

I AM THE COMPANION OF ALL
THAT FEAR THEE,
AND OF THEM THAT KEEP

Thy Precepts

PSA. 119:63

KEEP BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WHICH
DWELLS IN US THE GOOD DEPOSIT
ENTRUSTED. 2 TIMOTHY 1:14

Jan/Feb 2001
Vol. 16, #1

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New Pamphlet

An Exposition of 2 John With Some Comments on Gal. 5:9 and Rev. 2 & 3

A series of pamphlets on the subject of the holiness of Christian fellowship is being prepared. If the Lord will, there will be substantial expositions of various passages of Scripture coupled with documentation, and refutation, of what is brought forward to shirk responsibility while addressing the unfaithfulness in a cloak of false love. Among other things, the evil teachings in *The Lake Geneva Conference Report* will be addressed.

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An Observation on the Subject of the So-called “Pretribulation Rapture”

In *Elements of Dispensational Truth*, vol. 1, the subject of alleged precursors to J. N. Darby was examined. These are persons alleged by Scofieldians as holding some elements of dispensational truth. To such Scofieldians JND becomes merely a systematizer. When Scofieldians look at the schemes of the alleged precursors, they find that some ages are distinguished by them, and, behold, there are some precursor to JND! The error is, at bottom, equating *ages* with *dispensations*. Moreover, in the Scofieldian system the dominating and characterizing feature of *ages* is extended into making a Church age, etc., and to continuing the testing of the first man -- man in a fallen, Adamic standing in responsibility -- to see if he is recoverable -- beyond the cross and on to the millennium. The truth is that man has already been demonstrated to be unrecoverable. The *final test* was the revelation of the Father in the Son, but Both were rejected (John 15:23, 24). The results of this final test are traced in the book cited above, which the reader may consult. The point is that when Scofieldians find age distinctions, they conclude that they have found precursors to the *dispensationalism* taught by J. N. Darby. In this they reduce him to a systematizer.

A similar effort is also made in connection with the removal of the saints before the outpouring of God's wrath. In fact, it is easier to find precursors to the recently espoused position called the “pre-wrath rapture.” In this scheme, the rapture allegedly occurs perhaps 2/3 of the way through the last half of Daniel's 70th week supposing that to be about the time of the pouring out of wrath. The interesting thing about all this is that if something akin to this view is found in a precursor to J. N. Darby -- ah! there is a precursor of pretribulationism. But if Marvin Rosenthal presents the “pre-wrath rapture,” -- Ah! the same alleged precursor may be something akin to posttribulationism. Well, it is very convenient to have it both ways, as it suits one's purpose, is it not? At any rate, the kinship to posttribulationism is more accurate.

Another consideration is that the *last half-week* of Daniel's 70 weeks opens “the great tribulation.” Thus, the expression, “pretribulation rapture,” might open the door for a mid-week rapture because the great tribulation does not commence until the beginning of the last half-week.

Thus, does pretribulation rapture mean a rapture just before the opening of the last half-week? Or, does it mean it will occur before the opening of the 70th week? Or, does it mean it will occur before the last, say, third of the last half-week? Or, will it occur just before the mis-named “battle of Armageddon”? I perceive that the expression “pretribulation rapture” may have considerable flexibility imposed upon it. It struck me to search the Darby CD-ROM for the word pretribulation (and pretribulation) and it was not there! Then I looked at the Kelly CD-ROM, and lo, it was there in three places -- in brackets as added for explanatory reasons. It was there because of my having added these explanatory brackets in

The Writings of W. Kelly on Prophecy, a PTP publication, which was used by permission in the production of the Kelly CD-ROM. I do not know why these two voluminous and able expositors did not use the expression “pretribulation rapture,” but considering the matter over-all, it is well. They avoided the ambiguity noted above.

Of course, a right understanding of the distinction between Israel and the church precludes any saints who are part of the true church from being present in any part of Daniel's 70th week. “The hour of trial” noted in Rev. 3:10 is a very comprehensive designation that embraces the whole epoch from the opening of the 70th week and includes the appearing of the Lord in glory and His subsequent dealing with the enemies and nations (during part of the 75 day interval -- see Dan. 12). The hour of trial has in view the whole habitable earth, but with special reference to a moral class of persons referred to some 10 times in the Revelation: “them that dwell on the earth.” These are thus contrasted with those dwelling in heaven (cp. Rev. 13:6). These earth-dwellers are the apostates of Christendom, not every person living on the globe. The promise in Rev. 3:10 is exemption from “the hour,” i.e., from *the time* of it. The saints will be caught up before the commencement of that hour, that time.

“The great tribulation” begins at the middle of the 70th week. In Matt. 24:8, the first half-week is referred to as “the beginning of throes.” In the middle of the week Satan is cast down from heaven (Rev. 12), the abomination that makes desolate is set up (cp. Matt. 24:15), the Jewish sacrifices cease (Dan. 9:27), ecclesiastical Babylon is overthrown (see Rev. 17), the mortal wound of the beast is healed (see Rev. 13), and the Antichrist is revealed (2 Thess. 2). Thus, the apostasy begins (see 2 Thess. 2) in the middle of the 70th week. And this all marks the onset of “the great tribulation.”

What is called “literal interpretation” never brought the alleged precursors of JND to the understanding of a pre-Daniel's 70th week rapture, nor to the other things that go into such an understanding. Such an understanding is not even found in the so-called “Apostolic Fathers.” Rather, the Judaizing of the church began very early, hindering understanding. Thus, any view of Israel's future blessing was thought to be via Israel's incorporation into the church.

The expression, “the pre-Daniel's 70th week rapture,” is more clear than the expression, “the pretribulation rapture,” which might be taken by some to refer to a rapture at the middle of the 70th week just preceding the events listed above (or, even to a rapture later in the last half-week). “The pre-Daniel's 70th week rapture” clearly states what JND taught. And what is involved in such a teaching is not only the great and important distinction between Israel and the Church, a necessary understanding, but also the place of the godly Jewish remnant who are the “elect” of Matt. 24. These godly ones are largely seen in the Psalms. It was J. N. Darby who brought this out in his expositions of the Psalms. And so he did also in the case of the Song of Songs, but there the subject is the forming of the affections of the remnant; whereas, the Psalms have more a governmental character of God's dealings with them. Thus, through JND's ministry, many

Scriptures were returned to the Jews in their proper understanding. All of this involved a great break with what went before him; not, however, concerning foundation truths of the faith once for all delivered to the saints, though I do not doubt for a moment that these truths also received a fuller, and richer, and more correct, exposition by him.

The truth of the end of the testing of the first man, the truth of the new creation, and many other truths, were brought before many saints through his ministry, all connected together with dispensational truth (as he taught it), and with Christ's present and future glories.

It was a Philadelphian recovery. This article about the so-called pretribulation rapture is purposely placed here before an article on *The Seven Churches*, which will have something to say about what the assembly at Philadelphia (Rev. 3) foreshadowed, as well as about Laodicea. But before turning to that article, some thoughts on what is meant by the expression 'ecclesiastical Babylon,' as distinct from 'political Babylon,' may be helpful and to that subject we now turn.

Ed.

Babylon in the Book of Revelation ***and*** ***"The Times of the Gentiles."***

"The times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24) began with the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. These times were marked by the setting aside of Israel as the acknowledged people of God. The nation was pronounced to be Lo-ammi (not my people) in Hos. 1. The Shekinah left, and in Daniel God is referred to as the God of heaven, in keeping with this dispensational change. Of course, in divine purpose, God still has them before Himself as His people. In the millennium they will again be His *acknowledged* people (Hos. 2) and, as we see in Ezek 40-48 the Shekinah will return. Then shall the nation of Israel be composed of all saved ones (Rom. 11:26); they will be the new Israel under the new covenant.

Meanwhile, up to the cross the testing of the first man continued in Israel, though the nation did not stand as the *acknowledged* people of God. With the rejection of the revelation of the Father in the Son (John 15:22, 23), the epoch of the testing of man, from *fallen* Adam until the cross, was concluded. Meanwhile, the times of the Gentiles roll on until the smiting stone falls on the feet of the image (Dan. 2); i.e., Christ will come in power, destroying the Gentile power of empire. The kingdom then passes into His hands. The smiting stone becomes a great mountain and fills the earth. That is His millennial reign.

The times of the Gentiles, then, is depicted in the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2). The power of Gentile empire was committed by God into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. It is instructive to note that the head of gold is stated to be Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:38) and that the first of the four powers depicted by the image is the *Babylonian* empire. Now, *this point is to be noted*. The power

first committed to the Babylonian is the same power that will be there when Christ appears in glory. Yes, that committed power has a Roman form at the end, but that does not change the fact of the continuity of the power first committed to the Babylonians. That committed power runs on during an epoch called "the times of the Gentiles." And this is why "Babylon" is used in a figurative way in the Revelation. Failure in responsibility for the use of the power committed to the Babylonian ruler must be judged. The next three empires depicted in the image are successors to this power, whatever form it may take in these successive empires.

Now, Babylon has two aspects to it in the Revelation, just as it did in Nebuchadnezzar's time. It had, and will have, a religious side and a political side. Thus, in Revelation, the religious side is seen in the harlot of Rev. 17. The harlot will be destroyed in the middle of the 70th week of Dan. 9 by the beast (Rev. 13:1-10) and the 10 kings (Rev. 17:16, 17) and this opens the way for the revelation of the Antichrist (2 Thess 2; Rev. 13:11-18) and the commencement of the apostasy, when the worship of the Triad (Satan, the Beast, and the Antichrist in Jerusalem) begins. The beast and the 10 kings destroy the harlot (religious Babylon) and continue on for the last 3½ years. They are the political side of Babylon, and the political side is destroyed just after the end of the last 3½ years, in the pouring out of the seventh bowl (Rev. 16:19). When this distinction between the religious aspect of Babylon and the political aspect of Babylon is seen, various difficulties are cleared up.

Note well, then, that the Beast, the head of the revived Roman Empire (Rev. 13:1-10), is the last one to hold the political power of empire originally given to the Babylonian, Nebuchadnezzar.

Lucifer (Isa. 14) is not Satan. Certainly, and quite understandably, he *reflects* Satan, and Satan will be publicly worshiped during the last 3½ years. But Lucifer is called the **king of Babylon** in Isa. 14:4. Yes, he is the last holder of the political power of empire given to the Babylonian, Nebuchadnezzar. That was the starting point; and what has become of that power in the hands of the Gentiles? The most solemn judgments will fall on the dominion of the Beast, and he himself, and the false prophet (the Antichrist), will be summarily cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 19). So, religious Babylon is destroyed first, in the middle of Daniel's 70th week, and political Babylon is destroyed later. Seeing this double use of Babylon will remove difficulties in understanding parts of the Revelation.

Helpful comments on the double use of Babylon in the book of Revelation are found in A. C. Brown, *The Revelation Chronologically Arranged*, sec. ed., Revised, with Chart. He regarded the matter of the use of Babylon in the Revelation as "the most perplexing problem in the book," p. 11.¹ Ed.

1. Available from Present Truth Publishers.

The Seven Churches

Chapter 2

(Continued)

The Literal, or Historical, View

PRACTICAL PROFIT FOR OUR SOULS

Profit from the study of Rev. 2 & 3 may be obtained by considering the seven churches as, first of all, literal churches. They existed when John wrote and described their several states. Next, there are practical things that can be gleaned from the seven addresses, by Christians in any period, that will help them in being here for Christ. Finally, these seven churches foreshadow a number of periods and states in the history of the church from the time John wrote until the second coming of Christ.

