepulchre. It was feeling unguided by Truth; for they knew not the Scriptures, and therefore understood not the thoughts and intentions of God. So in the present case: error and danger to the Church must result, if feelings or prepossessions be acted on that will not abide the test of the Word of God.

It has then been very extensively stated and extensively received, that it is spiritually injurious to the souls of God's people to believe that any event is to occur between the present moment and the Advent of the Lord: for that it is necessary to a right habit of soul to be in momentary expectation of His return.

If it were merely said that the one great object of the Church's hope and faith is the coming of the Lord, and that the Holy Spirit would seek to carry our thoughts over all intervening circumstances, so as not to rest in anything short of the return of the Lord—such a statement might unhesitatingly be received. But this is not the statement. What is meant is this—that it is contrary to the mind of the Lord that the Church should have the knowledge of any event as certainly to occur previous to His return.

But surely the pattern of our instruction is the Scripture. There, if anywhere, we learn the manner in which God adapts His communication to the spiritual necessities of the heart of man, for "He knoweth what is in man". If there were something necessarily injurious to the soul in becoming acquainted with events which are appointed to occur previous to the Lord's return, we should not have found the early Churches instructed as they were: for they were instructed as to the occurrence of events which rendered the daily and instant expectation of the Lord's return, in their case, impossible. Peter, for example, had his own death foretold to him, previously even, to the commencement of his ministry, and yet no one would, on that account, affirm that Peter had not the proper expectancy of the Lord's return. If it had been the mind of the Spirit that he should have kept back the knowledge of this fact from the Church, he might, of course, have buried it in his own bosom. But Peter did not think it necessary to the right spiritual condition of the saints that they should be ignorant of the occurrence of this event. On the contrary, in a Catholic Epistle (an Epistle which he wrote not of himself, but as inspired by the Holy Ghost) and in a passage in which he had been earnestly exhorting the Church to more vigorous service and watchfulness, he adds, "Yea I think it right, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me. Moreover, I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance" (2 Pet. 1:13-15). Here the Churches are plainly taught by Peter, not only that he himself was to die, but also that they would continue after his decease, and would need the exhortation that he was then giving, as well as the light of Prophecy, that should continue to shine as "a light in a dark place until the day should dawn." Indeed, the whole Epistle speaks of the saints as about to continue, for some while, in the place of danger as well as darkness, for he goes on to warn them of the false teachers that should arise among them in the last days; and on this he grounds his exhortation to be "mindful" of the commandments of himself and the other Apostles, for that there should come in the last days, scoffers, etc. Surely the Holy Spirit would not have caused John to record (John 21:18), and Peter to refer to, the Lord's prophetic intimation of Peter's death, if it had been necessary to the right spiritual condition of the saints that they should expect the return of the Lord without the expectation of any intervening event.

## **Events to Come in the Church**

Again, in the case of Paul, in his second Epistle to Timothy, he tells him what would ultimately come to pass in the professing Church. "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears," etc. Yet even corruption affords fresh occasion for service, and vigor of action, to those who hold fast the faith. On the very ground then of this corruption being about to be, he rests his exhortation to Timothy to watch and make full proof of his ministry: for he adds, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand". The reason of his thus speaking of his near departure, is to throw on Timothy increased responsibility in the future care of the Churches; yet at the same

time telling him that, notwithstanding every effort, failure and departure from the Truth would certainly ensue. Here, therefore, again, as in the case of Peter before, we find not only the intimation of his own decease, but also a foretelling of those things that were to occur after that decease, and in which Timothy and others would live and act. So likewise in the address to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20) we find him saying, "Take heed to the flock, . . . for I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things", etc. The evil thus predicted required at least some time for its development.

