

THE
RETURN
OF
CHRIST

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1. The Promise of His Coming

Signs of the Times, July 3, 1884

THAT there was once upon this earth a man called Jesus of Nazareth, scarcely anyone will now deny. Whatever conflicting views different ones may hold concerning His nature and office, all agree on this one fact. That He was...

Acts 2

²³ ...taken, and by wicked hands crucified and slain,

—is quite generally conceded. All, however, are not aware that the admission of these facts is virtually an admission of the inspiration of the Bible, but so it is. Those very things, which no human wisdom could foresee, were recorded by holy prophets hundreds of years before they occurred. This fact shows that those prophets were inspired, or, as Peter declares, they...

2 Peter 1

²¹ ...spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

But this much being true, we must admit further that what they wrote of the mission of Jesus was also true. Paul sums it up in brief when he says that:

Acts 10

⁴³ To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins.

Christ is, then, as all Christians agree, the...

John 3

¹⁸ ...only begotten Son of God;

He is...

John 1

²⁹ ...the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world;

He is the divine Word that, having been with God in the beginning, was made flesh and dwelt upon the earth.¹

The incidents of His life, His subjection to His parents, His baptism, His temptation in the wilderness, His wonderful teachings, His marvelous miracles showing at once His tenderness and His power, His betrayal and crucifixion, and finally His triumphant resurrection and ascension to Heaven,—these are familiar to hundreds of thousands.

Aside from His wonderful sacrifice, which demands the unending love of all creatures, the character of Jesus as a man was most lovable. His disciples who had been with Him night and day for more than three years, had learned to love Him devotedly, both for what He was and what He promised them. On Him all their hopes centered.

Their feelings were well expressed by Peter, who, when they were asked if they would leave Jesus, said,

John 6

⁶⁸ Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

We can imagine, then, to some extent, their grief when Jesus said to them:

John 13

³³ Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You shall seek me; and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, you cannot come; so now I say to you.

It was the blasting of all their hopes; their hearts were filled with anguish. Jesus, whom they loved, was to go away, and even though they should lay down their lives for Him, He would not take them along.

But the compassionate Saviour would not leave His children in torturing suspense. Noticing their despondent looks, He

¹ See *John* chapter 1.

said:

John 14

¹ Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me.

² In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

“You believe in God, believe also in me.” What can these words mean, but that the words which He was about to utter were the words of God himself, true and unchangeable? Whatever this promise means, then, it will as surely be fulfilled as that God is a God of truth. We can rely upon it implicitly.

And now as to the meaning of the promise. How could it be made more clear? The gist of it is contained in these simple words:

³ ...I will come again.

He was here then, a real being. The word “again,” meaning “once more,” implies a repetition of the same thing. That is, that He would come in the same form in which He then was,—glorified, of course, as we shall see,—but a real, tangible being,—Jesus of Nazareth.

There is a great deal contained in the three verses which we have quoted, but at present we are concerned only with the simple fact that Christ has pledged His word to come again.

The time which Jesus spent on this earth, from His birth in Bethlehem until His ascension from the Mount of Olives, is known as the first advent, or coming of Christ. There is no question but that He had been upon the earth many times before, but that was His first appearance in connection with the great plan of salvation.

And so, although He has since been on earth continuously, by His representative, the Holy Spirit, His second coming must be limited to that one mentioned in the promise,

John 14

³ ...I will come again.

This promise cannot be fulfilled by anything except by His personal presence in glory. It will be His second coming in connection with the great plan of salvation—this time to complete the work by taking His people to himself.

That we are not mistaken in saying that Christ in comforting His disciples, gave promise of a second coming, is proved by the words of Paul, in:

Hebrews 9

²⁷ And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment:

²⁸ So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

This places the matter beyond dispute. This text also settles another much mooted question, that of a future probation.

²⁷ It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment.

How long after death the Judgment takes place must be determined by other texts. The general truth is stated that men die but once, and that after that their future fate is determined by the Judgment.

²⁸ So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.

That is, since men have but one life,—one probation,—which ends with their death, so Christ was only once offered. His offering had reference only to men in this present life. If man was to have two or more probations, then it would be necessary for two or more offerings to be made in his behalf; but

there was only one offering. At His advent, Christ was offered “to bear the sins of many.”

