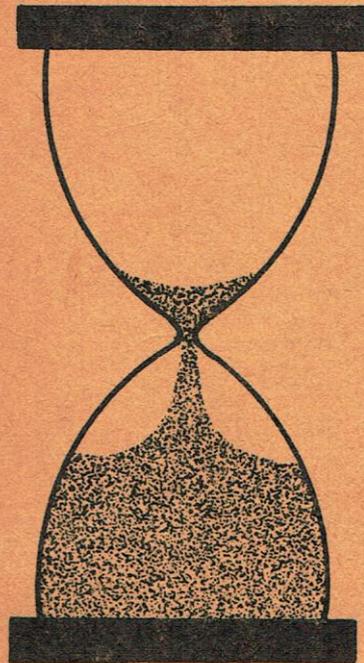


This publication is currently out of print.  
Adapted from the original booklet which was in A5, page numbers changed accordingly

# **THE TIME OF THE END**



by **H A WHITTAKER**

# THE TIME OF THE END

*Studies in Bible Prophecy*

*by*  
HARRY WHITTAKER

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*Published by*

H. A. WHITTAKER, No. 6 WALKERS CROFT, LICHFIELD, STAFFORDSHIRE

*and obtainable from*

Sis. (MRS.) M. PALMER, SILOAM, BACK LANE, MARAZION, CORNWALL, ENGLAND

*Printed in Great Britain by*

WORDNS OF CORNWALL LIMITED, PENZANCE, CORNWALL

## FOREWORD

In 1967 the writer of this collection of studies in Bible prophecy published an earlier series, written in 1964, under the title: "The Last Days." They were little more than brief summaries, to suggest lines of investigation. The present compilation, written in the Fall of 1967, is an attempt to dot a few i's and cross a few t's.

In recent years there are certain distinctive attitudes discernible regarding the study of Bible prophecy. One school of thought saves itself from thinking and from hard personal Bible study by nailing its colours to the mast and refusing to consider any interpretation more recent than the nineteenth century.

Another trend, also to be deplored, is the picking up of isolated verses here and there from prophetic passages in order to weave them together, with a confidence altogether unwarranted, into a detailed prophetic time-table. Anything which is attempted in this direction should always be done with great diffidence. One foresees the possibility of serious strains on personal faith when over-confident schemes of interpretation are turned topsy-turvy by the hard facts of a year or two.

Yet another fashion, understandable but not to be encouraged, is the rambling political commentary, decorated with an occasional knowing allusion to some prophecy or other. This tendency to turn Bible prophecy into a kind of political game—the only kind of politics valid to Christadelphians—is of little spiritual profit. It is especially undesirable when it steers the attention of the Lord's watchers to the Far East or Africa or Western Europe or the Papacy, and away from Israel. There is no single lesson to be learned by the student of Bible prophecy of more importance than the almost self-evident: Watch Israel! By comparison all the rest is negligible.

The present series of studies is a rather miscellaneous sequence of brief expositions of more or less familiar chapters in the prophets. They are essentially Biblical studies. Allusions to current politics are few. Many of the conclusions reached—especially in considering such chapters as Daniel 11, Amos 1, 2—are very tentative. The writer is prepared to see some of his expectations proved to be mistaken by the events of the next few years. In that case he will be in good company.

Two themes, both of which have suffered unwarranted neglect over the years, were given some prominence in "The Last Days": the repentance of Israel, and Arab hostility. It will be observed that in these further excursions into prophetic fields, the same motifs (deliberately recapitulated in chapter 2) constantly recur—not because they have been sought, but because they are inescapable.

It is, of course, well recognized that most, if not all, of the prophecies considered here have already had some kind of fulfilment in or soon after the prophet's own time. But this is not to say that further fulfilment in days yet future must be ruled out. Almost no allusion is made in these pages to any primary fulfilment, but the reader is assured that where such application of the prophecy has been known, it has been borne in mind in order to help towards a harmonious exposition of the later, and now more important, fulfilment.

Some will be disappointed at the paucity of references in these pages to the Book of Revelation. Such readers are assured that there has been no culpable negligence. The present writer has a complete commentary on that remarkable book in manuscript. Perhaps one day it maybe possible to make this available for perusal, but it is fervently hoped that the rapid development of events in these Last Days will soon make the further study of the Apocalypse unnecessary.

*Other publications by the same Author:*

EXPLORING THE BIBLE ABRAHAM

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*These are obtainable from:*

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THE LAST DAYS

HE IS RISEN INDEED (*To be published shortly, God willing*)

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## CHAPTER 1

### FISHERS AND HUNTERS

*Jeremiah 76*

The greatest day in Israel's history was their deliverance from Egyptian bondage by the hand of Moses. Of this their Passover is an unailing reminder, when they say: "The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt."

Jeremiah 16:14, 15 foretells the coming of another day of deliverance which will utterly dwarf that ancient experience. Instead, they will say: ". . . The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers" (v. 15).

This promise certainly did not find its fulfilment in the return from Babylon, for in no respect did that restoration compare with the deliverance from Egypt—and here Jeremiah foretells something considerably greater than that. Also, it is to be noted that the same promise is repeated in Jeremiah 23:7, 8, where it is specified as the work of Messiah, the Lord our Righteousness. So, without any possibility of doubt, here is a prophecy of the Last Days. The rest of the chapter shows how the fulfilment is to come about.

#### FISHERS—

"Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them" (v. 16). Since the twentieth century came in, these words have found ample fulfilment. In many different ways God has, so to speak, dangled bait before His ancient people to lure them back to Himself and back to the Land. The Balfour Declaration in World War I was almost an incitement to Jews to get busy on re-colonization of Palestine. And circumstances were every way propitious—the Turks had been driven out, the Land was almost empty of population, the few Arabs there were tolerably friendly and willing to sell large areas of land at give-away prices, and the mandate was in the hands of Britain. The barometer was set at "Fair."

#### —AND HUNTERS

But at first the Zionist Movement was slow to gather momentum. Nearly everywhere the Jews were tolerably comfortable, and pogroms seemed to be a thing of the past. So God tried a more radical method: "And afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks." Thus there arose, to the utter astonishment of the entire world, a fanatical German demagogue who attracted power to himself as a magnet. This man was possessed with an insane hatred of Jews and everything Jewish. Before World War II began, and especially during it, Jews were hunted with a calculating resolution and inhumanity without parallel in world history. Both before and after the war, this hunting of God's people meant a great swelling of the stream of immigrants to Palestine. Increasing Arab hostility cleared out the Jewish communities in all the lands of Islam, and the new State of Israel throve. But it throve in godlessness! An overwhelming proportion of its three million people are without effective religion. Such religious conviction as exists is of negligible power, for it is basically a zeal for and rabbinic tradition. Repentance and faith towards God are almost unknown. Jewish Christians in Jerusalem are only a tiny handful. The great lesson of self-mistrust and of faith in the God of Abraham has still to be learned.

Accordingly, the Jeremiah prophecy proceeds: "For mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes. And first I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double; because they have defiled my land" (vv. 17, 18a).

Israel is God's firstborn, endowed in time past with double blessing (see Deuteronomy 21:17), but bearing also double responsibility. The present generation has certainly developed God's Land with unmatched skill and industry, not to God's glory however, but out of their own pride and for their own selfish ends. Therefore, first, before the divine blessing can be given them there must come recompense and a consequent change of heart.

When this transpires, the fulness of God's kingdom will flood in: "The Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit . . . I will cause them (Israel, or the Gentiles?) to know mine hand and my might: and they shall know that my name is Jehovah" (vv. 19, 21).

## CHAPTER 2

### THE REPENTANCE OF ISRAEL

The re-gathering of Israel to the Land of their Fathers as a sign that the Last Days are upon us is a fact familiar enough to all who read these words. It is familiar both in Holy Scripture and in modern politics. The thing is past argument. Why cannot others see it as plainly as we can?

And the future of Israel is just as plain. They will come through the chapter of tribulation which yet awaits them, saved by the advent of the Messiah whom they have refused for many centuries; they will then acknowledge him, yielding humble submission, and thus will find themselves exalted to be the head of the nations, and not the tail; the glorious Kingdom of God now brought in will be essentially a Kingdom of Israel, the splendour and power of the Davidic era raised to the nth degree.

It is the purpose of this chapter to suggest that, whilst the fore-going summary is entirely correct, the emphasis is wrong. A subtle distortion has crept in which has resulted in serious loss of perspective.

The key factor is the repentance of Israel. All our thinking regarding this vital element in the divine purpose has been dominated by the familiar passage in Zechariah 12:10:

And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

An inference, not wholly justified, has been readily made that the inevitable conversion of Israel to faith in Christ will follow instantaneously when they set eyes on Jesus. The stigmata of his sufferings, inflicted by their own race and now displayed before them, will bring full conviction of their national error and sin, and they will prostrate themselves in wretchedness before him.

Such a reading of the passage is weak in two points. Misled by the familiar words of the King James Version, readers have assumed that this transformation in stony-hearted Israel is brought about by the actual evidence of their senses, as was the conversion of hard-headed Thomas: "they shall look

upon me . . . and they shall mourn." But the Hebrew text is not so explicit. The expression means literally: "they shall look unto me," and it would be unwise to press the more familiar meaning. The same is also true of the New Testament version of these words in John 19:37. Incidentally, it is well to be clear also that the allusion in John is not to the piercing by crucifixion but by the spear-thrust of a Roman soldier: yet John's intention is that this shall be seen as brought about by Jewish malice: "him whom *they* pierced."

A further difficulty (to the present writer, though he is aware that many take this in their stride) is the astonishing paradox of a great national mourning in the very moment of redemption and triumph (see, by all means, Zechariah 12:11-14).

It is well that the fact should be recognized that this picture of a national repentance of Israel at sight of their crucified Messiah stands almost alone. Revelation 1:7 is nearly the only parallel passage:

Behold, he cometh with clouds: and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

Ezekiel 36:24-28 and 37:23 should perhaps be read in harmony with this idea, but this cannot be taken for certain. Romans 11:26 is fairly explicit on this:

And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

Yet even here the original text in Isaiah 59:20 is markedly different in its implications, suggesting that the repentance of Israel must come before the manifestation of the Redeemer:

And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord.

This repentance of Israel is a frequent theme of the prophecies concerning the Last Days. The Bible passages concerning it are numerous and explicit. It would appear to be a facet of the prophetic Scriptures which has suffered from unwarranted neglect. Here is a block of four of these passages.

1. "For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:39).
2. "If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they have trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; and that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land" (Leviticus 26:40-42).
3. "And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return, and gather thee from all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee" (Deuteronomy 30:1-3).

4. "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" (Romans 11:15).

These passages call for only brief comment. Their main idea—that the Chosen Race must shew a change of heart before its final redemption can take place—seems to be carried on surface.

1. For many many years the faithful remnant among the Gentiles have said: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." But not so Israel. Nor at the moment is there any clear sign of such conversion. Nevertheless the force of the word "until" here is inescapable.
2. Here the full realization of the covenant promises to the Fathers is made explicitly dependent on the contrite heart of the nation.
3. In the passage from Deuteronomy 30 the word "when" is very forceful. So also is the context in verses 11-14—verses which Paul expounds in Romans 10 with reference to the gospel of faith ignored by self-sufficient Israel.
4. Romans 11:15 is almost like a proportion sum in arithmetic. Paraphrased the words mean this: Just as Israel's rejection of the gospel has led to their casting off by God, so also their repentance will lead on to the Kingdom of God and the resurrection from the dead. With such Scriptures as these the case surely stands proven. Nevertheless for the benefit of those who would make doubly sure, another block of four passages may not be amiss:
5. "I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face. In their affliction they will seek me early (earnestly), saying, Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us, in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight" (Hosea 5:15-6:2; and see v. 3 also). It is almost as though the nation must re-enact in its own experience the suffering and glory of the one whom they pierced.
6. The great Zechariah prophecy concerning Joshua-Jesus, "the man whose name is the Branch" who is to build the temple of the Lord and sit and rule as a priest upon his throne, concludes with these words:  
"And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God" (Zechariah 6:15).
7. The margin of the Revised Version correctly re-shapes Jeremiah 4:1, 2 to read thus:  
If thou wilt put away thine abominations out of my sight, and wilt not wander, and wilt swear, The Lord liveth, in truth, in judgement and in righteousness; then the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory—which surely means that the coming in of God's Kingdom depends on Israel turning to Him in repentance.
8. Peter's speech to the Jews of Jerusalem (Acts 3) carries the same exhortation. In the Greek text the point is made explicitly, but is less obvious in the Authorised Version: "Repent ye therefore"—that three results may follow:
  - (a) "that your sins may be blotted out;"
  - (b) "that there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord;"
  - (c) "and that he may send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you" (Acts 3: 19, 20).

Omitting (a) and (b) for the moment, Peter's appeal runs thus: "Repent ye therefore . . . that he may send Jesus Christ." The plain implication here is that, in the inscrutable purposes of God, the coming of Messiah's Kingdom somehow has the repentance of Messiah's people as a necessary pre-requisite. Perhaps this is the point, easily over-looked, of the familiar fig-tree parable: "When her branch is now *become* tender" may well be a prophecy of stony Jewish hearts becoming hearts of flesh. In other words, the intention of the parable could be *spiritual* rather than political—in which case this long-foretold revival of the "fig-tree" has not yet begun!

#### FURTHER EVIDENCE

The catalogue of prophetic Scriptures which have to do with this theme is by no means exhausted. For the benefit of those who may care to investigate further, the following are added:

9. Isaiah 17:6-8.
10. Psalm 81:13,14.
11. Jeremiah 3:14-18.
12. Jeremiah 29:12-14.
13. Deuteronomy 4:27-31.
14. Amos 5:15.
15. 1 Kings 8: 47-49.
16. Genesis 18:19.
17. Zechariah 13:9.
18. Joel 2:12-20.
19. Ezekiel 20: 42-44.

The last of these is specially interesting as an explicit prophecy that the return to the Land is to *precede* the change of heart which is the recurring theme of so many prophetic testimonies.

One caution is necessary here. It would be a mistake to assume that the Scriptures cited require that there be a wholesale conversion of the nation. So far as can be seen, there is nothing to indicate such a conclusion. Rather is it to be expected (on the basis of Ezekiel 20:42-44 and other passages to be cited later) that Operation Fig-Tree—a divine surgical operation (as will be seen by and by)—will concern the Jews in the Land of Israel. The Dispersion may go almost completely unaffected by it. But of this one cannot be sure.

#### HOW WILL IT HAPPEN?

A further question inevitably arises here: If the Jews in Israel are to undergo such a change before the irresistible conviction which the manifestation of their Messiah is sure to bring sooner or later (and sooner rather than later), then what or who is the power that will bring it about?

There are those who have dreamed of big-scale Christadelphian campaigns in Israel. "Why should not such a project achieve success?" it is asked; "our message would not be blocked by insuperable Jewish prejudices against an orthodox Trinity. 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One' is our enthusiasm as well as theirs. And would not our appeal be entirely to their Law and Prophets? Who is more qualified than we to open the message of Jewish Scriptures to Jewish ignorance? More than this, the Jews are prejudiced in our, favour. Of all believers in Jesus, none stand higher in Jewish regard than do Christadelphians. And what more fitting than that Israel after the flesh be brought to Christ through the ministrations of Israel after the Spirit?"

Expressed in these terms the thesis is an alluring one, and almost convincing. But, alas, it overlooks a vital fact which completely outweighs all other considerations.

And that is the stark truth that Jesus failed to convert Israel, and Peter and Paul failed! Then what hope that a team of twentieth century Christadelphians might succeed? It is not for nothing that the Bible's summary assessment of the Chosen Race is this: "children in whom is no faith"!

#### THE STATE OF ISRAEL DESTROYED

So far as one can discover, Israel's change of mind will be brought about by a combination of two divinely controlled factors.

The first of these will be the crash in ruin of the State of Israel. For generations now it has been the confident assumption of all our expositors that this will be attempted by the Northern Invader but will fail at the outset because of the divine destruction which will be poured out in the last great vindication of the authority of God against the puny might of man.

There are certain unresolved difficulties inherent in this view. Whereas the familiar Ezekiel 38 seems to imply an intention—"Thou shalt think an evil thought, and thou shalt say. . ."—and an attempt—"Thou shalt fall upon the mountains of Israel"—with Jerusalem as an island of safety in a Land swiftly overrun—"in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance," as in the days of Hezekiah and his Assyrian enemy—other prophecies (Zechariah 14:2; Ezekiel 36:2, 3) imply a lengthy occupation of the Land, with a time of grievous affliction for the Jews and a settled occupation of the Land by their enemies.<sup>1</sup>

The effect of such an experience on modern Jewry will be utterly devastating. It needs little exercise of the imagination to picture Jewish reaction to such a cataclysm. A generation which was beginning to congratulate itself on its steady assimilation into Gentiledom came suddenly under the full fury of Hitler's persecution. Millions of them died in misery. Many others fled to the Land of their Fathers. There, surrounded by Arab squalor and backwardness, they fashioned in record time a new state of Israel, a model to all the smaller nations of the world in its drive, efficiency and cocky self-assurance. When Arab attempts were made to wipe the Jews off the map of the Near East, they were defeated with a dedicated swiftness which made the world marvel.

Today, so far as Arab relationships go, the Jews continue supremely confident. They have beaten the Arabs three times and would positively welcome an opportunity to do so again. Yet all the Biblical indications are that in the next clash between Jews and Arabs, the pride of Israel will be humbled.

The emphasis in the prophets on this sensational development in Israel's history is itself sensational. Yet in our traditional enthusiasm for searching out the truth of Bible prophecy it has suffered from unwarranted neglect. All eyes have been on Ezekiel 38 (which may well have its fulfilment after the coming of the Lord, and not before: So Dr. Thomas in Eureka Vol. 2p. 557, 558. Vol. 3 p. 405, 602, 611), with only the most cursory of glances thrown in the direction of other Scriptures equally forthright and exciting—and certainly more numerous.

<sup>1</sup> See also chapters 5, 7, 13; and "The Last Days" chapter 8.

Here is another block of four to illustrate the truth of what has just been written:

20. Psalm 83 presents a picture of Israel in dire straits, beset by enemies who "have taken crafty counsel against thy people" saying: "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance." So successful is this evil scheme that God's faithful remnant are driven to appeal to Him for aid: "Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God." The list of confederate enemies is given: "the tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; Moab, and the Hagarenes; Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre; Asshur also is joined with them: they have holpen the children of Lot." Almost all, without exception, occupy what is now Arab territory. This fact is emphasized by allusions to Arab oppressions in ancient days: "Do unto them as unto the Midianites—Sisera and Jabin . . . Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, Zeba and Zalmunna." Lest it should be thought that this psalm is of purely historic reference and is here being blithely misapplied, its climax should be noted: "Let them be put to shame, and perish: that men may know that thou, whose name is Jehovah, art the most high *over all the earth*."

If it stood entirely alone, this Scripture would be impressive in its relevance to the modern Jew-Arab problem, but in fact the theme recurs constantly in the prophets.

21. The prophecy of Obadiah against the Edomites (Arabs) ends in this explicit fashion: "Saviours<sup>1</sup> shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's" (cited in Revelation 11:15). The body of this short oracle includes these details: "For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever... Thou shouldst not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity. . . nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity . . . For the day of the Lord is near upon all nations: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee. . . as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the nations drink continually. . . and they shall be as though they had not been. But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness. . . And the house of Jacob shall be a fire. . . and the house of Esau for stubble."

Whatever reference this prophecy may have had in ancient days, there is every reason in such phraseology for believing that its true and bigger fulfilment is still to come.

22. Ezekiel 35, 36 is a long and powerful prophecy of judgment concerning Edom,<sup>2</sup> "because thou hast had a perpetual hatred, and hast shed the blood of the children of Israel by the force of the sword in the time of their calamity, in the time of the iniquity of the end." The theme is one of divine retribution in the Last Days. "Because thou hast said, These two nations and these two countries (i.e. the territories of both Jew and Arab) shall be mine, and we will possess it; whereas the Lord was there: therefore, as I live, saith the Lord, I will make myself known among them, when I have judged thee. And thou shalt know that I am the Lord. . . When the whole earth rejoiceth, I will make thee desolate. As thou didst rejoice over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do unto thee" (35:5, 10, 11, 14, 15).

<sup>1</sup> An intensive plural for "the Messiah"?

<sup>2</sup> Some are inclined to question reference of Edom prophecies to the Arabs. Who else can they apply to? Dr. Thomas's principle, letting geography, and not national character, settle the issue, is decisive. Is there any Biblical ground whatever for the strange idea, recently published, that the Edom prophecies refer to Russia?

Chapter 36 continues in the same strain. The inveterate Edomite enemy is pictured as gloating over securing possession of "the ancient high places" and the mountains of Israel. The balance is set right by an alluring contrast—Israel re-settled, blessed, and prosperous in their rightful heritage. One feature of this description is specially interesting. The recent conflict with Edom is to be the last oppression of their age-long experience: "Because they say unto you, Thou land (of Israel) devourest up men, and hast bereaved the nation; therefore thou shalt devour men no more, neither bereave the nation any more, saith the Lord God. Neither will I cause men to hear in thee the shame of the heathen any more, neither shalt thou hear the reproach of the peoples any more, neither shalt thou cause thy nations to fall any more, saith the Lord God" (36:13-15).

23. Joel's great prophecy of the Last Days has this unexpected detail in its climactic description of the new Kingdom: "Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Israel, because they have shed innocent blood in their land" (Joel: 3:19). There is little point in this expression of divine wrath except it be as retribution for what has just lately been perpetrated against the Jews. Indeed if these words are not to be referred to some oppression in the Land in the Last Days which has not yet taken place, their application must be sought more than two thousand years earlier.

Readers are now in something of a position to judge whether or not there is good reason to expect a fourth Jew-Arab conflict in the near future in which the brash self-confident swagger of the modern Israeli is reduced to abject terror as he is called upon to face the worst chapter in all his long and bitter history.

#### ARAB HATRED

If indeed this comes to pass, the condition of mind of the Jews can well be imagined. Their fine new state of Israel, so efficiently built by Jewish brains, sweat and resolution is rubbed right off the map as though there had never been even a single kibbutz. Their vindictive enemies vent upon them all the pent-up jealousy, exasperation and hatred which hitherto has found expression only in futile vituperation and Fatah bomb explosions. The foulest horrors of occupation and slavery multiply in the Holy Land as with fiendish glee Arab out-Hitlers Hitler. And Jewish wails and groans go out to distant lands in vain. For hard political reasons nations like America and perfidious Albion find it advisable to shake their heads sadly—and do nothing. Little Israel is expendable, especially if there is the threat of nuclear escalation.