On the ground then of these and similar passages, I would again repeat, that to speak of events antecedent to the coming of the Lord, is not contrary to, but in accordance with, the teaching of the Apostles. Thus they taught the Churches, that so the people of God might know beforehand the character of the path in which they would be called to walk. Thus too, as I shall presently show, the Lord Jesus taught. Surely then it behooves us to be very jealous of the introduction of a principle which condemns the practice of the Apostles and of the Lord Himself. But not only so—not only does it impugn the mode of teaching which the Scripture uniformly adopts, but it also deprives the Church of that place of love and confidence in which it stands by the side of Him who said: "I have called you friends, for whatsoever I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you". For if it be wrong for the Church to have the knowledge of any events between the present moment and the Lord's return, it necessarily follows that the Lord could not have treated it in the confidence of love, but must have refused to teach it any thing connected with its own prospects and history in the earth. The Church could not have been entrusted with the knowledge of one event connected with its own history.

### **The Time of Waiting Determined**

Although it was the intention of the Lord that His Church should tarry on the earth for more than eighteen hundred years of sorrowful militancy, yet it must have been left in utter ignorance of all the circumstances of its way. It must have been kept in darkness as to everything that was to occur either in it or around it; because as soon as one event had been foretold, then there would have existed the knowledge of something which must necessarily precede the Coming of the Lord. He could not even have said to the Church in Smyrna, "Ye shall have tribulation ten days"; much less could He have communicated all that the Apocalypse unfolds. He must have said, "I cannot treat you with confidence, for ye are unworthy. If I instruct you as to anything that is to come to pass, ye will use the knowledge amiss; your evil will find in it an occasion for saying that I delay My coming. Ye will not use the knowledge in grace, and therefore I will foretell you nothing". Such is the place in which, virtually the Church is set by those who say that the knowledge of any intervening event is necessarily evil and contrary to the mind of Christ. But such is not the place assigned to us by the Lord. In the confidence of love He treats us as those to whom He could say, "I have called you friends". He desires to treat us as those in whose love He can confide. Thus when He spoke of His approaching departure He added, "Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless, it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you" (John 6:6, 7). Here, then, was an intervening event of unspeakable importance.

### **The Mission of the Comforter**

That Comforter by whose authority and power the whole course of their testimony to Israel and to the Gentiles was to be ordered—a testimony that was to exceed the limits of the Apostles' lives, as it is plain from the connected words, "they shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service"; a plain intimation that they would not live to witness their Lord's return. Indeed, all the concluding discourses of the Lord recorded in John, abound with allusions to events that were to intervene between His departure and return. The Church is not instructed on the supposition of being faithless, careless, and rejoicing at the departure of the Lord, but as those whose hearts sorrow had filled. The knowledge,

therefore, of intervening events is not withheld from them. They are regarded as, through grace, loving Him who also has confidence in them; and thus whilst consolation and encouragement is ministered by seeing in the fact of the communication the abiding evidence of our Master's love, it also supplies the occasion for discipline of soul in patience, and therefore we read of "the patience of the kingdom of Jesus Christ".

### **A Common Principle in Human Affairs**

Nor is this principle against which I am contending, at all in accordance with what experience teaches us in the ordinary conduct of human life. Men are daily accustomed in the ordering of their affairs to expect the occurrence of intervening circumstances without being thereby diverted from the great final object of their expectation. The return of beloved friends from a distant land, is waited for not less earnestly because a letter is first expected to intimate their approach. The result of some long cherished plan, or favorite enterprise, is expected not less eagerly, because there may be some circumstances first to happen, necessary perhaps, as means to the end. The summer is not less certainly anticipated because the fig tree must first put forth its leaves. And if it be so in things that cannot be regarded as certain (for uncertainty must always mingle with the most assured of human prospects)—if even in such things the expectation of intervening circumstances is found to quicken, rather than deaden, liveliness of anticipation, how much more must it be so, when every event that happens is the sure and covenanted pledge of that which it is sent to indicate? Nor are we speaking of ordinary human expectancy, but of the earnestness of love (for the Church is addressed as loving Him); and that must be a strange character of love, which, because a token is expected from a returning friend, should so fix its thoughts on the token as to forget the friend.

