

PROPHETIC STUDIES

PART I.



The End of the Age.



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TWOPENCE.

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THE END OF THE AGE.

IT would probably be too much to assume that all who will read these pages, albeit they truly love our Lord Jesus Christ, are devout and careful students of the prophetic Word. Experience rather goes to prove that the vast majority neglect this department of divine truth. Some look upon it as of no real practical importance. In their eyes it is an interesting study for persons of leisure, but not really essential to the spiritual life of believers everywhere. All who hold this view are most grievously mistaken. Is it not a fact that if one went right through the Scriptures, scissors in hand, and were to cut out every passage prophetic in character that we should have a very small Bible left? Now if God has been pleased, in His infinite wisdom to put so much prophetic teaching in His Word, we may be assured that it is of importance for the spiritual life, and those who give it no place in their minds are, in consequence, the losers by their neglect.

Before we examine our present subject, a few suggestions may be helpful as to the advantage of prophetic study in general. First, it deepens and extends our communion with God. Take an illustration of what I mean. Suppose I had a friend who in all his intercourse with me is close and reserved.

statement may seem bold to some, but it may quite safely be affirmed that the end of the world is at least a thousand and seven years distant. Before the history of the world, as we know it, is wound up, the Man of God's choice must reign in Zion a thousand years, and the man of the Devil's choice must reign there seven years before Christ's appearing. But none dare say that the end of the **age** is far off. Indeed, all that is taking place around us to-day is suggestive that it is very near. Great changes are impending. Even men of the world feel that it is so. This thought should solemnize our hearts, and cause us to look well to our ways.

But what are we to understand by "**the end of the age?**" Are we to understand the end of the Christian era? By no means. When the Lord Jesus spoke as He did in Matt. xiii. the Christian era had not even been hinted at. The disciples to whom the Lord spoke were a handful of believing Jews who were looking forward with intense desire to the establishment of the promised earthly kingdom. When they asked the Lord in Matt. xxiv. concerning His coming and the end of the age, it was not the Christian era of which they were enquiring. Those Jewish disciples, with the Old Testament in their hands, were familiar with

TWO AGES OR DISPENSATIONS,

the one to follow the other; first, the age of Moses, or the law; and second, the age of the Messiah or the kingdom. Thus they were really asking the Lord about the end of the Mosaic age.

Let us endeavour to realize the circumstances in which the disciples found themselves at that moment. They had just listened to the Lord's lamentation over unbelieving Jerusalem (Matt. xxiii. 37-39). His words were very plain. He was going away; but there would be another coming when Israel will joyfully exclaim, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." Presently, as they walked away from the temple, they drew the Lord's attention to the beauty of the structure. He replied, "See ye not all these things? verily, I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Then four of His disciples asked Him, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age?" (Matt. xxiv. 1-3). They thus connected His coming with the wind-up of the age. Remember to whom they were speaking. These disciples were not like Baruch, seeking light from Jeremiah. They were in conversation, not with a mere prophet, but with their God! Oh, the grace of it! No "thus saith Jehovah" ever passed His lips; He is Himself Jehovah!

The Lord's reply to the disciples should be read very carefully, and the difference should be noted between the reports of it as given by Matthew and Luke respectively. There were really two questions; the one relating to the destruction of the temple, and the other relating to the Lord's coming and the end of the age. Luke was led by the Spirit to record more particularly the Lord's reply to the first question, and Matthew was led to concentrate upon His

reply to the second. Accordingly, Luke speaks of the impending overthrow of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans; while Matthew speaks of afflictions which are yet to come.

