

Revelation

A Complete Commentary

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WHY THE CHURCH WILL NOT BE IN THE GREAT TRIBULATION

We mean by *The Church*, the Body of Christ, which includes all "born-again" people from Pentecost to Christ's second coming. "Ye are the body of Christ. . . . In one Spirit *were we all* baptized into *one* body, . . . and were all made to drink of *one* Spirit. Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up *for it*; that he might present the church to himself, a glorious *church* . . . one body and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in *one* hope of your calling." (I Corinthians 12:27, 13; Ephesians 5:25, 27; Chapter 4:4.) Note, that we do *not* mean by "The Church" the religious profession the world knows by that name; but the true Body of Christ only, which will be also His Bride.

We mean by *The Great Tribulation* that "time of trouble" on earth spoken of by Daniel, Jeremiah, and other prophets, and our Lord, and the Apostles, as so terrible in character that "there hath not been the like from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never shall be" (Mark 13:19). Its duration will be brief,—3½ years, or 42 months (shortened somewhat "for the elect's sake"); and it will immediately precede the Lord's return *to earth* to set up His kingdom *on earth*, as "Son of man" (Matthew 24:29; 13:41-43).

1. We know that the most of the Church *cannot* go through The Tribulation; for the vast majority of it, during the nearly two thousand years *has already gone to be with Christ*, to return with Him at His second coming. I wish we might let that sink deep into our hearts! Why should a small number at the end be subjected to a test and trial that the rest, even "carnal" saints, have entirely escaped? (*I Corinthians 8*).

2. We do not deny, but rather continually affirm, that the Church is always subject to suffering—indeed, that for Christ's sake we are killed all the day of grace long, accounted as "sheep for the slaughter" (*Romans 8*). Such instances, for example, as the Boxer martyrdom in 1900 and the Russian situation prove that the Church is

always subject to suffering; in fact, that is the program for it: as witness the early martyrs!

3. It is only from *divine wrath*, not human, that we affirm the Church of God to be absolutely and forever delivered, and that not only from the "great day of wrath" at Christ's second coming (*Revelation 19*) and from the eternal wrath at the Great White Throne judgment (*Revelation 20*); but we also affirm that the Church has no share in the woes that come directly from God's indignation, which occur upon the Lamb's taking the sealed book in heaven (*Revelation 5:1*). Now why do we affirm that? Because the Church is under grace, under *eternal favor*. I mean God's elect, those chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, sanctified by the Holy Ghost, believing the truth. Those in Christ *HAVE* their redemption, the forgiveness of all their trespasses. They have been made meet already to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. They have not been appointed unto wrath in any sense. They are not of the world; they have been made alive together with Christ, and raised up with Him and made to sit with Him in the heavenlies, with an eternal outlook of kindness from His hand in Christ Jesus. All wrath for them from God was forever over at the cross when Christ cried, "It is finished!"

Now these are the facts about the Body of Christ—not perfected saints only, but all the saints. There is no exception. God will not and cannot turn from His acceptance of those in His Son. Wrath has passed over forever for the Church. They have been fore-ordained to be conformed to the image of God's Son. They shall be so conformed so that Christ may be "the first-born among many brethren." This is the plain declaration of the God of all grace. This was a sovereign act of His own, not contingent upon their response to it; but, on the contrary, God Himself undertaking to work in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure, and to perfect that which concerned them. It was of the carnal Corinthian Christians that Paul said they should be conformed unto the end, that they should be unreprouable

in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me emphasize the fact that Paul calls them *babes* in Christ, saying, "Ye are yet carnal." But Paul says God is going to confirm them unto the day of Jesus Christ. Paul addresses this epistle to "all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in *every* place." Therefore, it covers this whole age, and it covers "carnal" Christians!*

4. We find also that Paul was sent by Christ to reveal not only the Church's heavenly calling, and destiny, but also to reveal that *Gospel* which belongs to this day of salvation, the essence of the message of which is that God was in Christ, *reconciling the world unto Himself at the cross, not reckoning* to them their trespasses; and hath *committed* to His saints of this "day of salvation," the "*ministry of reconciliation*" in such a sense that the word of reconciliation has been "placed in us." That is the meaning of the Greek word—God has *placed in us the word* of reconciliation, the business of telling others regarding reconciliation. Unto us this word belongs. "We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God." That is the attitude of the Apostle Paul, and of the saints of God of this age, *the whole age long!* Nor is there any hint that it has ever changed. It cannot change. The saints, as sinners, having found Christ, can do nothing but proclaim Christ to others. So that no matter how much we may be moved to arouse men by warnings of eternal judgment, *we must ever return to the message of the cross;* of the grace of God. The Church has no other commission, and the Church is God's house and the pillar and

*If it be argued that some of God's own are on earth during the wrath-days of The Great Tribulation, and therefore why not the Church-saints? the answer is, that it is perfectly evident to a thoughtful reader of prophecy regarding Israel, and especially the Psalms, that there will be souls who seek Jehovah, (and that in times of great trouble) to whom the finished work of Calvary is not yet revealed. Their consciences are not yet purged; the sense of sin and even of divine wrath—the wrath upon Israel oppresses them: the "fountain for sin and uncleanness" having not been nationally opened to Israel (Zechariah 12:11-13:1). Yet the saints of the Church cannot be meant here, for the blood of Christ is declared to have so cleansed,—not only from guilt, but from "dead works," the conscience of the believer that he serves gladly and freely the Living God (Heb. 9:14; 13:15). The Psalms present the consciousness, not of an Ephesian Christian, but of a godly Israelite longing for his Messiah's (second) coming as Deliverer and King.

stay of the truth in this age. So long as she is on earth we do not find any Scripture, any warrant for the idea that God will have two witnessing bodies with different messages on earth at the same time, one of present grace and one of present judgment! Let us keep this carefully in mind.