Isaiah 53

⁶ The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

1 Peter 2

²⁴ In His own body, He bore our sins on the tree.

In order to save us from sin,

2 Corinthians 5

²¹ He was made to be sin;

–the innocent One was counted as guilty in order that the guilty might be accounted innocent. The benefits of this sacrifice are now free to all who will accept it, while Jesus is pleading its merits before the Father.

But when He comes “the second time,” He will be “without sin;” He will then no longer act as substitute for sinners; no longer will He assume any responsibility in their behalf. The sins of the righteous will have been blotted out, and those of the impenitent rolled back upon their own heads. There can then be no more probation for them unless Christ should again take upon himself their sins and make another sacrifice; for there is no salvation in any other.

Acts 4

¹² Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

And since Christ makes but one offering, it follows that their sins remain upon them, to sink them into perdition.

In the texts already quoted, there is sufficient proof that the promised coming is not at the death of the saints, neither the conversion of sinners. He appears...

Hebrews 9

²⁸ ...to them that look for Him;

—to those who...

2 Timoyour 4

⁸ ...love His appearing.

And this coming is not death, for it is only the “second” coming; if death were that coming, then there would be many millions of comings, for not an instant of time passes in which men do not die. He said that He would...

John 14

³ ...come again;

—now we submit that this can with no propriety be applied to death, unless His first coming was death, and they were all dead when He was speaking for “again” signifies repetition.

But we have an inspired comment on this point in the last chapter of *John*. Christ had just signified to Peter by what death He should glorify God, when that disciple, turning about, saw John following, and asked,

John 21

²¹ What shall this man do?

²² Jesus said unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you? follow me.

Now if the coming of Christ is at the death of His saints, these words of Christ are equivalent to this:

“If I will that he live until he dies, what is that to you?”

But such a substitution makes utter nonsense of the passage. Then when Christ spoke of His coming, He had no reference whatever to death. This will be still more evident as we consider texts that describe the manner of His coming.

2. Manner of Christ's Coming

Signs of the Times, July 17, 1884

LAST week we gave two texts² which contain a direct promise of Christ's second coming. If the subject were mentioned nowhere else in the Bible, these two texts would be sufficient. They are unequivocal statements of a fact, and the promises of God are not yea and nay.³ From those texts we concluded that the second coming of Christ must be as real and literal as His first. We shall now produce positive testimony to that effect.

We would first, however, remind the reader that every text that speaks of the manner or object of Christ's coming, is additional proof of the fact that He will come again. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul warns the brethren against indulging in hopeless sorrow for their dead friends, as though they were lost. He assures them,

1 Thessalonians 4

¹⁵ ...by the word of the Lord,

—that those who live until the Lord comes will have no precedence over those who fall asleep in Jesus. We will not be with Christ any sooner than they are. And then he proceeds to tell how this can be.

¹⁶ For 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:

¹⁷ Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

We shall have occasion to use this text again, and we pass it for the present. Turning to the 1st chapter of *Acts*, we read the account of Christ's ascension. In his gospel, Luke had previ-

² *John* 14:1-3; *Hebrews* 9:27-28.

³ *2 Corinthians* 1:19-20.

ously written,

Luke 24

⁵⁰ And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them.

⁵¹ And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

In Luke's second narrative we have this account:

Acts 1

⁹ And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

¹⁰ And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

¹¹ Which also said, You men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven.

There is no mistaking these words. Christ was there in person. In bodily form, while in the act of blessing His disciples, He ascended to heaven. And the angels declared that “the same Jesus”—“the Lord himself,”⁴—should come in exactly the same manner as He had left the earth. Now, as showing the perfect harmony of the Bible narrative, we quote right here the words of John:

Revelation 1

⁷ Behold, He comes with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen.

The one who claims that the coming of Christ is death, or conversion, or anything else than a literal return to earth, squarely contradicts these plain texts.

Our Saviour foresaw that before His return many would be engaged in this very work. In order to draw the attention of

⁴ 1 *Thessalonians* 4:16.

man away from the real advent of Christ, as described in the Bible, Satan and his angels will transform themselves, not merely into angels of light, but into the appearance of Christ himself, and will...