Someone has commented on the practical use of the seven letters:

. . . we may view these seven epistles in another, a practical light, as affording instruction and profit for God's saints throughout the whole period between John's day and the Lord's return in the air. For, though addressed each one to the angel of the local assembly designated in the letter, the whole seven were to be made acquainted with the message of each (ch. 1:11). Thus, whilst each assembly was acknowledged to be distinct from the other six, it was to be concerned with the letters written by the Lord's commands to the rest. Distinct assemblies they indeed were, each one responsible to Him, yet all parts of the one assembly on earth of which He is the living and glorified Head. So the address sent to each one was to be communicated to them all. Nor were they to be confined to themselves in their day. People in Greece and Syria, as well as Egypt and Italy, were to take heed to the things here declared, as we learn from the one exhortation common to them all, which applies as much to us as to every listener and reader in John's day, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."²

THE RUIN OF THE CHURCH HAD ALREADY TAKEN PLACE

This Ruin is Evident from Rev. 2 & 3 Itself. Consider the fact that these seven churches were in these various states when John wrote: how soon general failure took place! It reminds us of what God said to Moses when he was on mount Sinai:

2. *The Bible Treasury*, 9:223.

"They are quickly gone out of the way." Over and over in man's history such failure been demonstrated -- and the church of God, seen in responsibility as a lightbearer on earth, is not an exception. The bulk of saints do not seem to grasp the fact that the church is in an irremediable state of failure. It is because of this fact that the book of Revelation was written. Of old, it was true that failure was the occasion of prophecy. When failure came in on what God had set up, the voice of prophecy was called forth pronouncing judgment on the failure. God marked what He would judge and this gave light to the faithful to walk in separation from the evil and from what He would judge.

The book of Revelation is the great NT book of prophecy -- the writing of it was consequent upon the failure of the vessel of testimony on earth. The writing of the book is the standing witness to the fact of that ruin. Concerning some of the evils noted as existent, another wrote:

The Nicolaitans had troubled both the assembly at Ephesus and that at Pergamos. Those falsely called Jews, that is, God's people on earth, but here declared by the Spirit to be of the Synagogue of Satan, were met with at Smyrna and at Philadelphia. Persecution had raged at Pergamos, during which Antipas, Christ's faithful martyr, had sealed his testimony with his blood; and the devil by similar means was about to try the faithful in Smyrna. Doctrinal evil had gained a footing in the assembly in Pergamos, and was rampant in that in Thyatira; while deadness had crept over the assembly at Sardis, and lukewarmness characterized that in Laodicea. How soon had the light begun to burn dim, and how great was the triumph of the enemy, even before the last of the apostles had been removed from the earth! In Thyatira the bulk of the assembly, the angel included, had been seduced by the teaching of one called (symbolically one may believe) Jezebel; in Sardis a few only had kept their garments undefiled; and in Laodicea it was a question to which their subsequent conduct would furnish the answer whether any in that assembly had spiritual life in the soul.³

Ruined While Apostles Still Lived.

Paul had warned that the mystery of iniquity (lawlessness) was already at work (2 Thess. 2:7). When the "lawless one" is *revealed* it will no longer be a mystery, a matter that we believers are privileged to understand now. It is man's will systematically working in the sphere of the profession of Christianity; and this self-will is to culminate in the revelation (2 Thess. 2:8) of the Antichrist. By the time Revelation was written (AD 90s) we can plainly see in, say, Pergamos and Thyatira that the mystery of iniquity had already worked. The fact is that the church fell while some apostles were still living and the Spirit used them so that we have inspired Scripture to guide us in the ruin and failure. Peter said that judgment must begin from the house of God.

John said it was "the last hour." That is, he characterized the time from then until we are removed as "the last hour" (1 John 2:18). This is a moral expression

3. *The Bible Treasury* 9:222.

embracing from then even until now, as marked by certain moral features. And it marks the epoch of ruin.

2 Timothy describes a day in which Paul lived (just before his departure) and it is our day also. Yes, there is a *progression* of evil described in 2 Timothy, but the evil was *there already* before the Apostle's eyes and has continued until now. Observe the following from 2 Timothy:

Ch. 1 (v. 15) gives us the forsaking of Paul (not apostasy from Christ) by all in Asia, notice, with exceptions as Onesiphorus, an Ephesian. This indicates a giving up of "Paul's doctrine." The preservative is to seek him diligently (v. 17).

Ch. 2 notes the introduction of evil, organized evil, as the great house illustration indicates. This describes the Christian profession, a mixture of precious and vile, along with vessels to dishonor, and an unnamed class not separated, and the separated vessels to honor. The preservative is withdrawal from iniquity, the bounden duty of every saint until the Lord comes.

Ch. 3 (v. 8) describes the resistance of truth by counterfeit. The preservative is to "continue" (v. 14) in the truth.

Ch. 4 (v. 4) speaks of turning away from the truth to fables -- such as the 19th century J.E.P.D. theories concerning the writing of the Pentateuch, as an example. There are many other fables. The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement is full of them. Indeed, the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement, of which more will be said when we consider Laodicea, is characterized by each of these four departures. The preservative is watchfulness (or better, sobriety) in all things, etc.

Peter warned that judgment must begin from the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17). And surely this is right and just, that so highly privileged but faithless Christendom should be so judged. In Rev. 1, 2, and 3 we see that the Son of man has taken the aspect of judge regarding the church on earth viewed in responsibility as a lightbearer.

These things show that the ruin of the church had already occurred by the time of the addresses to the seven assemblies (about 96 AD).

The Foreshadow View

NOT STATED AS A PROPHECY

Some speak of this view as "the prophetic history of the church." The seven churches do indeed have a prophetic character, a prophetic bearing; but strictly speaking, it is well to observe that the letters to the seven churches are not *stated*

as predicted events. ⁴ We believe that the seven churches foreshadow seven phases and/or states. ⁵ This was discovered when the history of the church had well advanced. ⁶ Rev. 2 & 3 is written so as to be consistent with the NT encouragement of the saints to maintain an expectant posture with respect to the Lord's coming. ⁷ Commenting on this J. N. Darby wrote:

4. W. Kelly observed:

On the other hand it is clear, that to have made this bearing so marked as to be apparent from the first -- to have given a distinct chronological history, if one may so say -- would have falsified the true posture of the church in habitually waiting for the Lord from heaven. For the Lord has nowhere else so spoken to or about the church as to keep it necessarily waiting for ages upon the earth. Of course the Lord knew that it would be so; but He revealed nothing that would interfere with the full enjoyment of the blessed hope of the Lord's return as an immediate thing. In the parables of the Gospels which set forth His return, while space is left for delay, room is left for His coming, if so it pleased God, in their lifetime whom He then addressed. And so it is here (*Christ and the Seven Churches* . . . , Glasgow: Allan, p. 39, 1868).

5. Leon Morris, wrote:

Others take the churches to stand for periods in history . . . Such views are unlikely. It seems much more probable that the letters are letters to real churches . . . (*The Revelation of St. John*, Grand rapids: Eerdmans, p. 57, 1973 reprint).

I wonder who it is that does not think the letters are to real churches. He seems to set up an either/or strawman, easy to knock over.

A posttribulationist, Charles R. Eerdman, denying the foreshadow view, wrote:

The intention is rather to picture characteristics of the church in all ages . . . until the return of Christ (*The Revelation of John*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, p. 42, 1977 reprint).

The foreshadow view does not negate such a use of Rev. 2 and 3.

In *Watching and Waiting*, v. 15, #18 (Nov./Dec. 1956), a posttribulationist organ of Strict Baptists, we read:

But there is absolutely no ground for this belief . . .

From this it appears that posttribulationist writers do not find the foreshadow view compatible with posttribulationism.

On the other hand, David M. Levy, a Scofieldian, does not accept the foreshadow view either:

. . . there is a lack of scriptural support for this interpretation (*Revelation: Hearing the Last Word*, Bellmawr: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, p. 33, 1999).

Hardly!

6. W. Kelly took note of the fact that Vitringa, Sir Isaac Newton (a closet unitarian, actually), and others (see *The Bible Treasury* 18:45) held to a protracted view of Rev. 2 and 3 (though Bishop Newton, Dissertations, pp. 450, 451, doubted such a view (*The Prospect* 1:185)), and we need to keep in mind that these writers were historicists.

7. Regarding the idea of James Kelly, propounded in a book in 1849, that these seven churches are churches in the future, see the strictures of W. Kelly in *The Prospect* 1:185.

In answering a traducer, W. Kelly wrote:

(continued...)

There is another point of divine wisdom here. Though we have, I doubt not, the whole history of the assembly to its end in this world, it is given in facts then present, so that there should be no putting off the coming of the Lord. So, in the parables, the virgins who go to sleep are the same that wake up; the servants that receive the talents are the same found on the Lord's return, though we know ages have passed and death come in.⁸

Rev. 2 and 3 is not given as a statement of predicted events, but as a foreshadow, discovered only when the time was advanced and its discovery did not hinder the expectant posture.

INDICATIONS THAT THE SEVEN CHURCHES FORESHADOW SOMETHING WIDER THAN WHAT IS ONLY LOCAL

There is a Mystery Involved. In ch. 1 it was remarked that a *mystery* (Rev. 1:20) is involved here, showing that we must look for instruction beyond the mere existence of seven assemblies in Asia at the time John wrote.⁹ The selection of seven from the total in Asia, and the order in which they are addressed, are important. Each of these seven assemblies foreshadows a development in the state of the church on earth seen in responsibility, and signifies something larger and more widespread than the state described in each respective local assembly.

The Number Seven is Used with Symbolic Significance Throughout the Book.

This is obvious from even a shallow reading of the book. There are also several sevens used in connection with the churches designated. The sevens in the Revelation point out things of symbolic character.

The Selection of the Seven Churches. Notice how He presents Himself as the One who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks (Rev. 2:1). Does that mean that He does not do so concerning all the other assemblies? Think about that. You may say it is because throughout church history these seven states may

7. (...continued)

Mr. W. . . . proceeds to tell us that Mr. James Kelly put forward the same view long before Mr. Darby wrote his book or ever went among "Brethren." Now the truth is that the only works I know of Mr. J. K.'s on this subject (which he kindly sent me) strongly controvert any such view, and are apparently the development of a widely different theory thrown out by Dr. S. R. Maitland: namely *future* assemblies of believing Jews in Asia Minor.

Dr. Maitland was a futurist who did not hold the pretribulation rapture. E. W. Bullinger and some other ultradispensationalists hold the view that the seven churches are future.

8. *Synopsis*, "Revelation," p. 369n.

9. There are those who believe in independency of assemblies who yet take the view that the seven churches do indicate that Rev. 2 and 3 give a view of the church's course until the rapture. Of course, this implicitly admits of such a thing as the *church* (singular) *on earth*. For example, John Ritchie (*A Brief Sketch of Church History*, Kilmarnock: John Ritchie, n.d.) wrote that:

. . . they have a further application to the whole course of the Church in testimony through the entire dispensation (p. 1)

be found, without this indicating the foreshadow view. Well, the fact is that the foreshadow view includes that point, but is much more far-reaching. Denying the foreshadow view does not do justice to *the order in which they are addressed*.

Seven churches out of others, even others in Asia Minor, were selected for some reason and placed in this order for some reason.