In such an extreme and desperate situation what aid can be sought by these poor sons of Jacob who, like their notable forefather, have ever been slow to learn the futility of self-dependence and the wisdom of leaning upon Jehovah? In all their history before God and men, they have believed in justification by their own works. Always they have had plenty of confidence in their own powers and little in the God of their fathers. But here, at last, is the final demonstration of the folly of their historic philosophy. Now they are without a friend in all the world. No one will lift a finger to help them—and this at a time when they suffer as never before.

In such circumstances—and only in such circumstances—will these hearts of stone show any sign of yielding to the appeal of heaven. Here in their bitter disappointment, and their most horrific suffering of all time, is the grace of their God most tangibly evident as He forces them to their knees in supplication and faith for the aid and solace which can come, as they now at last realize, from no other.

## ELIJAH THE PROPHET

This repentance of Israel, so vital to the furtherance of the divine purpose and so patiently awaited over long generations, will now be helped forward in this crucial hour of their need by divine help of a sort they neither expect nor implore—*the appearance of a prophet of repentance!*

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers. . ." (Malachi 4:5, 6).

John the Baptist, an Elijah-like prophet, was sent to bring Israel to repentance and failed (Matthew 11:14 RVm and 12:43-45). Now the prophecy will have its second, true, fulfilment. Whether this time it will be Elijah in person, or John the Baptist in person or, as is most likely, some other prophet also in the character of Elijah, is of little consequence. This prophet of the Lord will be manifested just when Israel needs him most and for the first time in millenniums is minded to heed a call to godliness.

What do the words of Malachi mean? It is difficult to be sure, but perhaps this Elijah will turn the hearts of the fathers to be like those of children, for no man can achieve true repentance except by such a change—"Except ye become as little children", said Jesus. And the hearts of the children—this last generation of natural Israel—he will turn to their Fathers (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) that they might learn to emulate their faith.

## HOW LONG?

The guess may be hazarded—if indeed it is a guess—that this ministry of "Elijah" will continue through a period of three and a half years of Jewish wretchedness. Jesus emphasized that the vital part of the first Elijah ministry was three and a half years (Luke 4:25). This fact is not traceable in Old Testament history. Did Jesus get it by direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, or did he, with divine insight into Scripture, infer it from the mysterious prophetic periods of Daniel?—the time, times, and dividing of time which are to bring in Messiah's kingdom. And are these times the "times of the Gentiles" which the Lord spoke about with such ill-omen and fair promise in his prophecy on Olivet?

Whether these tentative piecings together of intriguing Scriptures follow the divine pattern and programme is a thing to be learned through personal experience before many years are past. But there does seem to be good ground for believing that (a) there will be a repentance of Israel, at least in part, before the coming of the Lord; (b) Israel will face complete defeat at the hands of the Arabs (aided, doubtless, by more formidable allies) and will suffer as never before—"the time of Jacob's trouble"; (c) the promised Elijah prophet will lead the people back to God; (d) when they say: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord," *then* he will come.

## CHAPTER 3

### "THE TIME OF JACOB'S TROUBLE"

*Jeremiah 30, 31*

The phrase (Jeremiah 30:7) is a familiar one to all students of prophecy. It turns out to be the key to the understanding of a remarkably complete picture of the day of Messiah.

"Alas, for that day is great, so that none is like it (a time of trouble such as never was! Daniel 12:1); for it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it." Clearly this is intended to be the last great deliverance. And how? By the coming of Israel's Messiah. The Hebrew text here almost clamours to be translated: "the time of Jacob's trouble, but out of it Jesus"!

A further specially significant detail is that this keyword "trouble" is the same Hebrew root which is used to describe how Jacob trembled at his impending encounter with Esau: "Then Jacob was exceedingly afraid and distressed. . . Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children" (Genesis 32:7, 11).

#### JACOB PRE-FIGURES ISRAEL

The phraseology in Jeremiah 30 seems to imply that Jacob's experience when he returned from his arduous life with Laban only to encounter Esau near the river Jabbok will be re-enacted in the Last Days experience of his nation.

This conclusion is surely put beyond doubt by the remarkable series of allusions in Jeremiah 31 to that period in Jacob's life:

- v. 7: O Lord, save thy people, the remnant of Israel.
- v. 8: Behold, I will bring them from the north country (compare the return from Laban in Syria). . . and with them the blind (Isaac? Leah?) and the lame (Jacob halting upon his thigh), the woman with child (Leah), and her that travaileth with child (Rachel).
- v. 9: with weeping, and with supplications (Jacob's importunity with the angel: Hosea 12:4) . . . by the rivers of waters (the Jabbok) in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble (Jacob's lameness). Ephraim is my firstborn (Joseph the favourite).
- v. 11: For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him (Laban) that was stronger than he.
- v. 15: Rachel weeping for her children, refused to be comforted (Benjamin= Benoni=son of my sorrow).
- v. 16: thy work shall be rewarded (contrast Laban's treatment of Jacob).
- v. 19: alter that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh (again, Jacob's lameness).
- v. 21: Set thee up way marks (the heap of witness—Genesis 31:45, 53—to mark the final return to the Land).

Those accustomed to this kind of allusiveness in the writings of the prophets will have no difficulty in recognizing that here the final return of Israelis being described in terms of the return of Jacob from Syria. The entire picture in Genesis is marvellously apposite.

Because he sought the heavenly blessing by his own devices, Jacob was compelled to leave the Land of Promise. He spent many years in a Gentile land enduring hardship and oppression. At last God brought him away from persecution to dwell in the Land which was his by right. No sooner was he

returned than he had to encounter his brother Esau, "which is Edom," coming against him with a great force of men. In the night which followed Jacob wrestled—against Esau, so he thought!—for the safety of his family. If they were to survive, everything depended on his self-reliance, prowess and ultimate victory. Yet all the time he was actually pitting his puny strength against angelic powers who, unseen, controlled and directed his life. All his days this had been Jacob's fault. Now, wrestling at Jabbok, the lesson was learned. It meant subjection to Esau (see Genesis 33, especially v. 3), and the outcome—all unexpected—was that he was left unmolested in the Land. God appeared to him at Bethel, and the great Promise was ratified.

#### A TYPE FULFILLED

The teaching of Jeremiah 30, 31 is that all these events, pregnant with meaning, are to be re-enacted in the Last Days. Already Jacob has returned from the land of his oppressor where he has borne long and arduous taskwork. In the Land of Promise he has encountered Esau soon to prove mightier than he. With little reliance on God but with confidence in his own powers he now wrestles for national survival. All this is according to the unerring counsel of God, but the divine Providence in these momentous developments goes unrecognized. So there must ensue a time when Jacob, lame and disabled, shall acknowledge the superior might of Esau—but, now acknowledging also the overruling power and wisdom of God, Jacob becomes Israel, a people of destiny, freed from all adversaries and oppressors and rejoicing in inheritance of the Land and in a glorious vision of God:

And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the Lord (Jeremiah 31:28).

## CHAPTER 4

### "FOR THREE TRANSGRESSIONS AND FOR FOUR"<sup>1</sup>

After the briefest of introductions, Amos 1, 2 consists mainly of eight judgements foretold against Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah and Israel. In each the solemn repetition sounds in the ear: "for three transgressions 'and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof." This doom, against the people of God and against their ancient enemies round about, was spoken "two years before the earthquake" in king Uzziah's reign, and presumably was to be fulfilled through that cataclysm. This was the proximate or primary fulfilment of the prophecy. At the beginning of his work as prophet, Amos was presenting his credentials—a prophecy soon to be fulfilled. When events turned out just as he said, the people would be ready to take notice of his ensuing prophecies. All this in accordance with Deuteronomy 18:22: "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him."

#### THE LAST DAYS

This should not be deemed to be the limit of application of Amos' initial prophecy. There are good Biblical reasons for looking for a further fulfilment in the Last Days:

- a. 1: 2: "The Lord shall roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem" is a passage which is repeated verbatim in Joel 3:16, in a context the last-day fulfilment of which none would question. So evidently Joel saw this Amos prophecy as having reference to the time of the end. The similarity of 1:6, 9 to Joel 3:4, 6 confirms this conclusion.
- b. The language of the prophecy requires an upheaval which is a final retribution for the evil wrought by the nations listed on four (not seven) separate occasions which have involved all of them. This is not traceable in ancient history, but presents no difficulty whatever in the twentieth century.
- c. Uzziah's earthquake provides a valuable clue. In Zechariah 14:4, 5 that earthquake is presented as a unique prototype of the earthquake which will happen at the coming of the Lord. The same earthquake is described beforehand by Isaiah also (2:10-22). But this description by Isaiah is appropriated in two places in the New Testament as prophetic of the coming of Christ. Isaiah 2:19=2 Thessalonians 1:9 ". . . punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints. . . ." Also, Isaiah 2:19=Revelation 6:12, 16: "and there was a great earthquake and the kings of the earth, and the great men . . . hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."

#### THREE WARS-THEN A FOURTH?

If the conclusion based on these Scriptures be accepted, a further conclusion of exceptional interest follows. The nations enumerated in Amos 1, 2 are Judah and Israel together with all the Arab powers round about. On three separate occasions in recent years all these peoples have been involved in transgression together—in 1948, when the state of Israel was established; in 1956, the time of the Suez crisis; and in 1967, the amazing six-days war.

<sup>1</sup> That is, 3+1=4; not 3+4=7. Compare Micah 5:5, where 7+1=8 (Revelation 5:6), not 7+8=15.

The prophet says explicitly there is to come a fourth involvement which will lead on inexorably to divine retribution upon them all. This prophecy reads like specific reinforcement of the inferences possible from such Scriptures as Psalm 83, Obadiah, Ezekiel 35, 36, Joel 3, that there must be yet another clash between Jews and Arabs, in which, or after which, all will pay the penalty for their cruelty, selfishness and ungodly materialism.

It may be that Amos 1:1 justifies a further conclusion. Why was the prophecy made public "two years before the earthquake"? Is the vindication of the prophet's dependability the only reason for mention of this unusual time element? Or is it there to indicate also that after the third (or maybe the fourth) transgression there is to elapse a period of only two years before the great divine intervention which must inevitably ensue?

It may be appropriate to add a further detail. Amos mentions both Judah (2:4) and Israel (2:6). Both were in existence in his day. In a sense both are now in existence today. Up to 1967 there was a small very circumscribed Jewish state, very little larger than the old southern kingdom of Judah. Since the six-days war the territory of the state of Israel approximates much more nearly to the dimensions of the combined kingdoms of Judah and Israel. The stage is set for big new developments.

## CHAPTER 5

### DRY BONES

Ezekiel 37

To the readers of these words there are few Bible prophecies more familiar than Ezekiel's vision of the resurrection of Israel. The bones of the nation, which have remained dry, despised, and without decent sepulture over the centuries have been gathered back to the land of their fathers; flesh and sinews have grown on them as the new state of Israel has taken on increasing vigour and efficiency; and today they stand upon their feet an exceeding great army, bursting with confidence after winning the three swiftest wars in all history.

This interpretation, which is so familiar as to have become almost dogma, ignores several significant details and fails to take account of the correct order of development in the vision. The mistake is easily made (it was made repeatedly by the present writer for over thirty years!) because Ezekiel's record of the vision and prophecy is not given with the tidy logical chronological sequence which the western mind normally looks for.

#### THE SEQUENCE IN THE VISION

A careful re-examination of Ezekiel 37 reveals the following as the order in which the prophet saw things happen:

1. The graves where Israel is buried are opened (v. 12).
2. The skeletons are brought into the valley of vision (in the land of Israel), and are left scattered there (vv. 2, 12).
3. They say: "our bones are dried, our hope is lost" (v. 11).
4. To this is added confession of their own unworthiness: "We are cut off for our parts" (v. 11).
5. Ezekiel prophesies upon them.
6. There is a noise like thunder, and an earthquake.

7. The bones come together and re-form into skeletons.
8. Flesh and sinews grow on them. They are now corpses.
9. The call to the four winds (spirits) brings the breath (spirit) of life into them.
10. They stand on their feet an exceeding great power.

If this sequence has been assembled correctly then the parable is a prophecy of Israel being brought, in a spiritually dead condition, from their Gentile dispersion back to the land of their fathers. There they *become* disintegrated and helpless. It is a process which takes place in the Land. This part of the prophecy has not yet happened. It would seem to correspond to the prophecies in Zechariah 14:1, 2; Ezekiel 35: 5 and 36: 13-15; Joel 2, 3; Psalm 83; and especially Ezekiel 20: 34-37.

Another prophecy which comes in appropriately here is the familiar Ezekiel 21:26, 27: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be on more until he come whose right it is (both mitre and crown: v. 26); and I will give it him." There must be yet another overturning to be added to that by Nebuchadnezzar and by the Romans in A.D. 70.

#### HOPELESSNESS

The evil plight to which Israel is reduced causes them to abandon all hope of help or rescue: "our hope is lost." Through all their chequered history this has never yet happened. Amid all the dire calamities that have come on them, at each Passover they have always said: "Next year in Jerusalem." But this and other prophecies speak of a time, now achieved in part (by the war of June 1967), when they are in Jerusalem but not yet in a state of utter destitution and despair, with no one but God to turn to for aid.

Because of the calamitous hopelessness of their evil situation, for the first time since they crucified Jesus there will also be a willingness to recognize their own unworthiness and the justice of God's discipline: "we are cut off for our parts." Literally this rather mysterious phrase is: "We are cut off for us (or, to us)." Most probably the meaning is: "we are cut off because of ourselves."

#### REPENTANCE

It is a noteworthy principle of Bible teaching that only when a man honestly acknowledges his own unworthiness and sin before God can he be forgiven. Concerning Israel this truth is enunciated over and over again: "When thou art in tribulation, and all these things come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice: (for the Lord thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them"; Deuteronomy 4:30, 31 (compare also Psalm 81:13, 14; Jeremiah 3: 14-18 and 4:1, 2; Deuteronomy 30:1-3; Leviticus 26:41; Zechariah 6:15; there are many others— see chapter 2 hereof).

Next comes a great thundering (RVm). It is the voice of God (John 12:28, 29) addressed to His repentant people (through the Elijah prophet?). There is also an earthquake. Like that which took place at the crucifixion of His Son, it is the manifestation of the anger of the Almighty at the despoiling of His Land and People (Psalm 18:7). The result is that the bones move together to become skeletons once again. Flesh and tissue grow on them, so that now they are corpses.

## RESURRECTION

When Ezekiel prophesies to the four spirits of the heavens, the Spirit of God comes into this corpse-like Israel so that the spiritually dead come to life and stand up on their feet "an exceeding great company" (the Hebrew here is very emphatic). These four winds or spirits are the manifestation of divine power in the fourfold cherubim chariot, with its fourfold symbol of Israel, which Ezekiel saw: "whither the spirit (wind) was to go, they went. . . the spirit of life was in the wheels" (1:20; compare also Zechariah 6:1-8).

Interpreted in this way, the vision harmonizes very readily with the various other prophecies of Israel's experiences in the Last Days. But at first sight the next vision of the two sticks, joined into one, appears to have little connection with this. It has to be borne in mind that the political split between Israel and Judah had become final and complete about a hundred and fifty years before the time of Ezekiel, in the days when Shalmanezzer V destroyed Samaria and took the northern people captive. Since that time Israel (as distinct from Judah) ceased to be identifiable.

It would seem, then, that with reference to the Last Days one must look for a meaning of the joining of the two sticks into one other than that of the re-uniting of the northern and southern kingdoms. Three possibilities present themselves:

1. The uniting of Jewry into one community—the Dispersion actively and wholeheartedly joining with the Yishuv, those who have returned. Hosea 1:11 supports this suggestion.
2. The union of the saints in Christ with that section of the Jews who turn to God in faith in the time of their calamity, thus themselves becoming saints in the higher sense of the term (compare John 10:16).
3. The uniting of Israel to Christ (note the introduction of the name Joseph, the great prototype).
4. The extension of the State of Israel to include all the territory of the ancient kingdom (see end of chapter 4).

The second and third of these are very close in idea, and for this reason one of these is probably to be preferred. But there seems to be little in the context which is decisive.

## THE KINGDOM

The prophecy proceeds to a heart-warming climax. Messiah's kingdom is now in being. Israel cleansed of sin, dwell happily in their land, ruled over by "David my servant" (the phrase is from the Messianic Psalm 89:20). The land is now theirs for ever. In it they "walk in God's judgements, and observe his statutes, and do them" (v. 24). God's "covenant of peace" (v.26 and 34:25) is now ratified with them for all time. The "evil beasts" and "the beast of the earth" (34:25, 28; Revelation 13:11) cease out of the land. God's tabernacle is now in the midst of His people, a fact which is known (though not yet finally acknowledged and accepted) by all the nations of the world (vv. 27, 28).

## CHAPTER 6

### "SCATTERED AND PEELED"

*Isaiah 17, 18*

There are certain chapters in Isaiah which clearly had primary reference to the stirring political events in the prophet's own day. The Assyrian was marching through the Land. Unusual political alliances came into being and dissolved again almost overnight. The Jews themselves were in a state of fragmentation. The more wholesome part of the nation put their faith in Hezekiah, their stricken king, a man whose character and experiences marvellously typify the main aspects of the work of Jesus. Because of this close correspondence between two who were each a Suffering and Glorified Servant of Jehovah, many of these prophetic chapters can be coned afresh with reference to the Last Days and the time of Christ's Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> There are difficulties galore, but is this adequate reason for not making the attempt to understand?

#### A REMNANT

Isaiah 17 is headed: "The burden of Damascus," but nearly all the chapter is about Israel (one suspects that the same may be true in chapter 13: "The burden of Babylon"). It describes a time when "the glory of Jacob shall be made thin." The prophecy continues (v. 5): "And it shall be as when the harvestman gathereth the corn, and reapeth ears with his arm; and it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim" (ominous word! "Rephaim" means "the dead"). "Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost branches thereof, saith the Lord God of Israel." One is immediately reminded of the double harvest symbolically described in Revelation 14: 15-19. Perhaps the "gleaning of grapes" and the "two or three berries" of the olive tree represent the faithful remnant of Israel for whom God has regard. These only are worthy of His care in Israel's final experience of tribulation and destruction.

The hopelessness of the situation will drive those who hitherto have depended on "the work of their own hands" (Isaiah 17: 8) to "look to their Maker, and their eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel" (v. 7).

#### RETRIBUTION

Nevertheless, first (as in Jeremiah 16:18) there must come recompense on the godless nation: "And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his own hands (this is what the Jews worship today!). . . In that day shall his strong cities be as the forsaken places of the Amorites and the Hivites, which were forsaken from before the children of Israel" (RVm and Septuagint). In the time of Joshua Israel rapidly took over the cities built by their Canaanite predecessors. In the time of Ben Gurion (1948), they did the same again. But in the time of Sennacherib the reverse process took place just as rapidly (2 Kings 18:13). So also must it be in the time of the end: "And there shall be desolation. Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the Rock of thy strength... in the day of thy planting thou hedgest it in, and in the morning thou makest thy seed to flourish (the vigorous beginnings of modern Israel?), but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and desperate sorrow." It is a picture of divine discipline exercised against an ungodly nation. This is inevitable. How can God bless that which ignores Him and glorifies man?

<sup>1</sup> Here is a wonderfully fruitful topic of Bible study for those who have not already attempted it!

However, ultimately—because the people of Israel are "beloved for the fathers' sakes"—the Land will be swept clean of all enemies: "And behold at eveningtide trouble: and before the morning he is not. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us."

The next chapter apostrophizes "the land which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia," that is, Egypt whose chief asset is in the rivers which flow down from Ethiopia. It is the nation which sends its messengers "in vessels of papyrus"—a nation which is a paper tiger and which is lavish in both paper threats and paper promises. These ambassadors are given, in place of the message in their diplomatic bag, a revelation from the Lord of hosts of Israel to "a nation scattered and peeled. . . a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers (that is, the nations, see 17:13 and 8:7,8) have spoiled."

The essential part of the divine message to such a nation is contained in the words: "For afore the harvest, when the blossom is perfected, and the flower becometh a ripening grape, he shall cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches" (18:5).

#### A NEEDED DISCIPLINE

This figure appears to describe the exercise of God's discipline against the vine of Israel at a time when it is beginning to shew all the signs of luxurious growth. There is as yet no fruit for God when the heavenly vinedresser acts drastically against it, suddenly cutting off what looks so fair.

"They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, 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" (v. 6). Possibly these words may be interpreted as meaning that the final time of tribulation for Israel is to last a summer and a winter, and not the longer period of three and a half years hinted at in certain other prophecies. "But for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened"—this principle probably has more than one application.

The prophecy concludes with a drastic change of tone: "In that time (why not "in that day," as in 19:18, 19, 23, and so frequently in other prophets?) shall a present be brought unto the Lord of hosts (consisting) *of* a people scattered and peeled (66:20), and *from* a people terrible from their beginning (the divine deliverance from Egypt under Moses) hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden underfoot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place (the word also means temple) of the Lord of hosts, the mount of Zion."

Here is a final picture of Israel chastened and changed, and now gladly and humbly submitting themselves before the God of Abraham. The time of true blessing for Israel can only come when they turn to Him in repentance and cease to glory in the work of their own hands.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE BURDEN OF EGYPT

*Isaiah 19*

The shape of this prophecy is distinctive and clear-cut. The first fifteen verses form a poetic pronouncement of woe upon the land of Egypt; then follows a prose appendix, which five times repeats the characteristic prophetic phrase: "in that day."

"Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud. . . and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence." Both expressions allude to Israel's earlier deliverance from Egypt, when the angel of the Lord looked forth from a pillar of cloud and fire, and when judgement was executed against all the gods of Egypt (Exodus 14:24 and 12:12). Just as, in ancient days, Egypt reeled under a long series of hammer blows against its people, its economy and its religion, so once again the entire land and nation is to be brought to nought—this as a necessary prelude to its conversion and restoration "in that day."

The policy of the rulers will be proved to be worthless and ineffective: "Surely the princes of Zoan are fools. . . the Lord hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof"; compare the way in which the shattering defeat in the 1967 campaign was transformed into an occasion for great rejoicing by the mobs because their blundering leader had decided not to relinquish the reins of power after all!

