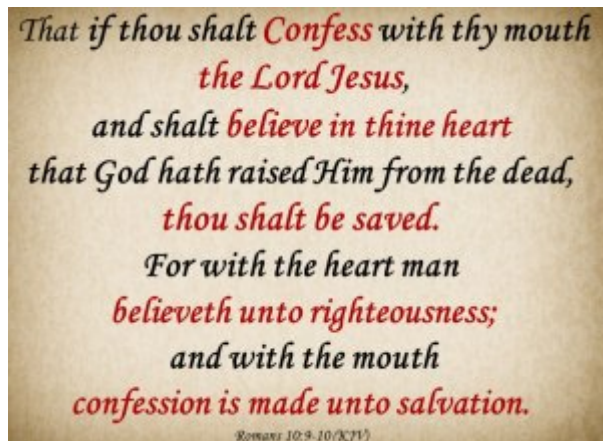


The Divine Programme of The World's History Chapter VII. The Christian Programme – Part II.



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He said much more on the subject to His disciples shortly afterwards. Seated together with Him on the Mount of Olives, and gazing across the valley of Jehoshaphat on the striking view of Jerusalem outspread before them, with its beautiful temple, and temple area, in the foreground,—the twelve, pondering the sad future He had predicted for their holy house, and finding it hard to believe, remarked to Him, in a deprecatory, expostulating tone, on the extent, variety, magnificence, and solidity of the structures recently erected by Herod. They pointed out how richly the temple was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, and seemed anxious to elicit, if possible, some qualification, if not contradiction, of the doom that had been foretold. It was a perfect vision of beauty from that point, with its marble courts and golden gates glittering in the glorious sunshine of the East, and contrasting in its massive magnificence with the graceful palms, the feathery tamarisk, and the dark cypress around.

The scene was the pride of Jewish hearts, and, as they challenged Christ's admiration of it, His gaze was troubled, and in accents of deep sincerity and sorrow He assured them that His previously expressed anticipation was only too correct. "See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." He then went on to assure them that they would themselves see Jerusalem compassed with idolatrous Gentile armies; and that when they did so, they and all His Judean disciples should flee to the mountains, for that days of dreadful vengeance would then be commencing; that a time of great and unparalleled tribulation for the Jews would be opening; that many of them would fall by the edge of the sword, many more be led away captive into all nations, and that Jerusalem itself would not only be taken and destroyed, but that the very site of it would—throughout an entire dispensation—be held by Gentile conquerors. "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles," He prophesied, "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Now, as the times

of the *Jews*, or Jewish age, had lasted for 2,000 years, these words might well suggest to the disciples that "the times of the Gentiles" would be no brief seventy years, like the Babylonian captivity, but, as has proved to be the case, a long dispensational "age" analogous to that of Judaism.

Our Lord thus foresaw and foretold as definitely and clearly as possible, both in parabolic and plain predictions,—

1. The fall of Judaism as a religion;
2. The destruction of Jerusalem as a city, and of the temple as a sanctuary;
3. A time of great tribulation, and of prolonged dispersion of the Jewish people;
4. An age-long desolation of the land, and Gentile domination of Jerusalem.

Here are four distinct elements of the future; and it should be noted that any one of the four might have happened without the other three. The religious economy of Judaism might have come to an end without the political extinction of the nation; the city and temple might have been destroyed *and rebuilt* within a century, as after the Babylonian captivity; the Jews might have been scattered *and restored*; or Jerusalem might, like Nineveh, or Palmyra, or Ephesus, have lain long in its ruins without being trodden down by Gentile occupants all those ages. The foreview given on this one point alone was no simple, obvious one, easy to invent, certain to be realized. On the contrary, it picks its way carefully amidst a crowd of probabilities, possibilities, contingencies of all kinds. It announced, simply and authoritatively, the future will be thus and thus, at a time when no human wisdom or prescience could have decided—out of a thousand contingencies—which was even most *likely* to occur.

An elaborate series of events, embracing complicated, intricate, and long-continued episodes of Jewish and Gentile history, which it has taken volume upon volume to *record*, is predicted in a few sharp clear sentences. The prophecy is precisely such a one as no pretender to supernatural prescience would have ventured on. But just as there are portraits, landscapes, sea pictures, and cloudscapes that could only have been painted from the actual sight of the originals, so this outline of the future of the Jews, uttered 1,800 years ago by Jewish lips, amid scenes of Jewish peace and prosperity, could only have been drawn by One whose all-seeing eye could gaze on events which lay at the time hidden in the womb of the future.