5. We find in Scripture that God may reveal to His servants, as to Enoch, judgments in which they will *personally have no part*. See the Apostle Jude, wherein Enoch prophesies of the Lord's second coming in wrath upon the ungodly. But Enoch was translated, and never saw that wrath. Though he knew about it, he did not see it. It was revealed to Enoch that he should be translated. Enoch becomes, therefore, a type of the Church which is to be translated from judgment, even as Noah was a type of the Israelitish remnant that will go through the judgment and come out into the new kingdom on earth when the Lord Jesus returns. We need not be surprised, therefore, that the Lord has told His Church, by the Apostle John especially, of the end-horrors which they will not themselves enter, nor even see, except from above. The *principles* of evil are on now—"the *mystery of lawlessness*," *many* antichrists: but not the *manifestation*, "the Anti-Christ": *that is restrained*.

6. You remember the passage: "We that are left unto the coming of the Lord shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep." This great Thessalonian revelation proves at once two blessed things: *first*, that the proper Christian expectation is to be alive when Christ comes: "*We that are alive*," says Paul by the Spirit. *Second*, that so far from there being any time of wrath in store for believers alive when Christ comes, there will be such a naturally expected advantage from being left unto the coming of the Lord that a special revelation was necessary to assure the Church that those fallen asleep would not be behind, but should really rise first! Now if a portion of the Church is to share the fearful horrors of The Great Tribulation, the only cry of any intelligent saint should be, "How much better to die in the Lord and escape all this!" But God has as surely

put the hope of the rapture of *translation* into the breast of His instructed saints, as He put it into Enoch's breast. "We will together be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." The Spirit *moved* Paul to write that. That is the hope which we ought all to share. "We shall all be changed in a moment," in "the twinkling of an eye" we shall be caught up. Now this is *the hope*, and this is written into the hearts of the saints.

7. C. I. Scofield very aptly calls attention to Christ's *new* promise given in John 14, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also." Now will you notice that this promise has absolutely nothing to do with the Son of man's work of setting up a kingdom on earth! It is a *new announcement*. It is the anticipatory announcement of the heavenly prospects of the Church of God. It is our Lord's first intimation to His saints of this special phase of His coming. Our Lord, on the Mount of Olives, you remember, had given them a view of the dispensation with special reference to His coming to earth in judgment (*Matthew 24 and Mark 13*). Our Lord there looks on the disciples as *Jews* (which they primarily were), and those passages must be read in the light of that fact.* For instance, in Matthew 24 the Lord Jesus says concerning The Great Tribulation, "There shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be." And in connection with that, "Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath," because a Jew could only journey so far on the sabbath day by their custom (*Acts 1:12*) without breaking the law; and I want to remind you the Jews will not then be under grace. They will not yet know grace in that awful tribulation time that is coming. They will be in spirit under the solemn sabbath restrictions, as in Maccabean days. But Paul said to the Colossians, "Let no one judge you

*"The whole effect of Christ's coming, with regard to the Jews, to 24:31, then to all His servants till His coming, to 25:30; then to the nations preparatory to His kingdom, 25:31-46." (Darby)

in respect of a sabbath day, which was a *shadow* of the things to come; but the body is Christ's. You are not under the law, but grace." The folks who talk about the Church going through The Tribulation do not realize Church truth; they do not realize the *absoluteness* of God's grace. I say that kindly, but I say it with much emphasis. I cannot teach anything else, and be true to the Gospel of the Grace of God! The constant use of such words as "look for his appearing," "wait for God's Son," "love his appearing," in the Epistles shows how the Spirit kept this hope alive in the hearts of God's saints. It was the expectation of the actual appearing of the Lord Jesus, "I go, I will come, I will receive you unto myself!"

8. Now the Thessalonian saints were in danger, like those of today, of getting their eyes *off* the real hope of Christ's personal and imminent return, the hope of translation into the air, and *upon* conditions round about them. So Paul writes his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, upholding their faith which he established in his First Epistle. Let us quote this most important passage. "Now we beseech you brethren, *in behalf of* (the preposition here in the Greek means "in behalf of" not merely "concerning"—it is a *plea for*); the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *our gathering together unto him*." (He wrote them about it in the First Epistle. Read I Thessalonians 4:13-18. Now he would exhort them to hold fast what he wrote them in the First Epistle.) "To the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind" (the mind that he got them in by writing the First Epistle—I Thessalonians 4—where he said, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be *caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words"). Now note II Thessalonians 2:2 "Be not quickly shaken from your mind" (into which my First Epistle brought you) "nor yet be troubled, either by spirit

(either your own "feelings," or else an evil spirit, as in a false prophet) "or by word" (any wrong preaching or instruction) "or by epistle" (purporting to come from me) "as (teaching) that the day of the Lord is present."