Matthew 24

²⁴ ...show great signs and wonders; inasmuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

They will claim that Christ is already come, and will work miracles to support the claim. How, then, can we be sure that they are not the Christ; here is the sure guide:

²⁶ Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, He is in the desert; go not forth; behold, He is in the secret chambers; believe it not.

²⁷ For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

The reason why it will be impossible to deceive the elect, is because they will remember and implicitly believe the plain declarations of the Bible. These texts prove not only that the coming of the Lord is a literal event, but that it is yet future.

Do you still say that it took place on the day of Pentecost? We answer that Paul's words in *Hebrews* 9:28 were written many years after that time. None of the apostles had written a line at that time, and, since the resurrection of Christ, had engaged in no public work whatever.

Is it claimed that the destruction of Jerusalem answers to the coming of the Lord, we remind you that the book of *Revelation* was written more than a score of years after Jerusalem was conquered by Titus; and in that book, besides the description already quoted,⁵ almost the closing words are these:

Revelation 22

¹² And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

⁵ *Revelation* 1:7.

²⁰ He which testifies these things says, Surely I come quickly.

These forbid the application of the promise to any event before the close of the first century.

Again, no event has ever yet occurred comparable to the coming of the Lord as described in the Bible. Peter, in answer to those who, professing to be able to see no signs of such an event, derisively asked, "Where is the promise of His coming?" says:

2 Peter 3

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

The psalmist says:

Psalms 50

³ Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him.

⁴ He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people.

⁵ Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.

The heavens have not departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; not yet has the glorious appearing of the Son of man in those opening heavens dazzled every eye as does the vivid lightning flash. Not yet have...

Revelation 6

¹⁵ The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

¹⁶ And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.

The time is still future when the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God shall call the dead in Christ from their graves, and when the living righteous, with glad accord, shall unite in the exclamation:

Isaiah 25

⁹ Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us; this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.

That day will not pass and leave saints and sinners alike unconscious of its arrival. The Lord comes, not as an intercessor, but as a king, “without sin.” There is thenceforward no more mercy for sinners—they receive according to their deeds; no more trials for saints—He appears to them unto salvation. This being so, it is manifestly fool-hardy in any one to say,

“We shall know more about it when it comes than we do now.”

Yes, we will; but those who put off their knowledge of it until it comes, will learn to their sorrow. While the signs that show that coming near are fulfilling all around us, let us search the Scriptures that we may be children of the light, and, having our lamps trimmed and burning, be able to hail our Lord with joy when He returns.

3. Object of Christ's Coming

Signs of the Times, July 24, 1884

WE HAVE now established two points beyond controversy:

1. Christ will come again;⁶ and
2. His second coming will be as literal as the first,⁷ the only point of difference being that it will be more glorious.⁸

We say that these points have been established beyond controversy, because we have read them directly from the Bible, in words so plain that a child could not misunderstand them. They need no interpretation to make them plainer.

But if the Lord is indeed coming again, it must be for some purpose; He must have some object in view. And if He was so particular to tell us of His coming, and to urge us to prepare for that great event, it must be that He has not left us in ignorance as to its object. We shall find that the Scriptures are very clear upon this point also.

The words of Christ himself demand our first attention. We have quoted the promise of Christ's coming found in *John* 14:1-3. That promise also contains the reason:

John 14

³ If I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there you may be also.

He is coming, then, to take all His followers to himself. Those who mourned at the thought of having Him apart from them, will then once more enjoy His presence.

⁶ *John* 14:1-3; *Hebrews* 9:28.

⁷ *Acts* 1:9-11; *Revelation* 1:7.

⁸ *Matthew* 24:27; 25:31.

Besides this, there is something else. Paul comforted the Thessalonian brethren in their tribulation with the thought that God himself could give them rest, and this rest he said they would receive...

2 Thessalonians 1

⁷ ...when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

⁸ In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

With those two texts agree the words of Christ:

Matthew 16

²⁷ For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works;

—and these:

Revelation 22

¹² And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me to give every man according as his work shall be.