For we need scarcely tell how history justified the daring predictions. The tragic and wonderful story is so familiar that it suffices to recall our knowledge of it in the briefest way. Who has not shuddered over the pages of Josephus, as he narrates, with the exactness of an eye-witness, the episodes of the long drawn-out agony, all the more painfully impressive because the tale is traced by a Jewish pen? If we inquire of this writer, Did many fall by the sword, as Jesus here predicted?—humanity itself sickens over the reply. Christian faith in considering it exclaims in awe: Behold "the severity of God,"—the proof that severity is as truly one of His attributes

as "goodness." We may not quote Josephus, for his story is far too full. The following summary from the pages of Bishop Newton will recall some of the facts so vividly described in full in his "Wars of the Jews":—

"The number of those who fell by the edge of the sword' was indeed very great. Of those who perished during the whole siege, there were," as Josephus says, "1,100,000. Many were also slain at other times and in other places. By the command of Florus, who was the first author of the war, there were slain at Jerusalem 3,600; by the inhabitants of Caesarea, above 20,000; at Scythopolis, above 13,000; at Ascalon, 2,500, and at Ptolemais, 2,000, At Alexandria, under Tiberius Alexander, the president, 50,000; at Joppa, when it was taken by Cestius Gallus, 8,400; in a mountain called Asamon, near Sepphoris, above 2,000; at Damascus, 10,000; in a battle with the Romans at Ascalon, 10,000; in an ambush near the same place, 8,000; at Japha, 15,000; of the Samaritans, upon Mount Gerizim, 11,600; at Jotapha, 40,000; at Joppa, when taken by Vespasian, 4,200; at Tarichea, 6,500, and after the city was taken, 1,200; at Gamala, 4,000 slain, besides 5,000 who threw themselves down a precipice; of those who fled with John from Gischala, 6,000; of the Gadarenes, 15,000 slain, besides an infinite number drowned; in the villages of Idumea, above 10,000 slain; at Gerasa, 1,900; at Machaerus, 1,700; in the wood of Jardes, 3000; in the castle of Massada, 960; in Cyrene, by Catullus, the governor, 3,000. Besides these, many of every age, sex, and condition were slain in this war, who are not reckoned; but of these who are reckoned, the number amounts to about 1,357,660, which would appear almost incredible if their own historian had not so particularly enumerated them.

"But, besides the Jews who 'fell by the edge of the sword,' others were also to be led away captive into all nations; and, considering the number of the slain, the number of the captives too was very great. There were taken, particularly, at Japha, 2,130; at Jotapha, 1,200, At Tarichea, 6,000 chosen young men were sent to Nero, the rest sold, to the number of 30,400, besides those who were given to Agrippa: of the Gadarenes, 2,200; in Idumea, above 1,000. Many, besides these, were taken at Jerusalem, so that, as Josephus himself informs us, 'The number of the captives taken in the whole war amounted to 97,000. The tall and handsome young men Titus reserved for his triumph; of the rest, those above seventeen years of age were sent to the works in Egypt; but most were distributed through the Roman provinces, to be destroyed in their theatres by the sword or by the wild beasts. Those under seventeen were sold for slaves. Of these captives, many underwent hard fate, Eleven thousand of them perished for want. Titus exhibited all sorts of shows. and spectacles at Caesarea; and many of the captives were there destroyed, some being exposed to the wild beasts, and others compelled to fight in troops against one another. At Caesarea, too, in honour of his brother's birthday, 2,500 Jews were slain; and a great number likewise at Berytus, in honour of his father's. The like was done in other cities of Syria. 'Those whom he reserved for his triumph were Simon and John, the generals of the captives, and seven hundred others of remarkable stature and beauty. Thus were the Jews miserably tormented and distributed over the Roman provinces; and are they not still distressed, and dispersed over all the nations of the earth?

"As the Jews were 'to be led away captive into all nations,'" so Jerusalem was to be 'trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be

fulfilled.' And accordingly Jerusalem has never since been in the possession of the Jews, but hath constantly been in subjection to some other nation, as first to the Romans, and afterwards to the Saracens, and then to the Franks, and then to the Mamelucs, and now to the Turks." (In the 19th century when this was written. The text taken from Newton's Dissertation," p. 414.)