Why was this not written to an assembly, as many epistles of Scripture are written? Or, why not to the assemblies in a province collectively as in Galatia? Or, why not such an address as in 1 Cor. 1:2, to Corinth and to all everywhere that call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ? The writings of seven epistles in this specific order is in keeping with the prophetic character of this book and has in view the ruin of the church on earth seen in responsible testimony. In point of fact, it *is* to the whole church on earth, as we see if we understand that the selection of seven particular churches, out of many others, has a mystery character as indicated in Rev. 1:20. Prophecy is occasioned by a ruin of what God has set up. The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is a standing witness to the ruin which had set in previously; indeed, while Paul was still alive. Concerning the significance of selecting seven, W. Kelly said:

Never but here occurs an address to a certain number of assemblies, particularly one so definite and significant symbolically as seven. Surely something is meant outside the ordinary course of things, where so unexampled a style of address is found. The spiritual usage of *seven* in prophetic scripture cannot be questioned. Nor is it confined to prophecy, for the same force holds good wherever symbol is employed. In typical scripture, as well as in prophecy, seven is the regular known sign of spiritual completeness. Who then but uninstructed minds can doubt that the Lord meant more than the actual assemblies that were addressed in the province of Asia? That letters were written to literal congregations from Ephesus to Laodicea seems to be unquestionable; but I cannot doubt that these were chosen, and the addresses so shaped to them as to bring before those who have ears to hear the complete circle of the Lord's testimony here below as long as there should be anything possessed (responsibly if not really) of a church character. The state of things might be ever so ruined; it might be even gross and false (as much was in several); but still there was an ecclesiastical profession if only for His judgment, which we do not find after Rev. 4. No such condition appears afterwards. The Lord no longer dealt so when this kind of footing vanished for the responsibility of man. In short, as long as church responsibility exists here below, these addresses apply, and no longer.¹⁰

The Positioning of the Call to Hear. In the first three, the promise to the overcomer precedes the call to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. In the case of the last four, the call follows the promise to the overcomer. This signifies that something more than the literal is here.

10. *Lectures Introductory to the Study of Acts, The Catholic Epistles, and the Revelation*, London: Broom, p.396, 1870.

The Ruin of the Church. Above, we touched on the subject that the ruin of the church took place before the Revelation was written. This immense fact supports the foreshadow view.

The Change in the Presentation of Christ. In keeping with “the things that are,” the Lord is presented as judge. This comports with the ruin of the church seen in responsible testimony. The way He is presented subsequently is as the Lamb in the midst of the throne, Who is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah. This is the way He is presented for “the things that are about to be after these” (Rev. 1:19), i.e., after the period of the true church on earth.

The Promises Make Good Concerning What the First Man Forfeited. There is an excellent article in *The Bible Treasury*, vol. 7, “The Promises to the Seven Churches.” It traces how each of the promises refers to something forfeited by the first man (cp. 1 Cor. 15:45-47). Here we will look at the writer’s general statement of the fact, but his comments on each of the promises will be integrated into the respective treatment of those promises for each of the seven assemblies in their turn.

There is a point of much interest, which I desire to trace, in connection with the promises to the seven churches. It will be found, on an examination of these promises separately, that they embraced what God had committed to man, or to the nation of Israel, under responsibility to the Giver; but which had been forfeited either through weakness or wilfulness, and had been in this way stolen by Satan out of the hands which were incompetent to hold them.

God had been good, supremely good, as these promises or actual gifts prove, which He so bountifully showered in the pathway He had chosen for Himself and His creatures. Into this path He had, in sovereign grace, called out the patriarchs to walk with Him as “the God of glory,” and with His people Israel under the covenant name of “Jehovah.” But a driven-out man from Eden, and a scattered nation from Canaan, tell plainly and sadly of Satan’s triumph, of man’s disgraceful defeat, and of God’s consequent dishonor. Nevertheless, this great fact was established, that the creature to walk with God (as a receiver of blessing) must in life and nature correspond with Him whose delight it is to bless: otherwise must responsibility be, when man is put to the test, but a temporary triumph for the devil.

The book of the Revelation introduces us to “One like unto the Son of man,” who laid His right hand upon John, saying, “Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” It is the presence and position of such an One as He who thus proclaims Himself that turns the whole course and order of things round again to God, for His eternal glory with His creatures, but only as redeemed by the blood of His own Son. By His intrinsic obedience when on earth, an obedience unto death, and by His righteous title as “the first-begotten from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth,” He gathers up, and connects with His person, as Son of man, every promise and gift which man had forfeited, and holds them till the day when “all the promises of God which are now made yea and amen” shall be

manifestly established “to the glory of God by us.” In the meanwhile, till Christ comes to receive us to Himself, He gives to those who “have an ear to hear” a *present* communion, in the joy of knowing that these promises and gifts are embodied in Himself; and those can best testify how precious this fellowship is who have tasted deepest what forfeited blessing means.

These remarks may suffice to introduce our subject to us, and in confirmation of the fact that the Lord, in His visit of inspection to the seven golden candlesticks, gives these promises out *afresh*, in connection *with* Himself to this last vessel of responsible testimony on the earth before He comes . . . ¹¹

A BRIEF SURVEY OF WHAT THE SEVEN CHURCHES FORESHADOW

The Epoch’s of the Church’s History.

Andrew Miller’s *Miller’s Church History* traces the history of the church on earth, viewed in responsible testimony, in this way:

Ephesus – “from the apostolic age to the close of the second century.”

Smyrna – “from the second century to Constantine.”

Pergamos – “from the beginning of the fourth to the seventh century, when Popery was established.”

Thyatira – “from the establishment of Popery to the Lord’s coming. It goes on to the end, but it is characterized by the dark ages.”

Sardis -- “from the eventful sixteenth century onwards. Protestantism after the Reformation.”

Philadelphia -- “since the reformation; but more especially from the beginning of this century {the 1800s}, and still more in the present day.” ¹²

Laodicea – “co-existing with Philadelphia, Sardis, and Thyatira, but especially the closing scene.” ¹³

If one is willing to submit one’s thoughts concerning history to the controlling influence of Rev. 2 and 3, the light of God’s Word will shine on the history of the church on earth seen in responsibility. ¹⁴ The reverse is not true, i.e., that the

11. *The Bible Treasury* 8:365.

12. I believe the words “since the reformation” to be incorrect.

13. Inexplicable to me, in a footnote to this statement we read, “Laodicea is one of the seven golden lampstands of Ch. 1, and [is] . . . a company on true church ground.” Perhaps I misunderstand what he intends to say, but we have seen elsewhere that the golden candlestick means their constitution in God’s mind. The state is altogether different, and how he could think Laodicea was on true church ground is hidden from me.

14. S. D. Toussaint wrote:

[Walter] Scott takes the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 to be a panorama of church history, a position that is gradually losing favor {the reference has escaped me}.

The book of Revelation gives numbers of indicators that that is the way to view the seven churches. (continued...)

history of the church may be used to explain the Revelation. The interpretations of the Historicists have amply demonstrated this.

Let us take a glance at the seven epochs in order to indicate their general bearing.

Ephesus represents the period beginning with the ruin of the church viewed in responsible testimony. The key to the history of the church viewed in responsibility is seen in the words, "Thou hast left thy first love," though there was so much that was commendable. But it was marked by the word "fallen" (Rev. 2:5) and repentance was enjoined.

. . . the very first thing that characterized the church, looked at in its responsibility as pictured by Ephesus, was, that it had departed from the power of its original standing, "left its first love."¹⁵

It is the only case where removal of the candlestick is mentioned. The significance of the candlestick being removed was explained in Ch. 1. It is what will befall the church viewed in responsible testimony on earth.

The *works* of the Nicolaitanes were hated by Ephesus but by the time of Pergamos their *teaching* was tolerated.

Smyrna, which was given no reproof,¹⁶ represents the persecuted church, but persecuted by the heathendom in which the church had been planted -- not that there were none persecuted before this period, but it took on a new character as allowed by the Judge in the midst of the candlesticks. It was His voice regarding

14. (...continued)

It is a view, of course, that is consistent with an understanding that there is such a thing as the church on earth, and that it is in a ruined state. You may have church-views that are not compatible with this. So much the worse for your church-views! At any rate, C. I. Scofield accepted this view:

. . . prophetic, as disclosing seven phases of the *spiritual* history of the church from, say, A.D. 96 to the end. It is incredible that in a prophecy covering the church period that there should be no such foreview (SRB, p. 1331).

L. S. Chafer held the foreshadow view also (*Systematic Theology*, Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 4:374, 1945). So did A. C. Gaebelein and William R. Newell, among other Scofieldians, as does John F. Walvoord (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*), C. C. Ryrie (*Revelation*), although John F. Walvoord in his *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, Wheaton: Victor Books, p. 526, 1990 says: "There is, however, no scriptural verification of this type of interpretation." Of course, this flies in the face of the mystery character of the seven golden lamps (Rev. 1:20), as well as other considerations.

15. *Collected Writings* 5:288.

16. At the same time we should note this:

I know . . . the railing of those who say they are Jews, and are not, but a synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:9).

We see here the presence of Judaism in Smyrna and an earthly orientation. The heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1) was being set aside. In the Philadelphian recovery of truth, the heavenly calling was again brought forward, and again we read of those who say they are Jews (not literally, of course).

the loss of first love. Poor in this world, yet rich in faith, they overcame even unto death.

There have been other persecutions down through the years, with the largest numbers killed in the 20th century. But Sardis has its own distinct character and phase in history.

Pergamos represents alliance with the world, having its patronage, and the consequent allowing among themselves seducing doctrines, carnality and vigorous clerisy. It is not surprising that Balaam is named. This period began about the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine who led his subjects into a profession of Christianity. This gave new power to the clergy and developed into the Thyatira era.

What was hated in Ephesus had now become tolerated: Nicolaitanism.

The world did not get rid of those who endured such persecution in the Smyrna era, but the world got inside the profession of Christianity during the Pergamos period. In 1 John 5:19 we read that the whole world lies in the wicked one. That was stated as a consequence of the rejection of Christ. Also, after the rejection of Christ, Satan is called the god of this age. Here, we see Pergamos dwelling where Satan's throne is. The establishment of the church in the worldly position is a phase of the church that is not repeated, as is the case also with loss of first love -- and as the case with the special persecution foreshadowed by Smyrna.

* * * * *

The first three churches foreshadow periods of church history that are not repeated as such. In Thyatira the coming of the Lord is introduced, marking a change; note also that the call to hear what the Spirit says to the churches is shifted to the last thing said in the remaining four epistles. This marks a change. The last four assemblies signify things that will continue until the rapture, or continue to the Lord's appearing in glory, as we shall note in the respective places. These four make their appearance in their sequential order; but once appearing, each continued on contemporaneous with the others.

* * * * *

Thyatira is the development of the Pergamos alliance with the world into pretension to rule over the world. How so, you say? Jezebel signifies that Thyatira was out of the subject place and the consequence is that the church which ought to have been the subject one is, instead, ruling. The spirit of the wicked Jezebel, who lorded it over Ahab, was there; and she had children -- indicating that evil was being generated within. She signifies departure from the subject place -- thus taking a place of ruling here instead of awaiting the kingdom as the time of rule (cp. Rev. 2:26). Within the system represented by Thyatira there were servants she was seducing. But there were others mentioned: "the rest" that had not her teaching. "The rest" indicates those who were separate. There were those in Thyatira, literally, in the first century AD, who had separated. These depict faithful ones in the middle ages who were separate from Thyatira-ism.

We have now arrived at an epoch in the history of the church on earth, seen in responsible testimony, that marks a transition point. The Ephesus, Sardis and Pergamos periods had sequentially passed away, but Thyatira, which sequentially replaced Pergamos, will still be here when the Lord comes. Thyatira will not be replaced. This is the case also with Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea where again, in several of these letters, the Lord's coming is presented. These last four will all be present when He comes, whether at the rapture, or at the appearing in glory -- such as are swallowed up in the apostasy during the last half-week of Daniel's seventieth week.

Two main indicators of this transition point are (1) that the Lord's coming is introduced and (2) the call to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies is moved from before the promises to the overcomers to following the statement of the promises -- whatever other considerations might likewise lead to noting a transition point. We should keep in mind that His coming has two phases, or stages, to it, the pre-Daniel's 70th week rapture and the subsequent the appearing in glory to execute judgment. One or the other of these stages of the coming may apply.