If, then, it be true that the principle of which I have been speaking is contradicted by the teaching of the Lord Jesus and the Apostles, by the character of the Church's calling in love, and by what nature itself teaches, is it possible that it should be adopted without producing the most disastrous results?

### **Perils or the Perversion of Truth**

Indeed such results have already abundantly appeared: for when it has been once assumed that no events antecedent to the Lord's return have been notified to the Church—in other words, that the Church has no instruction respecting its own history in the earth, then it necessarily follows that some method must be found for destroying the application to ourselves of those parts of the Scripture which, until lately, have been uniformly regarded by the whole Church of God as their especial portion, and as revealing facts peculiarly connected with themselves.

For, when I read in Matthew 24, such words as these: "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"—and, again in Luke 21, "Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but My words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare it shall come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be strengthened, to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man"—when I read these solemn words, it becomes obvious that the persons addressed are commanded to wait and earnestly to watch for the signs of their Lord's return, and upon their obedience to this command their preparedness for receiving Him depends. It becomes, therefore, a question of no little moment, whether these words were intended for us, as being, like the Apostles, believers in Him who spake them: or whether they are designed, not

for us, but for others. This is the important question—important, not because of any difficulty in returning the reply, but because these passages and other like passages, have, of late, been rejected as having no proper bearing on ourselves, on the ground of the Apostles being Jews, and therefore (as it is said) not representatives of the Church: and thus these passages, and therefore all the Gospels (for they cannot be separated), must cease to be regarded as addressed to Christians: for if the Apostles be not properly our representatives in Luke 21 and Matthew 24, there is less reason why they should be so in the doctrinal and practical instructions which they received: For doctrines and precepts which have a present reference to those to whom they are spoken, are more likely to be limited in their application, than those which, being prophetic, are necessarily future—perhaps remote in their fulfillment, and possibly designed not so much for those personally addressed as for others represented by them. The same principle that takes away from us Luke 21 and Matthew 24, will certainly deprive us of the Sermon on the Mount and the promises and instructions in John 16 ("they shall put you out of the synagogues", etc.), for in these passages the persons who were addressed were Jews, and Jewish allusions abound: and the principle is, that where there is anything characteristically Jewish in place or circumstance, there is that which is not properly Christian—a principle so utterly false, that nothing but a determination to affirm that no events antecedent to the Lord's return are made known to the Church, could account for its adoption by any reflective mind. If it be once admitted that the Apostles did not receive the instructions of the Lord as Christians and for Christians, the foundations of Christian truth are gone. When the foundations of the walls of that heavenly City which is the Bride of the Lamb, were beheld by John in vision, on those foundations were seen the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb. If we are to be excluded from the truths which the twelve Apostles taught, surely we must be excluded from the Heavenly City.

## **Rejection of Truth Causes Alarm**

There is, therefore, no little reason to be alarmed at the introduction, and now, wide dissemination of a principle, which, if established, would prevent our souls from being brought under the power of those very parts of the Word of God which are specially and peculiarly our own. Many parts of the Old Testament belong to dispensations that have passed away: others to dispensations yet to come. Such passages, though they may supply certain principles capable of being applied to believers now, yet cannot be primarily interpreted of them; for we are not under the law as Israel was, nor in millennial rest as, in the next dispensation, Israel will be. So, likewise, in the Gospels, many instructions were addressed to the disciples in their then present circumstances—circumstances that ceased to exist after the death and resurrection of their Lord; and all such instructions were, of necessity, limited to the time then present. Thus it is not now said to us, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any villages of the Samaritans enter ye not"; nor are we commanded to observe the bidding of those "who sit in Moses' seat", for with the death of Jesus the claims of the Mosaic economy terminated. But it is otherwise with those passages which were intended to guide their service during the time of His personal absence from them. With respect to such passages, we have a right to expect a clear, unhesitating answer from all who teach in the Church: for it has been well said that "ambiguities are to be avoided in the Church of God".