But we have not yet made clear the force of the expression "**the end of the age.**" That it is not the end of the Christian era must surely be plain to every careful reader. It is the end of the Mosaic, or "law-age." Are we then living in the Mosaic age? By no means. Here is the key to the situation. The age of Moses has suffered an interruption, due to Israel's rejection of Christ, and Christianity has come in as **a kind of parenthesis.** Daniel ix. puts this beyond dispute. In that chapter we have Gabriel's message to the prophet in answer to his intercession. Daniel longed to know more about the future of his people, and he was told that seventy sevens were determined upon them ere their sorrow would be ended for ever. That period, he was informed, would commence with the going forth of a commandment to restore and build Jerusalem. The commandment in question will be found in Neh. ii., and was issued in 455 B.C. The seventy sevens are divided into seven, sixty-two, and one. Sixty-nine sevens, four hundred and eighty-three years in all, bring us down to Messiah the Prince. Then we have His cutting off, with an indefinite period following, ere the final seven begins. This is where Christianity comes in. We are living between the last two verses of Dan. ix. Once it is understood that *the Christian era, or Church period, is an in-*

terruption of the Mosaic age, everything becomes plain. When the Church is complete, the Lord will descend into the air, and take His heavenly saints away. Then that which remains of the Mosaic age will run its course, and will be brought to an abrupt close by the appearing of the Lord from heaven.

At this point, a few words may be in season concerning a matter that is of the deepest interest to every Christian reader.

Where shall we be when the great King comes forth to reign in righteousness?

Matthew xiii. 43 answers this question. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." We all know where the sun is. The Creator has placed it in the heavens to give light and warmth to the earth, but it never comes down here. In like manner, when Christ shines forth as the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings, we shall shine forth with Him. The heavenly saints will come out into public view of the earth (remember the matchless symbol of the holy city Jerusalem in Rev. xxi.), but will not come down *to the earth*. His feet will stand upon the Mount of Olives, but Scripture never says **ours** will do so. The blessing of God will flow through the Church to Israel's tribes, and they will diffuse it to all the nations. "The glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (Isa. xl. 5).

Let us now glance at some of the happenings of our own time, which are suggestive that the age is nearing its end. No one will deny that things are moving rapidly to-day, but only God's saints understand whither they are tending. Let it be clearly stated, however, that

PROPHECY IS NOT YET BEING FULFILLED.

This cannot be until God's present work of grace is finished, but it may safely be said that the ground is fast being cleared for its fulfilment. Here are a few suggestions as to what will be witnessed at the end of the age.

First, we may expect to see a partial political

RESTORATION OF JEWS TO PALESTINE;

not of the people of Israel, but of the Jews. Isaiah xviii.—a most interesting chapter—speaks of an effort to be made by a maritime nation to restore the scattered and peeled people. But God is not in the movement. He considers it in heaven His dwelling-place, because everything that is connected with Zion and Abraham's seed is of the deepest possible interest to Him. The failure of the enterprise is graphically shown in the figure of a vine (the usual Bible symbol representing Israel), which looks promising up to a point, but which has a disastrous ending, the whole thing being cut down to the roots. In yet plainer language, Jehovah says of the returned Jews, "They shall be left together unto the fowls of the moun-

tains and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them." This means they will fall a prey to the Powers around them. At one time, when enquirers asked for a suggestion as to what nation is referred to in Isaiah xviii. no positive reply could be given. But it is otherwise now. Palestine is no longer under the yoke of the Turk, but is held by Great Britain under a mandate from the League of Nations. When the British took possession of the land in 1918, the Foreign Secretary (Mr. A. J. Balfour) announced, in his famous letter to Lord Rothschild, that the British government viewed with favour the project of making Palestine a national home for the Jews. When we read that letter, surely we all felt that the end had been brought sensibly nearer.

But let it be carefully noted that the proposed re-establishment of *the Jews* in the land is not the restoration of *Israel's twelve tribes*. That great event is a work of divine grace, with which the meddling hand of man will have nothing to do, and it awaits the appearing in power and majesty of the Son of Man.

Another thing we may expect to see at the end of the age is a great movement towards

CHURCH RE-UNION;

and this is very much in men's minds to-day. Throughout Christendom it is regarded as an object worth striving for. If we could see an ardent

longing on the part of God's true saints everywhere to draw together, it would be cause for deep rejoicing, for surely such a movement must be the work of the Spirit of God: but this is not what religious leaders are occupied with. Their aim is to federate the great ecclesiastical bodies. How much overlapping would thus be avoided! How much more influential would "the Church" be if only her breaches could be healed! Such are some of the arguments that are heard on every hand to-day.