Additionally, we may notice the character in which Christ presents Himself. His presentations in the first three were all references to what John had already seen in ch. 1. There are still two of these to Thyatira, then one to Sardis and none to Philadelphia and Laodicea. There is introduced in the letter to Thyatira His name of Son of God; to Sardis, the One Who has the seven spirits of God (which refers to judgments that are coming) and then to Philadelphia there is a further transition to what is moral, not official -- ending in Laodicea with Himself presented as Head of the new creation, which Laodicea sets aside, by substituting *the first man* for the second Man.

* * * * *

We must pause here to consider the fact that Sardis does not displace Thyatira, as Thyatira had displaced Pergamos, etc. My impression is that consideration of Philadelphia and Laodicea, particularly, makes expositors nervous; i.e., nervous about identifying them. One must weigh this: does each one of the last three develop out of the previous one? Certain conclusions would follow that thought. Or is it that both Philadelphia and Laodicea come out of Sardis, having a strong moral stamp upon them? Sardis itself does not displace Thyatira. Then Sardis does not have the same kind of an ecclesiastical place and character. Indeed, Sardis is composed of a mixture of lesser ecclesiastical systems. Perhaps, then, ecclesiastical position is even less a consideration with Philadelphia and Laodicea (which actually stand in marked contrast to each other). When we come to the presentation of the Lord to the last three churches, we shall find but one ecclesiastical character of Christ presented to Sardis, and none to the last two, where the presentation of Christ consists of what is moral and positional.

* * * * *

Sardis depicts what became of the reformation ("remember how thou hast

received and heard") -- which declined into a state described as having a name to live, but being dead. But there are some who live, a few names which had not defiled their garments. So upon Sardis He will come as a thief (cp. 1 Thess. 5:4), as He will upon the world (at the appearing in judgment). Sardis is Protestantism.

Philadelphia is liberation, separation from evil to Christ, the holy and the true, and faithfulness to such a One. A Philadelphian has escaped from Thyatira and Sardis. J. N. Darby remarked:

The characters that Christ takes in connection with these last days, are these, "The holy, the true." Yes, that is the character He takes; that which He desires in His own, in their walk, when He is about to come. We have to watch over ourselves and over our brethren, that it may be so. I feel, for my part, that we have, in these days, to watch very specially as to this holiness, though it is always an essential thing for the children of God.¹⁷

That is not of much account to Thyatira and Sardis, which represent man-made systems. Christ presents Himself morally to Philadelphia and Philadelphia answers morally to that presentation of Himself. Philadelphia is not a humanly-constructed system.

Philadelphia recognizes the end of the first man; but Laodicea boasts in him, sets him up, under the guise that what suits the first man is of Christ.

Pergamos tolerated it, Thyatira embraced it, Sardis is dead to it, Laodicea is indifferent to it, but Philadelphia repulses it. What? **Evil.** Philadelphia has "a little power." How much? Enough to be separated from evil unto the Lord. This is not Pentecostal/Charismatic power, which is a cloak for much evil.

Philadelphia means brotherly love; and here we learn that there is no brotherly love apart from Christ having His place according to how He presents Himself.

The words my/mine (Rev. 3:12) seem to indicate there is strong personal attachment to the One Who is holy and is true. And only as reflecting these moral features can "brotherly love" be rightly shown, for there are numerous counterfeits.

Keeping the word of His patience (regarding His coming for us and the promise of exemption from *the time of trial* (Rev. 3:10) -- this is more than being kept through it) indicates that this moral movement was connected with the sounding of the midnight cry. To Philadelphia it is: "I come quickly." No doubt the One Who sounded that cry was the Spirit. But it is certain that a human agent was used by Him. Do you know who it was?

The human instrument used by God in the sounding of the midnight cry restored to the saints much long-lost truth.

And when did the Lord distinctly thus work in Christendom? When did He make His own feel how useless it is to acknowledge truth that we do not live?

17. *Letters* 2:139, 140.

When did He thus recall His saints back to His word, and to own the power of the Holy Ghost in making that word living? Where is this found? We all know that there are those in Christendom that have set up for the Spirit of God without the word; and we are not ignorant of others who have set up for the word without the Spirit; and in both cases with results the most disastrous and withering. But where is it that the Lord has recalled His own to His word, insisting also on that sovereign place and liberty which is due to the Holy Ghost?¹⁸

The truth regarding the liberty of the Spirit as well as the truth that *ministry is the exercise of gift* were among those recovered. In the parable of Matt. 25:1-13, oil is a picture of the Spirit. Consequent upon the sounding of the midnight cry, a search for oil began. It is true that a real child of God may get caught up, mixed in, with such things. What we want to get hold of in our souls is the point, the issue, the picture, the character, of the thing. The five foolish virgins took **no oil with them** -- now there began a search for oil.

Almost simultaneously with the initiation of recovery of these truths, the Irvingite system arose, claiming recovery of the Spirit's power and gifts -- meaning specially tongues and prophecy in the future-telling sense. Irvingism went on to the establishment of 12 apostles.¹⁹ At the beginning of the 1900s the Pentecostal movement began and in the 1960s it gave rise to the Charismatic movement. And with what subjects are these characteristically occupied if not the Spirit, healings, and gifts? These are among the forces that work in opposition to the recovered truths, even where some facets may be held. Laodiceanism is also shown in trafficking in unfelt Philadelphian truth. This leads us to the consideration of Laodicea.

Laodicea began in John's day, in one sense, as did all the others since they were literal churches. But it has wide application today, as a moral condition and movement -- in contrast to Philadelphia. We were just thinking about the Irvingite/Pentecostal/Charismatic²⁰ movement. It will be objected that this movement and Laodicea are not the same thing -- there are differences. But there are some essential common things that appear in both.

Perhaps Laodiceanism is much closer to home than we dare to think. It has been said that those at Laodicea must have been unsaved professors only, to warrant such words from the Lord. E. Dennett remarked,

For if the warnings in this letter only concern an empty profession, we may delude ourselves with the thought that we are in no danger from the evils here indicated.²¹

And that itself would foster Laodiceanism. Laodicea is a contrast to Christ as the

18. W. Kelly, *The Bible Treasury* 16:298.

19. See *The Bible Treasury*, vols. 17 and 18, on the Catholic Apostolic Church; also see index to *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, under Irvingism.

20. The Pentecostal movement has been called the third force in Christianity and the third stream.

21. *The Christian Friend*, 1883, p. 49.

faithful and true witness. Laodicea is a false witness -- it falsifies Him. Christ is the beginning of the creation of God, meaning the new creation which came into being with His rising from the dead (see John 20). The first man was judged in Christ's death.²² Laodicea sets up the first man again, the first man trafficking in God's truth, boasting of spiritual riches, having need of nothing, which is but a show, a sham, a religious state nauseous to Him, which He will spew out as lukewarm. Preacher, did you ever preach things you do not walk in? It is Laodiceanism. Saint of God, did you ever feel complacent? Have you been indifferent to His love and claims, while going on as if all is well? Laodiceanism. Did you ever argue for some truth you were not walking in? Laodiceanism. Do you indulge the flesh under the guise of claiming "I have liberty in Christ," and when admonished you tell the rebuker, "you are a weak brother"? That is setting up the first man while using the death of the second Man to cover it up. It is Laodiceanism. Do you plead love to offset the claims of the Holy and the True? Do you plead unity at the expense of holiness in associations? It is Laodiceanism. Do you see the evil but say 2 Tim. 2:19, 20 cannot be applied? It is Laodiceanism.

Here was an assembly of Laodiceans. What do you do if "the Amen, the faithful and true witness" wakes you up? Would you argue that there is no direction to leave? Think about this faithful rebuke:

I have no doubt that in Thyatira is the Spirit's picture of popery. Do you think people should continue in that? I do not enter into the Seven Churches, because adducing such passages of obscure interpretation to judge the path of plain separation from plain iniquity, is at once condemnation of those who do so, but as you do, I ask you this: do you think you should remain in Laodicea to be spewed out of Christ's mouth? It proves too much and therefore nothing. You must not be surprised if others decline principles which lead to such a course.²³

There is one more point before drawing this to a close: Laodicea is a counterfeit Philadelphia. The Philadelphian recovery involved the true place of the setting aside of the first man by the new creation of which Christ in resurrection is the Head, formed by the power of the Spirit. Laodicea sets up the first man and falsifies the operations of the Spirit. Therefore, Christ is presented to Laodicea as the beginning of the creation of God. Christ, as risen from the dead, is the beginning of the new creation. Laodicea does not answer in practice to this character of Christ, but rather sets up the first man as if that is Christ.

Thyatira substituted the Pope for the Spirit. Sardis shuts out the free action of the Spirit in the assembly. Philadelphia is in the good of the operations of the Spirit in the assembly. Laodicea traffics in pretended actions of the Spirit,

22. The first man, as fallen, was under test to see if he was recoverable. This is a standing before God in Adam fallen; a standing in responsibility to perform. The *final test* was the revelation of the Father in the Son (John 15:23, 24). Since then, the testing of man is over, and the second Man is before God.

23. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, 20:208.

rejecting the true operations of the Spirit by counterfeits in the first man, whether by his own spirit, or by seducing spirits. I would suggest that this aspect of Laodiceanism is most clearly seen in the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement (with Irvingism as a precursor). The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement reminds us of the foolish in the parable of the 10 virgins who are occupied with acquiring oil -- a type of the Spirit of God. Laodicea will be spued out of Christ's mouth. There are those with whom the Knocker would sup. Yet, if true separation from evil, unto the Lord, were practiced, one would withdraw from Laodicea -- as we learn from the epistles.

J. N. Darby's Introduction to the Foreshadow View. The following is from J. N. Darby, in a letter of Aug. 1833:

Hardman, a dear brother in the Lord, a clergyman, was here lately, and he was speaking at large on the Seven Churches. I was not here, but this ground I hear he took. Sardis, the Reformation, on which, "if therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know," etc. Philadelphia, the separation of little bodies of believers with a little strength (there is comfort in that), but the Lord on their side, "I will keep them from," etc. "Behold I come *quickly*, hold fast that which thou hast," etc. And then the church left in its Laodicean state, its state generally now, at which He stands at the door and knocks -- there being still some remaining perhaps amongst them, but He is at the door. What do you say to this? The result to the Laodicean church is to be spued out of His mouth. It is an important consideration in the present state of things. It commends itself morally to one's mind. ²⁴

Ed.

24. Letters 1:22.

Elements of Dispensational Truth
Romans 9-11

Chapter 9.3

Romans 11:
The Administration of Privilege,
God's ways, and Israel's Future

Romans 11 :16-21

Gentile Privilege Meanwhile

- 16 Now if the first-fruit [be] holy, the lump also; and if the root [be] holy, the branches also.
- 17 Now if some of the branches have been broken out, and *thou*, being a wild olive tree, hast been grafted in amongst them, and hast become a fellow-partaker of the root and of the fatness of the olive tree,
- 18 boast not against the branches; but if thou boast, [it is] not *thou* bearest the root, but the root thee.
- 19 Thou wilt say then, The branches have been broken out in order that *I* might be grafted in.
- 20 Right: they have been broken out through unbelief, and *thou* standest through faith. Be not high-minded, but fear:
- 21 if God indeed has not spared the natural branches; lest it might be he spare not thee either.

THE FIRSTFRUIT AND THE LUMP, THE ROOT AND BRANCHES v. 16)

Abraham, the Root of the Olive Tree. The olive tree has "natural branches" (Rom. 11:21). The root, therefore, cannot be Christ because there is no natural connection with him. According to John 12:24 He abode alone until death. No one

is connected with Him by nature. Rom. 11:24 speaks of those “who are according to nature” in connection with the olive tree. It is Abraham (cp. Gal. 3:16) who was separated out (Gen. 12:1).