Now it is not "the day of Christ" as in the old version. The Revised Version reads *day of the Lord*. But "is present" follows: as 1 Cor. 3:22; Rom. 8:38. That is, the great and terrible day when the Lord comes down (*Revelation 19*) with the armies of heaven to execute vengeance and set up His kingdom and tread His enemies under His feet. "Don't believe," says Paul, "the *day of the Lord* is now present." "Let no man beguile you in any wise"—(they will try it; they are trying it now). "For *that day* will in no wise be" (that *day of the Lord*) "except the *falling away* come first, and the man of sin be revealed"—Antichrist.*

against another. He pleads for the day of Christ—when we are caught up to meet Him: "Don't let anybody move you away from that hope!" Watch for it! "*We* that are alive," "*we* that are alive," "*we* that are alive!" That is God's inspiration—it is the Holy Ghost who puts that into your heart, believer! We that are alive, that are left—we shall all be changed in the twinkling of an eye. That is the hope of the Church. Paul pleads for that.

It is described by the Spirit as "our gathering together unto him," the rapture or translation into the air with which they had been told to "comfort one another." And he warns *against* their expecting to see the *day of the*

*There is a great deal of controversy over what is meant by "the falling away." The Greek phrase (*apostasia*) is an expression used just once in Scripture. In my judgment Church days are not meant here. In these days I know there is a great deal of falling away from the faith (1 Timothy 4); and Paul writes in his last epistle, II Timothy 3: "The days will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine." But that is not what the Spirit of God meant by "the apostasy." The falling away is, I am perfectly convinced, described in II Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 13. It is the whole world *falling clear away from God to worship the Devil*,—all except the elect, who were written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world. It will be the elect of *that day*, not the Church. For the Church has nothing to do with earth things, having been chosen in Christ *before the foundation of the world!* God will always have His witnesses, His saints. There is coming an awful apostasy, a falling away of the human race to the god of this age. They shall worship the dragon because he will give his power to the wild-beast—Satan's burlesque of the resurrection. There is the reversal of everything that is divine. Satan has the place of God, and the Beast is Satan's Christ; and the False Prophet becomes an awful parody of the Holy Spirit. *Now that is coming!* And that, I think, is what God means by "the apostasy." Everything else is preliminary, is not the real *apostasy*.

Lord while on earth. Now look at that. Don't you watch for the day of the Lord. The apostasy is coming, but "we that are alive" are looking for Christ's coming for us. A temple of God has to be built by the returned Jewish nation, as we find elsewhere, and a great falling away from God to Satan, and the man of sin has to sit there, setting himself forth as God, before the *day of the Lord*, the great and terrible day, could take place. But *their* hope, the Church's hope, was being *caught up to be with Christ*. They were not to look for the other, the day of the Lord, although they were informed of it, as Enoch was informed of the wickedness that was coming. He looked for translation; and *by faith Enoch was translated!*

9. We find that The Great Tribulation is not once mentioned by Paul in his epistles which govern the churches (Romans to Philemon) nor in Hebrews; nor are the saints warned of it. The last days are indeed spoken of; perilous times were plainly in Paul's view, and the turning aside to Satan from the truth planted by him. But this brings us to emphasize again that the days of The Great Tribulation are quite another thing from a departure from the gospel of grace, or even from the inspiration of the Bible, as in modernism. If there had been the remotest possibility that the Church would see those *wrath-outpourings*, Paul would have warned them of it. But he speaks in exactly the opposite way. See his words to the Corinthians in I Corinthians 11:32, "chastened of the Lord that they might *not* be condemned with the world."

10. The 70th week of Daniel, lasting seven years, has two halves, *in neither of which the Church can be on earth*. There is no other place The Tribulation can come but in the 70th week of Daniel 9:27. Careful students of the Scripture are agreed about that. In this prophecy of Daniel we read that in the middle of that week, when three and one-half years are up, he (that is, that "prince," that last prince of the Roman Empire) "will cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease." He will stop the

Jewish worship like Antiochus Epiphanes, his famous prototype of the time of the Greek reign of the Seleucidae, in the second Century before Christ (*Daniel 11: 29, 30; 1 Maccabees*). This Antichrist, this last prince, however, will come and place *himself* there in the Jewish temple that they are going to build. Antiochus Epiphanes, in his rage because Rome turned him back from conquering Egypt, came to Jerusalem and "did his pleasure." He sacrificed a sow and strewed its broth in the Holy of Holies of their temple. Now this last Roman "prince" will do worse than defile. He will set *himself* forth there as God: and this is the thing that will make Israel desolate—"the abomination that maketh desolate." The word "abomination" in Scripture is God's word for a pagan god, or for a demon that is worshipped. There was the "abomination" Ashtoreth, of the Sidonians; and Chemosh, the "abomination" of the Moabites, and Molech, the "abomination" of Ammon. God calls these various heathen gods *abominations*. Now there is an *abomination*-thing to sit "where he ought not." When therefore ye shall see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet," (*Matthew 24*) sitting in a place he ought not, then let the remnant (of Israel) flee: Let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out the things that are in his house. For God will have given matters over to the enemy for the "hour," as He did in Gethsemane (*Luke 22:53*). There is coming this 70th week of Daniel, in the middle of which it was prophesied by Daniel and by our Lord Jesus Christ, that the Antichrist would thus take charge of things. Now I said that neither in the first half of this week of seven years, nor in the last half could the Church be here. Why?