The nation itself will be reduced to anarchy: "they shall fight every one against his brother, and everyone against his neighbour"—a state of affairs which 1967 did not produce; that campaign only served to increase national solidarity. The prophecy goes on to imply that out of the chaos will emerge a new iron dictator, though whether of themselves or imposed by superior power from elsewhere is not clear. The phrasing seems to favour the latter possibility. Is this the "king of fierce countenance" foretold in Daniel 8:23 "in the latter time of their kingdom"? One can only conclude that an even greater humiliation is in store for Egypt than any which has yet been experienced.

#### WATERS DRIED UP

Specially impressive is the long and detailed prophecy of the drying up of the waters of Egypt. The word which seems to be used exclusively with reference to the Nile and its delta streams comes into this prophecy over and over again. "The Nile shall be wasted and dried up. . . the meadows by the Nile, by the brink of the Nile, and all that is sown by the Nile, shall become dry;" and as a result, "the fishers also shall mourn. . . and they that spread nets upon the waters shall languish;" also, "they that work in fine flax, and they that weave cotton shall be confounded." It is a picture of complete economic dereliction.

Probably these pictures of the drying up of the Nile waters are to be taken symbolically, as indicating an overthrow of all Egyptian political and economic influence. But so often have symbolic prophecies turned out to have an unexpected foundation in literal fact that such a possibility is not to be ruled out in this place also. Perhaps there is reference here to the stagnation of the Suez canal which today is every bit as important to Egypt's economy as the Nile itself. The military destruction of Nile dams is another possibility.

#### ISRAEL IN EGYPT

The appendix to this prophecy of woe and dereliction has a feature which does not appear in any other place in the Bible: "In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of

Canaan, and swear to the Lord of Hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction." The last phrase here could read "the city of the sun," i.e. Heliopolis; but the Septuagint reading is "city of righteousness." Such a puzzling prophecy must surely be linked with the last verse of Deuteronomy 28, which—so far as is known—has never yet received fulfilment. And, since it comes as the climax to the catalogue of curses laid upon Israel, there is fair justification for the view that this is something yet to happen in the not distant future: "And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you" (Deuteronomy 28:68).

This interpretation gains support from ensuing details in Isaiah 19: "For they shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them" (Isaiah 19:20b).

Here is indication that these Jewish communities in Egypt are there as slaves who are to be delivered as in the time of Moses (the Hebrew text makes a significant play on the name of Moses); this Saviour is a "great one" like unto Moses.

Here, then, is the repentance of Israel which must be manifest before their Messiah can be given to them. When this "spirit of grace and supplications" turns to God for help in the hour of greatest need, then "there shall be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt"—not a massive Egyptian-style temple, but one of contrite hearts; not an altar with smoking reeking sacrifices, but One who is the gracious fulfilment of all such fore-shadowings.

It is not difficult to envisage how this prophecy may come to pass. In the final down-treading of Israel in their Land, a bitter experience is still in store. Zechariah 14:2 says explicitly that in the great invasion of the Land before Messiah's return, "the city shall be taken. . . and half the city (that is, half of the population of the city) shall go into captivity." It will doubtless be a great delight to the Egyptian nation to have enormous labour camps of Jewish prisoners to build their dams and irrigate their fields. And in such circumstances of hardship and hopelessness the Jews may be driven to turn to the God they have managed without for so long a time.

#### A MOSES AND A JOSEPH

The Saviour promised in this Scripture turns out to be not only a Moses for Israel but also a Joseph for the Egyptians: "And the Lord shall smite Egypt, he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the Lord, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them" (Isaiah 19:22). "Intreat the Lord for me," Pharaoh had cried to Moses, and had not truly meant it. But now an Egypt filled to the top with ignorance, squalor and hate will turn in submission to the God of their captives, and will be healed.

"And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and perform it" (Isaiah 19:21). Contrast here the many times that Pharaoh vowed to release God's people, and then went back on his promise! Instead there is to be a true change of heart. From that day forward "the Egyptians shall serve (God) with the Assyrians"—all the ancient enemies will come gladly acknowledging that the God of the hated Jew is the God of all the earth. It is possible that for "serve" the Hebrew text should read "passover"—i.e. on the highway which there shall be out of Egypt (v. 23). If this reading be accepted, then, in effect, the text reads "the Egyptians shall Hebrew with the Assyrians"—it is a picture of Gentile nations having become Jews to the glory of the God of Israel.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE LOCUSTS OF THE LORD

*Joel 1,2*

The greater part of the first fifty verses of the prophecy of Joel is taken up with an awe-inspiring prophecy of doom and of Israel's ultimate rescue from disaster. The symbolism takes the form of a description, powerful and portentous, of a locust invasion. Some go so far as to say that nothing more than a plague of locusts is being described and that to see anything else in the prophecy is to go beyond what the language warrants. Not improbably the basis in the prophet's own day may have been some national calamity of that character, but it is blameworthy carelessness to overlook such phrases as: "a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number" (1:6); "spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them" (2:17); "I will remove far off from you the northern army" (2:20)—in the days when locusts used to make their inroads into Palestine they certainly did not come from the north!

A fair amount of Bible evidence can be assembled to support the conclusion that the original "locust" invasion described by Joel was the Assyrian invasion under Sennacherib. The verbal contacts with the early chapters of Isaiah and with the history of Hezekiah's reign are very striking. Just as Isaiah so frequently ranges forward from the calamity and deliverance of his own days to the time of Messiah's kingdom, so also, undoubtedly, does Joel. It is this latter aspect of the prophecy which now engages attention.

#### IRRESISTIBLE INVADER

This mighty invasion is described as "the day of the Lord. . . a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. . . there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it." These words suggest —indeed, require—equation with Daniel's "time of trouble such as never was," and the Lord's "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."<sup>1</sup> "A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness." In other words, it is "as it was in the days of Sodom," for Sodom was "as the garden of the Lord" (Genesis 13:10), but it ended in a sea of flame.

The picture builds up through a long vivid paragraph (2:4-11). This is an army countless in its numbers, remorseless and eager in its pressing forward for conquest, irresistible in its power. All attempts to withstand the unceasing pressure and to stem the onward rush are as futile as King Canute with the tide at his feet.

Mention of "the northern army" (v. 20) has led many to equate this prophecy with the Gog-Magog invasion, "from the uttermost parts of the north," described in Ezekiel 38. But in chapter 18 hereof reasons are advanced for setting the fulfilment of that Scripture after the coming of the Lord, whereas this in Joel must necessarily be *before* his return. Also, if the figure of a locust army is to be given its due force, it must be remembered that locusts never come "from the uttermost part of the north" but (in Palestine) from the desert. With an obviousness which almost shouts, the figure of locusts describes an Arab invasion. The interpretation, once popular, which takes Joel 2 as a description of immortal saints advancing remorselessly against the enemies of the Lord, is fairly clearly disallowed by Nahum 3:15-17.

<sup>1</sup> Comparison of Joel 2:2 with Exodus 10:14 provides another clear proof that Joel is not describing literal locusts.

## INEVITABLE DESOLATION

The northern invader of Ezekiel 38 goes into Israel because he sees something desirable to be appropriated—"to take a spoil and to take a prey"—but with these locusts "the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness." Today every one knows that when the Arabs do overrun Israel, they will go in to smash and to destroy, for the sheer joy of doing this to the long-hated enemy. That which now blossoms as a rose they will turn into desert.

But if this prophecy describes Arab desolation of the Land, why is the attacker described as "the northern army" (v. 20)? Probably, it is suggested, because the inspiration and real strength of the attack is northern. The whole world knows that without Russian arms and technical skill, Russian encouragement and Russian chess-playing subtlety, the Arabs could never mount a successful onslaught on Israel.

One result of the complete military defeat suffered by Israel will be a wave of utter despair and wretchedness through all the survivors of that time of horror. There will be no powerful friend to come to their aid. Britain, now bereft of all real influence in world affairs, will not dare to interfere. America will wish to do so, but will write off Israel as expendable in face of the risk of escalation to nuclear war.

In such dire circumstances Israeli survivors will be called upon to endure such horrors of implacable remorseless Arab savagery as will make them sigh for the comforts and kindnesses of Auschwitz and Belsen. The only thing which might ameliorate the terrors of this time of trouble will be the prayers of those with the Hope of Israel in their souls who intercede as Abraham did for Sodom. In the hearts of all who read these words should be the earnest inclination to pray without ceasing that Jerusalem and its people may be at peace with their God. This is the real meaning of the words of Psalm 122.

## REPENTANCE

Accordingly, in Joel 2 there follows a long-sustained appeal to Israel to manifest a repentance long overdue:

Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him (Joel 2:12-14).

The moving five-fold appeal is matched by an even more moving five-fold reason emphasizing the graciousness of the God they have acknowledged with centuries-long indifference. This appeal is most probably the call to repentance to be made by the Elijah-prophet whom God has promised to raise up in the Last Days.<sup>1</sup> His name (= "The Lord my God") has its counterpart in Joel's repeated: "Turn unto the Lord your God"

Another detail of special interest comes in here. The call to repentance becomes peremptory: "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly." This is the language of the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement (the only God-appointed fast in the Jewish year: Leviticus

<sup>1</sup> It is a serious error, surely, to apply Malachi 4 to the conversion of the Gentiles. Every phrase in the context shouts for application to Israel. And John the Baptist, the prototype of this Elijah-prophet, certainly preached to none but Jews, Edomite Herod being the dishonourable exception.

16:31). Then can it be inferred that this appeal to call in the aid and forgiveness of God will be made at that time of the year—in other words, that the final defeat of Israel will take place in late September? In an earlier study of the prophetic periods of Daniel<sup>1</sup> it was pointed out that if, applying them literally, and not on the year-for-a-day principle, they are made to begin at the Feast of Trumpets, they conclude at Passover and Pentecost—the times of deliverance (Joel 2:32) and of outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28).

#### HELP FROM GOD

The heavenly response to this change of heart in the Chosen People will be immediate and drastic: "Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people. . . Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith (what connection here with the Third Seal?): and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations." Such language can only mean that this is the final desolation of the Land of Israel (compare the even more emphatic language of Ezekiel 36:12-15). "And my people shall never be ashamed" (Joel 2:27).

The divine intervention is even more drastic against Israel's enemy: "I will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the eastern sea (the Dead Sea), and his hinder part toward the western sea (the Mediterranean)." This intimates, as plainly as anything can, a flight of invaders from Jerusalem, the city newly wrested from Jews who themselves proudly celebrated in June 1967 that Jerusalem was nevermore to be "trodden down of the Gentiles" (an irony of history, this, which has deceived many a Christadelphian also).

The prophet does not indicate what will bring about this rout of a triumphant enemy, but the most obvious explanation available is: the manifestation of the Shekinah Glory of God in His Messiah, suddenly appearing at Jerusalem. Zechariah 14: 1-4 explains: All nations (round about) are gathered against Jerusalem, the city is taken, then the Lord goes forth, his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives—"and the earth shines with his glory" (Ezekiel 43:2). It will be the Glory of God, more than the earthquakes, which will rid Jerusalem of its enemies.

#### SYMBOLIC? LITERAL?

However, it is not to be assumed that this great deliverance will take place as soon as Jerusalem comes under the heel of the invader. The mission of Elijah is significantly mentioned as being three and a half years (Luke 4:25; James 5:17; but where in the O.T.?). During that period, "I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars (literally: palm trees) of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come."

Here, by any scheme of interpretation, is a picture of drastic dramatic happenings to terrify the hearts of the bravest. Of course the words cannot be taken literally, but it seems not at all unlikely that they describe some mysterious phenomena in that time of chaos. The symbolism of Bible prophecy has a marvellous knack of taking on something approaching literal fulfilment as well. These, then, are the "fearful sights and great signs from heaven" which Jesus spoke about along with "wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes" on a scale never known before. That phrase "palm trees of smoke" is specially ominous, for who can read it without conjuring up in the mind the grim picture of a radioactive mushroom cloud filling the sky? And since, in Scripture, palm trees appear to have symbolic association with Gentiles, there is perhaps added reason here for regarding this section of the prophecy as a description of God's retribution on the Gentiles also.

<sup>1</sup> "The Last Days" chapter 6.

The repentance of Israel will bring immediately the lifting up of God's countenance upon them: "I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh; and your Sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions." In the Law of Moses it was specifically prohibited that "upon man's flesh (i.e. a layman, one not consecrated to the priesthood) shall the holy anointing oil not be poured" (Exodus 30:32). But now such distinction will be swept away when Israel at last begins to fulfil its true destiny by becoming "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). This will also be the fulfilment of the great Elijah prophecy in Malachi 4. The hearts of the fathers shall become as little children, and the hearts of the children shall be changed to be like that of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (an impressive contrast with Isaiah 3:5).

This "calling on the name of the Lord" will bring spiritual and physical deliverance, "for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be those that escape, as the Lord hath said (when Joel wrote, it already stood written in Isaiah 4:3), and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call."

## CHAPTER 9

### THE VALLEY OF JEHOSEPHAT

*Joel 3*

The concluding section of Joel's prophecy is mainly concerned with a more detailed expansion of the threat of divine judgement against the inveterate enemies of Israel, a judgement which has already been pronounced in chapter 2:20, 30, 31. The reason for this anger is given with detail and indignant emphasis. Israel has been ravished by a host of enemies—Tyre and Zidon, Philistia, Egypt, Edom (vv. 4, 19). Neither the mighty Assyrian nor the barbarian northern tribes are hinted at, but only those names which represent the Arab nations round the state of Israel in the twentieth century.

The picture is one of savage inhuman treatment meted out to Land and people alike. The Land is divided up amongst the invaders (v. 2) and ruthlessly plundered (v. 5), the people are exported to far-off lands as slave labour<sup>1</sup> (vv. 6, 8) and are even used as currency to purchase self-indulgence ("they have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine")—and all this to work off a grudge and a spite against the Jews. Yet this sanctification of a Holy War (v. 9) is really an attempt at reprisal against God: "will ye repay a deed of mine?" (v. 4). It was God who brought Israel back to their land. Then how can Arabs hope to set themselves against the plan of the Almighty?

#### AN ANCIENT DELIVERANCE

God in His indignation will bring these adversaries into "the valley of Jehoshaphat," the valley where Jehovah is One who metes out judgement. It is a mistake to seek a geographical identification of this valley, even though there are plenty of maps which confidently, though for no good reason, place it to the east or south of Jerusalem. The allusion is to God's marvellous deliverance of His people in the days of king Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20). On that occasion a great confederacy from Ammon, Moab and Edom (v. 22) came against a king and people who abandoned all trust in themselves and who instead leaned for help on the God of their fathers. So the "Lord sent liars in wait" against the enemy, and there was a great overthrow. These "liars in wait" were evidently angels who, unseen, set the invaders against one another (v. 23), as in the day of Midian (Judges 7:22; Isaiah 9:4).

<sup>1</sup> Compare here the comment made on page 23, on Isaiah 19:18, 20.

This will happen again. In response to the prayer: "Thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O Lord," God will send not only His Gabriel (the Mighty One of God) but also His Messiah—El Gibbor (Isaiah 9:6).

The ensuing judgement of the nations is pictured in graphic language. There are "multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision." This Hebrew word translated "decision" is the same as "consumption" in Isaiah 28:21, 22 which foretells a time of divine intervention when God will "do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act. . . for I have heard from the Lord God of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth."

#### GRIM HARVEST

The Isaiah and Joel passages have another link, for the word "act" is used in the same context to signify "labour in agriculture." Accordingly the Joel prophecy proceeds: "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down (or, perhaps, tread ye the grapes), for the winepress is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great." The Septuagint version here suggests that two separate harvests of judgement are foretold, for the word "sickle" is plural. This is the interpretation given in Revelation 14, where "one like unto the Son of man" (that is, according to a familiar Bible idiom, one who is the Son of man), wearing a golden crown and carrying a sharp sickle, is seen coming on a white cloud—the radiant Cloud of the Shekinah Glory. This divine Being—the Messiah—is urged by an eager angel of glory to begin his work of judgement: "Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the harvest of the earth is ripe." Immediately after this an angel similarly equipped with a sickle, is bidden: "Thrust in thy sharp sickle (as the Son of man has done), and gather the clusters of the vine of the land." When this is done, and the winepress is trodden "without the city (of Jerusalem)," the blood flows forth "even unto the horse bridles" which are "holy to the Lord" (Zechariah 14:20, 21), "as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs." Here is a ghastly River of Death, to contrast with the loveliness of the River of Water of Life which is to proceed from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22:1 and Joel 3:18). Its dire effects carry through a distance of two hundred miles, almost exactly the length of the land from Lebanon to Kadesh, as it is described in a powerful Psalm of Judgment (29:6, 8; compare also Ezekiel 47:15, 19).

It is a time not only of wrath but also of deliverance. "The Lord shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem"—the judgements of Revelation 14 are the seven thunders, each introduced by "an angel with a great voice" whose shout is "as a lion roareth"; "and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the Lord will be the hope of his people (the saints), and the strength of the children of Israel. So shall ye know that I am the Lord your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more."

#### PUNISHMENT AND BLESSING

This double element of retribution and redemption is well suggested also by the promise: "a fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim." Here, once again, it would be a mistake to seek a merely geographical meaning. The valley of Shittim was where Israel committed fornication with the women of Moab to the honour of Baal-peor (Numbers 25). That iniquity—and all such sins of apostasy in Israel—is to be washed away, as it was by the water which came from the smitten rock after the idolatry of the golden calf (Deuteronomy 9:21). Shittim was also the scene of vengeance against these Moabite (Arab) enemies of Israel. The Land will be washed clean of all the defilement which they have brought in.

And not only Moab: "Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land." It is

impossible to believe that in the last days Egypt and Edom will be punished for their spiteful treatment of Israel thousands of years earlier. This "violence against the children of Judah" must be something recent and specially vile. It is not clear whether the words: "because they have shed innocent blood in their land" refers to what these Arab enemies have done or to what the Jews have done. If the latter—and all Biblical associations of the phrase "innocent blood" point to this interpretation—then the sin referred to is the crucifixion of Jesus. "His blood be upon us and upon our children" is a prophecy which must continue to be fulfilled until Jewry acknowledges its guilt. But as soon as that repentance is shewn (compare the parable of the prodigal son), "I will cleanse (hold as innocent: RVM) their blood that I have not cleansed, for the Lord dwelleth in Zion."

The prophecy could have no finer climax.

## CHAPTER 10

### "LIKE A WHIRLWIND"

*Daniel 11*

The concluding section of this long prophecy is recognized by all the students of Bible prophecy as having reference to the Last Days. Yet it presents many problems, and accordingly has received many diverse interpretations.

The general shape of the prophecy is this:

Beginning (v. 2) with four kings of Persia (Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius Hystaspes, and Xerxes), it goes on to mention briefly (vv. 3, 4) the Grecian empire of Alexander, and then settles down to give great detail about the ensuing rivalries between the Seleucid kings of Syria (the king of the north) and the Ptolemys who ruled in Egypt (the king of the south). The varied fortunes and interplay of policy of these two powerful neighbours of Israel are traced through a long section, the meaning of which is given in clear detail in the commentaries (and also by Dr. Thomas in "Exposition of Daniel," pp. 48-55 [1947 edition]).

Then, all at once, the prophecy unmistakably moves to the Last Days. There is a repeated mention of "the time of the end" (vv. 35, 40); and since the prophecy clearly runs on without break into chapter 12 (note 12: 1: "And at that time shall Michael stand up. . ."), the clear allusion in 12:2 to the resurrection makes imperative the application of the end of chapter 11 to the Last Days. Thus, the characteristic which is discernible in the other prophecies of Daniel (ch. 2, 7, 8, 9) is even more evident here—they all consist of a continuous historic prophecy of some detail, followed by a discontinuity which leaps a great span of years, and the rest relates to the Last Days.

#### CRUCIAL PROBLEM

Who is the king of the north? The two interpretations most commonly advanced are: (a) Turkey; (b) Russia.

The first of these may have seemed not unreasonable in the time of World War I, but since then Turkey's role has dwindled away in importance as seen against the backcloth of the momentous events which have transpired since 1917. That Turkey should be given such prominence in the prophetic panorama whilst other happenings of much greater importance in the developing purpose of God should be passed over without mention, is not easy to understand. Briefly, then, this interpretation is not big enough to accord with the vital importance of the prophecy.

Nor is the identification with Russia free from difficulty. It has already been indicated that there is greater probability of Ezekiel 38 finding its fulfilment after, and not before, the coming of the Lord. Also, if the prophecy is about Russia there are two details very difficult to harmonize with the current situation: the defeat (vv. 42,43) of Egypt, which ever since Suez, 1956, has been firmly subordinate to Russia in its economic and foreign policy; and the "escape" of "Edom, and Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon"—is it possible to imagine a Russia which can sweep through Israel and yet not be able to dominate the feeble state of Jordan also? In any case, is it not obvious that any power which invades Israel will, by that very fact, become the dear political ally of all the Arab states, including both Jordan and Egypt?

A further difficulty in the way of both the identifications mentioned is the interpretation of the corresponding role of "king of the south." Especially is this the case if Russia is the "king of the north," for the prophecy plainly implies that Egypt is the headquarters of his adversary. Thus to equate "the king of the south" with either Britain or America becomes near-absurdity. Since 1956 they have been almost ceaselessly at loggerheads with Egypt.<sup>1</sup>

#### ANOTHER POSSIBILITY

A careful re-examination of Daniel 11:40 brings to light the possibility of a different interpretation of this section of the prophecy which imparts to it an almost startling relevance to modern developments, an interpretation which is now submitted with all diffidence and consciousness of fallibility.

There can be no question whatever that in the earlier part of this prophecy "the king of the south" is the current Pharaoh of Egypt, the ruling Ptolemy, whilst "the king of the north" is the contemporary king of Syria, Antiochus II or Antiochus III (the Great) or—from verse 21—Antiochus IV (Epiphanes). In the later section, then, the most reasonable interpretation would be to make "the king of the south" Egypt and "the king of the north" Syria, continuing the earlier meanings unchanged.

"And at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind. . ." What is the picture presented here? Is it that of the two kings pushing at each other, or of both of them pushing at Israel, the buffer state between them? From the language used, either idea would seem to be possible. But if the identification just proposed for the two powers be adopted, then that conclusion becomes decisive in requiring that each be regarded as attacking Israel.<sup>2</sup> Thus the "him" is identified. Israel!