“If the first-fruit be *holy*” refers to being set apart to God. The firstfruit refers to Abraham. He was brought before God for the administration of privilege. The lump also is holy, or set apart to God. The lump indicates his offspring, particularly Israel (cp. Jer. 2:3). Now we come closer to the Olive Tree. If the root (Abraham) be holy, the branches are also. It represents being set apart to God for God’s administration of privilege. This privilege is external, as is also meant by the use of the word “holy.” It does not indicate vital connection with God, though, as a matter of fact (to use these figures), some in the lump or some of the branches might be in vital connection with God. Indeed, the natural branches that were not broken out were in such vital connection with God -- for they are the election of grace. They are called “natural branches” because they were naturally privileged by birth to be in the sphere of the administration of privilege, and so naturally belonged to the Olive Tree.

Now we must spend some time considering the use made of the olive tree in covenant theology. After having done that we will return to the subject of Abraham being the root of the Olive Tree, not Christ as the root.

WHAT DOES THE OLIVE TREE REPRESENT IN COVENANT THEOLOGY?

Amillennialists Say It Represents The Body of Christ.

Referring to Eph. 3:4-6, amillennialist P. Mauro wrote:

That ‘mystery’ is what is graphically illustrated by the olive tree of Rom. 11. ¹

But the mystery is Christ and His body! He also said,

That olive tree represents ‘the Israel of God,’ ‘the election,’ the ‘one body’ of the redeemed. *Not* all who are of Israel are in it. On the contrary many of the natural branches, ‘because of unbelief *were broken off*’ (v. 20). And on the other hand, many believing Gentiles are included; these being the branches of ‘the olive tree which is wild by nature,’ which branches have been ‘grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree.’ This is the fulfillment of all God’s purposes and promises, the final outcome of all His dealings in grace with both Jews and Gentiles. ² —

Furthermore, in saying, that ‘God is able to graft them in again,’ and that He will do so ‘if they abide not in unbelief’ (v. 23), the passage bears a clear witness to the truth that there is no other salvation for them but that which the olive tree represents. ³ —

Furthermore, the true Israel of God . . . is composed of *believing* Israelites

1. *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 245.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 249.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 249, 250.

according to flesh, with believing Gentiles added to them, forming one body, as represented by the olive-tree of Rom 11. ⁴ —

We do not attempt an exposition of those verses, it being necessary only to point out that the Israel of God’s eternal purpose is here represented by an olive tree, whereof the branches are holy because the root is holy (see Psa. 52:8); that the salvation of Gentiles is represented as having the effect of grafting them (who by nature were the branches of a wild olive tree) into that “good olive tree,” thereby making them fellow-partakers of *the root* (Christ) and *the fatness* (the Holy Spirit, commonly typified in Scripture by the oil derived from the olive) of that tree; and finally -- that the unconverted Jews are represented as branches “broken off” from the olive tree, in other words, as dead sticks fit only for the fire.

Verse 20 tells us it was “because of unbelief they were broken off,” but evidently Paul did not regard their state as hopeless; for he says that “they also, if *they abide not still in unbelief*, shall be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again” (v. 23). Paul is here speaking of the salvation -- not merely of an occasional individual, but -- of the great mass of the people, represented by the branches broken off from the olive tree. ⁵ —

O. T. Allis, an amillennialist, also says that:

The tree represents the true Israel. ⁶

L. Boettner, a postmillennialist, said:

There is but one vine, one good olive tree, one body, one holy nation, one bride . . . ⁷

. . . there is no hope for Israel apart from the gospel of grace which is proclaimed by local churches, to whom alone, as the pillar and ground of the truth, Christ has entrusted “the faith” until the end of this present evil age. Thus there may well be an ingathering of Jews after “the times of the Gentiles.” But when and if this happens, Israel will be “saved” and joined to the body of Christ by believing the same gospel as Paul preached to his brethren in the flesh.

D. Fuller wrote:

But how can this be in Dispensationalism? As we noted previously, Chafer teaches that there is no continuity or connection with what went before or comes after. Thus, all of Israel’s future, including her future turning to the Lord, must be separate from the body of Christ. But Paul asserts an intense unity of the “times of the Gentiles” with both the past Jewish economy and any future “ingrafting.” His analogy of the olive tree shows “that there is but

4. *The Hope of Israel*, p. 27.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 148, 149.

6. *Prophecy and the Church*, p. 109.

7. *The Millennium*, p. 304.

one people of God throughout redemptive history.”⁸

WHY THE OLIVE TREE CANNOT REPRESENT THE BODY OF CHRIST

If I understand these brethren correctly, their view is that the olive tree represents the saved, the body of Christ. This is impossible for the following nine reasons.

1. The Olive Tree is Distinct From the One New Man of Eph. 2.

In Eph. 2:15 we read of “one new man.” It is new because it never existed before the glorification of Christ, who, as glorified, is head. The olive tree was of old in existence before there was the one new man. Moreover, in the one new man there is no distinction of Jew and Gentile, but in the olive tree there is just such a distinction. There are the natural branches (Rom. 11:21; i.e., Jews) and the wild olive branches (Rom. 11:24; i.e., Gentiles) in the olive tree at present. The figure of the olive tree does not efface the distinction of Jew and the Gentile, but in the one new man the distinction is not seen. Those in the olive tree, seen as a figure of speech for the line of privilege introduced with the call of Abraham, are subject to the possibility of being cut off. Such is never the case for one who is part of the one new man of Eph. 2. No member of Christ is ever amputated.

The mystery of Christ and the church was a thing both unknown and not in effect in OT times. Silence had been kept concerning it (Rom. 16:25, 26); it was hidden from ages (the time periods) and from generations (the peoples) as Col. 1:26 says; and it was “hidden throughout the ages in God” (Eph. 9). Such texts explicitly and clearly point to dispensational truth.

The olive tree has a *root* -- something of the earth -- while the body of Christ has a *head* -- a head in heaven. We are one with the head *in heaven* and as such, cannot be cast out or cut off. Cutting off is from the earthly olive tree, cutting off from the line of privilege, for those whose profession is not real. As in Elijah’s day, God knows His elect.

2. Branches Cannot be Broken Out of the Body of Christ.

“Some of the branches have been broken out” (v. 17). Verses 19-20 repeat two more times that the branches have been broken out. From what were they broken out? Above, P. Mauro says that the unconverted Jews are represented as “branches ‘broken off’ from the olive tree . . .” If the olive tree represents the body of Christ, then these Jews were once part of the body of Christ but were removed from it. This is impossible, therefore the olive tree cannot represent the body of Christ.

Verse 21 warns the Gentiles who have been grafted into the tree that just as God spared not the natural branches, he might not spare them, i.e., the Gentiles. Therefore, the Gentiles might be removed from the olive tree. If the olive tree represents the body of Christ, then Gentiles who are part of the body of Christ

8. Fuller, p. 362.

might be removed from it. This is impossible; therefore the olive tree does not represent the body of Christ.

3. A Saved Person Cannot be Cut Out and Subsequently be Grafted in Again.

The Gentile is viewed as being under responsibility regarding a place of privilege before God as Israel also had been under responsibility regarding the place of privilege they had before God. A Jew who is saved now comes under the *present* administration of privilege, not as administered when Israel had the place and the Gentile did not. It must be emphasized again that this is not a matter of individual soul salvation, for then one could be cut out and grafted in again. That contradicts Heb. 6:1-4 which describes one who had *privileges* (but was never a child of God) and who is responsible as having them -- but apostatizes. Heb. 6:4 states that “it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance.”

4. The Olive Tree Has Natural Branches (v. 21). There are those who naturally belong to this tree, i.e., those who have a natural place in connection with the good olive tree. The Jew had this place by natural descent. The Gentiles obviously had no such place. They were not natural branches. Israel has a peculiar claim in this regard which Gentiles do not have.

In order for the natural branches to be broken out, they had to have been branches in the olive tree. Some natural branches in the olive tree were broken out because of unbelief. The good olive tree represents the administration of privilege on earth, not the body of Christ.

Just as some natural branches were unbelievers so the Gentiles now in the olive tree may through unbelief be cut off (v. 21).

5. The Olive Tree is “Their Own Olive Tree” (v. 24). Clearly, the olive tree existed before the Gentile was grafted into it. Abraham, not Christ, is the root. **It was contrary to nature to graft in a wild thing.** God’s grace acts contrary to nature.

6. The Gentiles Are not Addressed as Being in Christ. Up to v. 25, the Spirit of God is addressing Gentiles. They are not addressed according to their place “in Christ.” Some branches are also “in Christ” but they are not thus viewed in Rom 11.

Why, thou, O Gentile? Had not Christians, Jews by birth, as much need to take heed? Or could the Spirit of God, in such a warning, have made the distinction, and thus denied the principle of the Church of God in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile? If the question be about a divine administration upon earth, then God can well make the distinction and develop his ways towards the one and the other; and it is plain that from the commencement of the ninth chapter the Apostle is occupied with and pointedly contrasts the Jews and the Gentiles presenting us with the administration of the divine ways upon

the earth.⁹

It is quite right to insist upon this and it behooves covenant theology adherents to account for this. The natural branches that remained in the tree retained their connection on the same principle as the Gentiles. The Jew was as susceptible to boasting of place as any other, as the cut away branches plainly prove. Why didn't they get a warning? The answer is given in the quotation above.

To turn the passage, as some have done, into a warning to Gentile believers really standing by faith, as such -- that is to say, the election from among the Gentiles -- is really to turn the cutting of Israel and the wonderful fidelity of God in sparing an election from among that people, into a warning to the election from among the Gentiles, that they should fear to be cut off: which is mere nonsense.¹⁰

7. It Contradicts the Truth of Eternal Security of the Believer. It is a contradiction of the truth of the eternal security of the believer to say that the olive tree is the body of Christ and a branch can be cut off. What a gross contradiction it is. How can anyone with any adequate sense of the sovereignty of God in salvation affirm that the olive tree represents the body of Christ? It betrays the power of a false theological system upon the mind.

8. The Olive Tree Existed in OT Times. The church which is Christ's body (Eph. 1:22, 23) was yet future when Christ was on earth (Matt 16:18). It was formed by the baptism in the power of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13) consequent upon Christ's exaltation (Acts 2:33). It was necessary that Christ go away in order that the Holy Spirit would come (John 16:7). Christ is exalted and the Spirit came at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) as the indweller of the individual saint (1 Cor 6:19) and as the Indweller of the church (Eph. 2:22; 1 Cor 3:16). Before the body of Christ could exist, the Man Christ Jesus must needs be.

He is head of the body (Col 1:15). He was not head of the body in David's day. He is head in heaven. It was consequent upon His exaltation that the body was formed (Acts 2:33; 1 Cor 12:13).

Since the good olive tree existed in O.T. times, with Abraham as its root, the good olive tree cannot be the body of Christ, which never existed until Christ was exalted and the Holy Spirit came as described above.

9. There Are Two Olive Trees. There is a good olive tree (v. 24) and a wild olive tree (vv. 17, 24). This refers to the fact that Israel was in the place of privilege and specially under the scrutiny of God. The Gentiles did not occupy such a place of privilege. There is a good olive tree and a wild olive tree. There is a position of privilege on the earth and there is a position outside of this privilege. The wild, uncultivated olive is the Gentiles (Acts 14:16).

9. *The Present Testimony* 4:123.

10. *Ibid*, p. 127.

Gardeners take a branch from a good tree and graft it to a wild tree. In this chapter the opposite takes place, i.e., what was cut out of the wild olive tree was grafted into a good olive tree (v 24) and we are told that this is contrary to nature (v 24).

THE ROOT OF THE OLIVE TREE – ABRAHAM

We have seen nine good reasons why the good olive tree cannot represent the body of Christ. Neither can the root represent Christ because the text tells us that there are those who naturally belong to the good olive tree. Israel had no natural connection with Christ as if He were the root of the olive Tree. They most certainly had no natural connection with Him as Head of the Body. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone" (John 12:24). "Alone" means that there was no natural oneness with Christ.