In Revelation 11 we see the first half of this 70th week. You will remember from your study of The Revelation that we come to Jewish things in chapter 11. John has to "prophesy again," and the scene is Jerusalem of the last days: "Rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. And the court

which is without the temple leave without, and measure it not; for it hath been given unto the nations: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months." This refers to the *last* half of the seven years. The next verse refers to the *first* half, "And I will give unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth." Now 1260 days are three and one-half years exactly. Well, you say, it may be the same time as the other in the preceding verse. Come to chapter 13 and read of the last emperor, the Wild-Beast, the Antichrist. You will find he "prosperes and does his pleasure" for forty-two months, but it is during the second, not the first half of the seven years. I cannot believe that his way is open, until the "two witnesses" are out of the way. He does not fully get his "hour," with his ten kings, until then (*Revelation 17:12*).

During the first half, Revelation 11, God's "two witnesses," clothed in sackcloth and operating at Jerusalem, *preclude the possibility of the Church's presence and testimony on earth*. How? First, the whole earth becomes subject to a testimony which is *not the gospel*, not "the ministry of reconciliation"; and subject to two persons who are *not of the Church*. Here we have two witnesses that are of God, of course, but not preaching the gospel, nor grace, as does the Church. "And they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth." This is Old Testament ground. Let us quote their description and see.

These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks, standing before the Lord of the earth. And if man desireth to hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth and devoureth their enemies; and if any man shall desire to hurt them, in this manner must he be killed. These have the power to shut the heaven, that it rain not during the days of their prophecy: and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite

the earth with every plague, as often as they shall desire.

I said that the whole earth becomes subject, under these two witnesses, to a testimony which is not the gospel. You cannot change the gospel ministry—it is “God so loved the world,” “whosoever will.” You cannot change that; you cannot mix it up. If the Church is here she must preach the gospel and that only. She must preach the gospel of grace. For the Church to leave the gospel of grace, salvation to poor sinners, and turn to anything else is to desert her commission. Any preacher who leaves this and turns for example to prophecy only, or to any other “specialty,” dries up. The Church of God has a commission to go forth to every part of the earth, preaching the gospel to every creature. You cannot change that commission. Just because you find certain “saints” in the tribulation-time, do not imagine they *must be* the Church of God. That is to have the same kind of a veil about you that some folks have about the law of Moses. Because, for instance, God gave the Jews a seventh day sabbath such people must turn the first day of the week into a Jewish sabbath! But we cannot change the true interpretation of Scripture. We will not listen to those who would plunge the Church of God into a place where it cannot be scripturally!

The whole earth, I repeat, becomes subject to a testimony which is not the gospel, and to two persons who are not of the Church. The present days of “no difference” between Jew and Gentile in God’s sight, are past at that time, for the testimony has reverted to Jerusalem and the prophets are of the Old Testament. And they deal with a nation which does not even know Jehovah their God, but speak of Him as the “God of heaven” (*Revelation 11:13*). They do not even *know* Jehovah any more. And they (these prophets) are clothed in sackcloth—a wholly Jewish, Old Testament attitude. Personally, I believe Elijah is one of them. The Lord Jesus said, as also Malachi, that Elijah would return to

Israel before the “great and terrible day of the Lord” (*Malachi 4:5; Matthew 17:11*).

Further, they “smite the earth with every plague as often as they shall desire.” Here we have grace ended and judgment beginning. The attention of the whole earth is wholly taken up by these “two witnesses,” and consequently there is no place nor time for the Church or for a *grace* testimony. Really, Church saints present there would *hinder* God. God wants the whole earth then to listen to these witnesses at *Jerusalem*. Try to imagine how it will be! All the telegraph wires and radios fairly humming with news about these two terrible prophets that cannot be killed—no man can destroy them. They send out fire from their mouths upon any one who wants to kill them, and such persons shall die. They have (so the news will go) smitten this nation, that nation, from afar off, with plagues, shutting up the heaven that it does not rain, turning the water into blood. I’d like to know how you would have got along with the gospel down in Egypt when Moses was swinging out his rod over the Nile and turning it into blood, or when the frogs were hopping out. No place for the gospel there! *God was doing something else down in old Egypt, and as God dealt with Egypt so God is going to deal with this whole world.* And for people to say the Church is there is sad blindness. It’s a lack of discernment of the purposes of God, of His grace, or of the position of the Church of God. God does not mix things. If God has “two witnesses” there clothed in sackcloth, and the whole world subject to them, and they smiting the earth with every plague as often as they desire, where is there place for “Whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely?” *That is over—something else is on.* God is laying the foundation at Jerusalem in “the remnant” of fear of Jehovah again. We must remember that God has a deep and solemn work to do in the Jewish nation, ere He can take Israel’s side against the nations (as He will do when He comes to earth: *see Zechariah 12:14*). This nation Israel has lost the fear of God and given itself up to

covetousness and to idolatry. Now God is going to take Israel's part as He did in Egypt against Pharaoh. Terrible plagues are about to fall on the whole earth; but judgment is beginning with God's people Israel. The "*sinner*s in Zion will be afraid" at that time!