The Emperor Hadrian, whose first name was AELIUS, placed a Roman colony on the site of Jerusalem, and built there a city, which he called, after himself, AELIA. It had a temple dedicated to Jupiter Capitolinus. The erection of the temple excited to revolt the remnant of the Jews left in Palestine. They rose in rebellion under Barchochab, a robber and murderer, and then came the final catastrophe, the last act of the tragedy in the land, in A.D. 135.

"The Jews were at length subdued with most terrible slaughter: fifty of their strongest castles and 983 of their best towns were sacked and demolished; 580,000 men fell by the sword in battle, besides an infinite multitude who perished by famine and sickness and fire, so that Judea was almost all desolated.

"The Jewish writers themselves reckon that doubly more Jews were slain in this war than came out of Egypt; and that their sufferings under Nebuchadnezzar and Titus were not so great as what they endured under the Emperor Adrian. Of the Jews who survived this second ruin of their nation, an incredible number of every age and sex were sold like horses, and dispersed over the face of the earth. The emperor completed his design, rebuilt the city, re-established the colony, ordered the statue of a hog in marble to be set up over the gate that opened towards Bethlehem, and published an edict strictly forbidding any Jew, upon pain of death, to enter the city, or so much as to look upon it at a distance." ("Newton's Dissertation," p. 415.)

The tears which Israel's Messiah shed over Jerusalem and her children welled up from eyes that *foresaw what was coming*—foresaw all this and much more of the same sort.

For 1,800 years exile, persecution, and cruel oppression have, as we showed in the Mosaic section, been the portion of the Jewish nation—for all that we have recalled here was only the beginning of sorrows. The entire interval up to the time of the French revolution at the end of last century was to Israel a time of great tribulation, though its extremest severity was not continuous, but intermittent. Our century has seen a very marked change in the fortunes and condition of the Jews, for the times of the Gentiles are well-nigh over and Israel's long story is not finished yet. It is only beginning, indeed, for it will need eternity to tell it all.

Twice over our Lord employed the important little word "until" in His predictions of these Jewish experiences. Your house is left unto you desolate, He said, *until* ye are ready to welcome, instead of reject, Me; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles *until* their age has run its appointed course. What do these *limits* mean? If a judge says to a criminal, "You are to remain in prison *until* five years have run their course," what does he imply? If an architect says, "I will not begin to rebuild that house *until* funds have been secured for the purpose," what is the inference? He who

foretold the present doom of Israel indicated its limits, and *indicated also what would follow.*

For Christ foretold His own return, as well as His departure—His return to reign on earth and over Israel, as the prophets of the Old Testament had promised. He did not set aside the Jewish hope for ever, but only postponed it for a time, and revealed an intermediate dispensation. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. The kingdom promised to Israel under their Messiah cannot be fulfilled by the present Gentile dispensation, while Christ is in heaven and the Jews under great tribulation. It is derogatory to the truth and inspiration of Scripture to suppose it!

Note: I beg to differ! It seems to me that Rev. Guinness is ignoring the fact that the only Israel God recognizes today are those who embrace Christ Jesus as their Savior! Paul was speaking to the Gentiles when he wrote this:

Ephesians 2:12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the **commonwealth of Israel**, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14 ¶For he is our peace, **who hath made both one**, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; 15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for **to make in himself of twain one new man**, so making peace; 16 And that he might reconcile **both unto God in one body** by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

And Paul writes in the book of Romans,

Romans 12:5 So **we, being many, are one body in Christ**, and every one members one of another.

If we, both Jews and Gentiles, are *one* body in Christ, what *other* body is there?

The angel, in announcing the birth of Jesus, predicted that He should be great, and that the Lord God would give unto Him the throne of His father David; that He should reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and that of His kingdom there should be no end. This prediction has yet to be fulfilled. It is not and cannot be fulfilled by the present kingdom of heaven. On the contrary, Christ predicted that He would establish it at His second advent. He sets His seal to all the old predictions, and adds new ones. The kingdom, He tells them, when it does come, will be a far more glorious one than they imagined. The Son of man will come in clouds, with power and great glory. He will send forth His angels, and gather His elect. He will come in the glory of His Father, and of the holy angels, and sit on the throne of His glory. He will reckon with His servants, and award places of honour in the kingdom to His faithful followers {Luke xxii. 29). But Israel's repentance would have to

be the preliminary, "Until" then they would see Him no more. All this was in perfect harmony with Old Testament prophecy, with Zechariah xi, and xii, and many other passages. As all this is, however, at present unfulfilled prophecy, we do not dwell on it here.