Revelation xvii. comes to mind here. There we have a vision of a gaily-decked woman riding upon a scarlet-coloured beast. Her name is emblazoned on her forehead, "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of the harlots and the abominations of the earth." The Beast is the Roman Empire in its final form—a confederacy of ten kingdoms under one powerful head. The Harlot is the re-united Christendom of which men are now dreaming—Popery, and all that will be associated with it at the last. She will become so influential that for a season she will guide the affairs of the Empire, but this will only be tolerated until the Beast finds itself in a position to throw off the incubus. Then the earth will behold dis-establishment with a vengeance indeed!

We may also expect to see at the end of the age a serious development of the

**REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT AMONGST THE
MASSES.**

Our Lord has described it thus: "There shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Luke xxi. 25, 26). "The sea and the waves" mean the peoples. We read in Isaiah lvii. 20, "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." How true is this! A glance at the newspaper is sufficient to prove it. "Mire and dirt" fill its pages. "The sun, moon and stars" mean the rulers of the nations. When the Lamb breaks the sixth seal, chaos ensues, and all classes, high and low, rulers and ruled, are filled with terror. *But before a single seal is broken the heavenly saints will be removed to the courts above.* We are seen enthroned in chap. iv. of the Apocalypse, we are singing the new song that will never grow old in chap. v., but the Lamb does not commence to break the seals until we reach chap. vi. Then every form of government is overthrown, with a perfect welter resulting. Men are preparing for this now. They are refusing to be ruled. Government, in the proper sense of the word, scarcely exists to-day. The men who hold office for the time being are the mere executors of the people's self-will, and their seats shake as they sit in them.

Another thing we may expect to see at the end of the age is

THE REVIVAL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE.

A wonderful thing, truly! When was it ever known for a fallen Empire to revive again? As we look back over the world's history, we see Empires rising up, running their course, and then sinking into ruin. That is the end of their power. But the Roman Empire, after fifteen centuries, is to come up once more! Rev. xiii. 1 shows it to us as a Beast arising out of the sea, which means that the troubled condition of the nations will be the circumstances that will give it re-birth. In Rev. xvii. 8 it is said to ascend out of the bottomless pit. The import of this is that Satan's hand is at work, bringing up the old evil thing for his own malignant purposes at the end. *The present Dictator in Italy openly states that he wishes to see the Empire restored!* How little he realizes that his dream is destined to be fulfilled!

Just one thing more. We may expect to see at the end of the age several

GREAT COMBINATIONS OF POWERS.

How futile is men's scheme, however well meant, for a universal League of Nations! **Scripture speaks of at least five Leagues, not one!** First, there is the Latin League already referred to. It will include all those nations—Britain, Spain, France, etc.—that were governed by Rome long ago. For mutual advantage, driven doubtless by force of circumstances, they will draw together again, under the headship of "the Superman," whom they frankly confess they sorely need.

Second, there is the Near Eastern League, consisting of Israel's ancient enemies, Edom, Ammon, Moab, etc., and it will be found in Psalm lxxxiii. These Powers will re-appear upon the political stage when Israel re-appears, and they will be characterized by the same murderous hostility towards Abraham's seed as marked them of old. When the fig-tree puts forth its leaves, "all the trees" (the surrounding peoples) "will put forth theirs also" (Luke xxi. 29, 30).

The third League is the Northern, headed by the powerful chief of whom Isaiah and Micah say so much under the title of "the Assyrian." Daniel's book speaks of him as "the King of the North" (Dan. xi. 40). Now the Latin League (the Roman Empire) is friendly to the Jews, and will guarantee their independence after having re-established them in the land. This will bring the Northern and Latin Leagues into conflict, for the former is as determined to destroy the Jews as the latter is to protect them. This terrific clash of nations is the Armageddon of Revelation xvi.