These texts show plainly enough the object of Christ's second coming. It is to take His people to himself, and to take vengeance on the wicked. This latter part we will pass by for the present, and consider the promise to the disciples. From the words of Christ we would naturally conclude that there is no other way for His people to be with Him except by His coming.

John 14

³ ...I will come again, and receive you unto myself, *that* where I am, there you may be also.

The conjunction “that” denotes purpose, and is equivalent to “in order that.” When we read,

John 3

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, *that* whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but

have everlasting life,

—we understand that belief in Christ is the only way by which we can avoid perishing. And so when we read the promise of Christ to His disciples, we understand that if Christ were not to come, His disciples could not be with Him. Indeed, if it were otherwise,—if the disciples could be with Christ without His coming for them,—what force or comfort would there be in His promise? For the only words of comfort that He had for them were that He would come to take them to himself.

Moreover, we cannot imagine Jesus making an unnecessary promise; but if the disciples could be with Him without His coming, He, of course, knew it, and therefore made a promise which was entirely useless. From this text, then, we must conclude that Christ's disciples are not yet with Him, for His coming is still in the future.

We call the reader's attention to other texts which confirm this conclusion. Paul exhorts us to set our affection on things above and says:

Colossians 3

⁴ When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, *then* shall you also appear with Him in glory.

Note the adverb "then." It specifies the time when the saints will appear in glory; it is when Christ appears. The apostle Peter gives instructions to the elders of the churches, exhorting them to labor faithfully, and says for their encouragement:

1 Peter 5

⁴ And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away.

The report is sure, but they are not expected before Christ comes. Again he says:

1 Peter 1

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

which according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

⁴ To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you,

⁵ Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The saints are kept by the power of God unto salvation; but the salvation is not to be given until the last time. Or, as Peter expresses it still more plainly in the thirteenth verse of the same chapter:

1 Peter 1

¹³ ...be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In the 3rd chapter of his 2nd epistle to Timoyour, the apostle Paul speaks of the prevailing degeneracy of the last days, and recommends the Bible as the only thing that will thoroughly furnished man to good works. He then continues:

2 Timoyour 4

¹ I charge you therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom;

² Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

Here, then, we find when the Judgment is to take place; in connection with the coming of Christ. But if the dead are not judged until Christ comes, it necessarily follows that they do not receive any reward until that time. And this is exactly what the Saviour said, as quoted from *Matthew* 16:27; *Revelation* 22:12. The apostle continues his exhortation to Timoyour, and says,

2 Timoyour 4

⁷ I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteous-

ness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.

The Judge is to give crowns at that day, says Paul. At what day? Why, at the day when He judges the living and dead,

2 Timothy 4

¹ ...at His appearing and His kingdom.

Peter told the elders that they should receive their crown at the appearing of the chief Shepherd, and Paul says that all who love His appearing shall receive their crowns at the same time. Paul says,

⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.

He had reached the close of his life, and was about to be “offered” as a sacrifice to the truth. He felt that his life-work had been faithfully done. Did he therefore expect to immediately enter upon his reward? No; he was sure of a crown, but he knew that it would not be given until the appearing of Christ.

We have seen that when Christ comes, He will be accompanied by all the holy angels.

Matthew 25

³¹ When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory.

The work which the angels have to do is described in:

Matthew 24

³¹ And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

And this agrees with the words of the psalmist:

Psalm 50

⁴ He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth,
that He may judge His people.

⁵ Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a
covenant with me by sacrifice.

By what means the saints are gathered to be with Christ,
will be considered in another article.

4. The Resurrection – I

Present Truth, March 1, 1888 (July/August 1884)⁹

WE HAVE seen that the object of our Lord's second coming is to take His people to himself. And it has also been shown that Christ's coming is not at the death of the saints, but that the only coming spoken of is a literal, personal coming in power and glory.

From *John* 14:1-3 we drew the necessary conclusions that if His coming (yet in the future) is for the express purpose of taking His people to himself, then none of His people can be with Him until He comes. This fact is plainly stated by Paul in the 11th chapter of *Hebrews*. After having given a list of the faithful ones...

Hebrews 11

³⁸ Of whom the world was not worthy,

³³ [Those] who through faith subdued kingdoms, brought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions,

³⁴ Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong,

—as well as those who...