Note: For reasons explained above, I can't agree with this. The only true Israel today, the only true people of God, are only those in Christ Jesus. The second advent will not be primarily a reign mainly over the descendants of Israel, but over the entire world.

We have now seen what the programme given by Christ was in its *negative* aspect. The coming age would not be a continuation of Judaism. The favoured nation, which for 2,000 years had been the channel of revelation, and the sole witness for the living and true God in an idolatrous pagan world, was to be removed from the position of which its rejection of Christ had proved it unworthy. This predicted destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, with which Jewish ritual worship was inseparably connected, involved a change in God's providential action towards mankind. *What would be substituted for Judaism?* What was the *positive* side of the prophetic programme presented by our Lord Jesus?

He announced THE RISE, CHARACTER, COURSE, AND ISSUES OF AN ENTIRELY NEW AND PREVIOUSLY UNPRECEDENTED ECONOMY OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE, of which He speaks under the name of "the kingdom of heaven." He did not Himself personally reveal *all* that the programme was to contain on this subject. Much could not properly be revealed until after His resurrection. As we shall presently see, this part of the prophecy was left to be communicated subsequently, through the inspired apostles. But Jesus Himself sketched its outline. He neither defined fully what the true Church would be, nor what the outward professing Church, which we call Christendom, would be. That was foretold later on. But He gave similitudes of the coming "kingdom of heaven," which prove that the eighteen Christian centuries lay naked and open before His all-seeing eye, though during the days of His flesh a full disclosure would have been premature.

This "kingdom of heaven," or present spiritual kingdom of God on earth, must be broadly distinguished from the other kingdom of which we have just spoken. It is in mystery only a kingdom, not in manifestation. None can see its King or its court, its hosts or its palaces, nor even distinguish its subjects, by any outward sign, from its enemies. Christ speaks of "*the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,*" and He paints it as wonderfully different from the earthly kingdom of God which Israel had been expecting, and which, owing to their rejection of its King, was postponed *sine die* (indefinitely), and is still future. *That* kingdom was to be introduced by the return of the King in power and great glory, characterized by His personal presence, by His session on the throne of David, and by the exaltation of repentant and restored Israel. *This* kingdom, on the other hand, exists during the absence of the King in heaven, runs its course during His Melchizedek session on the throne

of God, and coincides with the time of Israel's dispersion and rejection. The two are contrasted in every respect: the one is a rule on earth, the other a rule from heaven; the one is over peoples and nations, the other is over the hearts and lives of Christ's disciples mainly, though involving also a hidden providential government of the world; it is an invisible rule, a mysterious sway, an intangible dominion; it is a kind of kingdom of which the Jews had no conception, and of which the disciples themselves were slow to catch the idea; it was one which had never been clearly predicted in the Old Testament, and they had failed to understand the hints of it which the prophets had given; it was practically a new revelation. Hence our Lord began His gradual unfolding of it in simple parables, in order that the homely analogies might make way for the novel conception.

Note: Again, I cannot agree with the author on this point. Are there really *two* kingdoms? "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom (singular, not plural) come..."

Combining all the intimations given by its Founder as to this kingdom of heaven, we must now deduce, from the mass of parable and prediction in the Gospels, the positive side, or Christian aspect, of Christ's programme of the future.

And *first*, in His prophetic parables, our Lord foretold that the coming dispensation, or kingdom of heaven, would have no national limits, but be cosmopolitan—*universal in its scope*. "The field" of Divine operation would in future be "the world." This was a novel and most startling idea for Jewish minds, and the disciples sought an explanation of what to them seemed so strange, though to us so simple and familiar. The world? Yes. "The field is the world." As if He had said: In the future no one nation will enjoy any religious advantages more than another. All distinction of Jew and Gentile will be done away, The revelation of God will be for all, to all. There will be no planting and hedging of a vineyard. "The field is the world." Absolute equality of religious privileges among men, irrespective of nationality, is here clearly predicted.