You remember that these two prophets of God are killed by the Wild-Beast, and through three and one-half days their bodies lie there unburied "in the street of the great city," and all nations come to celebrate this awful thing! The Lord's "two witnesses" are slain at "Jerusalem that killeth the prophets."

And from among the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations do men look upon their dead bodies three days and a half, and suffer not their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And they that dwell on the earth rejoice over them and make merry; and they shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwell on the earth (*Revelation 11*).

Where are the churches? They are not there! The people are occupied with *something entirely different*. "And they shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwell on the earth." The *whole earth* was in their hands for judging and tormenting. Where is the ministry of *reconciliation* in that day? Where are the ambassadors that were formerly pleading in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God? That day is gone! People with discernment see that. God is doing something else then: judgment is on. And Israel and the nations are involved in it—not the Church!

And after the three days and a half the breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them that beheld them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they went

up into heaven in the cloud; and their enemies beheld them.

Praise God, heaven can take folks up that the earth cannot stand! "And they went up into heaven in the cloud; and *their enemies* beheld them"—the whole earth at *public* enmity with God! The Church of God has gone away. Evil is now unrestrained.

And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell; and there were killed in the earthquake seven thousand persons; and the rest were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

No, as I said, Israel of that day do not yet know Him as "Jehovah their God." The Jewish nation does not *know* Him *today*. "They gave glory to the God of heaven." That is His name outside of Jerusalem, in Persia or in Babylon. See Daniel and Nehemiah.

11. Now let us look at another passage describing the second, or last half of Daniel's 70th "week." Turn to Isaiah 60:2: "Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and *gross darkness* the peoples." Now the expression "gross darkness" is God's term for judicial blindness. Darkness, in a certain way, covers the earth now; even in "Christendom." Not "gross darkness," however, as in this verse. See Jeremiah 13:15, where God describes vividly this expression "gross darkness": "Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud; for Jehovah hath spoken." Jeremiah is pleading with the nation of Israel who are sinning away their day of grace. "Give glory to Jehovah your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the mountains of twilight. And, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it *gross darkness*." "Gross darkness," therefore, in the Hebrew, is God's description of a state of things when there is *no light left*. Judicially God has withdrawn the light. "Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and *gross darkness the peoples*." It will be a spiritual

darkness like the physical darkness of the ninth plague in Egypt; "thick darkness that may be felt" (*Exodus 10:21*). People forget that. They think the Church will be there; but that is because of their thoughtlessness. And I want to tell you something about those who say that. They very soon begin to minify God's great future purposes about *Israel*. They begin to grow blind to the power and vision of the Old Testament concerning the coming kingdom; and they lose sight of the Church's distinct and separate calling—distinct from Israel and all earthly things. God will still deal with Israel. God says if the order of the heavens can be changed, then His purposes concerning Israel "from being a nation before him forever" can be changed. God says He is going to make a covenant with them in the future and you have to believe that. And Israel means Israel, and Jerusalem means Jerusalem. When God's light "ariseth" after that "gross darkness" it will be on His *earthly* people. (*Read Zechariah 12:10-13:1.*)

In Isaiah 60:1 we read: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee:" This is a prophetic message about Jerusalem, *beyond* The Great Tribulation, when the Lord Jesus comes back. The glory of Jehovah will rise upon Israel: "For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the peoples; but Jehovah will arise upon thee (Jerusalem) and his glory shall be seen upon *thee*. And nations shall come to *thy* light, and kings to the brightness of *thy* rising." Those that have read prophecy with the Spirit of God, know of what I am speaking. Oh, the awful darkness that is coming! People forget that; they think The Tribulation is just the wilful career of the last Roman emperor. Alas, far more, it's God-given *judicial blindness!* "Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples." There is no way of escaping this. The Church is gone, or *gross darkness* would not, could not, be written of the world! As long as the Church of God is here you cannot write those words "*gross darkness* covers the peoples." God said to Lot, "Haste thee, for I cannot do

anything *till thou be removed.*" Nothing in the way of judgment. Abraham said to Jehovah, "Wilt thou slay the righteous with the wicked? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Earth will be given up to believe *the lie* (for the definite article is before it) (*II Thessalonians 2*). There is no place for the "ministry of reconciliation" then whatsoever! The earth turns to Devil-worship and knows it. Our Lord said, "When the Son of man cometh" (as Son of man, note, by which name He is coming back to reign *on earth*) "shall he find faith on the earth?" And you cannot answer that by any other answer than "No." You say, do you mean to teach that there will be no one on earth when He comes back as the Son of man, who has *faith*? *I mean exactly that.* Israel, the remnant of Israel—God must pour upon them the spirit of grace and supplication ere they "look unto him whom they pierced." They must *see* Christ. They must *look* on Him. "They shall see the sign of the Son of man in heaven." Christ has said, "When the Son of man comes (as the Son of man) will he find faith?" No. He will find those that are *going* to have faith, but they have to *see* first like Thomas. What an awful state, and what a terrible thing for people to be teaching that the Church is going to be here when God says there will not be faith.