For whom then were the prophetic or prospective instructions of the Lord as recorded in the Gospels intended? They were exclusively intended for those who, as united with Him risen, and as recipients of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, were appointed to bear witness to Him, and to suffer for Him during the time of His personal absence, and during the time of Israel's national unbelief. Wherever we find these characteristics, there we find those who belong to the Church of the Firstborn. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave the power to become the sons of God", etc. All who received Him became in the same sense sons of God. It was equally true of John and of Cornelius—of Peter the Apostle of the circumcision, and of Paul the Apostle of the Gentiles. Whether, therefore, we read as in John, "They shall put you out of the synagogues, yea, the time cometh when whosoever killeth you shall think that he doeth God service"; or as in Matthew, "Ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake": those words, although addressed to those who were Jews by nature, yet did not pertain to them as Jews, but as those who, through faith

in Jesus, had been brought into that one body in which there is "neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all". They had all alike become "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ".

## **The Disciples Were Christians**

If we say that the prospective instructions addressed to the disciples in the twenty-fourth of Matthew, and the thirteenth of Mark, and the twenty-first of Luke, were not addressed to them as Christians—that is, as persons who were brought into all the fullness of the redemption prepared by God in Christ, then it is obvious that all the instructions respecting the observance of the Supper of the Lord, and Baptism, and all the prospective instructions of the Sermon on the Mount, could not have been addressed to them as Christians. Nor could the prayer which their departing Lord prayed over them in the seventeenth of John, have been prayed over them as Christians; for the company gathered around Him on Olivet in Matthew 24—and those to whom He gave the bread and the wine at the last supper—and those over whom He prayed in John—and those to whom He said in Galilee, "Go ye therefore, and disciple all nations, baptizing them"—were all one and the same company, instructed by Him and prayed for by Him with respect to circumstances that should surround them after His departure, and after they should have received the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

If sad experience did not teach us that there is no aberration too great for the waywardness of the human mind, we might deem it impossible that any who receive the Scripture should assert that the Apostles at Pentecost, and those who on that day were with them baptized by the power of the Holy Ghost, had not attained the position proper to the Church of God. How marvelously strange that any should labour to exalt the Apostle Paul and his Gentile converts into a preeminence denied to Peter, and John, and those whom their ministry gathered into that Pentecostal body on which so great grace rested! How strange that they accord to Paul and his converts, but deny to the twelve and their Pentecostal converts the name and standing of the Church of God! Paul did not this, when he emphatically spoke of the greatness of his sin consisting in this, that he had persecuted "the Church of God" (1 Cor. 15:9). Would he have called the saints who preceded him the Church of God, if they had not been the Church of God? So far from Paul dissociating himself from the Apostles who preceded him, and seeking to exalt himself into a distinct and higher sphere of ministry, he does the very reverse. He labours in the fifteenth of 1st Corinthians to show that although born late and as a weakling into the family of faith, yet that he was by grace strengthened to bear the same testimony as they, and to labour in the diffusion thereof even more abundantly. "So then whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed". Can any words imply consociation of labour more strongly than these? And in the second of the Ephesians, does he there seek to separate off his Gentile converts into a separateness and distinctness of privilege apart from those who had previously been gathered in from Israel? On the contrary, his effort is to show that the Gentiles who believed, though gathered in later, were yet, through God's marvelous grace, allowed to enter into coequal fellowship with all the Jewish believers who had preceded, so as in Christ to form one body. The thought of the exclusion of Jewish believers from that body, whether those believers had believed previous to the Advent of Christ, or during the ministration of Christ, or at Pentecost, is a thought so extravagant, so utterly at variance with all that God has revealed as to the methods of His grace, that it is not even mentioned, much less discussed, in the Scripture. Nor was the thought of his being separated unto a special and peculiar Gospel in the mind of the Apostle, when he wrote of that "great salvation which began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him" (Heb. 2:3). Is it possible to devise any form of words that could more unambiguously declare that the Gospel preached by the Lord, and by the twelve, and by Paul, was emphatically the same?