Secondly, the future operations of God in this field would be *dissimilar in character* from any past operations of His in the world. He would establish no outward visible theocracy nor ritual religious service. He would enact no new code of laws, as from Sinai, nor establish ceremonial worship and a separate priesthood. He would work no special miracles of preservation and deliverance for His people; on the contrary, His action would be like that of a sower sowing the seed. "Behold, a sower went forth to sow." The new dispensation would be marked by a wide distribution of living seed; that is, by a world-wide diffusion of truth—living and life-giving truth. Hence its one great ordinance would not be, as of old, sacrifice, but preaching, teaching, imparting to men the Word of God. The Sower's object was to diffuse His precious seed, and the seed possessed, latent in itself, the powers of life and of self-multiplication. All life comes from seed, and tends to produce seed, which, in its turn, gives birth to new life. The kingdom of heaven would grow, by inward life-power, from small beginnings to immense

development. The seed would grow secretly,—the progress of the kingdom of heaven would be by the hidden and concealed operations of spiritual life; for as seed is capable of being quickened into wondrous action, so the Word of God has in it the germ which can produce rich and ever-increasing results.

This was clearly a prediction that the coming age would see inward and spiritual operations on the part of the Divine Being, that He would work in the hearts and minds of men, and that, instead of imposing a new law, He was about to impart a new life. It was a prediction that the kingdom of heaven would not be established by force, like the empire of Caesar or the subsequent sway of Mohammed. The Jews expected Messiah to establish His kingdom by force, by the subjugation of enemies and the punishment of all opponents. The only kingdoms the Jews had ever known, or indeed that the world had ever seen up to that time, had been won by force, and been held by force alone. But Christ told them there was coming a dominion wider and longer than any earth had seen, that would be established solely by a gradual dissemination and spread of the truth of God.

He intimated, *thirdly*, that the subjects of the new kingdom would not be received *en masse*, as nations, but only individually, and that in every case the growth of the seed would depend upon the condition of the soil into which it fell. There would be a recognition of individuality: the state of heart and mind of each hearer of the word would in each case determine the issue of the sowing. This again was something wholly new, for a man was a Jew, whether he would or no, but no one would enter the kingdom of heaven against his will.

Fourthly, the new age was to present a *mixed condition* of things. He tells them that the kingdom of heaven will in this respect bear no resemblance to the future kingdom of God, in which He will “gather out all things that offend, and those that do iniquity,” in which righteousness will reign triumphant, and sin will not be suffered, nor enemies and evil-doers tolerated. He predicts that, on the contrary, in the kingdom of heaven tares will grow as well as wheat, that the enemy will be at work as well as the sower, that the husbandman will not suffer the tares to be eradicated, that both good and bad fish will be gathered in the net, and that no separation will take place until the end of the age. This mixed condition of things is predicted again and again as a feature of the coming kingdom in later parables: there would be foolish virgins without any oil in their lamps, as well as wise ones; there would be foolish builders laying their foundations on the sand, as well as wise ones, who would build on the rock; there would be wicked and evil servants, who wasted their Lord’s substance, as well as good and faithful ones; and there would at last be goats on the left hand, as well as sheep on the right.¹

¹ The meaning of the parable of the leaven has been much controverted, yet we have ourselves no question but that it teaches the same truth, only in a more definite form. It speaks of a state of things which exists not so much in the world as in a small and pure mass—“three measures of meal”; it says that leaven will be hidden in this pure mass, and will work till the whole is leavened. That is, evil will be introduced into the Church, and will permeate it completely. Though it

is often supposed to do so, this prediction cannot possibly point to the action of the gospel in the world, gradually evangelizing it, and that for two reasons: First, because Scripture is always consistent, and never employs the very same emblem to signify two opposite things. Now everywhere else in the Bible leaven is used as a symbol of evil, not of good: Exod. xiii, 3; Lev. ii, 11; Amos iv. 5; Luke xii. 1; 1 Cor. v.7; Gal. v. 9. The only passage which could be supposed to be an exception to this rule (Lev. xxiii, 17) is in reality the strongest instance of it. It commands the presentation on the day of Pentecost, not only of the wave sheaf, typifying Christ, but of two loaves baked with leaven, typifying the Church, *in which sin continues to exist, even though it be redeemed and sanctified*. Secondly, the gospel never *has* influenced "the whole" world, and never will in this age, seeing that it is distinctly predicted that when Christ returns to close it there will be vast numbers who know not God and obey not the gospel, and who will be punished with everlasting destruction from His presence. Hence we take the parable of the leaven to be a further revelation of the fact that the kingdom of heaven would witness not only the co-existence of evil and good in the *world*, but an active and corrupting influence in the *Church*.