³⁶ ...had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment,

—the apostle concludes thus:

³⁹ And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

⁴⁰ God having provided some better thing for us, that they

⁹ This article was part of a series, originally published in 1884. A few of the 1884 periodicals are missing, and apparently this study was in one of them. However, the series was republished later in 1888, and the periodicals from this year are complete. In the 1884 printing, the study preceding this one was dated July 24, 1884, and the one following it was dated August 21, 1884. It would rightly fit somewhere between those dates.

without us should not be made perfect.

This is an explicit statement that even the martyrs of old must wait for their reward until we who are alive receive ours. And this is exactly what our Saviour said. As He was one day eating in the House of a Pharisee, He took occasion to give some instruction concerning hospitality. Said He:

Luke 14

¹² When you make a dinner or a supper, call not your friends, nor your brethren, neither your kinsmen, nor your rich neighbors; lest they also bid you again, and a recompense be made you.

¹³ But when you make a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind:

¹⁴ And you shall be blessed; for they cannot recompense you; for you shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

There is to be but one reward given. Of those who looked for a return for their charities in this life, who gave alms to be seen of men, the Lord said,

Matthew 6

² They have their reward.

The applause of men, or an equivalent for the gift, is all they need expect. But those who live lives of unselfishness shall receive an everlasting recompense...

Luke 14

¹⁴ ...at the resurrection of the just.

The words of Christ,

Revelation 22

¹² Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be,

—show that the resurrection, when the reward is given, is at the coming of Christ. And so again we have found that the righteous receive no reward till Jesus comes.

The proposition, already approved, is sustained by many other plain declarations of Scripture. Let us once more refer to Paul's words to the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 4

¹⁶ For 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:

¹⁷ Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Nothing can be plainer than this; the apostle has carefully guarded against any possibility of mistake. It is "the Lord himself" who comes. He comes, not secretly, but with "a shout," and "with the trump of God," whose reverberations shake the earth. That mighty blast awakens the millions of sleeping saints,—those who have died in faith, not having received the promise,—and they rise. This is the first thing accomplished.

Then the living ones,—those who "remain until the coming of the Lord,"—are caught up "together with them" (those who have just been raised from the dead) in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. This work of gathering the saints together is performed by the angels at the bidding of Christ:

Matthew 24

³⁰ And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

³¹ And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

1 Thessalonians 4

¹⁷ ...and so, [the apostle says,] shall we ever be with the Lord.

The word "so" means "in this manner," "by this means." How is it, then, that we go to be with the Lord? By the resurrection

of the dead, and the translation of the living. There is no other way brought to view in the Bible, by which we can be with the Lord.

The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is not a product of the New Testament alone. When Abraham was called upon to offer up Isaac, he obeyed,

Hebrews 11

¹⁹ ...accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.

When Job was suffering not only physical torture, but the anguish of being deserted and despised by all his friends and acquaintances, his faith in the coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the dead still sustained him. From his lips came this sublime utterance:

Job 19

²⁵ For I know that my redeemer lives, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:

²⁶ And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

Isaiah, in prophetic vision looking down the ages and beholding the troubles of the church, utters these consoling words:

Isaiah 26

¹⁹ Your dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust; for your dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

Hosea, favoured with a similar view, speaks as in Christ's stead, and says of the people of God:

Hosea 13

¹⁴ I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be your plagues; O grave, I will be your destruction.

We have space in this article for only one more quotation. The prophet David, putting himself in the place of the church, and considering the persecution which it must endure...

Psalm 17

¹⁴ ...from men of the world, which have their portion in this life,

—anticipates the words of Paul in the 11th chapter of *Hebrews*, and says:

¹⁵ As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with your likeness.

When will the saints be in the likeness of Christ? The beloved disciple says:

John 3

² We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

David, therefore, it did not look for satisfaction until the Lord's coming; but if he could have gone to heaven at death, that certainly would have satisfied him. The following comments on *Psalm* 17:15, by Dr. Barnes, will be read with interest:

“I shall be satisfied.” While they are satisfied with this world, I shall be satisfied only when I awake in the likeness of my God. Nothing can meet the wants of my nature; nothing can satisfy the aspirations of my soul, until that occurs. “When I awake.” This is language which would be employed only by one who believed in the resurrection of the dead, and who was accustomed to speak of death as a sleep—a calm repose in the hope of a waking to a new life....