## **The "Any Moment" Coming Untenable**

Nor does this novel doctrine which asserts that the Pentecostal Christians were not properly gathered into the Church and the Church's blessings, at all answer the end which they who advocate it propose. They hope by

this doctrine to sustain their theory respecting the Lord's prophetic instructions in Matthew and the other Gospels not being addressed to, or intended for, the Church. But suppose we were to admit the supposition that the Pentecostal Christians were not properly Christian, and that the calling of "the Church" commenced with Paul, yet, even then, how can we exclude Paul and his Gentile converts from Matthew 24 and Luke 21? When I read, "Ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake; they shall lay hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and into prisons", etc., will any affirm that Paul and Gentile converts are not as much contemplated in these passages as any whom the Pentecostal Apostles converted from Israel? Surely we cannot exclude Gentile believers from such passages. They too were hated—they were brought before kings and rulers for Christ's name sake. Unless then we are to exclude Gentile believers as well as Jewish from the Church of God, and so have no Church of God at all, we must admit that the Church is addressed in Matthew 24 and Luke 21; and if the Church is addressed, then the Church is instructed as to certain things that were to happen to it previous to the return of the Lord, and is commanded to watch for the appointed signs. Thus the whole theory and all its consequences fall to the ground.

## **Israel Versus the Church**

The prophecy of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24 was delivered after His ministry towards Israel had closed. In the immediately preceding chapter we find Him presenting Himself to Jerusalem and to the rulers of Israel for the last time. They continued to reject Him, and He left them. He quitted the city and went without the gate, and retired to the Mount of Olives, saying as He left the city "Verily 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". Such were His last words to Israel. The "ye" of this verse belongs to them. They were left within the gates of Jerusalem, rejecters of the Lord, and rejected by Him. The "ye" of the twenty-third chapter is Jewish.

But now compare with the "ye" of the twenty-third chapter the "ye" of the twenty-fourth. The "ye" of the twenty-fourth pertains to those who had not rejected, but who had believed on the Lord Jesus. They remained not within the gates of Jerusalem attached either to the halls of Caiaphas or of Pilate. They went without the gate, bearing His reproach. God from heaven looked down upon them and viewed them in everlasting association with all the grace and all the power of redemption that was in Christ. The prayer which their Lord, a short time afterward, prayed over them, in the seventeenth of John, was but the expression of the thoughts that He had had respecting them, from the moment they first confessed His saving name. Who then more blessed than the disciples who stood around their rejected Lord on Olivet? They stood there, not as associated with rebellious and rejected Jerusalem, but as associated with the Son of the living God—sharing His sorrows, but heirs also of His glory. As such they are instructed in the twenty-fourth of Matthew. The Lord prophetically sketches the path which they, and others like them, would have to tread during the time of His absence, and their own sorrowful militancy. The "ye" of this chapter denotes not merely the four Apostles to whom it was primarily applied. It was a corporate "ye", applied to them as the representatives of others. It denoted all who were then the acknowledged disciples of Jesus, and all who should become the acknowledged disciples of Jesus up to the moment when His glory shall be made manifest. Up to the time of the conversion of Cornelius, the "ye" of this chapter was restricted to believing Jews, but after his admission into the Church, it was extended to believing Gentiles also. And as time rolled on, and darkness settled in on Israel, and as those thence gathered into the fold of faith became fewer and fewer, this "ye" of discipleship became, by force of circumstances, almost restricted to believers from among the Gentiles. It is the lot of Gentile believers, more especially, to see iniquity abounding, and love waxing cold, during the time that the Gospel is being preached for a witness to all nations. Nevertheless, when the hour of final crisis approaches, and the time of unequalled tribulation on Jerusalem draws near, the "ye" of this chapter will again include many a believing Jew. Gentile believers and Jewish believers—all made one body in Christ—all brought into the Church of the living God—are therefore included in this "ye". It pertains to them, and to them alone.