#### PROPHECY UP TO DATE?

If now the pronouns in the succeeding verses are similarly referred to Israel, the relevance of this prophecy to the brilliant Israeli blitzkrieg of June 1967, is positively startling: "he (Israel) shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over (this Hebrew word is "hebrew")." This describes an overwhelmingly successful campaign. "He shall enter also into the glorious land (the rest of the land of Israel not occupied as yet), and many shall be overthrown; but these shall escape out of his hand, even Edom, and Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon." The Israeli advance against the state of Jordan stopped at the river Jordan (though it need not have done), and the territory formerly occupied by these ancient neighbours has gone untouched.

<sup>1</sup> There is, of course, always the possibility of a dramatic change in the pattern of Middle East politics which would turn Egypt into an enemy of Russia and a friend of Britain. But the indications of other prophecies and current events hardly support this.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase "with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships" could apply to both invaders.

"He shall stretch forth his hand also upon the countries: and the land of Egypt shall not escape. But he shall have power over. . . all the precious things of Egypt." Does the poverty-stricken land of Egypt have anything more precious than the Suez Canal of which that lightning campaign by Israel brought about a long-lasting closure?

"And he shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas (i.e. the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean) in the glorious holy mountain (that is, in Jerusalem)." This can be nothing else but the capture of the ancient portion of Jerusalem. "Yet he shall come to his end, and none shall help him." Evidently the initial sensational success is to be swallowed up in a crushing defeat of the brittle state of Israel. Everyone knows that whilst the Israelis can mount a more efficient swift-moving attack than any other small nation in the world, they simply do not have the military or economic resources to sustain full-scale war for even a couple of months. So when "tidings out of the east (Jordan) and out of the north (Syria) trouble him," a last desperate attempt to crush all surrounding enemies will be made, and will fail.

Then will begin for Israel "a time of trouble such as never was since there was a Gentile." And when the frightful experience of the Jews in the times of Titus and Hitler are considered, this must mean horror past present imagining. The Arab enemy, ever unsympathetic to the softer virtues of mercy and compassion, and smouldering with bitter resentment over three ignominious defeats within twenty years, will give full expression to long pent-up hatred and the sudden savage delight of at last having his superior foe at his mercy. He will sweep into the efficient trim little country, which for a generation has been a standing exposure of Arab sloth and backwardness, not to take it over as a going concern, but to smash, ruin and destroy. This will be done with insatiable ruthlessness and with all the delight of teenage hooligans joyously and destructively flouting the forces of law and order. The Arab locusts will let the desert in. Those of Israel who survive will moan in helpless hopelessness. Now, at last, indomitable Jewish optimism and self-reliance is utterly quenched: "our bones are dried, our hope is *lost*."

#### DELIVERANCE

It is at such a time, when all Jewish self-confidence is gone and when the faith which depends on the God of Israel is being re-born, that "Michael shall stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people."

This divine deliverer with the name: "Who is like God," is commonly assumed to be Jesus because the name is so apt. Is this adequate reason for such identification? The angels also are like God in their glory and immortality. And why should this approach be adopted regarding Michael and not Gabriel (Daniel 8:16 and 9:21), for his name is the same as El-Gibbor, one of the distinctive titles of Messiah (Mighty God; Isaiah 9:6)? Also what commentator can be found (Christadelphian or otherwise) who is prepared to interpret the earlier mention of Michael in Daniel 10:13, 21 as meaning the Lord Jesus Christ? There has been a lack of consistency regarding the exposition of some of these Scriptures. It would seem more reasonable to read the reference to Michael as a reminder that the angel of God's presence who was with Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 23:20) and who blessed their conquest of Canaanites (Joshua 5:13-15) will be with them once again in their greatest hour of need.

It is appropriate to link with this angelic aid brought by Michael a further detail of the prophecy which has been badly mauled by interpreters over the years: "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." All kinds of unworthy guesses have been made as to the Last Day fulfilment of this

prophecy. Fast travel—two generations back it was locomotives and automobiles, now it is jet planes and lunar rockets. And the increase of knowledge has been (undeservedly) credited to the scientists. The variations on these unwholesome themes have been many. Interpreting Scripture by Scripture takes the student of these things in a different direction.

Amos 9 is marvellously detailed prophecy of the rejection of Israel. Very briefly:

*One* basket of summer fruit (v. 1) in the temple court, when there should have been thousands (Deuteronomy 26:1-11) tells of a nation wholly unacceptable to their God. It means that there is only one Man whose service is approved. Therefore (v. 2) "the end is come upon my people of Israel." The Hallelujahs of the temple are reduced to howlings (hëllilu). The entire Place (Sanctuary) is littered with dead bodies (all this in A.D. 70). The Land trembles, and all the people mourn (v. 8). The sun goes down at noon (v. 9; Mark 15:33), there is darkness over all the Land, whilst the Passover feast (v. 10) is turned into mourning for The Only Begotten Son (v. 10; Luke 23:48). From this time on there is a famine among the people of Israel of hearing the Word of the Lord (v. 11). Instead they wander from sea to sea, and from the north to the east (v. 12), and do not find it. They run to and fro seeking the Word of the Lord, yet their young men and maidens faint for thirst (v. 13).

Joel supplies the complement to this last detail with his prophecy (2:28) of the Last Day outpouring of the Spirit on sons and daughters, young men and handmaids. And Daniel 12 has the complement of their fruitless running to and fro in a picture of many in Israel running to and fro now to experience a vast increase in Knowledge of the Word (and the Logos) which has eluded them for two millenniums. It is another prophetic anticipation of the repentance of Israel in their great time of trouble. When it is realized that "running to and fro" is used to describe Israel gathering heavenly food in the wilderness (Numbers 11:8—same word in Hebrew), the seemliness of this interpretation will be more apparent.

"And at that time thy people shall be delivered, everyone that shall be found written in the book." There may be a distinction here from "the children of thy people" who are saved by Michael. This is made more likely by the phrase: "everyone that shall be found written in the book"—in the Lamb's book of life, the burgess roll of the New Jerusalem (Isaiah 4:3). In that case, this Scripture is comparable with the promise in Isaiah (26:20) of protection for the saints (Gentile or Jew) in that epoch of desperate trouble.

## JESUS AND DANIEL

It is noteworthy that Jesus makes no less than four allusions to this block of three verses: Daniel 12:1-3:

### *Daniel*

1. There shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation (and compare Joel 2:2).
2. Everyone that shall be found written in the book.
3. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.
4. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament.
5. The abomination that maketh desolate set up . . . the wise shall understand.

### *Jesus*

1. Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time; Matthew 24:21.
2. whose names are written in the Lamb's book of Life; Revelation 13:8.
3. All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation; John 5:28,29.
4. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father; Matthew 13:43.
5. The abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet whose readeth, let him understand.

Thus, even if the language itself does not patently require reference to the Last Days, it is not to be denigrated as the symbolic idealism of a crazy mixed-up apocalyptic visionary, for Jesus took it seriously and found an important place for it in his own teaching. The witness of the verses just quoted provides clear demonstration that Daniel 11:4-12:3 refers to the coming of Christ's kingdom and the events immediately preceding the Lord's return. If the interpretation suggested here is incorrect, one can only assume that other dramatic events will be set in train very soon to provide a more relevant fulfilment. But those who would learn from Daniel regarding these things must come prepared to be taught.

## CHAPTER 11

### SUN, MOON AND STARS

All diligent Bible readers, and especially those who give much attention to prophecy, are impressed with the frequency and importance of the allusions to the heavenly bodies. Traditionally the sun has been taken to stand for human government and dominion, the moon for ecclesiastical authority, and (somewhat vaguely, it must be admitted) the stars for lesser political lights. It is not to our credit as a community of Bible students that for a century this approach (culled in the first instance from orthodox commentators!) has been uncritically accepted.

It is agreed that some sort of case might be made for the sun as a symbol of human political government, although even this result can only be achieved by ignoring a number of inconvenient

examples (e.g. Micah 3:6, Luke 23:45, Isaiah 30:26, Revelation 21:23 etc.). But for the idea that the moon represents the ecclesiastical powers of the Gentile world, no Bible evidence worthy of consideration has yet been advanced. Until it is, the notion should be viewed with mistrust.

#### CONNECTION WITH ISRAEL

Over against the dearth of evidence in favour of these ideas can be set a group of obviously symbolic passages<sup>1</sup> where a figure of the people of Israel is clearly intended. Sometimes the symbolism runs on to include the spiritual Israel also. This is only to be expected.

For example, in Joseph's dream the sun, moon and eleven stars (or constellations?—the signs of the zodiac) offering worship to Joseph's star were immediately perceived to be symbolic of the family of Israel. Children in the Sunday School do not need to have this meaning explained to them.

Appropriately, the seed of Abraham are compared to the stars of heaven (Genesis 15:5 and 22:17) not only in number, but also in glory (Daniel 12:3). By contrast, those who forsake the Hope of Israel and follow false ideas are called "wandering stars" (Jude 13). When God "causes the sun to go down at noon" (Amos 8:9) it is because He is bringing judgement on Israel: "I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head." When, "the sun goeth down over the prophets" (Micah 3:6), they lose their power of spiritual direction of Israel, not their political authority. If, as seems likely, the Shulamite in the Song of Songs is a type of spiritual Israel, then it is understandable that she should be described as "fair as the moon, clear as the sun," even when she flees in confusion (Song 6:10).

#### JEREMIAH AND THE OLIVET PROPHECY

It is specially in the Olivet prophecy and in the book of Revelation where an accurate understanding of this symbolism is important. What are the "signs in the sun, moon and stars. . . the sea and the waves roaring," about which Jesus spoke (Luke 21:25, 26)? It is a matter of some surprise that the allusion here to Jeremiah 31:35, 36 has not been either recognized or taken proper account of: "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The Lord of hosts is his name. If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever" (Jeremiah 31:35, 36). So far as is known, this is the only other place in Scripture where mention of sun, moon and stars is combined with allusion to the roaring of the waves of the sea; and the pointed connection here with Israel will be immediately evident to all readers. By contrast, any attempt to read the more usually received meanings in this passage looks particularly unconvincing.

It surely follows, then, that in the Olivet prophecy Jesus was saying to his disciples: Keep your eye on Israel! When there are sensational developments in Israel as a nation, learn that the time is near.

It may well be that the other familiar phrase there should be read: "and in the land (of Israel) distress of peoples." The form of the Greek phrase allows of this, but it cannot be insisted on.

<sup>1</sup> Not all allusions to sun, moon and stars are symbolic.

## EVIDENCE THE OTHER WAY

The nearest approach to Bible support for the more usual view concerning sun, moon and stars comes from a group of three passages (Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4; Ezekiel 32:7) which appear to use these symbols where Israel is not in reference at all. Yet a careful re-examination of these passages suggests the possibility of harmonizing them with the others already considered.

For instance, some details in Isaiah 13 suggest that verses 6-12 (or 6-16, perhaps) are really a prophecy about Babylon's treatment of Israel, hence the judgement pronounced in turn on Babylon in the rest of the chapter: "the day of the Lord cometh... to lay the Land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine." This structure of the prophecy is not unique. Isaiah 17, the burden of Damascus, has only two verses about Syria, and all the rest is about Israel. Also, Isaiah 18 apostrophizes Egypt in the first two verses, but the rest of that prophecy is about Israel. Similarly in Isaiah 13, the inclusion of a judgement against Israel adds point to the denunciation of destruction upon Babylon, God's instrument which vaunts itself against the Almighty.

Again, Isaiah 34 is a sombre picture of divine wrath against "all nations" round about Israel, with special reference to the Arab enemy Edom (v. 6). All this is "the controversy of Zion" (v. 8). Appropriately, then, verse 4 gives the reason for this heavenly vengeance—the ruthless destruction of the Chosen Race: "And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll (in Hebrews 1 similar language is used with reference to the passing of the Mosaic order; see John Carter's "Hebrews"), and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine (another symbol of Israel)."

Ezekiel 32:7, 8 concerning Egypt is the only remaining problem, and no very great one: "And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark: I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God" (Ezekiel 32:7, 8).

The emphasis here is not so much on the symbolism of sun, moon and stars as on darkness. The plague of darkness with which God afflicted Egypt in the time of Moses is to have its counterpart in the experience of the Egyptian enemies of God's people in the Last Days. Symbolically, and probably in a very literal sense also, Egypt is to be made to feel the hand of God in the days to come; compare the allusion to the plague of the slaying of the firstborn, in Zachariah 14:18, and to the smiting of Egypt's waters, in Isaiah 19:5-10.

It is believed that there are no other passages of Scripture which even remotely appear to offer support to the use of this symbol regarding human governments and ecclesiastical powers. On the other hand, there are several which take on a fresh and much more satisfying meaning when read as symbolic of Israel.

## FURTHER INVESTIGATION

Joel 2:10 very plainly refers to the desolation of Israel; "The earth (the Land) shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble; the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining." The same is true of the other familiar verses in Joel 2:31 and 3:15: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come"; and, "The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining." The former of these two passages was used by Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2: 20) with evident primary

reference to God's overthrow of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. And the latter is closely associated with the "multitudes in the valley of decision" who desolate Israel (sun and moon darkened) and who themselves come to destruction when "the Lord is the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel."

The same ideas can be traced in the Sixth Seal which, whatever its past historic applications, certainly has reference to a day yet future when "the wrath of the Lamb is come": "The sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, *even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs*, when she is shaken of a mighty wind" (Revelation 6:12).

The language of the Fourth Trumpet is very similar (Revelation 8:12). The third part of the sun, moon and stars are smitten and darkened. Is this the third and worst of the overturnings of Israel foretold in Ezekiel 21:27 before the coming of "him whose right it is"? Many other Old Testament allusions throughout these Trumpets support this conclusion.

Similarly a very luminous exposition of Revelation 12 with reference to the Last Days becomes possible when the woman "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars, is taken as a figure of Israel who is seen first in heaven (i.e. in covenant relationship with God) but later on the earth, in the wilderness, in fact; persecuted, and yet ultimately saved from her enemies. From this point of view many of the details are very impressive.

There remains the apparent paradox involved in Isaiah's superb picture of the kingdom: "The sun shall no more be thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended." The meaning here is now seen to be quite simply and appropriately this: Israel is to continue as God's glorious nation throughout this age of blessing, yet always and in every respect this glory will be subject to, and indeed dependent on, the greater glory of God.

## CHAPTER 12

### "A FOURTH BEAST, DREADFUL AND TERRIBLE"

*Daniel 7*

Traditionally the four beasts of Daniel 7 have been expounded with reference to the four "world empires" of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. This is, of course, perfectly correct. And yet, at the same time, it can be and has been—misleading. The tendency has been to put emphasis on them as *world* powers, whereas they were hardly that. They did not even dominate the known civilization of their time. Babylon never expanded as far as Lydia and Greece; it gained only a temporary foothold in Egypt, which was as much the centre of civilization as Babylon itself was. Persia failed to conquer Greece and never touched other centres of Mediterranean culture. Alexander's empire only lasted as long as Alexander. And even though the might of Rome went as far as the north of Scotland, in the east it stopped at the Euphrates, and only for short periods was it effective so far.

But in a *Biblical* sense these four great powers were all-important, for all of them in turn controlled the fortunes of God's Land and People. It is from this point of view, and from this view only, that Rome "devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it." Normally this was not the character of Roman conquest. The legions did not conquer in order to destroy but in order to

civilize. Wherever Rome went, law and order followed —the *pax Romana*. In this respect the Land of Israel was an outstanding exception. The Jews did not want any Roman peace. So at last, against all normal Roman policy, that troublesome country was "broken in pieces, and stamped with the feet of it."

## ISRAEL AND THE EMPIRES

This view of Daniel's four beasts has good, but much neglected, Biblical support: "Their (Israel's) heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me. Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them, O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself" (Hoses 13:6-9).

There is good evidence in Daniel chapter 9 alone that the prophet was in the habit of poring over the Scriptures already written, and that his Bible included at least the Books of Moses, Psalms, Isaiah and Jeremiah. So it is not unreasonable to believe that he had also pondered this passage in Hosea and that the revelation of God's continuing retribution against his wayward people was made in terms of what he was already familiar with. This Hosea passage describes the great powers as raised up for the punishment of Israel. The extent of their dominion over the centuries is a matter of little importance —so little, in fact, that it is not mentioned once throughout Daniel 7 (verse 23 is not the exception to this which it appears to be). No wonder then, that the vision of an everlasting kingdom "given to the people of the saints of the most High" left Daniel not reassured or elated but "much troubled" and with "changed countenance" (v. 28); for he saw clearly that this long sequence of ravagers boded much ill for Israel before peace should come to Jerusalem.

In this view of chapter 7—and of the prophecy as a whole—there becomes evident the reason for the long gap which exists in all of Daniel's prophecies (see "The Last Days", chapter 3). These revelations take no account of the long period during which Israel have been scattered from their land. They all resume in the Last Days when Israel are back in the land preparatory to the setting up of Messiah's kingdom.

## TEN KINGDOMS

This concept helps considerably to impart unification and coherence to the various prophecies in Daniel. The ten toes (ch. 2) and the ten horns (ch. 7) belong to the Last Days, and not to the long period from the decay of Rome to the twentieth century. They are to be equated with the ten kings of Revelation 17 who make war with the Lamb and are overcome by him. For the stone smashes the *feet* of the image. The horns also are ten powers in the Last Days and not before, for they are there when "the Ancient of Days came." The strange leaps in the visions at 8:23 and 11:40 (or is it 11:36?) from prophecies long fulfilled to the Last Days are also now readily accounted for.

But one further conclusion follows. The revelation regarding *the little horn* of the fourth beast will have its true and detailed fulfilment in the days to come. In "The Last Days," chapters 4, 5, a variety of additional reasons was given for this view. The incompleteness and partial character of the "Papal" interpretation may be summarized in the following brief statements:

1. The usual application assigned to the three uprooted horns is so woefully insignificant as to condemn itself. Why should the transfer to Papal authority of three obscure little provinces (little more than counties) in Italy, be the subject of one of the most powerful Old Testament prophecies of the Kingdom of God?

2. "Made war with the saints." What saints? Anyone who has read the systematized creeds of Waldenses, Abigenses and Huguenots will hesitate to apply the prophecy to such. The Book of Daniel applies this Hebrew word to Israel (8:24 and 12:7; same word—and see Psalm 79:2), and also to angels (8:13). Obviously, in chapter 7, the former is the proper reference.
3. "prevailed against them; until the Ancient of Days came. . .". The persecuting power of the Papacy stopped long before the manifestation of Messiah.
4. "they (the saints) shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time." Even granting, for the sake of argument, the "year for a day" principle (although there is no hint of it in Daniel<sup>1</sup>), the fact still has to be faced that long before 1868-70 (the standard termination date) the Pope had lost all persecuting power, and has been without it now for nearly two centuries. Yet the prophecy strongly implies a sudden change from the persecuting horn of the everlasting kingdom of the most High.
5. Does the Pope "speak great words against the most High?" At least, he honours Christ, after a fashion—a thing which is hardly to be said about the Jews at any time in their history or about modern scientific rationalism (a much greater enemy to the Truth than the Pope can ever be).

#### A GAP

It is suggested, instead, that the Last Day interpretation calls for a gap in the prophecy (as in chs. 2, 8, 9, li), and read the details of the little horn as having reference to the Last Days when Israel are back in their land. It is known from such Scriptures as Zechariah 14:2, 3 that before the coming of the Messiah, the state of Israel is to be smashed to pieces by assembled enemies. Daniel 7 gives a vivid picture of the final and most terrible oppression in the land, lasting for three and a half years. This tyrant "shall be diverse from the former," that is, from Rome, Greece, Persia and Babylon, who were all Gentiles and blatantly imperialist. By contrast this persecutor will be himself an Arab son of Abraham seeking revenge rather than power, or he will be a Gentile co-ordinator of Arab hostility. He will speak great words against the most High by taunting the Jews regarding their vaunted national destiny.

It is useful to note that every period of three and a half years traceable in Scripture describes a period of increasing tribulation for men of God, culminating in vindication and triumph.<sup>2</sup> Elijah's exile in Sidon during three and a half years of drought ended on mount Carmel. Antiochus Epiphanes' desecration of the temple had Maccabee rebellion and triumph as its climax. The ministry of Jesus was followed by his resurrection and ascension. The forty-two stages of Israel's pilgrimage in the wilderness (Numbers 33) led to the Land of Promise. The forty-two generations from Abraham (Matthew 1:17) brought the birth of Messiah. Here in Daniel 7 is perhaps the most striking example of all.

#### DANIEL AND REVELATION

In Revelation 13 the very phrases used in Daniel 7 to describe the persecuting horn are applied to the Beast of the sea (vv. 5, 6, 7) which heads up the ten kings who make war with the Lamb (17:14) and are overcome by him. The oppression of the "saints"—God's holy people, Israel—described in Revelation 13 is evidently an apocalyptic expansion of the corresponding details in Daniel 7. The

<sup>1</sup> Not even in the Seventy weeks prophecy, when attention is given to the proper meaning of the Hebrew for "week."

<sup>2</sup> If this view is justified, what about the "papal" application concluding in 1868?

language is highly appropriate to Israel: "He that leadeth (Israel) into captivity shall (himself) go into captivity"—where does the Bible ever speak of saints in Christ going into captivity?—"Here is the patience and faith of the saints," i.e. this especially is when God's people will need patience, as three and a half bitter years drag their weary course.

This last-day Antichrist has as his "high-priest" one who is described as a lamb-like "beast of the earth," called also in 19:20 "the false prophet." Again the Old Testament helps towards identification. One of Ezekiel's prophecies of the restoration of Israel has these details: "And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause *the evil beasts* to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely (Ezekiel 38:111) in the wilderness and sleep in the woods (i.e. in open country—without walls, having neither bars nor gates). . . And they shall *no more* be a prey to the heathen, neither shall *the beast of the earth* (Revelation 13:11) devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid" (Ezekiel 34:24, 25, 28).

There is much that is difficult about the details of Revelation 13,<sup>1</sup> but in conjunction with Daniel 7 it appears to teach fairly plainly that its grim picture of oppression and blasphemy will find ultimate fulfilment in the terrible sufferings of Israel through three and a half years of ghastly horror when their state is overrun by Arab enemies headed up in a Power or a Man (Revelation 13:18).