12. We know certain things have to take place at Christ's coming. There is the rapture, the translation of the saints, the judgment-seat of Christ when each saint comes before the Lord to have his works examined and to be rewarded. And afterwards comes the presentation of the Church to Himself, "a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle." Then comes the marriage in heaven of Revelation 19. That all takes *time*. And yet these folks would have us believe that that is all just an instant's work at the second coming! But from the time He comes for the Church in the air, has them all judged there for their works, gives them their rewards, and then presents them to Himself in that wonderful day of the marriage of the Lamb (*Revelation 19*), until He comes on down with them and the armies of heaven, God gives

us no dates whatsoever. But Scripture shows there will be at least seven years between His coming *for* His Church and His coming *with* them. Because, as we saw in Revelation 11, the two witnesses fill the first half, and the Wild-Beast the latter half of the closing seven years of "Gentile times"; and in neither half are the Church and the Gospel of Grace possible!*

13. Now, again, let me ask a few questions. Why should a heavenly company, already made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, be asked to "await their Lord from heaven," unless His *imminent coming* be really their *hope*?

Again, what spiritual result is secured by giving up the hope of the imminent return of the Lord? Are those who give up this doctrine the more stable and steadfast for it? Are they more filled with the Spirit?

Does the doctrine of the Church going through the tribulation give joy? God's word says, "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." A dear friend of mine said publicly to me many years ago that he had abandoned the hope of the imminent coming of the Lord. I went to see him the next day and talked earnestly for hours with him. I finally said, "Mr.—, how did you come to give this hope up?" He told me that he had promised a friend to re-examine the Scriptures in the light of certain arguments against Christ's imminent coming for the whole Church. "I read the New Testament from the viewpoint of those *arguments*," he said, "and one day I got down on my knees in my own parlor, weeping bitter tears, and gave up a hope that had been very dear to me." I said, "Mr.—, do you expect me to give it up because you did? God gave me this same vivid hope years ago, and it was more wonderful than the experience of my conversion by far, and I cannot give it up." A friend told me recently that when she believed in a *partial* rapture she actually *hoped to die*, so as to "depart and be with Christ," and

*The Lord says in Matthew 24:29 that "immediately" after the tribulation the sun should be darkened, and He would come in glory. But at the close of the 1260 days of the "two witnesses," other things entirely happen!

be *safe*. Legalism is at the bottom of all this post-tribulation talk.

Again—is zeal for souls increased by giving up the imminent hope of the Lord's coming? In a trip around the world I found the most earnest missionaries were expecting Christ *vividly*, and not looking to go through the tribulation. The most earnest seekers of souls I know are those that believe that Christ may come for His Church at any time.

Again—why do the post-tribulationists keep claiming that men who held Christ's imminent coming while on earth, made some statement to them, "just before death," declaring the opposite?

Robert Cameron, of *Watchword and Truth*, whose later life was largely a proselyting campaign for post-tribulationism, used to claim that Dr. Brookes, of St. Louis, had given up this hope "before he died, in an interview with him!" But both the last books and the later associates of Dr. Brookes deny this. Others claimed that Prof. W. G. Moorehead gave it up, etc., etc. Someone told me that R. A. Torrey weakened. *I challenged him*. He could produce no proof whatever! Mrs. Torrey, when told that a Canadian magazine had claimed that her husband had given up the hope of Christ's imminent coming for the *whole* Church, was much distressed, and wrote the editor to publish her denial of such a false report. (Which request that journal has never granted. Why?) A certain church paper published a letter from a western woman saying, "Poor old Blackstone, who wrote 'Jesus Is Coming!'—he has got to be over ninety and he is still *holding on to the same old ideas*." Well, praise the Lord! She claimed that Dr. Scofield, "if he could only come back would be one of the first to revise all his ideas." When alive, did Dr. Scofield have to resort to a woman to prove Scripture to him? Nor could he be so faithless to the vision God had given him as to "revise his ideas."

Again—why do people claim to be teaching the truth when they are dividing the saints? The post-tribulation-

ists are propagandists that are not publishing the *glad tidings* of Christ's second coming. They are seeking to turn away those who have received these tidings as the great hope of their life, to *their theory concerning it*.