The obvious interpretation of the passage, therefore, so far as its sense can be determined from the connection, is to refer it to the awaking in the morning of the resurrection; and there is nothing in the language itself, or in the known sentiments of the psalmist, to forbid this interpretation....

“With your likeness.” Or, in your likeness; that is, resembling you....

I regard this passage, therefore, as one of the incidental proofs scattered through the Old Testament, which showed that the sacred writers under that dispensation believed in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead; that their language was often based on the knowledge and belief of that doctrine, even when they did not expressly affirm it, and that in times of trouble, and under the consciousness of sin, they sought their highest consolation, as the people of God do now, from the hope and the expectation that the righteous dead will rise again, and that in a world free from trouble, from sin, and from death, they would live for ever in the presence of God, and find their supreme happiness in being made wholly like Him.

5. The Resurrection – II

Signs of the Times, August 21, 1884

IN THE preceding articles concerning the coming of the Lord, we have learned that He will certainly come, that His coming will be manifest to all, that it is for the purpose of receiving all His disciples to himself, and that this is accomplished by the resurrection of the dead and the translation of the living. One or two more texts on the subject of that resurrection will be sufficient.

When Job was suffering the deepest affliction, and at the point of death, he asked:

Job 14

¹⁴ If a man die, will he live again?

This was a very pertinent question for a man in his situation. Notice the form of the question: Not,

“Shall he continue to live?”

But,

“Shall he live again?”

This expression shows clearly that Job made a plain distinction between life and death. “Again” signifies “another time,” and indicates that an interval of time has elapsed since the same thing occurred or existed before. Job anticipated a time in which there would be no life, in which he would not exist, and he asked whether life would ever be restored. But he asked the question only to answer it, for he immediately added:

¹⁴ ...all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.

¹⁵ You shall call, and I will answer You: You will have a desire to the work of your hands.

Now we may ask,

“When will the Lord call and be answered by those who are dead?”

Christ himself furnishes the answer:

John 5

²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself; so has He given to the Son to have life in himself;

²⁷ And has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man.

²⁸ Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice,

²⁹ And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

And David says that it is at His coming that the Lord calls to His people.

Psalms 50

³ Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him.

⁴ He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people.

In prophetic vision, Isaiah saw the end of the world, and the coming of the Lord. Speaking of the triumph of the righteous, he said:

Isaiah 25

⁸ He [the Lord] will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the Lord has spoken it.

If the Lord has spoken it, it must be done. Paul tells how and when it will be done:

1 Corinthians 15

⁵¹ Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

⁵² In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Here, then, is the “change” of which Job spoke. It is a change from death to life, from mortal to immortal. And in what state did Job expect to be until this change should come? In death, for it was that of which he was speaking.

The apostle also says that the dead as well as the living are to be changed. And here we find death called a sleep. We shall not all sleep, but both dead and living shall be changed.

⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

⁵⁴ So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

Death is not swallowed up in victory till Christ comes. The saints do not shout,

⁵⁵ O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?

—until the voice of the Son of God calls them forth from their tombs. And what does this prove? That death and the grave have for a time triumphed, and held them captives. If it were not so, if the saints had passed from death immediately into a state of the eternal bliss, they would not be obliged to wait until the coming of the Lord to shout their victory. They could at once voice their contempt for its weakness; or, more consistently, they could ascribe to it thanksgiving and praise for having liberated them from the toils of earth, and ushered them into the joys of Heaven.

Now we ask,

“What is the necessity for a resurrection of the dead? If the faithful of past ages are now ‘safe in the arms of Jesus,’ as is so often taught and sung, what more can they need? Of what benefit to them will the resurrection be?”

None at all. The Bible doctrine of the resurrection is directly opposed to the theory that men are taken to Heaven at death. The Bible writers rested their entire hope in a resurrection; and this proves that they had no idea of the possibility (since they must die) of being with Christ in any other way.