The ready harmonization of these prophecies with others of a similar tenor, already expounded, will not be lost on the reader.

## CHAPTER 13

### "THEN SHALL THE LORD GO FORTH"

#### *Zechariah 14*

The last chapter of Zechariah has many powerful details of the consummation of the Lord's work among His people, some of which are by no means easy to understand. Nor is it altogether clear how this prophecy is to be pieced together chronologically.

It begins with a successful attack on Jerusalem by "all nations." Clearly this phrase is not to be taken literally. It puts too big a strain on the imagination to picture the Fiji Islanders and the Eskimos, the pygmies of Africa and the Communist Chinese, all combining together in a savage onslaught on the city of God.

Some have sought a way out of the difficulty by calling in the United Nations. But even then a solution to the problem is still far away, for the aim of any such activity by that effete hypocritical organization is to separate combatants by means of a peace-keeping task force. But these attackers in Zechariah ravage and spoil without mercy.

As soon as the Bible idiom of "all nations round about Israel" (compare 1 Chronicles 14:17, 2 Chronicles 32:23; Ezekiel 32:12) is recognized, the difficulty ceases to exist. These, as in so many other prophecies already considered, are the Arab enemies of Israel who will never rest content until they have ground their Jewish neighbours into the dust. These Arab invaders may be confidently depended on to rifle houses and ravish women. In the third Arab-Israeli war a Jewish citizen stated in a newspaper article that if the Arabs had won he would have shot his own wife and family and then himself. "There would have been another Masada." This, at least, shews what the Jews expect when they lose the struggle against these inveterate foes.

<sup>1</sup> Inevitably so, once it is agreed that the detailed fulfilment of this part of the vision lies in the future.

That they will lose is plainly intimated in one Scripture after another. "The city shall be taken. . . half the city shall go forth into captivity." This must mean slavery for a big proportion of the population, as Joel 3 and Isaiah 19 have already been seen to require.

#### THE MESSIAH

"Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle." In the time of crisis and despair, and because Israel turn in their helplessness to the God of their fathers, deliverance will come in a way to amaze the world. How the Lord will fight is explicitly stated: "And it shall come to pass in that day that a great tumult from the Lord shall be among them; and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour" (v. 13).

The great plague with which these enemies will be smitten is described in language which makes the blood run cold: "Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth" (v. 12). All kinds of suggestions have been made as to how this might come about. Bubonic plague, the deadly incurable aftermath of nuclear radiation such as is caused by hydrogen bombs, some hitherto unused secret weapon of germ or chemical warfare perfected by the back-room scientists—many guesses of this sort have been ventilated. One thing seems to be clear: the words indicate an escalation of the attack on Jerusalem into war on a massive scale involving much more than the tiny Holy Land.

At such a time the Messiah himself will appear. It was promised by the angels that "he shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Since he went away in a cloud of divine glory (Acts 1:9), it may be confidently expected that he will be manifested accompanied by that same Shekinah majesty. This is implied in Zechariah: "and the Lord my God shall come and all the saints with thee." Here the "saints" or "holy ones" coming *with* (and not *to*) the Messiah are the angels (see Matthew 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 14).<sup>1</sup> Also, the Messiah will return to the same place from which he ascended: "his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east."

#### EARTHQUAKE

At that time this mount of Olives will be split in two by a mighty earthquake (v. 4) which will create a great valley running east and west. It is only in recent times that geologists have discovered the existence of a great geological east-west fault in the structure of the mount of Olives. It is as though ages ago the Almighty prepared the ground for the vast changes soon to take place.

The result will be a formation similar to that which already exists at Shechem (Nablus), where mount Ebal and mount Gerizim flank a deep east-west valley. It was here where Joshua assembled the people of Israel with the ark, the symbol of God's presence, in the midst, to hear recited the blessings and the cursings which would come upon them (Joshua 8:33, 34). Apparently, then, the mount of Olives will be prepared that it might be the scene of a similar declaration of the divine will concerning the saints in Christ.

<sup>1</sup> It has to be remembered that in Scripture the word "saints" may describe three separate groups of people:

- a. the angels, God's holy messengers;
- b. Israel, God's holy nation;
- c. those sanctified in Christ, God's holy remnant.

Each occurrence of the word has to be judged on its merits, in the light of the context.

They will be assembled in the divine presence of a more glorious Jesus-Joshua, and set either on his right hand to hear the wondrous invitation: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom," or to be thrust away to the left: "Depart from me ye cursed."<sup>1</sup>

At the time of the earthquake men will flee "as from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah"—fleeing "from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Isaiah 2:19—a passage based initially on the experience of Uzziah's earthquake, but appropriated in the New Testament to describe the terror of the coming of Christ: 2 Thessalonians 1:19; Revelation 6:16).

This "valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azel," a place no one can identify. Perhaps once again the allusion is not geographical but spiritual, intended to recall Azazel, the scapegoat, which, with sin laid upon it, was for utter dismissal (see RVm in Leviticus 16:8) from the presence of the Lord.

Thus, with both the unworthy in the ecclesia of Christ and the wicked among the nations purged out, the kingdom of Messiah will come in with glory and righteousness: "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one," that is, "the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."

#### MESSIAH'S KINGDOM

The prophecy is rounded off with two vivid pictures of the transformations brought by Messiah's reign. "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left, of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles."

That which in ancient days was a unique combination of national holiday, Bible School, and re-dedication for the people of Israel, will be extended to take in all the nations of the world. The feast will be held all the year round, members of all the diverse peoples going up to the Holy City in rotation, for instruction and guidance in the ways of God (Isaiah 19:23-25).

The phrase: "every one that is left of all the nations" is ominous. The implication is unmistakable that a big proportion of the world's teeming millions, now presenting such a problem to scientists and world planners, will not survive to see the wonders of the coming age.<sup>2</sup> But for those whom the grace of God preserves there will be opportunities of blessing past imagining.

Yet, such is human nature, even under the benign conditions which Christ's reign will bring, some stubbornness and recalcitrance is bound to happen. Those unwilling to be integrated in the divine family of nations will find themselves without rain: and in particular Egypt, if rebellious, will be visited once again with the plague which broke the spirit of that nation in the days of Moses. Jeremiah indicates that where there is persistent stubbornness, the plague will not stop at the firstborn: "And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, The Lord liveth... then shall they be built in the midst of my people (here is a true UNO, built round and in Israel, the people of God's choice; see also Isaiah 2:3). But if they will not obey, Twill utterly pluck up and destroy that nation, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 12:16, 17).

<sup>1</sup> Compare the way in which the travail of Jesus in the garden on the mount of Olives led to men being set on his right hand and his left, blessing and cursing, blessed and cursed.

<sup>2</sup> On this question see also Jeremiah 25:33; 44:14, 27; Isaiah 24:5, 6; 66:16, 19; Matthew 24:22.

In contrast to this picture of intransigence, so characteristic of human nature, is another of Jerusalem and its people utterly transformed in character: "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holy to the Lord." The very bridles which have been bathed in blood (Revelation 14:10) will now be as holy in the work of the city of peace as the garments of the High Priest (Exodus 28:33, 36). "And the (earthenware) pots in the Lord's house shall be like the (golden) bowls before the altar." Here is further symbolism too instructive to be neglected. Those who are earthen vessels filled with the treasure of the Lord's message (2 Corinthians 4:7) will themselves become as valuable and permanent in God's service as the treasure itself.

"And there shall no more be the Canaanite in the house of the Lord." Not only is this an assurance that the centuries-long Moslem sway over the holy city shall be swept away for ever, but also it is an indirect but yet emphatic way of insisting that the promises God made to Abraham will be finally and completely fulfilled. For, when "Abram passed through the land . . . the Canaanite was then in the land;" but when "the Lord made covenant with Abram," he promised: "Unto thy seed have I given this land. . . Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmothtes, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaims, Amorites, Canaanites, Girschites, Jebusites" (Genesis 12:6 and 15:18-21). Abraham himself will see it fulfilled.

## CHAPTER 14

### THE OLIVET PROPHECY

*Matthew 24*

On the face of it the Lord's Olivet prophecy is in three easily separable sections: (a) concerning the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70—this in response to the question: "When shall these things be," when not one stone of the temple is to be left upon another? (b) the Last Days, the time of the Lord's return—in answer to the question: What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (c) exhortation to preparedness, and warning regarding the day of judgement.

Such an analysis of Christ's discourse actually over-simplifies it. There is fair reason for believing that the A.D. 70 section of the prophecy will also find another fulfilment in the Last Days. In other words, the brethren of the first century saw the fulfilment of the first part of this prophecy in their day, and were able to profit from the knowledge of it; the brethren of the twentieth century will see the entire prophecy fulfilled from start to finish.

Even apart from the Bible evidence which is available, pointing to such a conclusion, this may be deemed reasonably possible or even probable, because this is the character of such a big proportion of Bible prophecy. The idea is familiar, to the point of obviousness, that the prophets were inspired to utter words which mostly had some kind of fulfilment in their own time or soon after, but which were also prophecies of the consummation of the age. Psalms writtgZ by David about his own experiences were also Psalms about the Messiah (Acts 2:30, 31). Isaiah based many of his prophecies on the suffering and glory of good king Hezekiah, but these were also prophecies of Messiah (John 12:41). So it would be strange indeed if the greatest prophecy of the greatest prophet of all time did not have a similar double application.

## A SECOND FULFILMENT

Here, then, are six more reasons deduced from the text itself why the first section of the Lord's Olivet prophecy should be re-studied with reference to the Last Days:

1. "Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes" (Matthew 24:17, 18). In Luke 17:31 Jesus had already used almost identical words concerning "the days of the Son of man." If this fact stood by itself there might be some (though not much) justification for the assumption that the Lord used the same language because there was the same urgency about the occasions. Those who have really absorbed the spirit of Bible prophecy will know how inadequate such a view is. But in any case there are corroborative reasons.
2. "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew. 24:21). Yet the Old Testament prophets had already made the same portentous declaration over and over again regarding the Last Days! One recalls Daniel's "time of trouble such as never was" (Daniel 12:1) and the extreme emphasis of the words of Joel: "there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations" (2:2). Either the words do not mean what they say, or they are to be reconciled by being applied to the same occasion.
3. It is in this section of the prophecy also that the words come: "But he that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved" (24:13). There is more innate difficulty in this saying than has generally been conceded. If "the end" is A.D. 70, was Jesus saying: He who keeps the faith till the temple is destroyed shall be saved? Or did he mean: He who keeps the faith to the end of his life shall be saved? But this is a truism valid for every disciple in every age. Had Jesus said: "He that shall endure *in* the time of the end (of the Mosaic dispensation), the same shall be saved," there would have been little difficulty. But he did not say that. On the other hand, reference to the Last Days allows the words to be taken literally, at their face value.<sup>1</sup>
4. Verse 29 begins: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days . . ." This word "immediately," the meaning of which has been evaded by a variety of tortuous or inaccurate devices (e.g. by suggesting that it does not mean "immediately" but "suddenly") requires a very close connection between the tribulation Jesus has already foretold and the time of his second coming.
5. "Then let them which be in Juda flee to the mountains" (v. 16). This is the experience of Lot over again: "Escape for thy life. . . escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed" (Genesis 19:17). In Luke 17:28, 29, 32 Jesus pointed to an emphatic parallel between the Last Days and the deliverance of Lot. So it is hard to believe that here also in his Olivet prophecy he used similar language without intending a similar idea.
6. "And the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all the nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). In the first century these words had their fulfilment in the matchless work of Paul who in humble truth was able to write about "the hope of the gospel... which was preached to every creature under heaven" (Colossians 1:23). "And then shall the end come"—about a year after Paul was beheaded, the three and a half year's Jewish War began in Juda. Yet as the words of Jesus are read and pondered, there is a finality about them which suggests a grander fulfilment. In this twentieth century, in spite of the blameworthy lethargy of

<sup>1</sup> Readers may like to probe further and seek an answer to the question why Jesus chose to include these words here and not in a later section of his discourse where they seem to be so much more appropriate.

God's elect, the message of the imminent return of Christ goes out from scores of radio stations. Today in a much more universal fashion than was true in Paul's day the gospel is being preached in all the world, even though it be mixed with error.

#### MEANING FOR THE LAST DAYS

The foregoing assembly of Bible arguments will surely predispose any earnest student of prophecy towards re-examining this part of the Lord's discourse with a view to learning more concerning the time of his coming. The following are some of the details specially worthy of re-consideration.

1. Verses 9, 10 speak of persecution and bitter hatred of the faithful. At the time of writing there is no sign of this. Would God there were, for the Household of God needs the bracing influence of external adversity to save it from the eroding effects of a soft materialistic civilization and to provide it with new and better opportunities of evangelism. This could well come.
2. "And then shall many be offended. . . and many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:10a, 11, 12). The words plainly mean that many will openly renounce the Faith, many others will pervert it, but many (most) will just drift. To the modern mind these seem to be incompatible with what has just been mentioned. Yet Jesus saw no incompatibility.
3. An "abomination of desolation" is to stand in the holy place (v. 15). This means: an abomination which desolates the holy city, Jerusalem. Such a conclusion is indicated by the parallel in Luke 21: 20: "And when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies. . ." Since Jesus adds: "whoso readeth, let him understand," it is a reasonable inference that the great sign of the imminence of the Lord's return will be the desolation of Jerusalem, lately freed from nineteen centuries of Gentile domination. In Daniel 12 the prophecy already quoted continues: "And from the time that. . . the abomination that maketh desolate is set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days;" whilst in Luke 21 the prophecy already quoted continues: "and Jerusalem shall be trodden down until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." This suggests that "the times of the Gentiles" which Jesus had in mind were not the long centuries of Gentile mastery of the city but the "time, times and a half," a period of literally three and a half years when the city is laid desolate just before the coming of the Lord.
4. "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:22). There are several impressive examples to be found in Scripture of a divine fore-shortening of evil days. The three days' pestilence in which David preferred to fall into the hand of God was shortened, by grace, to less than a day—again, for the sake of the elect. David prayed for the people and took the guilt upon himself (2 Samuel 24:13, 15, 16, 17). The siege of A.D. 70 was shortened, in the mercy of God, to five months precisely (Nebuchadnezzar's siege lasted the whole of a terrible year). This also was for the elect's sake: Revelation 9:5 and 8:3, 4. Similarly it may well be that the times of the Gentiles which are still future will be shortened through the faith and prayers of the saints who discern the pattern of God's working and influence it by their intercession as Abraham did in the days of Lot.

Tentative conclusions such as these may be momentous. The possibility of such sensational developments has perhaps not been ventilated and discussed as fully as it might be.

## CHAPTER 15

### THE DAY OF THE LORD

*Zephaniah 1-3*

The prophecy of Zephaniah is very evidently connected closely with the events of the prophet's own time—the reign of Josiah. Two possibilities present themselves. Either the prophet is foretelling events soon to happen, and the prophecy is so framed as to have reference also to events of the Last Days (much in Jeremiah and the early part of Isaiah is like this); or, recent events are being used (as in the later chapters in Isaiah) to provide prophetic pictures of bigger events in the time of the end. It is difficult to say with any confidence which of these modes of interpretation is correct, but the pointed allusions to Josiah's Passover in 1:7, 8, 12 suggest the second.

#### A FUTURE FULFILMENT

Apart from the language of the prophecy itself, there seem to be two clear reasons for a Last-Day application of it. First, there are the quotations from the prophecy of Joel: "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near . . . a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm" (1:14-16). This is Joel 2:1, 2. Some of the phrases are quoted word for word. If Joel may be applied with confidence to the Last Days, then surely Zephaniah also.

The concluding section of the prophecy (3:14-20) reads very convincingly as a picture of events still future. But there is also this: in John's account of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the familiar quotation from Zechariah 9:9 is prefaced with two phrases from Zephaniah: "Fear not, daughter of Zion" (3:16, 14)—the words are not found in Zechariah. And the context in Zephaniah 3 is: "the king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee.. The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will Jesus thee" (vv. 15,17). The triumphal entry of Jesus was, of course, a kind of dress-rehearsal of the kingdom. The Lord was asserting his right to come to Jerusalem one day as its eternal king.

The shape of Zephaniah's picture of judgement and blessing in the Last Days is worth noting. Chapters 1, 3 are, in the main, pronouncements of wrath against "Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem." Chapter 2:4-13 is against neighbouring enemies: the Philistines, Moab, Ethiopia, Assyria. The prophecy ends with the lovely picture of the kingdom, already referred to.

#### HEEDLESS ISRAEL

The prophet describes Israel as given over to idolatry and the pursuit of material prosperity. They have no mind for anything else. Making due allowance for the fact that Zephaniah necessarily has to use the language of his own day, the description is appropriate to the Jews now in the Land: "them that are turned back from the Lord, and those that have not sought the Lord, nor enquired for him... that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil." Today the Jews in Israel are, for the most part, godless in outlook. There is little acknowledgement of the blessing of God in the building of their vigorous new state, and little thankfulness to Him for the victories they have won. Instead, there is a rather cocksure dependence on their own powers and a glorifying of their own admittedly remarkable achievements. "She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God" (3:2). Princes, judges, prophets, priests are all castigated as unworthy of their office (3:3, 4). Yet "the just Lord is in the midst thereof," unrecognized; "morning by morning (through the signs of the times?) doth he bring his judgement to light" (3:5), but these men who are skilful in "discerning the face of the (political) sky, cannot discern the signs of the times."

Soon God will rise up early, sending His prophet Elijah among them, but the nation will continue to "rise early, and corrupt their doings" (3:7). The appeal is made, therefore, to the faithful remnant "before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you" (2:2); "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgement; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger" (2:3).

Appeal is made to the nation to see God's hand in the events of their own time: "I have cut off the nations (Egypt, Jordan, Syria): their towers are desolate; I have made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man" (3:6). Yet still the lesson that God controls the affairs of His ancient people goes unlearned: "I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction" (3:7). But no! Israel appears impervious to true wisdom.

However, inexorably the day draws near when the lesson will be learned: "In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings... for then I will take away out of the midst of thee thy proudly exulting ones, and thou shalt no more be haughty upon my holy mountain," as Israel has certainly been since June 1967.

The enemy nations round about will also be involved in this dramatic transformation. Judgement and desolation will come upon them who have been used to bring desolation and judgement on Israel (2:4,9,13-15; 1:17,18). All this because "they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the Lord of hosts" (2:10). Up to the present day there has been "reproach" in plenty. But until Arab utterly defeats Jew in battle, there is little ground for "magnifying themselves."

#### A GREAT TRANSFORMATION

During the evil time referred to here, "the time of Jacob's trouble," when the Arabs—with formidable Russian help—are able to gloat in triumph over a people they know to be their superiors in everything except barbarism, there will be a faithful remnant who will be saved through their repentance and faith in God: "I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord" (3:12).

Then the Lord will "take away thy judgements" and "cast out thine enemy"; from this time on "the king of Israel, even Jehovah, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more" (3:15). Retribution will be visited on the enemies of this nation beloved for their fathers' sakes. Jews who have endured affliction and dispersion yet again will once more be gathered to their homeland. Now for the last time in all their fantastic history they will come from all parts to inherit the Land, this time for ever. No contempt, opposition or hatred now, for God has "made them a name and a praise among all the people of the earth" (3:20). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in person will beckon them back to a Land lately associated in their minds with fear and horror. "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, o daughter of Jerusalem" (3:14). The exhortation to indulge in unrestrained gladness will be needed, for the startling change which will then come over the fortunes of this stricken people will surely reduce them to stupefied silence and awe.

"Then will I turn to the peoples a pure lip, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent" (3:9). The words have often been interpreted as a prophecy of the reversal of Babel, the institution of one common language (Hebrew?) in the kingdom of God. That this will assuredly happen may be taken as axiomatic. But whether that language will be Hebrew and whether this passage is a prophecy of that much-to-be-desired achievement is doubtful.

This famous Zephaniah passage is more fundamental than any of these considerations. Here, as in a great many other Old Testament passages "the peoples" are the tribes of Israel; and the "pure lip" is

not so much the language they will speak as the *ideas* they will express—"calling upon the name of the Lord" and "serving him with one consent"—a condition which has never been achieved in Hebrew history since the days of Abraham. Now, at last, Israel will not only say: "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do," but they will do what they say.

## CHAPTER 16

### PEACE AND SAFETY

#### *1 Thessalonians 5*

For many years this familiar passage has been expounded as a prophecy that there will come a time when the nations of the world will either be seized by an overmastering anxiety to get together and rid themselves of the threat of war, or will feel at some political juncture that at last they have actually devised a scheme by which war has been finally abolished. At such a time "sudden destruction cometh upon them"; it will overtake them "as a thief in the night." This will be the final cataclysm at the coming of the Lord.

Interpreted in this fashion, the Peace and Safety cry has been regarded as one of the outstanding signs of our times. U.N.O. and, before it, the League of Nations and also nearly every other twentieth century effort to patch up the quarrels and bickerings of the nations have in turn been hailed as the fulfilment of Paul's prophecy, with the logical (sic!) conclusion that the coming of the Lord is just round the corner.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the value of this long-standing interpretation is only in direct proportion to its degree of Biblical support. For too long interpretation of these Bible signs has been by means of politics instead of by means of Bible. Thus the elucidation of Bible prophecy has been brought down to the level of a semi-political game, valid for those who are forbidden to take part in politics in any other way.

## A FRESH APPROACH

The present approach will be on somewhat different lines.

A not unimportant feature of Paul's two letters to Thessalonica is the number of allusions which it contains to the Lord's Olivet prophecy. This is specially true in the section 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:10 (the chapter division here is unfortunate):

### *1 Thessalonians*

4:15 This we say unto you in a word of the Lord  
(i.e. what I am now reminding you of is what  
Jesus himself said).

4:16 the Lord himself shall descend from heaven  
with a shout,

with the voice of an archangel, and with the  
trump of God.

4:17 we which are alive and remain

shall be caught up in clouds to meet the Lord.

5:1 the times and seasons,

5:2 the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in  
the night.

5:3 when they shall say, Peace and safety,

then sudden destruction cometh upon them,

as travail upon a woman with child.

5:5 Ye are all children of light.

5:6 let us not sleep, but

let us watch,

and be sober.

5:9 God hath not appointed us to wrath.

5:10 whether we wake or sleep... live together  
with him.

### *Matthew*

24:30 they shall see the Son of man coming. . .  
with power and great glory.