## Intervening Events

What then are they directed to expect? Are they taught to expect no intervening event between the departure and return of their Lord? Is not the very object of the prophecy to mark a succession, and a long succession, of intervening events? Were they not cautioned against believing that the wars and commotions which were to follow His departure were signs of the end? "All these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." Did not the Lord then accurately delineate that path which His Church has, for the last eighteen hundred years, been treading, and which is even now not ended? Still iniquity abounds, still love waxes cold, still the Gospel is being preached as a witness. Nor shall we, until we shall see the idolatry of Antichrist established in Jerusalem, and the unequalled, though shortened, season of tribulation, come and approach its close, be able to say these are the things respecting which our Master has said, "When ye shall see these things come to pass, know ye that it is nigh, even at the doors". As the budding of the fig tree indicates the near approach of spring, so surely shall these things indicate His glorious coming; and for these things He commands us to wait and watch. Would the Lord have commanded us to watch for these events if such watching produced a bad spiritual effect on the soul, and tended to make it say, "My Lord delayeth His coming", therefore I will eat and drink with the drunken? Will any indeed say that the teaching of intervening events produces this effect, when they must acknowledge that in this chapter the Lord Jesus has not only spoken of intervening events, but commanded us to expect them, and made such expectation essential to a right condition of watchfulness? To say, then, that the prophetic and prospective instructions addressed to the twelve Apostles were not addressed to them as our representatives, is virtually to reject the Scripture as our guide. We are as much bound to expect every event that Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 predict, as we are to observe the commandment of the Lord respecting Baptism and the Supper. The promises too—"Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the age", and "I will come again and receive you unto Myself", are addressed to the very same persons as those who are commanded to watch for the signs predicted in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. If the reasons were valid for rejecting the latter, they would equally prove that we were not concerned with the former.

## Precious Promises

And what words can be more plain than the words I have just quoted—"Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age". How could the Lord promise to be with His suffering disciples "until the end of the age", if they were to be taken away from the earth before "the end of the age"? Nor is "the end of the age" an uncertain or ambiguous expression. In the parable of "the wheat and tares" in Matthew, it is expressly defined to be "the harvest"—"the harvest is the end of the age"; and the harvest is marked as being the period when the holy angels shall be sent forth finally to separate those who have truly, and those who have nominally, professed the name of Jesus: the former being gathered to the heavenly garner, the latter "cast into the furnace of fire". "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this age. The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." In explaining the parable of the net, the Lord again uses the same expression. "So shall it be at the end of the age: THE ANGELS shall come forth and shall separate the wicked from among the righteous". Whenever, by this mission of the holy angels, the final separation between false and true professors of the name of Jesus takes place, the Day of the Lord will have come. Until then the wheat and the tares "grow together".

The wheat and tare field represents Christendom (Christ's kingdom) that is, those who have been baptized into the profession of the name of Christ. At the time of the Lord's return, there will be multitudes in the earth who

will not form a part of Christendom, and therefore will not fall within the scope of this parable. For example, the whole Roman World (h oicoumenh) which will then have become divided into ten kingdoms, will have apostatized into infidelity and avowedly rejected the name of Christ, and worshipped Antichrist. No part of it, therefore, will at that time belong to Christendom. It will have a history of its own. The Jews, too, and Mohammedans, and the Heathen, are to be excluded from this parable; for they form no part of Christendom. They are neither tares nor wheat.

Long before the Apostles died, the fair field of wheat which at Pentecost seemed to promise so much, became marred by the interminglement of tares; and since then, tares and wheat have grown on in the world together. Are we then told anything respecting the period when this growing together is to cease? Is the wheat to be removed before the tares? Is it to be reaped secretly and gathered secretly into the heavenly garner? and are the tares to remain and flourish in the earth after the wheat has been thus removed? No: they are "to grow together until the harvest". And what is the harvest? The "end of the age"—the end of man's day of evil. And by what is it marked? By sending forth the holy angels to gather first the tares, then the wheat. And what does "gathering" as used in this parable, imply? It implies in the case both of the wheat and of the tares, removal from the earth—in other words the cessation of natural existence here. The saints, as represented by the wheat, are to be removed from the earthly into the heavenly branch of the Kingdom of God, whilst the tares will be taken altogether out of the Kingdom to which they only nominally belong, and will be cast into the furnace of fire. This is the harvest, or end of the age: for observe, the harvest is not said to be in the end of the age, but "the harvest is the end of the age". Until then, the wheat and the tares grow together. If then the wheat and the tares grow together till the end of the age, the wheat cannot be removed before the end of the age. Nothing can be more demonstratively conclusive than this parable; yet not more conclusive than the words, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the age".