What brought Israel into the place of privilege designated here by a good olive tree, whereas the Gentiles are a wild olive (v. 24)? It was Israel's connection with Abraham who was called out from among the Gentiles into the position of special privilege on the earth which Melchizedek, for example, did not enjoy. Abraham is the root and the first-fruit. The natural branches are his offspring, according to the flesh, who came from the line of Jacob. The natural branches are Paul's kinsmen according to the flesh.

The special place of privilege on the earth to which Abraham was called may be seen by considering the following scriptures. Acts 7:3; Gal 3:16.

THE CALL OF GOD TO ABRAHAM FORMED HIM AS THE ROOT OF THE OLIVE TREE

If the question were about a warning to brethren in Christ as members of the Church, and not about the earthly administration of the economy, how could it be said that the Gentiles were grafted into the place, or into the midst of the Jews? . . . This is that which is the subject of the chapter, and not that which is properly called the Church. Then, also, in like manner the Gentiles might be, and were grafted into the place of the dry branches which were cut out; in the meanwhile the green branches which remained in the tree, of necessity took the form of the dispensation of grace, the mold into which the promises were now cast. It will be the same with the Gentile world, all those who have professed the name of Christ, except the elect, will be cut off; the others will be in heaven, and the dispensation of the promises upon earth will again take the Jewish form; yet according to the new covenant, and in blessing upon the Gentiles also, under the reign of the Son of man. The truth is, it was not only the law which had application to man upon earth, but the promises also of God revealed in the word before the manifestation of His Son, of the eternal Life, which was with the Father, and has been manifested to us; these promises, I say, reached not to the heavens either: they were given since the foundation of the world, had reference to the world, and must be fulfilled upon earth. Even the resurrection itself, concealed as it was in the declaration, "I am the God of Abraham," etc., presented no distinct revelation of heaven. The promise of eternal life given to us in Christ before the world was, was not of this world,

and is not fulfilled here, although we are possessed of it while here in pilgrimage; the life according to which we enjoy it, existed before the world was, the life of the Word, the life of Christ. This it is which is the life of the Church, and which was revealed in order that the Church might exist: but it must needs, here below, equally take the position of the seed of promise, that is, though its life is the life which Christ had before the world was made, it must needs, at the same time, be placed in the position of heir of the promise here below. But how does it take that place? In that it is united *to Christ* (to Him who while indeed having divine and eternal life in Himself, is the true Seed of Abraham), and in that it is made partaker of His life. As partaker of his life, and endowed with the Holy Ghost the Church's hopes are heavenly, she expects the same glory with Him, but in that she has that life, she is placed upon the same root, is introduced into the position of the heirs of the promise here below, of the seed of Abraham, according to the promise, because Christ, although he had the life of God himself, deigned to place himself there. By the possession of that life, now in union through the Spirit with Christ above, she is properly speaking the Church, whether composed of Jews or Gentiles matters not, but as introduced into the position of the seed of Abraham and heir of the promise here below, she is sustained by the root. The branches grafted in take the place of those which had been cut off. It is the administration of the promises here below which is treated of; and it is in this latter point of view that the subject is looked at in this eleventh chapter. When I say that the promises made to Abraham go not beyond this world, I mean not to say that Abraham or any other such had not the enjoyment of other things in his soul; but it was not in such things that the promises by the which he was called to faith consisted. It is only when he entered Canaan, the land of promise, when he possessed nought, that his heart by faith rose higher (Heb. 11:8, 9; Acts 7:5).¹¹

As to us, we are called by a testimony to heavenly things; it is in heaven that the Church in spirit finds herself; in the meanwhile we are the seed of Abraham and heirs according to promise. There, the administration of God as to His promises and his ways towards Israel enters into the account, even for the Church; and the chapter treats this subject, and not of the promise of life given before the world was. Therefore it is, that He speaks of cutting off the branches grafted in amid others, *of grafting in afresh* the branches which had been cut off, of the Gentiles, of the people beloved although enemies as concerning the gospel, etc. To distinguish these things, and the government of God which flows thence and is connected therewith, from the power of eternal life in Jesus Christ, is of all importance for the understanding of the word.¹²

THE FATNESS OF THE OLIVE TREE (v. 17)

The fatness, the sap, of the olive tree represents the privileges and blessings granted by God. Let us keep in mind that these are external and do not signify a vital connection with God, though an individual might have a vital connection with

11. *The Present Testimony* 4:125-127.

12. *Collected Writings* 1:310, note

God. See Gal. 3

BREAKING OUT BRANCHES AND GRAFTING SIGNIFY CHANGES IN THE WAYS OF GOD (v. 17)

Can anyone doubt that there were unbelievers amongst Israel throughout Israel's history? In Elijah's day 7000 had not bowed the knee to Baal, nor kissed him. In Moses' day the majority had no faith (Heb. 4:2 and 3:16-19). The natural branches were not broken out on these occasions. When were the Gentiles grafted in? They most certainly were not grafted into the good olive tree before the Lord Jesus died on the cross! The cutting off of the natural branches is the same thing as their fall (v. 12) and their being cast away (v. 15). This is what gave occasion to Gentile blessing and privilege. So the cutting off took place in connection with their stumbling, their rejection of Messiah. The cutting off of the natural branches synchronizes with the grafting in of the Gentiles. See v. 30 which also proves this synchronization. It is the Gentiles verses Israel as a nation, but really professing Gentiles.

Just as the cutting off of natural branches and the graft from the wild olive denote a change, so does the grafting in again of natural branches represent a change. The remnant of Israel, the election of grace (v. 5), always remains in the good olive. "The sovereign purposes of God are worked out through the failure of man."

When the apostle wrote,

. . . and *thou*, being a wild olive . . .

the question arises of why is the singular "thou" used? J. N. Darby remarked:

And the reason, as it seems to me, that he says, Thou, O Gentile, in the singular, is because the question was, as to the Gentile, one of principle.¹³

In the coming day the nation of Israel will be the only ones in the olive tree. The olive tree represents privilege on the earth. The old Israel had that place in the past, but a few Gentiles were also blessed. The professing church has that place now and a few Jews are blessed. The Lord will rapture home the living; and the dead in Christ (1 Thess 4) and the OT worthies (Heb 11:40) will be raised while baptized unbelievers, i.e., the Gentile profession, will be left. The Lord will deal with these who received not the love of the truth (2 Thess 2:10) when He is revealed from heaven in flaming fire, etc. (2 Thess 1:7-10). They are broken out of the olive tree. Then, Israel will be blessed as a nation, grafted into the olive tree, but the nations will no longer have the place of privilege (cf. Rom 11:12, 15, 24-30). The nations will be blessed during the millennium, but through Israel mediately.

The end result is that only natural branches will be in the good olive tree but all natural branches will be saved in that day (Rom 11:26).

13. *Collected Writings* 1:319.

WHO HAVE BEEN GRAFTED IN, AND WHERE (V. 17)?

Who Were Grafted In? Above, we already considered the words, “I speak unto you Gentiles.”

The Gentiles have not, as a body, ¹⁴ been grafted in. Those who believed stood by faith. Those who came in without real faith will be judged according to the privileges which they have abused; and, before the end, God will send the gospel of the kingdom, in order that the judgment may not take effect upon all, without a testimony having been rendered to that judgment. ¹⁵

Where Were they Grafted? No, this is not a strange question. The Gentile is not grafted into Israel. That would make him a Jew, a notion utterly far from Scripture. You greatly err to bring the church into this matter of the Olive Tree. Concerning the Jew and Gentile, the Scripture clearly declares:

. . . that he might form the two into one new man (Eph. 2:15).

It is a new man because it did not exist before, and could not until Christ was in heaven to be the head of the body. The one new man, however, is not the olive tree. Nor can those who compose the one new man be broken out of the one new man.

Observe in Rom. 11:23 that “God is able to graft them in again.” That is not about personal salvation. Breaking out and grafting in again is not about the body of Christ or personal salvation. It is a matter of being broken out of the place of privilege and being grafted into it again. It has to do with God’s administration of privilege on earth.

THE ROOT BEARS THE GENTILES (v. 18)

Boasting against the branches means boasting against the broken out Jewish branches. Such boasting is highmindedness. Cutting-off lies ahead (Rom. 11:22).

There is no thought in the passage that the Gentiles are on the natural branches or on the trunk. The Gentiles are brought into direct association with the root (v. 18). The good olive tree does not represent Israel. The grafting in of the Gentiles does not make them Israelites or any theological, Gentile “Israel of God” or “true Jew.” That is all *spiritual alchemy*. In the administration of the privileges the Gentile remains a Gentile and a Jew remains a Jew. When we speak of “in Christ,” that is altogether a different matter. Thus, in Rom. 11: “I speak to you Gentiles,” says Paul. See Gal. 3:14; John 4:22.

PRIDE GOES BEFORE DESTRUCTION (vv. 19- 21).

Despising the Jews and Standing Through Faith. The Jews are under the governmental dealings of God as presently being set aside. Therefore the Gentile has grounds for a superior attitude? These verses are a warning against despising

14. {That is, not every last Gentile in the world has now been grafted into the olive tree}.

15. *The Present Testimony* 4:70.

the Jews (cp. Rom. 3:27). There was truth in the thought that the branches were broken out of the Olive Tree in order for the Gentile to be brought into view for God’s administration of privilege. The unbelief of Israel was the occasion, or instrumentality, of God so dealing with the Gentile. There is a needed and imperative warning: “Be not high-minded, but fear.”

Standing By Faith.

To me it is clear enough, that if the faith spoken of were the faith of an individual, there could be no cutting off; but the apostle points out the principle upon which the standing is, and that by which a falling may take place, in order to show that, as the Jews, enjoying certain privileges, lost them *through unbelief*, a similar thing would befall the Gentiles, as to their privileges, if they should be found in the same *position of unbelief*, the Apostle speaks not of those “standing by faith” in order to shew that those who were would be cut off; but to show the principle upon which they stood, and that if, on the contrary, that failed, they would be cut off. Now, as to a true believer that could not ever be; but for him who was in the enjoyment of privileges, who was in the goodness of God as to his position, but who had not faith, the same thing which had happened to the Jews in similar circumstances might happen to him. It is in such persons that these warnings ever find their fulfillment. ¹⁶ –

Moreover, although an individual stands by faith when he believes, such nevertheless is not all the Apostle means; it is the principle upon which he stands, and not the possession of the thing which is in question. He who possesses faith will never be cut off. In the Epistle to the Galatians, it is said, “After that faith came,” that is, after the establishment of that principle of relationship with God, in place of law. Now we stand by faith, that is the principle of our relationship, the goodness of God exercises itself towards those who find themselves there. I do not see that it is said that the grafting in is by real faith of the heart, although there be nought solid save that which is such. The sixth of Hebrews supposes the participation of all the privileges of the Christian economy without real faith of the heart, and without fruit being borne to God, and I know not who would say that Simon the magician was not grafted in, although so soon cut off. It may be said, He believed; yes. Yet just as all the professors of to-day believe, that is to say, like the Christian world. In short, I find here in the eleventh chapter, the principles of the administration of the economy, and not the state of individuals, although these principles, doubtless, are realized in the individuals who really believe in the Gospel. He speaks not of faithful Gentiles, save in the sense in which one can call professors “faithful.” ¹⁷ –

The Gentile is Subject to the Same Treatment as Israel. Compare what the natural branches that were cut out of the Olive Tree relied upon with what Gentiles rely upon now. It is true that all the saved are in the olive tree but there

16. *The Present Testimony* 4:132.

17. *The Present Testimony* 4:129.

are unbelievers in it also, no doubt composing the vastly greater portion. The only ground of continuance is standing by faith. If this is lacking with the Gentile, then the same thing will happen as happened to Israel (v. 21).