24:31 he shall send his angels with a great sound  
of a trumpet, and they

shall gather together his elect.

24:30 coming in the clouds of heaven.

### *Luke*

21:24 the times of the Gentiles.

### *Matthew*

24:43 if the good man of the house had known in  
what hour the thief would come.

24:48 my lord delayeth his coming.

24:43, 51 his house broken up... shall cut him  
asunder.

24:8 these are the beginning of travail.

25:1-13 the wise virgins with lamps lit.

25:5 they all slumbered and slept.

24:42; 25: 13 Watch therefore.

24:49 eat and drink with the drunken.

24: 51 appoint him his portion with the  
hypocrites.

25:1-13 the virgins.

It is doubtless true that several of these correspondences occurring by themselves could hardly be recognizable as allusions to the Lord's discourse, but the fact that they come together in the space of a few verses makes the probability of close connection a near-certainty. Those accustomed to tracing this kind of allusiveness in the inspired writers of Scripture will more readily perceive the character of this paragraph in 1 Thessalonians.

#### SLUMBERING VIRGINS

Once the fore-going parallel is recognized the conclusion becomes inevitable that those assuring themselves of peace and safety are not the nations of the world but *the Lord's own unprepared servants*. It is to *them* that the Lord comes as a thief in the night.

A further argument, readily educible from this passage, leads to the same conclusion. Paul continues: "sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child." This figure of speech needs to be pondered. A pregnant woman knows that her travail is inevitable. Also, she knows roughly when it will come. But the precise time is never known to her. Almost always she is at length taken by surprise.

All these aspects of Paul's simile are marvelously appropriate to the waiting church. She knows that the Lord will come. From the signs of the times she has a fair idea that the present epoch will see his coming. But "of that day and hour knoweth no man."

On the other hand, to attempt to apply Paul's figure to the nations of the world is to make nonsense of it. They do not know that the day of crisis is inevitable. All their planning is based on the assumption that it can be staved off by their own scheming. In any case the entire context of Paul's exhortation disallows the possibility of reference to godless nations. In this epistle the apostle is concerned first and last with the well-being of this newly-founded ecclesia in Thessalonica.

#### A SECRET ADVENT?

A further conclusion to be drawn from this re-examination of 1 Thessalonians is that the idea of a preliminary secret thief-like advent of Christ before his open manifestation in glory to the nations of the world loses all its Biblical support.

Not only here but in every other place where the same figure is used, it has reference to the condition of *the Lord's servants*. It is to certain of *them* that the manifestation of the Lord will be like the stealthy depredations of a thief: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments..." (Revelation 16:15). "If therefore thou (Sardis) shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief. . ." (Revelation 3:3). "The Lord is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But (to some who are unrepentant) the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night" (2 Peter 3:9, 10).

On the other hand Christ himself warned pointedly against being misled by those who teach that the second coming will be stealthy and secret. In effect the churches teach this when they try to persuade that the Lord's coming is to the heart of the believer, or mystically in the "Real Presence" in the sacramental bread. *Jehovah's Witnesses* teach the same thing when they affirm an invisible "spiritual" presence of the Lord since 1914.

## "BELIEVE IT NOT"

To all these the answer of Scripture is: "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the *lightning* cometh out of the east, and shineth unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:23-27). This passage is so clear and emphatic, it should make those pause and consider who have been in the habit of thinking (and teaching) in terms of a secret coming of Christ to his people assembled to meet him in some remote uninhabited part of the world.

It is not in this sense that the Lord comes as a thief. The point of this simile is different. When a burglar has broken into a home and slipped away with all the money and the choicest items of wealth it contains, the householder suddenly awakes to the fact that what he deemed to be his most treasured possessions are gone, they are his no longer.

The Lord's coming will be like that. For all, and especially for the unprepared, there will suddenly dawn a day of stark self-awareness when with a flash of honest insight such as is rare even with the most mature and spiritual, it is realized that those things which have counted for so much in life—cars, clothes, homes, gardens, holidays, social standing, professional or business status—are seen to be of very little value in the presence of the Lord. It will be as though they have all been suddenly snatched away by a thief.

## CHAPTER 17

### "ALL NATIONS GATHERED BEFORE HIM"

*Matthew 25*

The Lord's Olivet prophecy of the Last Things includes the most detailed picture of the Judgement which Scripture presents. Yet one detail has served to confuse students of this chapter more than any other. Because Jesus said: "Before him shall be gathered all nations," the conclusion has often been reached that Matthew 25:31-46 is not the judgement of the Lord's own servants to which, for example, Paul alluded when he wrote: "we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ." Instead, it is assumed, this is a national judgement in which the nations are held accountable for their attitude to the Jews—"my brethren." *This* Judgement is taken as a final outworking of the divine principle which Abraham learned: "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee."

#### DIFFICULTIES

There are serious difficulties in the way of this interpretation. For instance:

- a. If this view is correct, then the doctrine of a judgement on a national basis rests on this Bible passage only, and it a highly debatable one, as it is hoped to demonstrate by and by. The precarious nature of conclusions which have only one (*sic!*) Scripture to support them has been demonstrated over and over again. Every sect in Christendom sins against this canon of Bible interpretation. It is a habit which Christadelphians must ever be vigilant against. Nowhere else in the Bible is such a "national" judgement described or even hinted at. So enthusiasts for this

particular interpretation of Matthew 25 should hesitate before they achieve dogmatism regarding it. "A doctrine which is based on one text of Scripture will generally be found to rest on no text at all. It is our duty to expound the dark places of Scripture by the clear ones, and to interpret the single texts of Scripture by the whole *proportion of Faith*" (C. Wordsworth).

- b. The mind boggles at the idea of a *national* judgement. How can it be applied? And if it can, then will it not inevitably involve a tremendous element of unfairness—by God Himself who says: "Come, let us reason together?" If the basis of judgement is to be that mentioned earlier—a nation's attitude to the Jews—then what of nations which have had no contact worth mentioning with the Jews?—Fiji Islanders, Eskimos, Hottentots. And what of nations which have changed again and again in their treatment of God's ancient people? In the reign of king John, England was outstanding in its persecution of the seed of Abraham; in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries she set the world a shining example of humanitarian treatment of them; in the period 1920-1950, the shameful thirty years, this country broke its promises to the Jews and indulged its administrators' prejudices against them to an extent that made imperial downfall inevitable. Then if the coming of the Lord takes place, say, in 1980, what kind of assessment will be made of this country's worth? Or must such judgement depend on what a particular nation does to the Jews in the last few years before the Lord returns? More than this, is it not obvious that nations are not morally all of one piece? Again, England in its year of grace 1969 is a striking illustration of the difficulty. In recent years no nation has thrown itself into moral decline and decay with the same dramatic thoroughness that this nation now exemplifies. Yet unquestionably it still has an unvocal core of wholesome good-living people (and the world's biggest colony of Christadelphians) with a decent humane attitude to the Jews, and with reverence for the Bible. Then if the English are to receive judgement as a nation in the Last Day, either the godless are going to be wonderfully blessed for the sake of the Bible-loving minority or the wholesome section of the nation is going to be dragged down to undeserved degradation and punishment because of the rest. It is all very difficult.
- c. In the details cited in this Matthew 25 picture of judgement, the actions commented on are only too obviously those of individuals to individuals, not of nations: giving food and drink to the needy, helping the sick, giving hospitality, visiting the miserable in prison. Some of these beneficent acts may be possible on a national scale, but certainly not all are.
- d. A further difficulty is this. The ground for rejection is not hatred or persecution (of the Jews) but just lack of positive good-will towards those designated "my brethren." As a basis for national reprobation this is somewhat difficult to understand.

#### ARGUMENTS THE OTHER WAY

Over against these unresolved problems there can be set a number of positive arguments which seem to favour or even require that the entire passage be read as describing the judgement of the saints in Christ, those who *are* "his brethren" and whose final destiny is declared when they "come forth unto the resurrection of life or. . . to the resurrection of condemnation."

- A. The passage itself seems to be decisive: "Then shall the King say to them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." These words can describe only one set of people—those who are the spiritual seed of Abraham, who have been chosen according to the gracious divine purpose in Christ before the world began (Ephesians 1:4). To apply this passage to any but these is to debase the meaning of Bible words. The "national judgement" theory comes to grief here immediately.

- B. "When saw we thee hungry, thirsty, sick, in prison, and did not minister unto thee" are the words of people very conscious of having lived lives of "Christian service." Ignorant nations of the world could not express themselves in such terms. These are the words of men intent on justifying themselves by amassing good works to their own credit!
- C. The phrase "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren. . ." only makes sense if "these my brethren" are present at the judgement. Indeed, by far the most natural interpretation is to take them as meaning the approved already set on his right hand.
- D. The accompanying parables—the faithful and unfaithful stewards, the wise and foolish virgins, the servants with the talents—all emphasize the theme of personal responsibility to "the Bridegroom," "the lord of the servants." Is it likely then that the last sixteen verses of this discourse switch suddenly to dealing with an altogether different principle—that of national responsibility?
- E. The Greek text of verse 32 strongly suggests the idea of individual responsibility. The grammatical point is somewhat technical and therefore not easy to explain without a lot of jargon. In Greek, as in nearly all languages, a plural noun takes a plural verb. But Greek has one marked exception to this rule. When the plural noun is neuter gender, the verb is singular. A good example of this is Revelation 1:4: "the seven Spirits which is before his throne." Here "Spirits," being neuter plural in Greek, is correctly followed by the word "is" (singular). The translators have rightly turned it into the plural "are."

Similarly in Matthew 25:32, the phrase "before him shall be gathered all nations" should normally have the verb in the singular form because "nations" is neuter plural (in Greek). Yet the verb is actually plural. It would seem that the words include a grammatical solecism for the sake of emphasizing (by the plural verb) that this judgement is to be on an *individual* basis.

A further detail serves to corroborate this conclusion. "And he shall separate *them* one from another. . ." should normally have the word "them" in neuter form to agree with the neuter word "nations"; yet in fact the pronoun is masculine, as though yet again to bring out emphasis on individual people.

- F. The similarity between the Lord's parabolic language about sheep and goats and the powerful prophecy of judgement in Ezekiel 34 is not to be missed (see especially verses 17, 20). This resemblance is not accidental. But Ezekiel 34 is about God's judgement of unworthiness *in Israel*, not among the surrounding nations. It would seem evident from Matthew 25 that Jesus was declaring the extension of the same principle of judgement to his spiritual Israel also. This is reasonable. But to pick up a prophecy about Israel and apply it to Gentile nations in their friendship or hatred of Israelis surely a dislocation not so easy to accept.
- G. There are several examples in the Old Testament of the word "nations" being used in the sense of "people out of all nations"; e.g. Psalm 9:17: "The wicked shall *return* (Hebrew) into Sheol, even all the nations that forget God." The word "return" implies that there has been a resurrection. And the word "forget" strongly suggests that this verse pictures the fate of those responsible to the God of heaven and yet neglectful of His law.

A much more appropriate example is Isaiah 25:7: "And he will destroy in this mountain (Zion, where Christ sits on the throne of his glory) the face of the covering that is cast over *all people*, and the veil that is spread over *all nations*." The next verse clearly shews that saints *out of all nations* are meant,

for it is for them that the Lord "will swallow up death in victory." There is Paul's authority for this interpretation in I Corinthians 15:54.

With such a case, both positive and negative, regarding this judgement passage in Matthew 25 should there not be considerable reluctance to promulgate the idea of a judgement of the nations? Or has some evidence the other way been overlooked? Are there other places in Scripture which teach such a doctrine? It would be interesting to know.

## CHAPTER 18

### GOG OF THE LAND OF MAGOG

*Ezekiel 38, 39*

For over a century this unique prophecy in Ezekiel 38, 39 has been the sheet-anchor of all the political expectations built round the prophecies of the time of the end. The main ideas deduced from it seem to be unshakable. At the same time the fact has to be faced that the enthusiasm of expositors has often run away with them. Now and then the handling of this prophecy has been quite unworthy of the stark grandeur of its theme. And it has to be admitted that even the most balanced and cautious attempts at elucidation of its details look in need of overhaul in the light of the altogether unexpected turn of events since 1948.

The biggest of the many mistakes that have been made is in the interpretation of the details of this Scripture by the help of ancient maps, political geography, and newspaper articles, rather than by Scripture itself. This kind of emphasis should always be accepted with considerable caution.

The identification of Gog with Russia appears to be fairly secure. That this is an allusion to Gugu, a Scythian king mentioned in a Babylonian inscription, seems reasonable; and the Scythians most likely inhabited all the area round the Black Sea. But a safer means of identification is the expression in 38:15: "thou shalt come forth from thy place out of the *uttermost parts of the north*" (RV). From the standpoint of one in Palestine this expression most obviously refers to Turkey or Russia, yet even this conclusion loses some of its inevitability when one encounters the same expression in Isaiah 14:13 (RV) regarding the king of Babylon!

#### PRECARIOUS IDENTIFICATIONS

The suggestion, once very popular, that Magog is Germany, is a pure guess, completely devoid of all Biblical support. The obvious meaning in Ezekiel would seem to be that Magog is the land the great leader, Gog, comes from.

Meschech and Tubal quite demonstrably are *not* Moscow and Tobolsk. In Ezekiel 27:13 they are listed among the many nations and peoples trading with Tyre. But that city of commerce traded only with the peoples of its own hinterland, like Damascus, Sheba, and Dedan, which had caravan routes reaching to the sea, and with those regions overseas which could be reached by their intrepid sailors—Javan, Carthage, Tarshish, and the isles of Elishah.

But Moscow and Tobolsk fall into neither category. It is difficult to envisage in what way those remote places could maintain a trade with Tyre in slaves and vessels of brass.<sup>1</sup> This identification rests solely on similarity of sound—a precarious foundation! By such a method it would be as reasonable to equate Gomer with Wales (Cymri). How much confident dogmatism has gone into the equation of Rosh with Russia for exactly the same reason and no other! Yet *rosli* is one of the commonest of Hebrew words. In all its hundreds of occurrences it is correctly translated "head" or "chief." Then how can anyone be sure that in this single place it should be treated as a proper name?

The Ethiopia mentioned in the Gogian confederacy is not necessarily modern Abyssinia. The Hebrew name is "Cush," which is the ordinary word for "black." As a geographical name it has more than one application. It may refer to an eastern Cush, the land of the black mountains (Genesis 10:6-8); or to Midian, the land of black tents (Habakkuk 3:7); or to the Sudan, the land of black people. From the context in Ezekiel 38 it is difficult to say with confidence which of the three is intended.

Attempts have often been made to include France in the list of invaders, as Gomer or Togarmah, but this seems to be the result of wishful thinking or guesswork more than the fruits of Bible evidence.

It would be, no doubt, both interesting and highly desirable to identify with certainty all the members of this military alliance, but the present state of knowledge counsels caution in this matter. The main point is clear and incontrovertible—a mighty invasion of the land of Israel from the north is indicated here.

#### BRITAIN?

Both the identification and the character of "Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish" have about them the same elements of uncertainty. The equation of all three with Britain, for many years asserted with supreme confidence, now (1969) begins to look slightly sick in the light of modern politics and the events of the past twenty years. "Perfidious Albion," which has systematically and cravenly broken all its promises to the Jews in a spineless attempt to keep friends with oil-rich Arabs, has, as its reward, achieved only promotion from a first-rate to a third-rate power in record time. The "toothless bulldog" is feared by none and respected by few. Its economic, political and social decay has become the best possible modern exemplification of one of the greatest truths in history: "Him that curseth thee, I will curse."<sup>2</sup>

Yet it has to be conceded that these facts in themselves do not rule out as hopeless the old familiar interpretation. Over the centuries God has brought about many strange and sudden transformations in the political scene, and the same thing could happen again, even though at the time of writing there is not on the horizon a cloud even as big as a man's hand.

The real criterion is still the evidence from Scripture—and a re-examination of this does not go far to allay misgivings.

It seems pretty certain that there was both an eastern (2 Chronicles 9:21 and 20:37) and a western (Jonah 1:3; Ezekiel 27:12) Tarshish. If the former is India, as seems most likely, there is little help towards identification with Britain, for the ties of both India and Pakistan with the old imperial power are now about as tenuous as they could be. Also, both are militarily innocuous, and the latter

<sup>1</sup> A similar argument based on Ezekiel 32:26 goes further to eliminate this interpretation.

<sup>2</sup> And in the Hebrew text, the second word here is much stronger than the first.

is strongly, almost violently, antagonistic to Israel. Nor does the fact that Phoenicians traded with England prove that country to be the western Tarshish, for the Phoenicians certainly traded also with Spain, a country far more rich than Britain in "silver, iron, tin, and lead."

In any case the phrase "merchants of Tarshish" is not bound to mean "merchants who live in Tarshish." It may simply mean "merchants who trade with Tarshish," and thus may indicate the much more local commercial power of Tyre. From this point of view it might be simpler to say that the merchants of Tarshish represent U.S.A. rather than Britain, though in that case all the usual supporting evidences educed from the familiar passages about both eastern and western Tarshish becomes not only valueless but a real hindrance. The passages listed above positively refuse to fit in with such a view.

"All the young lions" of Tarshish is another detail long overdue for re-examination. Even when the British Empire was at the height of its grandeur the application of these words to dominions and colonies, whilst apparently obvious enough, had precious little Biblical foundation to rest on. Why, one wonders, was the evidence of Ezekiel 19:2-6 on this point so consistently overlooked through several generations? There the young lions are the princes of the house of Judah (compare the way in which the greatest scion of that house is called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," and see also Genesis 49:9). Is it likely that Ezekiel would use the identical symbol with two widely differing meanings? More probably, surely, the expression describes either certain outstanding national leaders associated with Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish or, possibly, the great Jewish merchant princes who carry such influence in the world of commerce.

At one time and another much has been made of the phrase: "Art thou come to take a spoil and to take a prey?" If indeed the word "come" requires that the speaker be actually present in the invaded land or in close proximity to it, then modern developments and present prospects both make reference to a defensive challenge by Britain decidedly difficult.

#### SHEBA AND DEDAN

Again, Sheba and Dedan have been glibly replaced by modern Muscat and Aden. Even if this assumption were warranted (which it certainly is not), one would be left wondering why these somewhat obscure corners of British influence (if they can be so described today!) should be picked out as the foremost way of identifying the protector of Israel in the Last Days.

In any case, the Bible evidence concerning Sheba and Dedan altogether disallows the conclusion which has been so often uncritically reached.

Ezekiel 25:13 and Jeremiah 49:8 and 25:23 pointedly associate Dedan with Edom and Teman, which were certainly located to the immediate south and south-east of Israel, and not in the remote corners of the Arabian peninsula.

Concerning Sheba, there is at least one clear-cut line of evidence which makes identification with the southern corner of Arabia highly unlikely. Lamentations 4:21 identifies the land of Uz, where Job lived, with Edom. Mention of Eliphaz the Temanite supports this. The Sabeans who raided Job's oxen and asses were actually, according to the original Hebrew text, men of Sheba<sup>1</sup> (see Job 1:15 RVm). If Sheba is in the extreme south of Arabia, then these raiders had travelled across nearly a thousand miles of desert to capture beasts with which they had almost no hope of getting home —another thousand miles! Such considerations require that Sheba be placed along with Dedan in the *northern*

<sup>1</sup> The word for Sabeans is written quite differently.

part of the Arabian desert. And now where is the ground for identification with either Britain or America? The modernising of "Sheba, Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish" with Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria is at least as likely as the more familiar alternatives, especially in the light of the Septuagint reading "Arabs" for Sheba.

In recent years a completely different interpretation of the passage under examination has been canvassed. Instead of the words: "Art thou come to take a spoil. . .?" being read as a challenge and a rebuff to the northern invader, they can be taken to mean: "You are going to invade Israel and profit from its prosperity? then we will join you in this and share in the plunder." Such an interpretation is not impossible, and would certainly accord well with the historic character of the Arab races in their dealings with Israel.

So far the net outcome of the present investigation is to leave the main idea of the traditional interpretation of Ezekiel 38 where it was, but to throw some doubt on the soundness of many of the details associated with that exposition.

#### WHEN FULFILLED?

There remains another important aspect of the prophecy which has hardly had the serious consideration which it deserves, even though it is suggested more than once in the writings of Dr. Thomas. The assumption is often made, indeed it is usually taken as almost axiomatic, that this Gog-Magog invasion will take place before the coming of the Lord and will actually be the most clear-cut sign available to the saints that his return will happen almost immediately. Is there any single argument which points clearly to this conclusion? Certainly there are several difficulties in the way of such a view, and these are considerations which cease to be difficulties if the prophecy is read as having application to the time *after* Jesus has become King of the Jews in Jerusalem. These arguments, which have been discussed at greater length elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> are listed here briefly for convenience:

1. Israel dwelling securely. Can this ever be true of Israel whilst ringed round by hostile Arab states? "Dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates." The words have never shewn any sign of being true since 1948, nor—by ordinary judgement—can they be until Arab enemies become friends or subjects.
2. "To take a spoil and to take a prey." In itself the small state of Israel is a prize not worth grabbing by any greater power. It is true that the geographic situation of Israel would make it a prize worth having, but the prophecy does not hint at geographical advantage. Instead: "cattle and goods," i.e. material wealth. But once their Messiah rules over Israel, their material prosperity will be evident to all the world. And if meantime the world has been ravaged by nuclear war, famine and pestilence (Matthew 24:7), the contrast with the rest of the world will be all the greater.
3. The language used to describe the destruction of Gog and his army (39:17) is quoted in Revelation 19:17, 18 concerning the judgement meted out by him whose name is King of kings and Lord of lords. For those who believe in letting Scripture interpret Scripture, this and point 4 will be decisive.
4. The phrase "dwelling securely" is applied in Ezekiel 34:28, 24, 25 and in Zechariah 14:11 to the time when the kingdom is established.

<sup>1</sup> "The Last Days" chapter 1.

5. With the alternative concept—an invasion of the Land before the Lord's coming, the sequence of ideas in Ezekiel 37, 38 has to be completely disregarded:
- a. Valley of dry bones—Israel's final time of trouble.
  - b. The nation united in the Land.
  - c. Their Messiah ruling over them; God's sanctuary in the midst of them.
  - d. The invasion from the north when Israel are in peace and prosperity.