## **Vain Arguments**

Some who have wished to avoid the force of this parable, have suggested that the gathering of the tares may possibly mean a slow, progressive gathering (such as has long ago commenced) of false professors around various centers of evil such as Popery, neology, and the like; and that the angels may represent, not holy angels, but evil principles, or perhaps evil spirits by whom men are attracted to the aforesaid centers of falsehood. But to say that "angels" do not mean "angels", but principles, would be in itself neology. Nor is it possible that "His angels", that is, Christ's angels ("the Son of man shall send forth His angels") can mean anything else than holy angels: nor would it be possible for evil angels to gather Christ's saints into the heavenly garner, and the saints are to be gathered by the same agency—the same "reapers" that gather the tares. Moreover, the gathering as we have seen, involves removal from the earth, and therefore implies that the period of their earthly existence is brought to a close forever. The gathering of the tares is immediately followed by their being cast into the furnace of fire. Other arguments might be added; but I should despair of convincing any who are not convinced by what has been already said.

Others have suggested that the parable of the wheat and tares has no reference to the present period: that the wheat represents not the saints of the present, but the saints of the next dispensation. But the next dispensation is the millennial. The period of the Church's sorrowful militancy ends as soon as this present dispensation ends. How could the parable of the wheat and tares apply to the next dispensation? The very point in which the coming dispensation is contrasted with the present is, that Satan will be bound, and therefore will no longer be able to sow tares among the wheat. Of converted Israel (and to them the testimonies of Truth in the next dispensation are to be committed) it is said, "they shall be all righteous". The wheat field will be spoiled by no intermingled tares, nor will the banner of Truth when committed to their hands, be again dragged dishonored in the dust as it has been by the professing Church of the present dispensation.

Nor would the history of Christianity in the next dispensation be a subject that would properly fall within the

scope of the Gospel of Matthew. The specific subject of the prophetic parables of Matthew is the history of the period during which Jerusalem and Israel are left in unbelief and desolation, and a body of professed believers, including some Jews and many Gentiles, becomes the witness for Christ during His personal absence. The rejection therefore of the Son of Abraham and of David by Israel corporately, and His nominal and (in some cases) true, reception by others, principally gathered from among the Gentiles, is the especial subject of Matthew throughout: so that Matthew may, in a peculiar sense, be considered the Gentile Gospel, inasmuch as it treats of Christianity throughout the period during which, scorned by the house of Israel, it sojourns in Gentile and Galilean places. All the prophetic parables of Matthew have this character strongly marked on them, as may be easily seen by an examination of those recorded in the thirteenth chapter.

I must repeat then, that the one declaration that the wheat and the tares are to grow together until the holy angels at the end of the age are sent forth to separate them, is of itself sufficient to prove that the saints of the present dispensation are not to be removed from the earth until the day of man terminates forever. What presumption could be greater than to affirm that the wheat are taken away from the earth before the tares, when this parable so distinctly declares that they are "to grow together until the harvest"? Again, the prophecy of Matthew 24 (unless indeed we reject it) throws on us the responsibility of watching for the predicted signs. If we refuse to observe those signs, we virtually refuse to watch in the only way in which we can watch rightly according to God's Word. And although such watching will not enable us to know the day or the hour of the revelation of the Lord, yet it will enable us to know when it is nigh, even at the doors. "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 (the predicted signs) come to pass, know that it is near, even at the doors."

END

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