The fourth League is the Eastern. In Revelation ix. 14 we read of four angels bound at the great river Euphrates. These are doubtless messengers of evil, whose activities are divinely restrained until it suits God in His wisdom to permit them to operate. John saw forthwith two hundred million of horsemen in motion. Revelation xvi. 12 speaks of the Euphrates being dried up, that the way

of the Kings of the East may be prepared. The "Yellow Peril" has been a good deal upon men's minds in recent years; God will yet allow it to materialise as divine chastisement for the long-favoured, but guilty, West.

Let it be noted that the antagonism of the Near Eastern and Northern Leagues is against the Jewish people; the antagonism of the Eastern League is against Europe in general. But God's land is the battle-ground, with consequences so appalling that Scripture speaks of "blood . . . even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs" (Rev. xiv. 20). All the birds that fly in the midst of heaven are invited by an angel to the most ghastly feast of the ages: "Come and gather yourselves together unto the great supper of God: that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great" (Rev. xix. 17, 18).

There remains the League indicated in Ezekiel xxxviii., xxxix. Here, unquestionably, we have Russia, and her many allies in the last crisis. The Revisers were quite right in rendering chap. xxxviii. 2, and xxxix. 1, "Prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal." The passage was so rendered in the Greek Septuagint three centuries before the birth of our Lord. Russia is meant, with a clear allusion to her European and Asiatic capitals, Moscow and Tobolsk. It is not a little significant that in recent years Peter the

Great's beautiful city on the Neva has been abandoned as the seat of government, which has reverted to Moscow. The invasion of "Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal" is Israel's last trouble ere the Millennial kingdom is established in blessing. This invasion, although from the same direction, differs from that of the King of the North (Dan. xi. 41) in that (1) all the tribes are in the land when it takes place, and (2) in that Jehovah does not permit it to have the smallest success. The King of the North overflows 'the glorious land,' and then goes down into Egypt, crushing and despoiling that country also. Gog and his hosts, on the contrary, are divinely overthrown in the Northern mountains of Israel. The earlier invasion is Jehovah's scourge upon the people for their acceptance of the Antichrist (Isaiah xxviii. 14-21), and Jehovah in consequence calls the host of the desolator "His army" (Joel ii. 11), the later invasion has no such character—it is wanton aggression by an envious foe after the whole twelve tribes have been restored to happy relationship with God.

Although in these pages the latter day combinations of Powers have been shown in their distinctness, it is not at all unlikely that the Northern and Eastern Leagues may act in collusion in their hostility to the Western Empire and the Jews.

Thus the present age is destined to have a terrible close. Man's scheme for a condition of universal peace cannot be realized, because the Prince of Peace is unwanted. Cæsar was the world's choice on that great and solemn day that can never be forgotten, and Cæsar men must have, with all that stands connected

with that martial name. Creation's offended God keeps silent at present, but the moment rapidly approaches when He will speak—not in terms of grace, but of judgment unsparing. "He will arise to shake terribly the earth" (Isa. ii. 19, 21). "The mighty God, even Jehovah, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Our God shall come and shall not keep silence; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him" (Psa. l. 1-3). Thus wrote Asaph three thousand years ago, voicing prophetically the feelings of Israel's pious remnant in the unparalleled disorders of the last days.

But beyond all the ruin that men's evil will bring about, there lies the unspeakable blessing of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. The day is not far distant when God will put the iron sceptre into His competent hands. "I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (Psa. ii. 8, 9). "He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet" (1 Cor. xv. 25). Seeing that the end of the age is manifestly drawing near, the home-going of the Christian company cannot be much longer delayed. The bright Morning Star will be seen by watchful eyes before the shining forth of the Sun of Righteousness (Rev. xxii. 16; Mal. iv. 2). The Lord make both reader and writer ready in heart and mind to cry, "Come, Lord Jesus."