Admittedly, chronological sequence cannot be insisted on in prophecies of the Last Days; e.g. Zechariah 12-14: "in that day," Isaiah's "Little Apocalypse," chapters 24-26; the book of Revelation itself. But in Ezekiel 37, 38 the detailed parallel with Ezekiel 34 requires strict sequence.

- i "I will set up one Shepherd over them."
- ii "My servant David a prince among them."
- iii "And I will make with them a covenant of peace."
- iv "I the Lord will be their God. . ."
- v "and they, the house of Israel, my people."
- vi "I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land."
- vii "And they shall  *dwell safely*  in the wilderness (i.e. the open country; compare without walls, having neither bars nor gates)."

The first six of these seven quotations from Ezekiel 34 are found almost word for word in Ezekiel 37:22-27. But the last is repeated in 38:8, 11. The conclusion seems to be inescapable that since in chapter 34:23-31 the prophet is picturing the blessedness of Israel when Messiah's kingdom is fully established, the same is true in chapter 37, 38—including the expression "dwell safely." And since another *common* meaning of the Hebrew phrase is: "dwell in trust (in God)," this is probably how it should read here, emphasizing the conversion of Israel.

One difficulty in the way of this conclusion (that the Gog-Magog invasion happens *after* the return of Christ) is more apparent than real: "After that they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made them afraid."

This seems to indicate that Israel must suffer for their sins at the hands of Gog. Yet it need not. "They shall bear their shame" (RV) may mean repentance and acknowledgement of unworthiness rather than the suffering of punishment. In other words, this passage is equivalent to the familiar words of Zechariah 12:10, which tells of a repentance of Israel not only before Messiah's coming but even more poignantly afterwards.

It should be noted that there is no hint in Ezekiel 38, 39 that Israel suffers in any way from the northern invasion. "As a cloud to cover the land. . . to take a spoil and to take a prey" describes intention. There is no lasting achievement. No sooner is the land over-run than it is delivered by divine power.

The language of 39:3 seems to require this conclusion: "I will smite thy bow out of thy left hand, and will cause thine arrows to fall out of thy right hand." This is a picture of an invader still in action with his weapons of offence when he is annihilated. Thus any interpretation which requires Gog's occupation of the Land to last for several years, or even months, must be disallowed.

## CHAPTER 19

### THE CUP OF GOD'S WRATH

*Jeremiah 25*

Few prophecies of the Bible are so frightening in their comprehensive expectation of divine judgement as is Jeremiah 25.

The prophet is bidden take a cup of wine and insist that all the nations drink of it. This cup is a symbol of God's anger against them (compare Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17, 22, 23), expressed in the form of war one with another: "And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them" (v. 16).

A long list of the nations and peoples involved is now added. It ends with (v. 26): "And all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another, and all the kingdoms of the world, which are upon the face of the earth: and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them."

#### FEAR OF WAR

There is manifest reluctance to obey the prophet's bidding: "And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at thine hand to drink, then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Ye shall certainly drink" (v. 28). How accurately these words anticipate the temper of the nations today! They spend untold wealth and resources on a lunatic piling up of armaments, yet not one of them wants war. The frantic activities of the diplomats at each recurring crisis have made a dramatic series of panic-stricken refusals to drink the cup which they are destined to share. "Ye shall certainly drink!"

The prophecy is associated with the enthronement of a divine king in Jerusalem: "The Lord shall . . . utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes (see Revelation 14:19, 20), against all the inhabitants of the earth. . . he will plead with all flesh; he will give them that are wicked to the sword" (vv. 30, 31).

The war by which God uses the nations to punish themselves is one without parallel in human history: "Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation (compare the abuse of international broadcasting in modern times; and consider also the three unclean spirits like frogs, in Revelation 16:14), and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the uttermost parts of the earth. And the slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground" (vv. 32, 33).

#### WORLD WAR III

The twentieth century has seen two world wars which were not really world wars at all inasmuch as they left large areas and populations virtually untouched by their ravages and rigours. This next international conflagration will be comprehensive. Even if nuclear weapons are relatively local in their immediate effect, the insidious invisible radiation will carry round the world and bring slow death to millions. In the big centres of population the immediate onset of war will mean horrors of destruction such as few can adequately imagine. A year or two ago American civil defence was geared to an expectation of *seventeen millions* dead or seriously disabled in the first few hours of nuclear attack. It is only in the last twenty years that this grim Bible prophecy has come within sight of fulfilment.

## JERUSALEM

One detail is specially valuable. The list of nations and peoples coming under judgement *begins* with Jerusalem (v. 18): "Lo, I begin to work evil at the city which is called by my name. . ." (v. 29).

So it is futile to look to any international crisis elsewhere to spark off this final devastating cataclysm. Cuba, Vietnam, Yemen, Aden, Central Africa, Cyprus, Nigeria, are all unimportant. Eyes must be kept on Jerusalem. When the flare-up is seen there, the end of the age is near.

It is also noteworthy that the second on the list is Egypt (v. 19), and that all the others mentioned by name are Arab peoples and their immediate Near East neighbours. To begin with, then, the war is between Jews and Arabs.

The last name mentioned is "the King of Sheshach." This is probably a code form of the name Babel (by the device known to the rabbis as Athbash the equivalent in Hebrew of putting Z for A, Y for B etc.).

Assuming the correctness of this, the identification of the king of "Babylon" is still no easy matter. Many would say with confidence: "the Papacy," but the case is by no means proven. Yet what alternative is there available?

## CHAPTER 20

### THE LITTLE APOCALYPSE (I)

#### *Isaiah 24*

The three chapters, Isaiah 24, 25, 26, present so many resemblances to the language and ideas of the Olivet Prophecy and the book of Revelation that they are often alluded to as Isaiah's Little Apocalypse. There is a good deal to be said for this equation, especially when chapter 24 is considered in detail.

Certain similarities of phraseology and idea are traceable between that part of the prophecy and the Olivet Prophecy of Jesus:

<i>Isaiah 24</i>	<i>Olivet Prophecy</i>
	<i>Luke</i>
14 <sup>1</sup> LXX: The water of the sea shall be troubled	21:25 The sea and the waves roaring
19, 23 LXX: in perplexity	21:25 with perplexity (Gk: aporia —same word)
20: stagger like a drunken man	21:34 surfeiting and drunkenness.
17: the snare	21:35 lest that day come on you as. . . a snare
	<i>Matthew</i>
18: the windows from on high are open (=Genesis 7:11)	24:37 as it was in the days of Noah
23: Then the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed.	24:29 the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light
LXX: And the brick shall decay and the wall shall fall	24:2 not one stone left upon another

The similarities also extend to the general shape and pattern of the prophecy. In Matthew 24, after a preliminary summary, the Lord spoke in detail with special reference to the end of the Jewish era in A.D. 70. The second half of his prophecy (from 24:29 to the end of ch. 25) refers to the time of his coming. There is good reason for believing that the first half of the prophecy will also be recapitulated in the Last Days (see ch. 14).

#### ISRAEL IN THE LAST DAYS

The structure of Isaiah 24 is remarkably similar. But this fact can be obscured for some readers through failure to remember that in Hebrew the word *eretz* has to do duty for both "earth" and "land" (the land of Israel).<sup>2</sup> Many phrases in 24:1-12 seem to require special reference to Israel, and not to the whole wide world: "as with the people, so with the priest. . . The land is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the

<sup>1</sup> Septuagint Version.

<sup>2</sup> The same is true also in the New Testament regarding the Greek word *ge*.

everlasting covenant. (What reference can these words have to Gentile nations?) Therefore hath the curse devoured the land (compare Malachi 4:6: "Lest I come and smite the land with a curse"); therefore the inhabitants of the land are burned and few men left."

These words, and the entire section they belong to, will—it is believed—be recapitulated in the time of Jacob's trouble at the end of this age. In the short "bridge" passage (vv. 13-15), this probability is almost made into a certainty:

"When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done." This (so reminiscent of the Last Day prophecy in Isaiah 17:6) reads like a prophecy of a faithful remnant in Israel in their final tribulation. Here are the fruits of an Elijah-taught repentance. "These shall lift up their voice, they shall shout for the majesty of the Lord"—presumably when "they (the tribes of the land) see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." It is "the glory of his majesty when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Isaiah 2:19).

The mysterious phrase which comes next, "they cry aloud from the sea," becomes in the LXX version: "The waters of the sea shall be troubled," which inevitably takes the mind once again to the Olivet prophecy: "the sea and the waves roaring."

There follows a call to "glorify the Lord in the *lights*"—which phrase would surely be taken to allude to the Shekinah Glory if it were not for the parallelism: "even the name of the Lord in the isles of the sea." Then is this an allusion to the Dispersion being called, like those in the Land, to turn to the God of their fathers? This seems to be the first of several hints of a broadening of scope of the prophecy to include the whole world.

Alternatively this allusion to "glorifying the Lord" may refer to the call of the saints, for the prophecy continues: "From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs (LXX: wonders), even glory to the Righteous One (or, perhaps, hope for the righteous man)."

#### MISERY AND SUFFERING

In sharp contrast with this bright picture, there ensues a sustained description of unrelieved horror and destruction:

"But I (the prophet Isaiah, because of his concern regarding 'Jacob's trouble') said, My leanness, my leanness (i.e. intense starvation), woe to met the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously." The situations to which these words might have reference in the Last Days are legion, but the chief competitors are the broken promises of the politicians (in this respect the shameful record of Britain with the Jews through most of the twentieth century is hard to beat), and the "crafty counsel" (Psalm 83:4) of the inveterate Arab enemy. It is noteworthy that the prophet Jeremiah quotes verbatim this chapter (48: 42-44=Isaiah 24:17,18) with reference to Moab in the Last Days. And Isaiah's own "apocalypse" has a further reference to judgement on Moab which the present passage would more than amply justify: "For in this mountain (Zion) shall the Lord rest, and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill" (25:10).

## WORLD WAR

In the next few verses the language hardly allows of a limited application to Israel only. The sweep of the passage seems to be as universal as Jeremiah 25.

"Fear, and the pit, and the snare ('scare, lair and snare' is a translation suggested by the assonance of the Hebrew words) are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth (or, if limited to Israel, 'O dweller in the Land')." These terrors are now described in greater detail: "And it shall come to pass that he who fleeth from the *noise* of the fear (as though it were a mighty explosion!) shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare." There is hardly a government in the world which has not made elaborate preparations to go underground at the first threat of nuclear war. Yet those who come up out of such a "pit" will have to face the insidious imperceptible "snare" of the radioactive aftermath which is the legacy all these Satanic perversions of human cleverness inevitably entail. "For the windows from on high are opened (as though destruction comes down out of the sky), and"—terrifying result!—"the foundations of the earth do shake." The Biblical associations of these phrases are impressive. At the time of the Deluge God "opened the windows of heaven" (Genesis 7:11) and sent destruction on an evil world. And now once again a like retribution is inevitable, only this time by fire. Note the association of these two judgements in Peter's impassioned warning in 2 Peter 3:5-7. Also, in a powerful psalm of Messiah, the shaking of the earth is represented as an evident token of God's anger: "Then the earth shook and trembled. . . because he was wroth" (Psalm 18:7).

The horror of the picture intensifies: "The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage." The language is marvellously apt to describe the utter destruction and chaos which nuclear war will inevitably bring. "Removed like a cottage" suggests to the mind the idea of a frail shack battered and wrecked by a hurricane. "And it shall fall, and not rise again." This is to be the final end of all human vanity and self-assertion against God.

"And it shall come to pass that the Lord will punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth." The words seem to imply the existence of two kinds of armies—those who make war in the sky, and those who fight on the ground.<sup>1</sup> No wonder the prophets studied their own writings to see what they were all about (1 Peter 1:11)! "And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days they shall be visited." The precise meaning of this outcome of human rebellion is not clear, but the similarity with the symbolic picture of Satan's imprisonment and ultimate destruction, as given in Revelation 20, is not to be missed (compare also Isaiah 14:9-11, 15). These Scriptures are surely about the same thing.

## THE KINGDOM

The climax of this first section of the Little Apocalypse is a re-assuring picture of Christ's kingdom established: "Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously." This last phrase is surely a reference to the fulfilment of the Covenant of Promise. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, now raised to immortality, will experience the gladness of knowing in person their exalted Seed whose "day" they rejoiced to see (John 8:56). But especially are these words true regarding David, for to him it was explicitly promised: "thy kingdom shall be established for ever *before thee* (that is, in thy

<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, if the phrase "the high ones on high" is interpreted as a symbol, the reference will be to Israel and their encircling enemies.

presence)." Yet the same wonderful truth was known to Isaac and Jacob. The blessing which the latter received from his father implies this: "And God Almighty give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee and to thy seed *with thee*; that thou mayest inherit the land" (Genesis 28:4).

The shaming of sun and moon is susceptible of different interpretations. The view that here the sun stands for the ruling powers and the moon for the ecclesiastical powers is not so apt as the idea that the symbolism has reference to national Israel. In that case, here is another prophecy of the bitter remorse of Jewry when their Messiah is manifested: "They shall look on me whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son."

It is even possible that the words will have a literal basis. The Shekinah Glory associated with the risen Jesus when he appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus outshone the brightness of the midday sun (Acts 26:13). The same phenomenon will be known again (Malachi 4:2; Isaiah 60:1, 3 and 4:5).

## CHAPTER 21

### THE LITTLE APOCALYPSE (II)

*Isaiah 25*

The chapter division here is artificial. The burst of thanksgiving in verse 1 celebrates the assertion of divine authority in Jerusalem with which chapter 24 concluded: "O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done a *wonder of counsels*: of old are (thy) *faithfulness and truth*." The last phrase, which invariably alludes to the Covenants of Promise (compare 24:23: "his ancients") becomes in the Big Apocalypse the name of Jesus: "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war" (Revelation 19: 11).

Similarly, "a wonder of counsels" echoes the title of Messiah in Isaiah 9:5: "his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor." Thus this part of the prophecy declares itself a prophecy of Christ.

The picture of ruin and destruction of an altogether God-less civilization is continued: "Thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built." The end of the works of men is a final end. Now, and for all time, the divine right of man is swept away, and honour given to the Unknown God: "Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee. For thou hast been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress (here is the protection of the faithful remnant in the Last Days), a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall." It is the language of a nuclear age in fear from itself.

The next verse, puzzling enough in the Common Version, clamours for re-translation—perhaps thus: "With the sword of Zion thou shalt humble the noise of strangers, as when the heat burns under a Cloud (the Shekinah Glory?) a psalm shall bring down the terrible ones."

#### INCOMPARABLE BLESSING

The contrasting picture of God's blessing on His people is one of the most delightful to be found in all Isaiah's 66 chapters.

When the Law was inaugurated at mount Sinai, Moses and the elders of Israel saw the glory of the God of Israel "and did eat and drink"—they shared a meal of fellowship in the Divine Presence. But now, when the Gospel of Christ comes to its consummation, "in *this* mountain (Zion; see ch. 24:23) shall the Lord of Hosts make unto *all people* a feast of fat things. . . of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." Under the Law the choice fat was God's portion, to be offered on His altar (Leviticus 3:3-5), but now this is shared with mortal men who are mortal no longer, for they share the divine nature. "Wines *well refined*" is another phrase which teaches the same truth. In this happiest of re-unions is fulfilled the implied promise of Jesus: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

The covering over all nations (it clearly means "people out of all nations"—see chapter 17) which marks their leprous uncleanness in the sight of God (Leviticus 13:45) is now taken away. Death is swallowed up in victory and for ever (the Hebrew phrase has both meanings). It is not a conquest that will need to be renewed. Tears will be wiped from off all faces, and will never flow again. For this is the final and happy uniting of the Messiah with his redeemed people: "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him (because His very name Jehovah enshrines a purpose and a promise), we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation (in his Jesus!)." This "waiting" is not a selfish waiting but springs out of an intense eagerness to see the honour of God vindicated in a world which thinks it can do without Him: "With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgements are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord" (Isaiah 26:8, 9).

This vindication of the God of Israel will necessarily involve the assertion of His authority over the nations that have done despite to His people. So the prophecy continues with words which have often been read as out of place in this context: "For in this mountain (Zion, which was once a threshing floor!) shall the hand of the Lord rest," and the threshing floor of Jehovah shall be where such drastic divine action is most called for: "and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down in the dunghill." This Arab enemy, the last to vaunt himself against God's nation, will have his pride brought down "together with the spoils (or, craft) of their hands." And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.

## CHAPTER 22

### THE LITTLE APOCALYPSE (III)

*Isaiah 26, 27*

At first sight there is little in Isaiah 26 to justify its inclusion in any apocalypse, yet it begins with the familiar phrase: "in that day," which is such a favourite of both Isaiah and Zechariah when their inspiration ranges forward to the Day of the Lord. Here it recurs five times (25:9; 26:1; 27:1, 2, 12, 13), as though to emphasize that these chapters are not to be separated from chapter 24, the most ominous of them all. Chapter 26: 13-21 is the section specially relevant to the present study.

"Lord, thy hand is lifted up (as when Moses lifted up the rod of God over Egypt and over the Red Sea), yet they see not: but they shall see thy zeal for the people (Israel), and be ashamed; yea, fire shall devour thine adversaries. Lord, thou wilt ordain (literally: judge) peace for us" (26:11, 12)—it is a peace which can come only through judgement on ungodly nations—"for thou hast also wrought all our works for us." There can be salvation for Israel from their enemies only when they come to this admission before God that they are unable to save themselves. All through their history and in every aspect of life they have believed in salvation through their own works. What a change of heart is pictured here" "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, they have poured out a prayer when thy

chastening was upon them." This is the repentance of Israel as they turn to the God of their fathers in a time when no other door of hope is open to them. "Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight" (LXX: for the Beloved—'David my servant who is to be their prince for ever').

## THE RESURRECTION

Because of this spiritual re-birth there comes a flood of blessing: "Thou hast increased the nation (the Hebrew text strongly tempts one to see here another Messianic allusion: Thou hast provided Joseph for the nation); thou art glorified: thou hast enlarged all the borders of the land" (v. 15).

The nation is increased yet further by another accession of strength—the resurrection to glorious immortality of all the finest and most saintly characters it has produced throughout its history: "Thy dead shall live; dead bodies shall arise.<sup>1</sup> Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust: for thy dew is as the dew of lights (does this intensive plural refer to the dawn of the Great Day of God?), and the earth shall cast forth the dead."

As Paul insists in I Thessalonians 4:15 that "we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep," so it is in Isaiah (perhaps this is the Scripture from which he learned it!): "Come, my people (it is an exhortation addressed to a community), "enter *thou* into *thy* chambers (the pronouns indicate individual response to this call), and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself for a little moment until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth (or, perhaps, the dwellers in the Land?) for their iniquity."

The historical background to this prophecy is impressive. Devout king Hezekiah had called the people of Israel from north and south to come and keep Passover in Jerusalem. As it turned out, by this act of faith those who responded provided for their own protection and safety, for then the land was ravaged from end to end by the merciless armies of Sennacherib, and only Jerusalem remained undevastated. There, as at the first Passover, twelve legions of angels hovered in protection over the faithful (Isaiah 31:5), as they had done over the homes of the twelve tribes in Egypt at the first of all Passovers. And, as the destroying angel had gone through the homes of all families not protected by the blood of the lamb, so also in Hezekiah's day "the angel of the Lord went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians." Thus in Isaiah's own time, the faithful had their Passover refuge when divine judgement wrought deliverance.

## SAFETY

This prophecy assures the true Israel of God in the twentieth century of a similar protection in the day of wrath. As it was in the days of Noah, when the Lord said: "Come thou and all thy house into the ark. . . and the Lord shut him in."

How will protection be provided for the Lord's people in that day, and where? The idea that the saints will be taken away to Sinai or some other remote deserted place has little support in Scripture. Noah found safety in the ark which *he* had prepared "by faith." And it was "by faith" that the people of Israel kept the Passover in their own homes, made safe there by the blood of the lamb. Here Isaiah's pointed instruction is: "Enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about

<sup>1</sup> "together with my dead body shall they arise" springs from an attempt to make sense of the solecism in the Hebrew text. The reading given here calls for only the slightest emendation.

thee." This echoes the action of Elisha, when "he went in, and *shut the door* upon them twain, and *prayed unto the Lord*" (2 Kings 4:33); and in turn Isaiah is quoted by Jesus in the familiar words: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father" (Matthew 6:6).

From these words it would seem that the saints' place of safety in the last great crisis is the place of faith and prayer—which might be anywhere! Can any more specific conclusion, as to locality, be drawn from this Scripture? By reasoning from the parallel deliverance in Hezekiah's day (to which this passage originally referred), it may be argued with fair confidence that the place of safety will be Jerusalem, to which those who respond immediately (Luke 12:36) to the angelic summons (Matthew 24:31 and 25:6) will be taken; for, at the time of the resurrection and gathering of the saints, the Lord will already be established as king in Jerusalem (Matthew 25:31)<sup>1</sup> when the days of its warfare are accomplished and it is become truly a city of peace.

#### THE ADVERSARIES

"In that day," Isaiah 27 continues, "the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword (note the triple emphasis) shall punish

leviathan the swift serpent, and  
leviathan the (crooked) winding serpent, and  
he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea."

Here, easily identifiable, are the great political adversaries of God's people. In Isaiah's day the identification of them would be simplicity itself. Nineveh of Assyria is pictured as a great beast in the waters of the swift-flowing Tigris. Babylon is a similar monster in the waters of the slow meandering Euphrates, whilst Egypt is a crocodile in the vast expanse of the Nile (the word "Sea" is used in this sense in Isaiah 19:5 and Nahum 3:8). Any Jew of Isaiah's own day would readily recognize the allusions.

In the Last Days their counterparts may be sought in the implacable enemies of Israel who desolate the Holy Land for the last time. Or is it possible that these should be equated with the three great beasts of Revelation?

Yet another picture of this momentous time is the final gathering of Israel: "In that day the Lord shall beat off his fruit from the channel of the River (Euphrates) unto the stream of Egypt (now referred to as 'brook,' RV, because its power is dwindled away), and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel" (27:12). If this reading correctly interprets the figure of speech, then the picture is that of the few isolated olives being knocked off their remote branches by blows from long sticks. If, however, the RV margin be accepted: "shall beat out his corn," then the figure is that of threshing and winnowing, and should be equated with the vision in Revelation 14:15 of the crowned Son of man reaping the harvest of the earth with his sharp sickle.