When God reveals something it places those upon whom the privileges are conferred into a corresponding accountability. Even in the book of Romans we see this in Rom. 1:19, 20. God sovereignly saves whom He will, but that leaves His government where it was as acting in accordance with the great truth that "God is light." His divine government may fall cataclysmically as in the flood, or on Sodom and Gomorrah, or it may proceed in more of a "providential" manner. Something cataclysmic will yet occur in connection with what is figured by the olive tree, though in a certain way judgment is proceeding already with the outward testimony of Christianity, as indicated by Peter:

For the time of having the judgment begin from the house of God [is come]
 . . . (1 Pet. 4:17).

From Rev. 2 and 3 we learn something of the conditions into which the house of God had fallen. Let him that has an ear to hear, hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies! Our discernment is in a sorry state if we cannot discern from Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea that a final judgment of the divine government will fall on Christendom. Here in Rom. 11:21 is the warning to the Gentile about being cut from the olive tree as was natural Israel in its season (Rom. 11:22). The Pruner of the olive tree will act according to His holiness and the cutting off is referred to as "severity" (Rom. 11:22). It is a vain, Gentile conceit to think God will act otherwise. And as the removal of natural Israel was followed by the awful judgments upon the nation in AD 70, so shall faithless Christendom (2 Tim. 3) be cast into the great tribulation (cp. Rev. 2:22) and be given over to the working of error (2 Thess. 2:11, 12); just as the divine judgment sealed to the obdurate heart of Pharaoh his self-willed hardening of his heart; and as in the case of the natural Israel (Rom. 11:7-10).

Professing Christendom, then, is in a place subject to the governmental judgment of God. The very place occupied is the very basis on which God will act in judgment against the abuse of His grace. How great will be that judgment in view of the greatness of the responsibility during the present unfolding of His glory and grace.

The Natural Branches Now and in the Millennium. We noted previously that the natural branches are Jews. They were in the olive tree in accordance with their natural descent from Abraham. Concerning the administration of privilege now, the natural branches that were not cut out of the olive tree partake of the form of privilege as it is presently administered. The degree to which those privileges are understood and appropriated is another matter and is not the subject of Rom. 11. Rom. 11 is about being in the place of privilege -- by profession.

In the millennium, the only branches in the olive tree will be the natural branches, and they will enjoy the form of pre-eminent privilege then in force regarding the olive tree. That form will be under the new covenant (Rom. 11:27)

and being the instrument through which God will bless Gentiles in the millennium.

* * * * *

Notice: The next installment of *Elements of Propitiation, Substitution and the Righteousness of God* is deferred to the next (Mar/Apr) issue.

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

Idle curiosity inquires what this thorn in the flesh could be. It matters little to us what it was. There might be a different thorn for each case in which God saw fit to send one. It would be always something suited to humble him who needed it. It is enough for our spiritual instruction to know by the word, that as to Paul it was an infirmity which tended to make him personally contemptible in his preaching (see Gal. 4:14; 2 Cor. 10:10). The object of God, in such a trial, as meeting the danger, is so evident to every spiritual mind, that it were useless to dwell upon it.

J. N. Darby, *Synopsis* 1:256, note.

Does the Word “Eternal” in Our English Bible Properly Translate the Greek Word “Aionios”?

To a plain, common sense person the title question of this paper might seem to be ridiculous; such a person would declare that eternal means everlasting, in contrast to the word limited or temporary. I raise the question because false teachers of Scripture and unbelief combine to deny it is the correct translation of the Greek word *aionios*.

Now the reason they (scholars of unbelief) question the translation of the adjective *aionios* as eternal is that it literally means “age” from its noun *aion*, having the thought of a period marked by certain *characteristics*, but not meaning the *duration* itself. Not being a Greek expert, let me quote one who was and in accord with others who are. On the word noun *aion* he says:

The force attaching to the word (*aion*) is not so much that of the actual length of a period, but that of a period *marked by* spiritual or moral characteristics. This is illustrated in the use of the adjective (*aionios*) in the phrase “life eternal” in John 17:3, in respect of the increasing knowledge of God.

The phrases containing this word should not be rendered literally, but consistently with its sense of *indefinite duration* . . . The Greeks contrasted that which came to an end with that which was expressed by this phrase, which shows that they conceived of it as expressing *interminable duration*.

“*Aionios*” the corresponding adjective, denoting “eternal” is set in contrast with “*proskairos*,” literally “for a season” (2 Cor. 4:18), which reads: “while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal (*proskairos*) but the things which are not seen are eternal (*aionios*).”¹

Could anything more plainly and clearly illustrate the use of the word “eternal” in contrast to the other Greek word *proskairos* meaning temporary? Paul declaring in the previous verses the contrast of the present trials with eternal values (vv. 16, 17) concludes his encouragement by the factual statement of what is seen being temporary and the unseen eternal.

To a subject mind we need go no further, but to confirm this we will see seven Scriptures which use this adjective *aionios* before some precious truths to show the fallacy of trying to make *aionios* mean temporary or limited. All these portions employ the same Greek word *aionios* or *aion* to define the *continuous duration* of the subject considered.

1. “and being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal *salvation*.” (temporary?)
2. “. . . they which are called might receive the promise of eternal *inheritance*.”

1. W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

(temporary?)

3. “Who through the eternal Spirit (temporary?) offered Himself without spot to God.”
4. “therefore leaving the...doctrine of...eternal *judgment*.” (temporary?)
5. “And I give unto them eternal *life* (temporary?) and they shall never perish.”
6. “But the God of all grace, Who hath called us unto His eternal *glory* (temporary?) by Christ Jesus . . .”
7. “. . . we have a building of God, *an house* not made with hands, eternal (temporary?) in the heavens.”

All these portions employ the same Greek word “*aionios*” or “*aion*” to designate a continuous duration of the subject considered. Why falsely teach the supposed different meaning of *aionios* with regard to punishment, fire and destruction as used in Matt. 25:42, 46; 2 Thess. 1:8, 9? There can only be one answer and that is unbelief in God’s sure testimony to the fact of the justness and righteousness of all His acts. Unbelief is the greatest sin possible, for it makes God subject to our feeble and defective understanding. As to Himself, He said to the Jews:

I said therefore unto you that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am [“He” is added in italics, but not rightly for He is declaring His eternity of Being] ye shall die in your sins (John 8:24).

When the Holy Spirit was come, one of three things He would do was, “reprove the world of sin . . . because they believe not on Me . . .,” not because of some particularly heinous sin, that even men might characterize so. It is a serious matter and affront to God to question His righteous actions by intruding our own thoughts as to what constitutes justice. Sin has spoiled our understanding and on top of this, “the god of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not . . .” (2 Cor. 4:4). We are further warned by God through the apostle Paul:

. . . casting down imaginations (reasonings) and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

All the false cults of Christendom deny eternal punishment; i.e., Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Science, Armstrong World Wide Church of God, Unitarians, even Romanism, which, though it teaches Hell, attributes its occupants to the Devil and Martin Luther, as one priest said. All others go through Purgatory (temporary punishment!) longer or shorter, depending on the particular sins committed, but eventually fly out to heaven! The Protestant purgatory, of temporary punishment, is better than Rome’s because you don’t even have to pay to get out if you ever get there at all. What a mockery all this teaching is as to the righteousness of God in smiting His only begotten Son of His love in view of sin’s eternal penalty, our due! “Let God be true and every man a liar” is Paul’s declaration in the epistle to the Romans where the Gospel of God is set forth in all its fullness but preceded by the awful end of those who obey not His call to repentance.

Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto

thyslf wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds (Rom. 2:4-6).

God is Light as well as Love, and one attribute cannot cancel out the other nor can grace rule out righteousness. God's attributes are all in perfect accord. It is man who sets one against the other and so distorts the image of God! I close now with a further quote from W. E. Vine's dictionary:

aionios is used of the sin that 'hath never forgiveness' (against the Holy Spirit, i.e.) (Mark 3:29) . . .

The use of "*aionios*" here show that the punishment referred to in 2 Thess. 1:9 is not temporary, but final, and accordingly, the phraseology shows that its purpose is not remedial but retributive, i.e., punitive, not corrective as some discipline is, such as 1 Cor. 11:32. Physical death for the murderer is not corrective but punitive and final (Gen. 9:6, 7). He that believes not God's testimony, let him do so to his own peril in that Day!

Does God delight to punish? Indeed not for it is His "strange work" (Isa. 28:21). He gave His only begotten Son for a mercy seat (propitiatory) for all who will come to repentance and believe. So the terse statement is true "all may, none will, some shall," and is the blessed message of God's sovereign grace not of works, lest any man should boast (as man does anyway). God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But all will not, as He says, "Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life."

So He has chosen some unto salvation (election sovereignly).

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:13, 14).

In contrast to this wonderful grace, we see God's justness in sending "strong delusion" to those who believe not, that they will believe the Lie in the coming day of retribution (2 Thess. 2:9-12). Universalism (a term meaning all will ultimately be saved) finds no place in God's Word of truth. Pulling verses out here and there, out of context or isolated from other portions of Scripture or misquoted, is the prince of darkness's and the Liar's devices as he did to Eve in the garden of Eden 6,000 years ago. Beware of Greek scholars who reject God's truth and come with airs of knowledge to trap the unsuspecting.

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them...and many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you . . . (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

The cults and sects are multiplying and unbelief and "falling away" make rapid strides in these end times with the coming of the Lord drawing nigh for His true Church -- Maranatha!

T. J. Knapp

On the End of Joshua 1

I add but one word on the end of the chapter. There are Christians (I cannot say approved of God) who take their place on this side of Jordan -- that is to say, on this side of the power of death and resurrection, applied to the soul by the Spirit of God. The place in which they settle is not Egypt; it is beyond the Red Sea, it is within the limits of Israel's possessions outside Egypt and this side the Euphrates, river of Babylon. But it is not Canaan. It is a land they have chosen for their cattle and their possessions; they establish their children and their wives there. It is not Joshua who conquered that land; it is not the place of testimony to the power of the Spirit of God -- that Canaan which is beyond Jordan.

However, although the children and their families might be placed there, yet the men of war must, whether they will or no, take part in the conflicts of the children of God, who seek no rest except where the power of God is found -- that is to say, in Canaan, in the heavenly places, all enemies being driven out. And indeed when the sin of Israel, and their consequent weakness, exposed the people to the successful attacks of their enemies, of the enemies of God, this country was the first that fell into their hands. "Know ye that Ramoth Gilead is ours?" leads to no blessing to the people when sorrowful on account of its loss. For the time all was well; that is, as long as Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh remained under the authority of Joshua, and through him the power of God conducted the people. They too say to Joshua that which God had said, "Be strong and of a good courage."

How often among the children of God some principle or line of conduct is brought in, that is inferior in nature to the excellence of that work which is going on in the purpose of God; but which, as long as the power of God is working according to this purpose, does not disengage itself, so to say, from the work, so as to assume any prominence, and produce uneasiness and sorrow! But when this divine stream becomes shallow in consequence of man's unfaithfulness, then bitter fruits appear; spiritual declensions, weakness, heart-burnings, divisions, and direct subjection to the evil power, flowing from the impossibility of reconciling that which is spiritual with that which is carnal, and of maintaining a spiritual testimony while conforming to the ways of the world.

But this testimony belongs to the other side of Jordan. The two tribes and a half may follow this course if they will, but we cannot come out of Canaan to join them. Alas! these beautiful meadows, well suited to feed their flocks, have found but too many Lots, and tribes of Israel, to settle in them to their loss. The shoals that are met with in our Christian voyage may perhaps be safely crossed at high tide; but at low tide skillful pilotage is needed to avoid them, and to float always in the full current of the grace of God in the channel it has made for itself. But there is a sure and steadfast pilot; and we are safe if we are content to follow Him. God has given us what we need for this. Perhaps we must be satisfied with a very little boat: the unerring pilot will be in it.