Again—who have been the teachers and preachers of Christ's imminent coming? We have such men as John Darby, who was probably the greatest interpreter of Scripture since Paul, with such early Brethren as C. H. Mackintosh, J. G. Bellett, Wm. Kelly, and the rest, a marvelous coterie. Then you have C. H. Spurgeon. It is idle to claim that he was not *looking* for Christ's coming. He split no hairs such as the post-tribulationists do, but boldly and constantly proclaimed the second coming of Christ as *an actual and a daily possibility*. D. L. Moody was a wonderful witness to any truth God revealed to him; and his sermon on "The Second Coming of Christ" is a classic. He was looking for the Lord's coming. George C. Needham, beloved Irishman; Wm. E. Blackstone, whose life has been to *look for his Lord*; James H. Brookes, a mighty warrior, now with the Lord; A. B. Simpson, of whom Moody said, "Everything he says reaches my heart." All these were *looking* for Christ's appearing. It was the *hope of their lives*. H. M. Parsons, of Toronto, now with Christ; and Dr. Weston, yet in Toronto, faithful witnesses alike. Grand old I. M. Haldeman, of New York, as well as J. Wilbur Chapman, now with Christ. A. T. Pierson, of wonderful penetration in the meaning of Scripture; A. J. Gordon; George E. Guille—lately among us, now with Christ, devoted, gentle, sane, yet a *contender* for Christ's *imminent coming*; our Brother Ironside, whose praise is among the real churches of Christ; Lewis Sperry Chafer at Dallas; A. C. Gaebelien, of New York, Editor of *Our Hope*, perhaps the most persistent, faithful witness for over fifty years to the imminent return of our Lord for all His saints, that the Church has had in America.

To these names should be added that of James M. Gray, late President of the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago and Editor of the Moody Institute Monthly.

In the pages of the latter, Dr. Gray has often borne witness to the teaching of Holy Scripture that the translation of the Church which is the body of Christ shall precede the tribulation. See particularly the issue of August, 1931, page 583. See also his books, *Prophecy and the Lord's Return*, *My Faith in Jesus Christ*, *The Teaching and Preaching That Counts*, and chapter 10 of *Bible Problems Explained*.

Then there are the godly (and there are many) among the Holiness people, and also the Pentecostal people, those who seek to live a life of prayer and praise continually. Where do you find such saints aligned? They are all looking for the *blessed hope*; and they believe it can be in their day or they would not be looking for it. Where can the post-tribulationists find such witnesses as these? It has cost very much along every line of sacrifice for these witnesses to hold fast the *imminent hope of Christ's coming*, and along with it the infinitely precious doctrines of *grace* (for the two go always together).

Then there are a host of faithful witnesses to Christ's *imminent coming*, in Great Britain, Scandinavia, the mission fields, and Australasia.

Mr. George H. Pember of England (now with Christ) was one of the most honest men in writing that I have ever read, as well as a very able man, author of several books. But Mr. Pember was *forced by the logic of his position* to claim that the Body of Christ was not the whole Church at all, but just *certain surrendered folks!* And that arouses the query in our minds, What people have been surrendered enough to be in the Body of Christ? And, who is going to settle it? As we have said, the Corinthians were the Body of Christ, and they were *carnal* Christians. Mr. Pember gives a little over half a page of one large book to the whole subject of divine sovereign election, and claims that it does not concern salvation at all! Well, brethren, you cannot be rid of Spurgeon, Darby, Edwards, Calvin, Luther, Augustine, or Paul, as easily as that!

14. The final and unanswerable argument that the

Church cannot be in The Great Tribulation is revealed in our Lord's own outline of The Revelation: Chapter 1:19. Here we have: First, "The things which thou sawest," (the vision of Christ among the churches in chapter 1). Second, "The things which are," (the letters to the seven churches with their plain outline of the Church's history in chapters 2 and 3). Third, "The things which shall come to pass after these things," (the rest of Revelation, from chapter 4, onward).

In both the King James and Revised Versions an utterly inadequate translation is given of the last phrase of this divine outline. The Greek expression is *meta tauta*. "*Meta*" is a Greek preposition meaning "after"; "*tauta*" is a neuter plural pronoun meaning "these," or "these things." To translate this phrase "*meta tauta*" by the adverb "hereafter" is not to translate it at all! That is shown in chapter 4:1, where this remarkable phrase *meta tauta* both opens and closes the verse—a remarkable thing!* Let us read this verse:

"After these things (*meta tauta*) I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard, as of a trumpet speaking with me, one saying, Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must come to pass after these things" (*meta tauta*),—that is, after Church things.

a. No one would dream of translating *meta tauta* at the *beginning* of this remarkable verse by "hereafter." It would make no manner of sense. We *must* translate it, "after these things I saw."

b. But the use by the Spirit of God of this *same phrase* at the *end* of this verse compels us to believe that

*Liddell and Scott say *meta* with the accusative of place signifies "after, or next after;" and of Time, "after, next to;" and of Rank, "next to, next after." Winer (the dean of Greek grammarians, says *meta* with the accusative signifies after in regard to time, and is the opposite to *pro*, "before."

Thayer wholly agrees: "*Meta* with the accusative denotes sequence, i. e. the order in which one thing follows another; a. in order of Place—after, behind; b. in order of Time—after." Thus among some thirty instances of the phrase *meta-tauta* which he adduces, see examples in Luke 17:8; Acts 7:7; John 5:1; and then all the occurrences in The Revelation: 1:19; 4:1 (2); 7:9; 9:12; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1; 20:3.

the things set forth after 4:1 happened just as really after the things of the preceding chapter as the vision of 4:1 happened after those of chapters 1, 2 and 3.

The messages to the seven churches have been formally and fully closed at the end of chapter 3 and what *follows* these Church things is given from chapter 4, onward.