Either way, the emphasis is on the selectivity of this final re-gathering: "Ye shall be gathered one by one." The word "channel" in this passage emphasizes the same truth, for it is the familiar word "shibboleth" (which also means "corn") of Judges 12:6. Just as, in that famous incident of Jephthah's campaign, "shibboleth" divided infallibly between friend and foe, so now in prophecy it becomes a

<sup>1</sup> "The Last Days" chapter 11.

token of a separation between those who are Israel indeed and those who are only nominal members of the nation: "And I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion" (Jeremiah 3:14. Compare also Amos 9:8, 9).

"In that day a great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and they that were outcasts in the land of Egypt (compare here the exposition of Isaiah 19:18-20 suggested in chapter 7), and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount of Jerusalem." It is the trumpet of Jubilee which is sounded, carrying the news of final release from bondage. It is the great trumpet because with the seventh and last (Revelation 11:15), the Messiah takes to him his Great power and reigns; it is "the time of the dead that they should be judged, the time to give their reward to thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear thy name, small and great."

## CHAPTER 23

### "WITH DYED GARMENTS FROM BOZRAH"

*Isaiah 63:1-6*

Traditionally few prophecies of the Last Days have been interpreted with more complete confidence than this one. When the Gog-Magog forces sweep into the Holy Land, they will simultaneously drive through to Egypt and also pursue the retreating defenders (the British army!) into Edom. At the crucial moment the Messiah and a mighty phalanx of warriors—the immortalized saints, now marching to the Land of Promise by the route followed by Moses and Israel—will come to the rescue and utterly destroy the invading army in a terrible carnage. This done, the march on Jerusalem is resumed, and the King of Glory enters his capital.

In the light of the current political situation and especially when the developments of modern warfare are considered, all this sounds rather odd. But quite apart from assessing this speculation in its relevance (sic!) to the twentieth century, it is surely time to take a fresh look at it and ask a few pointed questions about its *Biblical* basis.

Elsewhere ("The Last Days," ch. 10) it has been shewn that the evidence for believing that the Judgement will take place at Sinai is hardly satisfactory and certainly not such as warrants confidence. The idea of a wilderness march by immortalized saints, who in any case would be able to transport themselves with the speed of angels has a further element of incongruity, and appears to be based almost entirely on a mis-reading of Micah 7:15: "According to the days of thy coming out of Egypt will I shew unto him marvellous things." This passage does not necessarily mean that precisely what happened at the time of the Exodus will happen again with Messiah in place of Moses. All that can be safely got out of it is that the marvels of Israel's experience then will be matched by the manifestations of divine power through the Messiah. The entire scheme of prophetic interpretation often referred to as "the march of the Rainbow Angel" has been built on one or two assumptions of this kind. A judicious re-appraisal of the solidity of its foundations has long been overdue.

#### A NEW DELIVERANCE

In many parts of Isaiah (e.g. chs. 29-33) there are copious allusions to Israel in Egypt and the wilderness, yet in interpreting these chapters with reference to the contemporary crisis—Sennacherib's invasion of Judah—no one is misled into thinking that the prophet was foretelling a march of rescued Israel through the wilderness of Sinai. His message was, very simply and forcefully, that there was to be a divine intervention in his day on behalf of Israel such as would parallel in its breath-taking majesty and power the magnificent demonstration of divine glory experienced by

Israel under Moses.<sup>1</sup> And this duly took place, not in the wilderness of Sinai, but underneath the walls of Jerusalem. It is true that after the destruction of Sennacherib's army, many captives were released from bondage and returned with joy and thanksgiving to their homeland, but these came from Assyria, not from Egypt. If Isaiah's language about Sinai and the Exodus is not to be taken literally, but rather as a parallel to events in his day, is not the same likely to be true of his contemporary Micah? Of course the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah can be expected to have further fulfilment in the Last Days, but since the first fulfilment was not literal, how can one be confident that the second will be?

#### RE-INTERPRETATION

Returning to Isaiah 63, it has to be noted that the prophecy is couched in the most general terms, with the exception of the mention of Edom and its capital, Bozrah, and also the idea (v. 5) of redemption and vengeance when all hope seems to have been abandoned. Yet even the references to Edom and Bozrah are far from certain, for with only the slightest change in the pointing of the Hebrew text, the opening challenge may be read thus: "Who is this that comes, more than man, raiment more crimsoned than the grape-gatherer?"

If this reading be accepted, and it is just as possible as the more familiar translation,<sup>2</sup> then *no* geographical reference remains, and the prophecy is seen as a picture of divine intervention, truly, but not in any specific place.

Another approach to this problem accepts the AV reading but interprets it as an allusion to the Song of Deborah after the rout of enemies in northern Canaan: "Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. The mountains melted from before the Lord, even that Sinai from before the Lord God of Israel" (Judges 5:4, 5). This language is echoed in Isaiah 64:1: "O that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence. . ."

Again it has to be emphasized that in the days of Deborah there was no recapitulation of Exodus deliverance or wilderness journey, but there was a deliverance comparable to those mighty happenings, and this is the point of the allusion.

Even if the traditional interpretation of Isaiah 63 be accepted, it should not be overlooked that it could be fulfilled by the Lord coming first to Jerusalem, later seeking out certain enemies for special judgement in the territory of Edom and then returning to Jerusalem. There is nothing in the prophecy which rules out such an idea, and in Isaiah 25:9, 10 there is an exact parallel regarding Moab. It is this view which is favoured by the present writer, but only in a tentative fashion, because no arguments are known which definitely rule out the alternative modes of interpretation just mentioned.

#### HELP FROM JEREMIAH

It is not difficult to demonstrate that this "punitive expedition" in the direction of Edom is not against the forces of the great northern confederacy. Jeremiah 49:7-22 is a prophecy with marked similarities to Isaiah 63, and a careful reading of its details makes very clear that this is a judgement on the Arab enemy of Israel. Verse 12 repeats the language of Jeremiah 25:29, a prophecy which is

<sup>1</sup> Compare also Isaiah 63:9-15, a passage which makes the same point very clearly.

<sup>2</sup> See W. A. Wordsworth's *En Roeh*, in loc.

concerned first of all with Israel's hostile neighbours. Verse 19 also is important: "Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan against the strong habitation: for I will suddenly drive them away (RVm): and who is a chosen man that I may appoint over her? for who is like me? and who will appoint me the time? (or possibly: who will cause men to know me?), and who is that Shepherd that will stand before me?"

Who can this be but the Messiah? And he comes "from the swelling of Jordan," not from mount Sinai, against the proud enemy "that dwells in the clefts of Sela" (v. 16).

#### DETAILS EXAMINED

Other details of Isaiah 63 can now be considered more specifically.

"Who is this that comes from Edom? . . . I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." This is the leader with blood-stained raiment, described in Revelation 19:11-16 as "King of kings and Lord of lords" and also as "the Word of God." In that prophecy he has a sharp sword going out of his mouth—"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." The idea is the same. He speaks in righteousness, and judgement ensues.

It is a mistake, commonly made, to picture this divine Man as being alone in the judgement described. The Hebrew word translated "*trample* them in my fury" necessarily describes the action of a multitude. And in the parallel in Revelation 19, the crowned warrior is followed by an army "clothed in fine linen, white and clean." Since this is the description of the glorified saints (Revelation 19:8), and since the leader is already crowned, the saints have already been made immortal in Jerusalem ("The Last Days" ch. 10) by one whose kingdom is already in existence.<sup>1</sup>

Then in what sense is he "alone"? The next phrase explains: "of the *peoples* there was none with me." This word is commonly used with reference to the tribes of Israel. It is a redemption brought to Israel when at last they realize that their own efforts cannot save them. The rest of the chapter, so often neglected, emphasizes this theme. "The day of vengeance (vengeance for the oppression of Israel, not of the saints) is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come." The word "redeemed" implies a near kinsman. This is a greater Joseph saving his brethren, but only when they acknowledge the despoil done to him long before (Genesis 42:21).

The mention of "the day of vengeance" recalls Isaiah 34:8, which prophecy also is directed against Edom (34:6), in "the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion." "Red in thine apparel" is a play on the name Edom; and "I will *stain* all my raiment" plays with the (untranslatable) double meaning of a Hebrew word which also signifies "redeemed." Thus this dramatic- divine act—the Arm of the Lord bringing salvation (v. 5)—looks both ways. It is on behalf of a people reconciled to Christ and recognized as His kinsfolk. And it is against callous unspiritual enemies who refuse to see Israel as the Chosen Seed of Abraham with full right to the Land by divine covenant.

<sup>1</sup> Another possible interpretation here identifies these who are with Christ as his angels of judgement (note Revelation 15:6). This view would not seriously interfere with the main point being made in this paragraph.

## CHAPTER 24

### "WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING?"

2 Peter 3

There are more real difficulties in the exposition of this familiar prophecy than those who use it with such vigour are usually prepared to recognize. The first, and main problem is this: When Peter wrote these words, did he have his eye on A.D. 70 and "the Last Days of Judah's Commonwealth," or was his expectation ranging forward to the twentieth century?

Dr. Thomas gave the first of these two answers. Most Christadelphian expositors of the present day give the second. What are the pro's and con's?

The case for a First Century application will be summarized first, with rather less detail than Dr. Thomas was in the habit of allowing himself:

1. The words of the scoffers are: "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*" (v. 4). Such expressions, with their allusion to Abraham and David and to Genesis 1-3, would readily be made by Jewish adversaries of the gospel in Peter's own time, but read strangely as the cynical objection of modern sceptics.
2. The allusion to "scoffers in the last days" is surely taken—and with what appropriateness 1—from 2 Chronicles 36:16, which describes how in the last days of the Kingdom of Judah men mocked the messengers of God and scoffed at His prophets (the Septuagint Version has the same word as Peter uses), until at last there came wrath from God, the destruction of the temple, and the scattering of the people in captivity.
3. Jude 17, 18 quotes Peter's words about the "mockers in the last time" (the reference to 2 Peter 3 is unmistakable), and immediately continues: "These are they. . .," as though seeing the fulfilment *already* taking shape.
4. Verse 5a: "this (the story of Creation and of the Flood) they willingly are ignorant of." The words imply an authoritative record which the scoffers know as well as Peter does, but the implications of which they deliberately fail to face up to.
5. Verse 11: "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved . . ." Almost all the translations conspire to push this into the future, yet actually Peter used a present *continuous* tense, requiring the words to be read thus: "all these things (already) dissolving thus. . ." Certainly it is difficult to associate such a verb form with the distant future (from Peter's point of view).
6. Verses 11, 12: "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and hasting the coming of the day of God." Three points require to be noted here: (a) the AV reading: "hasting unto" is permissible but in this context meaningless. How can a man hasten unto the coming of Christ? To make sense of it this way the word has to be slanted or paraphrased so drastically as to drag it clean away from its proper meaning; (b) "what manner of persons ought ye (first century believers) to be. . ."the exhortation has little point if there were yet nearly two milleniums to roll by; (c) since so long a time has elapsed before the return of the Lord, their "holy living and godliness" either were not in evidence or else did not have much effect in "hastening the coming."

7. Verse 8: "with the Lord. . . a thousand years is as one day." The words are taken from Psalm 90:4, a psalm of Moses about the forty years of hardship endured by God's Israel in the wilderness. Then can it be that Peter saw that experience as a parallel to his own generation? As the forty years in the wilderness was followed by the establishment of the Kingdom of God under Joshua-Jesus, so the A.D. 30-70 period would be followed by the overturning of the church's greatest adversary—Judaism, enthroned in Jerusalem.
8. Verse 10, which seems to be the sheet-anchor of the "twentieth century" exposition, actually goes along with the A.D. 70 application just as well. "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise" finds a parallel in Psalm 102:26, words which are cited in Hebrews 1:10, 11 with reference to the end of the Mosaic order: "the heavens are the works of thy hands: they shall perish, but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment. . ." Isaiah 51:6 has the same idiom: "the heavens shall vanish away like smoke. . . but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished." There can be little doubt that this is a prophecy of the passing of the Law and the bringing in of the imputed righteousness proclaimed in the gospel.
9. "The elements shall be dissolved (unloosed) with fervent heat." Justin Martyr and others understood this word "elements" to refer to heavenly bodies. In which case it is not inappropriate to mention that just before the fall of Jerusalem Halley's Comet was visible for a protracted period, "hanging over the city like a drawn sword." But the Biblical association of "elements" is with the ordinances of the Law of Moses: Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20. With the burning of the Temple, the exact keeping of the Law became an utter impossibility.
10. "The *earth* also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." The Greek word here could equally well refer to the Land of Israel. It is so used in the New Testament in at least twenty places—and many more times in the Septuagint Version. So this passage speaks of judgement on the Land where all emphasis is on *works* and not on faith.

This catalogue of supporting evidence makes a fairly strong case. But another look, this time at the other side of the picture reveals certain features in this prophecy which seem to require reference to the personal return of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

1. "Where is the promise of his coming?" is a phrase difficult to refer to any manifestation of divine judgement except the personal revelation of Christ in glory.
2. "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night" (v. 10). This figure of speech always refers to the return of Christ in the Last Day: Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; Revelation 16:15. The fall of Jerusalem did not come "as a thief in the night," for disciples of Christ in the city were able to read the signs of the times and make good their escape.
3. "Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God" (v. 12) cannot be applied to A.D. 70 at all, for it is not possible to believe that that holocaust was hastened by the faithfulness of Christ's disciples.
4. "New heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (v. 13) can only mean the bringing in of Christ's Kingdom, as in Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; Revelation 22:1, 27.

<sup>1</sup> The point needs to be made that not in any sense was A.D. 70 a second coming of Christ. All the prophecies of the fall of Jerusalem represent it as the wrath of God because of the rejection of His Son; e.g. Luke 20:15, 16. Let the parable in Luke 13:6-9 be studied carefully and the characters identified. Then let the pronoun "thou" be given its due force. Similarly, the "he" in Mark 12:9 needs to be carefully identified.

5. "Be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (v. 14) can likewise mean only one thing: the day when Christ returns with blessing for his faithful.

Thus the situation has come about that a vital chapter of Bible prophecy is expounded by two schools of thought in two radically different ways, neither group giving much attention to the evidence cited by the other—which is hardly a satisfactory attitude to adopt.

#### O.T. METHODS APPLIED

There is a way out of the impasse—by following the method of interpretation normally applied to many an Old Testament prophecy.

It is commonplace experience with Bible prophecy to find that such Scriptures often have more than one fulfilment. Psalm 72, "a psalm for Solomon," will have its true fulfilment in the Kingdom of Christ. Psalm 2 doubtless sprang out of some critical experience in David's own life, but is applied by the New Testament to the first rejection of Christ (Acts 4:25-27) and also to his coming again in glory (Revelation 19:15; 2:27). Nearly all of Isaiah's prophecy had reference to the circumstances of his own time, but in a score of places the New Testament requires an application to Christ and his work. The early chapters of Zechariah are based on the return of the captives from Babylon but are also undoubtedly Messianic. The Olivet Prophecy is in two main sections—the first appropriate to A.D. 70 and the troubles immediately preceding it, and second concerning the coming of the Lord. But it has been shewn in chapter 14 that the first section should also be re-read with reference in the Last Days. There are many many more examples of this kind of thing.

Then why is it that the study of Prophecy in the New Testament makes so little allowance for the same principle? Strange, truly, that so many Old Testament prophecies should readily be expounded on the basis of a dual fulfilment but the same possibility for the greatest prophecy of all—the Apocalypse—not be even contemplated! But that is another subject. Here it is more germane to suggest that the key to the difficulties in 2 Peter 3 lies in its application, first and in a fragmentary way, to the Last Days of Judah's Commonwealth, and then, fully and completely, to the Day of the Lord's personal return.

The rest of this chapter will be devoted to a consideration of some of the outstanding details in it, from the second of these points of view.

#### HEAVENS AND EARTH

A difficulty of some magnitude arises out of the five-fold reference to "heavens and earth" (vv. 5, 7, 10, 12, 13). The first of these is undoubtedly literal—a straight allusion to the Creation (Genesis 1:6, 9). The last is just as certainly symbolic, as the parallel passages plainly require. The problem is: how to read the other three? It is difficult to be certain about this, but probably they are to be taken literally, in a way that will be suggested by and by.

Peter's first argument against the mockers is this: They choose to overlook the fact that that which God constituted and equipped in Genesis 1 He later destroyed in Genesis 7—the implication being that what He has done once He may well do again. All things do not continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. Peter was obviously writing with a vivid memory of his Lord's own words: "Even as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man" (Luke 17: 26). But though the, main point of the Deluge allusion is clear enough, the details are obscure. What is the point of describing the earth as "standing out of the water and in the water"? And the word "whereby" (literally: by means of which things) appears to be redundant, unless perhaps it refers

back to the heavens and earth being the source of the overwhelming flood. A re-translation is perhaps permissible here: ". . . that of old the heavens were, and the earth (emerging) out of the water, and by (or, in) the Word of God through water it endured (i.e. the earth itself was saved by being baptized!), through which things the civilization that then was, being overwhelmed by water, perished."

#### STORED WITH FIRE

There is appropriateness in reading here an allusion to the fact that in Noah's day destruction came from both earth and heaven (see Genesis 7:11), because Peter's next argument is that in the time to come once again destruction will come from both earth and heaven: "But the heavens and the earth which are now, by (or, in) the same Word (of God) have been *stored with fire* against the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men."<sup>1</sup> Until August 1945 it was difficult to make any sense at all of these words. To give them a vague figurative meaning was almost the best that could be done with them, yet such an interpretation only created another problem—the contrast with the literal "heavens and earth" of verse 5. But since that epoch-making day of the first atomic bomb, the literal character of this prophecy has become increasingly obvious. Today the earth is literally "stored with fire." America and Russia between them have a stock of nuclear-fission devices big enough to wipe out civilization two or three times over. And there is reason to believe that the heavens also are "stored with fire," in view of the immense amount of controlled "hardware" which has been put into orbit round the earth, much of it capable of being brought back on any selected target. The phenomenal development of laser beams opens up another breath-taking possibility in the fulfilment of Peter's words. Certainly there is far less difficulty today in a literal reading of them than there is in any figurative interpretation which might be suggested.

It is interesting to enquire where these things are foretold "in the same Word of God." In what part of the Old Testament? So far, the best answer available has been Isaiah 24:21, which speaks of judgement on those who make war in two elements—on the earth and in the sky: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth." But there is probably some other prophecy which is more pointed than this.

So far Peter's answer to the mockers' criticism about "delay" is: Noah's Flood may have seemed long overdue, but it came; and since the Word of God also foretells judgement by fire, that too is inevitable.

#### PETER'S NEXT ARGUMENT

This point is immediately supplemented with the appropriate reminder that "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years," that is, when He chooses God can act with such breath-taking swiftness as to bring about in one day developments for which men would estimate a thousand years. It is a point which needs to be well taken by those who are in the habit of assuring themselves, and others, that the coming of the Lord is still an appreciable length of time away because such and such events have to happen first. Peter's words mean that, even if these confident interpretations of prophecy are correct, God may bring about their fulfilment with such startling suddenness that the call concerning "the Bridegroom" will come to virgins who are asleep.

<sup>1</sup> Mark the lovely contrast in 1 Peter 1:4.

Also, this powerful statement is another nail in the coffin of the theorists who believe that the year of the Lord's return can be calculated in advance. The logic of Peter's words means a possible error of as much as a thousand years in one's calculations, so the exercise is one of somewhat limited value.

"And a thousand years as one day." This rather bewildering paradox must surely mean that it is idle to talk of "delay" where God is concerned. To Him delay means nothing, so great is His time-scale. A "delay" of a thousand years would be comparable to being one day off reckoning in the life of a human being.

#### CLIMAX

Next comes *the* great positive statement of this chapter: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." In other words, any apparent delay is due to the loving kindness of a God reluctant to snatch away from His creatures their unused opportunity of salvation. It is a principle much neglected by the present generation, yet taught over and over again in Scripture. Twice more Peter comes back to it in this chapter: "be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is (your opportunity for) salvation" (vv. 14, 15). More positively: "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God" (vv. 11, 12). That is to say, lack of true repentance in God's people may have the effect of holding back the fulfilment of His purpose, and conversely, repentance and godliness will bring the great Day so much more speedily.

The same idea is implicit (some would think explicit) in the words of Peter in Acts 3:19, 20 RV: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted," that three blessed consequences may ensue: (a) "that your sins may be blotted out;" (b) "that there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord;" (c) "and that he may send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you." When the structure of this statement is properly appreciated, the third item in it makes the coming of the Lord dependent on the repentance and conversion of the Israel of God (both national and spiritual).

This is an awe-inspiring doctrine, for it puts on the believer of the present day a terrible responsibility. By his holy life and godliness he has it in his power to bring the day of Christ's kingdom nearer. It is also true that a life of selfish indifference and faithlessness may put the brake on God's purpose for the re-habilitation of a sick world.

#### NUCLEAR DESTRUCTION?

Peter's argument in answer to the unreasonable is now done. There remains only for him to renew his exhortation to those who are willing to take his words seriously. This is done by a solemn and powerful reminder of the inevitable judgement. It will come "as a thief in the night" to those who are not "looking for the coming of the day of God." It will involve terrible happenings in which "the elements shall melt with fervent heat." The most obvious application of these words is to nuclear fission, especially since the next words are "the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." In the detonation of any nuclear device, the elements do literally melt with fervent heat. Even in this connection, Justin Martyr's reference to heavenly bodies may not be altogether out of place, when it is considered what a wide variety of contraptions have been flung into orbit round the earth in the past few years. Yet another suggestion, decidedly *ad hoc*, is that Peter's words may be fulfilled through the earth's gravitational acquisition of an uncomfortably large lump of anti-matter from outer space—something like the so-called Siberian meteorite of 1908. But

speculations of this sort, whilst within the bounds of possibility, are clean outside the scope of Biblical study and therefore of this investigation.

It has to be said in all honesty that as yet the present writer has been unable to assign any sort of clear-cut idea to the words: "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise." The word "noise" may encourage a nuclear interpretation (compare Isaiah 24:18), but what is meant by "the heavens shall *pass away*" There is confidence only in a rejection of the idea that this is a symbolic way of saying: "all human government will be abolished."

Whatever horrors are yet to be experienced, there is little to be feared by the Lord's faithful. They "look for the coming of the day of God." They "look for new heavens and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." And since they "look for such things," they "give diligence to be found of him in peace." The two characteristics go hand in hand. According to the intensity of a man's expectation and confidence, so is his diligence.