Paul said that he counted all things loss for Christ, and for Him gave up everything, and was willing to know the

Philippians 3

¹⁰ ...fellowship of His sufferings, [and be] made conformable unto His death.

And what for?

¹¹ If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Why did he esteem it so all-important to attain unto the resurrection of the dead? Let him answer:

1 Corinthians 15

³² If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantages it me, if the dead rise not?

He had no hope in anything else. Let him once be convinced that the dead would not rise, and all incentive to action would have been taken away from one of the most tireless and zealous men that ever lived. Surely, then, the resurrection is a doctrine of no small importance.

In order to try to harmonize the doctrine of a final resurrection with the theory that the spirits of the good are taken to Heaven immediately upon the death of the body, it is claimed that they do not receive the fullness of their reward until the resurrection. But this theory is overthrown by Paul's words:

1 Corinthians 15

³² ...what advantages it me, if the dead rise not?

Is it nothing to be in the presence of God and Christ and the angels? Is it nothing to be exempt from pain, and free from the assaults of Satan? Certainly to gain such a state, even if it were not the fullness of joy, is worth a great deal of effort. Paul's words show that he had no knowledge of any benefit that would accrue to the dead except through the resurrection. And if he taught men to place all their hopes in the coming of the Lord and the resurrection, who shall dare to teach otherwise? If he did not know the exact truth in regard to the matter, to whom has a later revelation been made?

So true are all the words of Paul that even an angel from heaven would bring a curse upon himself if he should teach anything different.

Galatians 1

⁸ But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

In view of the testimony that has been quoted to show that the resurrection takes place at the coming of the Lord, it is hardly worthwhile to notice the position that it is at death; and that the rising of the soul or spirit from the body is "the resurrection." This theory makes the saints be with the Lord at death, and thus makes death to be the coming of the Lord, which we have seen is a false and absurd position.

There were some in Paul's day who taught that the resurrection was past, and he said that they had erred concerning the truth, and were overthrowing the faith of some.

2 Timoyour 2

¹⁸ Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

Nothing could more surely overthrow faith than such teaching, for who that accepted it could have any belief in the promises of a future second coming of Christ? It is as impossible to harmonize the theory of the past resurrection, or a resurrection at death, with the doctrine of the second coming of Christ, as to mix oil with water.

In closing, we will call attention to Revelation 22:4-6. John says:

Revelation 20

⁴ I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God...and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

“Ah,” says one, “that is what I believe; the souls of the martyrs went at once to live with Christ.”

Let us see; these are not all the dead that John saw. He continues:

⁵ But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

⁶ Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection; on such the second death has no power.

Now notice:

⁵ The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.

Then the dead that John first saw were living again. And if living again, this must be the second life, which is separated from the first by an interval called death. Then death and life are not the same. And this “living again,” after an interval, is called a resurrection.

Then what is the resurrection? It is the “living again” of those who have been dead, and not the continued existence of something that has never died. Those who do not have part in the first resurrection, do not “live again” until the thousand

years are finished. Then they have a resurrection.

Now allowing that “the rest of the dead” died at the very beginning of the thousand years, and we have their death and their resurrection separated by a period of a thousand years, that does not look like a resurrection at death.

6. Eternal Life

Signs of the Times, August 28, 1884

FROM a study of the doctrine of the second advent, and the kindred doctrine, the resurrection, we have arrived at the necessary conclusion that if Christ were not to come there would be no hope of salvation for any of His followers.

The leading place which is given to this subject in the Bible, and especially in the New Testament, is enough to convince any one of its great importance; and when we consider Christ's words, that His second coming would be for the express purpose of taking His disciples to himself, we see why it is given so much prominence.

We dare not regard our Saviour's words so lightly as to say that His promises mean nothing; but if His followers can be with Him before His second coming, then His promise in *John* 14:3¹⁰ has no meaning whatever. So, as we said, we are driven to the conclusion that the people of God must wait for their salvation until the Lord comes.

Our reading of the Bible has also shown us that the resurrection is a "living again," which implies a previous cessation of life between death and the resurrection; for a man cannot "live again" unless he has once ceased to live. And since there is no resurrection until the Lord comes, it follows that if He were not to come there would be no life for His people. There can be no escape from this conclusion; we will verify it by the declaration of Scripture.