J. N. Darby, *Synopsis* 1:254, 255.

The Two Tribes and A Half

Numbers 32, Joshua 1 and 22

The history of the Two Tribes and a Half has its own instruction for us, and illustrates a peculiar character of mind and will among the saints of God. They do not stand with the Lot of the days of Abraham, though in some respects they remind us of him.

It is wonderful what a variety of moral character and of Christian experience finds itself before the soul in the histories of scripture. The soul reads itself there fully; the workings of nature not only in man, but in the renewed man, its conflicts and its strength, giving us to see so much that we know in ourselves; and, at times, the lights and shades as well as the distinctive features are to be traced.

The Two Tribes and a Half are not Lot, but there is that in them which tells us of him. Like him, their own distinct, independent history begins with their eyeing the well watered plains, which were good for their cattle, in the wilderness side of Jordan. They think of their cattle rather than the call of God, and the pilgrimage of their brethren. Had their hearts been full of Christ, they would not have seen anything till they had crossed over the river. Abraham, their father, had never been on that side of the river; nor did their expectation when called out of Egypt stop short of the other side. Neither had Moses said anything about those plains, in the land of Gilead. But they had cattle, and those plains were suitable to their cattle, and they sue for an inheritance ere they reach the land which had been their expectation when they set out. This was all. They had no thought whatever of revolting; of sacrificing the portion of true Israelites, but their cattle drew their eyes to the goodly plains of Gilead, and they were for *possessing them, though they would do so as Israelites.*

How natural! How common! In moral power they come short of the call of God, though they hold to the hope of that calling, and claimed fellowship only with those who were the objects of it. They were not in power a *risen* people; though in faith one with such. They were careful to declare and hold to their alliance with the Tribes who were to pass the Jordan; though they were led to remain on the wilderness side of it themselves. I do not regard them, like Lot, a people of mixed principles, who had deliberately formed their lives by something inconsistent with the call of God, but rather as a generation, who owning all that obey it, and refusing all thought of having any other, are not found in the moral power of it.

Again I say, how common! This is a large generation. We know ourselves too well to ask, is there such a people?

Moses at once is made uneasy by this movement on the part of Reuben and Gad and the Half tribe of Manasseh. He expressed this uneasiness with much force. He tells them that they bring to his remembrance the conduct of the spies whom he had sent out years before from Kadesh-Barnea, and whose way had discouraged their brethren, and occasioned the forty years pilgrimage in the wilderness. There was something so unlike the call of Israel from Egypt in the hope of Canaan, in all these suggestions on the part of these Tribes, that Moses at once thus resents it: and it is bad that this is produced in the soul of a Moses; when the first instinctive feelings and thoughts of a saint, who is walking in the power of the resurrection of Christ, are alarmed and wounded by what is seen in a brother. And yet how common! many a Moses now-a-days is called in spirit

to challenge what offends, as being out of company with the calling of the saints. For many a thing gets its sanction or its excuse from the heart of a saint that cannot stand before the judgment of faith.

Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh have to explain themselves, and to give fresh pledges to Moses that they by no means separate themselves from the fellowship and interests of their brethren, and they do this with zeal, and with integrity too. In this they are not with Lot. Lot's conduct separated him for the rest of the journey from Abraham. But not so these Tribes. With zeal they assert their purpose to be still with their brethren. Nay, they would by no means have taken the Eastern Gilead, had this produced a forfeiture of their identity with those who were to be in the Western Canaan. They are to give pledges too, that they will be foremost in the action which still remains on behalf of their brethren's inheritance. By no means do they contemplate anything like the loss of fellowship with them; in this they are above Lot. But still they have stopped short of Canaan. They are not in the full power of the Canaan-calling -- not in the thoughts of the man of God, a dead and risen people; for they are pausing (ere the promised inheritance be reached) for the sake of their cattle in the wilderness.

Moses, however, does not let them go, as Abraham let Lot go. They are not to be treated in that way, neither does the judgment of God light on them, as on the unbelieving spies who bring up an evil report of the land. They do not belong to such generations, though their way may savour of such. Moses cannot lose sight of them because they propose to feed their cattle in the plains of Gilead, while they thus with zeal assert their purposed fellowship with their brethren. They are his, and he is theirs still, I may say; and they hold on together, unlike Lot and Abraham, who never met after Lot became a citizen of the world; practically forgetful, so far, of the calling of God.

This is so; but still Moses has to eye them and remember them, and keep his thoughts somewhat anxiously and uneasily occupied about them. And this is not the best witness for a saint. Happy when the Holy Ghost can have us and our state also, to lead us still onward and feed us still in the knowledge, and with the things of Jesus.

Lot and Abraham never met after the way of the world had drawn Lot into it. Jonathan and David, now and again, and in their affections there is communion between them true and warm. Obadiah and Elijah met only once, and it is but a poor meeting: "*Reserve*" marking the way of Elijah; and "*Effort*" that of Obadiah; for they were not kindred spirits. The leathern girdle of the prophet but ill-assorting with the living of Ahab; but the Two Tribes and a Half are above these. They are still companions of their brethren, and will not think of anything else; and Moses admits their title without reserve. Their desire to have their portion in Gilead makes no difference as to this. But still they do not go through and through; they do not measure *the whole* of the wilderness, but they linger; and the thought of their cattle being suited in the fields of Gilead attracts them, and there they find an object, though they still accompany the camp.

What shades of difference there are in those different illustrations; what different classes of the people of God; yea, and what difference in the same class do we meet here. Lot and Jonathon and Obadiah are of one class; men of mixed principles, as the expression is; men whose lives are formed by such every-day habits as cannot combine with the pilgrim character; or the suffering-witnessing-character to which the call of God leads. Sodom, as Lot's place, Saul's court as Jonathon's, and the palace of Ahab, King of Israel at Jezreel, as Obadiah's; when Abraham dwelt in a tent, David in a den or cave

of the earth, and Elijah with the provisions of God at Cherith or Sarepta. And yet Jonathon was not Lot or Obadiah personally, though we have to set them all in one class. Neither was Obadiah, Lot exactly; and as between them as a class, and such dead and risen men as Moses and Joshua, we have to bring in the Reubenites, Gadites, and Half Tribe of Manasseh, a generation who will by no means admit the thought of their separating themselves from full companionship with the call of God; but who, nevertheless, exhibit in moral action that which is not according to the full measure of that call. And this is indeed a common case -- nay, this is *the* common case among the saints. We know it ourselves; we own the call, we witness it, we speak of Canaan, of death and resurrection, of hopes and inheritance beyond the river; but nature, and present ease, and present desires, the bleating of the flock, the lowing of the oxen, as they feed in the plains of Gilead, lead to much which makes the more single eye of a Moses, and the more fixed and single purpose of a Caleb or of a Joshua to wonder and enquire. (See Num. 32.)

Joshua, who has the spirit of Moses, has them in some anxious and uneasy remembrance, like Moses; and he addresses a word of special admonition to them when he tells the conduct of affairs under the Lord, and for Israel. For they are still, being the Tribes, on the wilderness side of Jordan, the occasion of this fear and uneasiness to the more simple and devoted mind of a full-hearted, single eyed servant of Christ (Joshua 1).

There remains, however, another sight of them still in the progress of the history, and one which has its own striking moral features, I mean in Joshua 22.

The ark had gone over. The feet of the priests bearing it had divided the waters of Jordan, and the ark had gone over conducting and shielding the Israel of God. And it is true that our Tribes of Reuben, and Gad, and Half-Manasseh had gone over with them; but the ark and Israel had *remained* there -- that's the difference. The Two Tribes and a Half return, but the ark remains. The place that becomes a ransomed people, a dead and risen people, is left, and they return to *settle* where Israel had but *wandered*.

Joshua, like Moses, instinctively feels all this, and warns them, and exhorts them on their departure. And as soon as they reach the place they had chosen, *they* begin to feel it also. They are not fully at ease; and there is something specially significant in that. They raise an altar -- (the heart of an Israelite in the land of Gilead would do just the same at this day). They are uneasy -- Jehoshaphat was uneasy, when he found himself in the court of Ahab, and asked for a prophet of the Lord. The renewed mind speaks that language in a foreign land. They raise the altar, and call it "ED," or a witness -- a witness that Israel's God was their God. But why all this? Had they remained in Canaan, where the ark and the tabernacle of God were, they would not have needed this. But they were not there, Shiloh was not in view, nor could their souls carry the sense of it, that Shiloh was the common centre with all their brethren. They have to give themselves some artificial help, to give their souls a crutch, if I may so speak, to aid the confidence and the joy of their hearts; that, as Israelites, they had fellowship and common interests and calling with their brethren. All this is very full of meaning, and is constantly experienced to this day. Some witness of our belonging to the Israel of God is needed and craved by the soul, when we get into a position in the earth which the call of Israel does not fully justify. The countenance of others -- the restless examinations of our own state-reasonings with ourselves -- remembrance, it may be, of better days with the soul -- something that is as artificial and of our own device as the altar of ED, and which would

have been as unneeded too as that had the soul been more simple and faithful.

All this is still known, and is all figured here -- it is the writing on this pillar on the eastern side of Jordan. And a wonderful pillar it thus is. Lot's wife, the pillar of salt, had a writing upon it which the Divine Master Himself has read for us, and, I doubt not, so has this pillar of ED, which the Holy Ghost would fain teach us to read, that we may be warned to know what uneasiness and doubt accompanies the soul that has retreated to find a *settlement* there, where the saints are and have been *strangers*. This altar witnessed both *for*, and *against* these Israelites. It was just what Jehoshaphat's uneasiness was when he found himself with Ahab and the prophets of Baal. It is just what a saint's uneasiness here is when he finds himself involved in a world that he ought to have left. For all this bespeaks the saintly or renewed mind, but in such exercises and experiences as the grace of God has caused it.

Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh, are challenged the second time -- by Joshua here, as by Moses before; because of their pillar here, because of their seeking the plains of Gilead before.

This is all natural, as common as Christian fellowship is, but all more or less painful and troublesome now-a-days as it was then. A great stir is made among the Tribes; and a great assemblage is formed to enquire into this further.

Something appeared in the eye of them who were on the other side of the river, which alarmed them as Israelites, as worshippers of Jehovah. It looked to be something which the common call of God could not allow for a moment -- it must at least be explained. What a living picture this is! Are we not at home here? Do we not scan this spot well?

The calling and the election of those eastern borderers was not made sure to their brethren who were living in the place of the ark of God. They have to enquire and inspect their condition; and whatever the result of such inspection may be, the need of such a process is but a poor thing at best.

I believe the first Epistle to the Corinthians is very much an Eleazar crossing the river to look after a pillar. There were things at Corinth that alarmed Paul. They seemed to be reigning as kings in the earth; his ministry in the meekness and gentleness of Christ was getting despised. The world was fashioning the hearts of saints there; and people were valued because of their place in the world. "The princes of this world," the men of the schools, or the ways of the schools, were regaining their place, and saints were returning to *settle* where they ought to be *unknown* and *strangers*. Paul, in the zeal of Joshua 22, has to cross the river; and whatever the discovery may be, the action is a painful one, and the need of it a sad one in the history of the Church.

The Tribes may satisfy Eleazar more than the Corinthians did Paul; all these varieties are known at this hour: but there is this common sorrow and humbling, that the call and election is not made sure; and we have either to take jourmies, or to occasion jourmies, to have our own ways and ED's, and altars, as brethren, read; instead of reading to all the secrets of God's altar and the tabernacle at Shiloh! -- J. G. B.

J. G. Bellett, *Words of Truth*, Vol, 1, 1867.

From New Birth to New Creation

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