Indeed, as all commentators have recognized, we have in Revelation 1:19, a three-fold division answering to the past, present, and future; and, as Govett remarks, "The last division of the Book begins on the completion of the first two, and not till then."

But we find The Great Tribulation not in the first three chapters, but beginning in Chapter 13:1. Now the Lord *said* this would occur *after the things* of chapters 1-3.

We repeat finally that a weak grasp of the real character and scope of divine grace; failure or refusal to *accept Paul as the revelator to the Church of God*; and consequently dimness of view of the character, security and coming glory of the whole Church, and a lingering legalism that does not perceive that our Lord in the sermon on the mount was speaking as the Great Prophet of Deuteronomy 18, backing up Moses, and *speaking to Israel, just as really as Moses on Sinai did, and not to the Church of God at all, which was yet future (Matthew 16)*:—I say, all these elements enter into the deadly untruth that the saints of the Church are subject, any of them, to the wrath-time of The Tribulation.

Let the members of the Body of Christ remember that they are *one with their Head*, that judgment is past and only glory is beyond. That, however much men may distress them (for "in the world ye shall have tribulation,") The *Great Tribulation*, the "time of temptation that is to come upon the whole world" shall not touch them! "Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial that is to come upon the whole earth to try them that dwell upon the earth."

Let us beware of confusing the *Bema*, or "judgment-seat of Christ" after the Church is caught up, with divine judgment for *guilt*, as such. Christ *bare* our sins on the cross, with their entire guilt, and put it all away forever. "To them that wait for him (all His Church) he will appear a second time, APART FROM SIN, unto SALVATION." Remember, "They that are CHRIST'S, at His Coming."

15. Another proof the Church *cannot* be on the earth during the last half of Daniel's 70th week—the Great Tribulation, is seen in *the character of our warfare*. "We wrestle against the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). But Satan and his whole host are cast altogether out of heaven, in Rev. 12,—*before the beginning* of the Great Tribulation! Then *warfare* in the "heavenly places" will be closed. The Church of necessity will have been removed from the warrior scene. Then *earthly* conflict,—*"the time of Jacob's trouble,"* will begin (Jer. 30:7).

It must be most carefully noted that that warfare, which Church-saints carry on now in "the heavenlies" against Satan and his host, is *transferred to Michael and his angels*, in Revelation 12! And the result of the expulsion of Satan and his angels from heaven is announced in the words: "*Neither was their place found any more in heaven * * * he was cast down to earth, and his angels were cast down with him.*"

Note now the facts that make it impossible that the Church should be on earth after Satan is cast down:

(1) The "Great voice in heaven" of Rev. 12:10 proclaims a *new state of things*, essentially opposite to the present time: *the salvation, power and kingdom of God COMES: with the authority of His Christ in execution*, as not before. While the Church was on earth "wrestling" with the "principalities and powers in the heavenlies," she suffered with Christ, but Christ now speaks with a "Get thee hence, Satan!" that banishes him utterly from all heavenly position whatever!

(2) The *accusations* before God of Satan are thus ended. That peculiar position of "Accuser," which is so fully shown in our Lord's words to Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan obtained you (plural, all of them!) to sift you as wheat; but I made supplication for *thee* (so in danger from self-confidence) that thy faith fail not,"—is now *over*. When Satan is "cast down," all his accusing work is past, thank God! while the saints, whom he "accused before God," are found in the heavens, from which he has been cast out.

(3) The "*heavens*" are called to "*rejoice*" (XII:12)—*and those who "are tabernacling in them."* (Compare "the camp of the saints" (XX:9). These are evidently, it seems to us, *the Church saints*, and *all the saints* who have "*overcome Satan*" *because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony,—loving not their lives even to the death.*"

(4) The *object* of Satan's rage when cast down is,—not the Church, but "the Woman that brought forth the Man-Child,"—that is, *Israel*, which, after the Rapture, represents God on earth. The Church, being heavenly in calling and destiny, has *disappeared from the scene!* Otherwise she, being "the fulness" of Christ Himself, because His very Body (Eph. II:22-23) would be more the object of Satan's attack than Israel: because Satan is more jealous of her! But she is *above*,—in the heavenlies, where Satan's place is *no more found!**

*If it be objected that we ourselves are now on earth, and yet carry on a warfare "in the heavenlies," and that therefore Satan can carry on such a conflict, even after being "cast down to earth"; the answer is simple: the saints are *in Christ*, they share His risen life, and their walk and warfare is by the indwelling Spirit "sent down from heaven,"—so that they are constantly and actually connected with heaven, in a Risen Christ!

Satan has no such connection,—no connection whatever *with heaven*, when once he is cast out of it. He is as much an "earthly" power as any earthly monarch. Having, indeed, still a spirit's ability to "walk up and down the Earth (Job I), and terrible power and energy,—yet he is no longer capable of *heavenly* warfare. This is evident at once in his impotence in Rev. 19:19-20:3; where his false Christ and his armies gather "to make war" against Him that sits on the white horse, *but make no war at all!* They are at once "taken," and cast into the lake of fire, *with no power of battle at all!* And Satan himself makes *no fight with angelic power*, as before in heaven, but is "bound," and "cast into the abyss!" (Rev. 20:1-3).