It is objected to this statement, that Scripture symbolizes Christ as a lion in Rev. v. and Satan as a lion in 1 Pet. v." But in this and all similar cases the characteristic differences make the symbols employed virtually two distinct and widely different ones, though they have an identical base. Just as in the science of heraldry a lion couchant (lying down with the head raised) and a lion rampant are not the same, so the "lion of the tribe of Juda" and the "roaring lion" seeking whom he may devour are widely different emblems. Leaven, on the contrary, is one and the same.

Thus our Saviour's very earliest parables—before there were any signs that Israel would reject their Messiah, and thus interpose a barrier to the immediate coming of the kingdom which they expected—predicted four of the most salient features of the new dispensation, which He alone foresaw. Its sphere was to be *universal*; its nature was to be *spiritual*, as He taught the woman of Samaria in plain words; it would deal with men *individually*, and not nationally; and its character, though a kingdom of heaven, would be *mixed*, imperfect, good and bad.

In later parables He revealed many additional features of the coming age, to which we must only allude. In His story of the labourers who, though they had toiled for dissimilar periods, were equally rewarded by the householder, He foretold that the exercise of sovereign grace would be a leading principle of God's providence, for this was a similitude of the kingdom of heaven. In giving every man his due,—the wages for which he had agreed,—the master acted in strict and simple justice. So God had acted in Judaism. In giving *some men much more than their due*, the owner of the vineyard had acted *in free grace*, for the labourers had no claim to so much, and had made no bargain at all. That was undeserved kindness, unmerited generosity, for which the recipients made no return. *This* principle was to mark the future in contrast to the

past. So "the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

In the parable of the ten virgins, again, Christ not only teaches the duty of watchfulness, but indicates in advance facts concerning the future, to name which is to recall the fulfilment of His prediction. He foresaw that His own second advent would be long delayed. *The Bridegroom tarried*,—came not when He was expected. He foresaw also the effect of this on the Church,—“They all slumbered and slept.” For a thousand years the Church did so: the hope of the Lord’s coming, so bright at first, so bright again now since the warning cry went forth, was lost sight of throughout the middle ages. He foresaw also that false profession would be exceedingly prevalent. Half the virgins would have no oil in their vessels with their lamps. We are accustomed to look at this parable and similar ones as teaching needed moral and spiritual lessons. They do this, but they are also *prophecies*. They foretell a new state of things, and one contrasted with Judaism. Jews did not slumber and sleep as to their Messianic hopes! The longer Messiah’s advent was delayed, the more impatient they became for it. They did not make false profession of being Jews, for they were such by blood. This sketch portrayed a *future* state of things, and one without any previous precedent; in other words, it was distinctly part of a prophetic programme.

The wide extension of the kingdom of heaven in the world had been distinctly predicted in the similitude of the mustard seed. Later on Christ foretold the bitter persecution of His disciples; the hatred and opposition of the world to them and their mission. He told them that He Himself was leaving them, that they would lose the help of His Divine wisdom and supernatural power, and be like sheep among wolves. And yet they were to witness for Him to the uttermost ends of the earth, and spread the story of a despised, rejected, and crucified Prophet among all nations. They were practically to establish this “kingdom of heaven,” which was to become so great, and they were but a few poor, ignorant, unlearned, and very commonplace Galilean peasants, with no power, or wealth, or experience, or special talent of any kind. The plan seemed very unlikely to succeed, and yet we know it *did* succeed, as was predicted, so that the apostles turned the world upside-down; and that the Christendom which now is, owes its origin instrumentally to their lives and labours.

How was this? The question brings us to the last of our Lord’s predictions, which we must notice here,—those we have noticed being only a sample of many more, which our readers will recall on reflection,—the last, and, with one exception, the most important and distinctive.

The Lord Jesus foretold repeatedly and emphatically the advent from heaven to earth of God the Holy Ghost, and His future indwelling in the disciples.

This was no mere doctrine which He taught. It was a stupendous fact of the first magnitude which He predicted. No other facts, save His own incarnation and atoning sacrifice, can even be compared to it in importance.

The Holy Ghost, the mighty Spirit of God, who brooded on the face of the deep before the world was; the Spirit of truth, who could reveal things to come;

the Comforter, whose presence would so replace His own as to make it even "expedient" that He should go away; whose coming would prevent their being lonely and helpless "orphans"; who would be to them "power from on high"; who would reprove the world of sin and righteousness and judgment; who would teach them all things, and recall Christ's own words to remembrance, illuminating with heavenly light sayings which had been dark to them when uttered, and enabling them also faithfully to *record* the words He had spoken to them;—this Divine Being should not only come, and influence them as He had often done before, but, said the great Prophet, "He dwelleth with you, AND SHALL BE IN YOU."

Here we have a present and a future. The Holy Spirit had in earlier ages come *upon* God's saints and influenced them from an external position, as it were; and in Christ's own presence He had dwelt *with* them. But in the coming age His relation to the disciples would be an altogether different one. 'He shall be *in* you," said the Saviour. And He described this indwelling in figure as a fountain springing up from the inmost depths of a man's being—"in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

This advent of the Holy Ghost was to *succeed* Christ's own ascension. "The Holy Ghost," says John, "was not yet given, because Christ was not yet glorified." "If I depart," said Jesus, "I will send Him unto you." What a magnificent indication of the Divinity of Jesus of Nazareth! Who but God can send the Spirit of God? "I will send HIM!"

But this is not the aspect in which we must here consider the words. We regard them only as a *prediction by Christ* of the distinguishing feature of the kingdom of heaven—the indwelling in His disciples of His own Holy Spirit. The prediction began to be fulfilled, as we know, at Pentecost and has been fulfilling ever since; and nothing else but its fulfilment accounts for the spread of the religion of Christ which has taken place. Christians alone could have done nothing; Christ, in His people, by His Spirit, has changed the face of the world, and established a spiritual kingdom which has embraced already unnumbered millions, who have been translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

To this point we shall have to revert in considering the Pauline view of the Christian age. In the meantime we must ask, before going further, Has the section of the programme given by our Lord Himself been—so far—borne out by subsequent events?

It is, of course, of the religious history of the world we must think mainly in seeking the answer. Political events were mentioned under the negative Judaic section; here it is mainly with Church history, with the aspect of the world in its relation to God and to religion, that we have to do. We have pointed out that the state of things *predicted* differed widely from anything that *had* existed on earth up to that time. Need we point out that it corresponds precisely with that which came into being soon afterwards, has lasted from that day to this, and is all around us now? In the first century there was one nation, and one only, that knew anything at all about the one living and true God. In the nineteenth, over four hundred millions of men, of all nations, profess to adore Him through Jesus Christ. In the first century

there was one temple only to Jehovah—that of Jerusalem. Then Egypt, Greece, and Rome with all the nations she had subjugated, were “without hope and without God in the world.” Now, in the nineteenth century, churches for the worship of God may be found from Eastern Japan girdling the globe to California, and studding it everywhere, from Greenland in the north to New Zealand in the south. Is it not true that the field is the world? Did Moses ever give such a command as, “Go ye into all the world and preach to every creature”? Limitation by nationality was not more characteristic of Judaism than universality and individualism of this Christian age. Yet when Christ sketched this outline, *no eye but His own foresaw the change that was coming.*

Again. What has wrought the change from Judaism and heathenism to the Christendom of our days?

Sowers sowing the seed, preachers preaching the word, martyrs witnessing for Jesus, the Holy Spirit convincing and converting individuals one by one. Nothing else! No warlike aggression, no philosophic speculation, no scientific discovery, no miraculous intervention, no political organization. It has “pleased God by the foolishness of *preaching* to save them that believe.”

It is so with every other point: the fact and the foreview correspond as the scene and its photograph. They do this so obviously that it would only be wearisome to particularize. Reflection will discover countless such correspondences between Christ’s own plain or symbolic predictions and their fulfilments in the eighteen Christian centuries, and the only thing needed to produce an overwhelming sense of wonder and adoration in the mind as we contemplate the harmony is to realize the condition of the world when the programme was given. It is nothing *now* to say, “We shall one day see China intersected with railways,” because we *have* seen England and Europe so intersected. But to have conceived and described the steam engine, the train, and the iron road, with the speed of transit and the number of travellers, in the days of stage coaches would have evinced the foresight of genius. So to describe beforehand a great change in the providence of God, and in the religious state of men, demanded Divine prescience, and that Christ did so proves that He possessed such foreknowledge.

But we must turn now to His indirect revelations through His apostles, which, from the nature of the case, were even more full and definite than His own direct prophecies.

THE APOSTOLIC SECTION OF THE CHRISTIAN PROGRAMME.

The nature of the case rendered it inevitable that much about the future should *not* have been clearly or fully revealed by our Lord Himself during His earthly lifetime. There were features of the coming age consequent on His own death, resurrection, and ascension which were necessarily veiled in mystery until these all-important events had taken place. Hence He said to His apostles, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will show you things to come.”

This promise and prediction would lead us to expect to find in the recorded utterances and still extant writings of the apostles further details as to the programme of the eighteen Christian centuries. Nor are we disappointed, for on examining the Book of Acts, and especially the Epistles of Paul and the Revelation of John, we find the outline of Christ filled in with a thousand details, and the sketch which He drew coloured with the rich and glowing tints of a finished picture. Yet He was Himself the great Prophet, for not only did He give in embryo all that is afterwards developed into the full Christian programme of the apostles, but it was HE who spake *by* the apostles, and He who gave to John the wonderful Apocalypse of the future which he transmitted to the Church. The programme is all from Himself, therefore, though it was given in three successive sections: the first from His own lips, the second through the apostles, and especially through Paul, and the third through John.

It should be noted that Paul had never companied with our Lord in His earthly lifetime, like the twelve. He was called by the ascended Saviour from heaven, and was acquainted only with Christ risen and glorified. This imparted, as we shall presently see, a peculiar character to his revelations. John, again, wrote long after the other apostles had sealed their witness with their blood. He wrote after Jerusalem had fallen, and the temple been destroyed by the Romans, in the year A.D. 96.

In considering the apostolic programme, we shall find that it consists almost entirely of an enlargement and amplification of Christ's own predictions. It shows how the future which He foretold would *work itself out*, and the actual *form* which the results of the great changes He announced would take. There is in it nothing independent or disconnected with the earlier predictions in the Gospels, though much that is *apparently* new. We can trace back each of the fresh revelations to its root in the Lord's own previous teachings. His prophetic words are seen in the light of the apostolic foreviews to have been seeds—germs of great things. A whole group of predictions connects itself with each one of His brief similitudes and simple statements. This will at once be perceived, if we consider the apostolic programme under the three main heads of,—

- I. ITS DISPENSATIONAL PREDICTIONS
- II. ITS REVELATIONS ABOUT THE TRUE CHURCH
- III. ITS PROPHECIES OF THE APOSTASY.

The first set will be found to grow out of and harmonize perfectly with our Lord's predictions about Judaism; the second with His revelation of the coming Comforter and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost; and the third with His foreview of the mixed condition of Christendom and of the conduct of the unfaithful servants.

I. THE PROPHETIC STATEMENTS OF THE APOSTLES ON DISPENSATIONAL SUBJECTS.

Inspired by the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost itself, Peter quotes and applies Joel's prediction of the effusion of the Spirit of God on people of all ages and both sexes in the last days,¹ and claims that the wonderful event which had just taken place, and as to which all Jerusalem was

marvelling, fulfilled the ancient prophecy.

¹ This expression "last days" may be and is applied either to the whole of the Christian dispensation, or to its closing portion, So a British officer returning from the East might say he had entered on the last stage of his journey when the P, and O. steamer left Gibraltar, because its next stop would be in England. But the ship might touch at Plymouth, and he might run up to town by train. That would be in another sense the last stage of his long journey, and only the drive from the terminus of the line to his own home would be absolutely the last stage. In Joel's day, and in Daniel's, the whole of this dispensation is spoken of as the last days, that is to say, *the last dispensation of Providence*; but we now live in the last stage of the last days.

Now that prophecy was not one of *Jewish* blessing, but of universal blessing, and speaks of a time when the distinctively Jewish age will have passed away and given place to another. It speaks of "all flesh," and strikes the keynote of the gospel age in the words, "*Whosoever* shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Peter thus endorses our Lord's own statement, that the kingdom of God had been taken from the wicked husbandmen and given to others; that the universal age had begun, and that henceforth the field was the world.

Continued in [Chapter VII. The Christian Programme – Part III.](#)

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