There are no words of the Bible more familiar to the Christian, or more clear to him than these words of Christ to Nicodemus:

¹⁰ **John 14** ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

John 3

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The love of God to man is beyond all human comprehension. Even the angels, we are told,¹¹ desire to look into and understand the mystery of the plan of salvation. But none but God himself can comprehend the love that prompted that vast scheme. To all eternity it will be the wonder of both saints and angels.

Human hearts know something of love, and some can perhaps imagine the anguish they would feel if called upon to give up an only child to suffer cruel torture and an ignominious death. But the love of an infinite God must be as much greater than that felt by mortals, as God himself is greater than man. Yet He gave His only begotten Son,—the one by whom all things were made, whom angels worship with reverence equal to that which they yield to God¹²—that men might have eternal life. Then certainly men do not have eternal life, or, what is the same thing, immortality, by nature.

Men often work to no purpose, and spend time and strength for that which is wholly unnecessary; but it is not possible to imagine such a thing of God. Since He knows the end from the beginning, He knows what is necessary to be done, and what means are needed to accomplish it. Would God make such an infinite sacrifice to accomplish something entirely uncalled for? to give to man that which he already possessed? Certainly not. If left to themselves, men would never have had even a hope of eternal life.

¹¹ **1 Peter 1** ¹² Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

¹² See *Hebrews*, chapter 1.

And right here it is worth our while to consider what this wonderful thing is that was bought for us at such a price. There are few that value it as they ought. If men appreciated it then there would be a general ascription of praise to God for His love in bringing it to us.

In the first place we must remember that it is eternal life and that alone that is brought within our reach by the gift of God's Son. So Paul says,

Romans 6

²³ For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Eternal life is life to all eternity—life that has no end. Now what is life? It is simply existence. Nothing else is contained in the word. The poor man who drudges for a bare subsistence, the invalid who has no waking moment that is free from pain, the beast that possesses no moral sense, the idiot who is even lower in the scale of intelligence than the brute,—all these live just as certainly as does the man who possesses health, wealth, the keenest perception, and a sense of moral obligation.

We can say of one that he has a happy life, and of another that his life is miserable, even a burden, but these ideas could not be conveyed by the unqualified term "life." When we hear that a man lives, we know that he exists, and that is all that we know. He may be ill or well, weal or in the depths of poverty, enjoying perfect happiness or suffering extreme anguish, yet we can know nothing of this unless we are told something more than the mere fact that he lives.

What then is eternal life? Simply eternal existence. Then it is eternal existence that is brought within man's reach by the sacrifice of Christ. We do not say that the redeemed will not enjoy perfect happiness, but that is not the primary thing that is given to the overcomer. The happiness of the redeemed is a secondary matter, growing out of the circumstances in which

they are placed. That happiness should be the lot of men who spend an eternity in the presence of God and of Christ where nothing can happen to annoy, is a natural consequence. Unending existence, then, is what is promised to those who believe in the Son of God. And now we notice that...

John 3

¹⁶ ...whosoever believes in Him,

—shall have eternal life. What shall they have who do not believe in Him? Shall it be eternal life? If it is so, that all men have immortality by nature, then what is gained by believing in Jesus? How much better off are believers than unbelievers? None at all.

Is it reasonable to suppose that God would hold out to man unending existence as an incentive to him to accept of Christ, if he were already in possession of it, and if he had it so securely that God himself could not deprive him of it? There is no one who will agree to such a proposition. We repeat: If all men are by nature in possession of immortality, then the gospel holds out no inducement for man to believe in Christ.

It cannot here be argued by those who hold that man is essentially immortal, that the unbelievers will be worse off than the believers in that they will be doomed to hopeless misery, because, as we have seen, it is life pure and simple that is held out as the prize. The text does not say that God gave His Son in order that whosoever believes in Him should not be miserable, but have happiness. We must take the text as it reads, and not attach anything to it that is not contained in it. From *John* 3:16, we can reach no other conclusion than that those who do *not* believe in Christ will *not* have eternal life. And this fact is plainly stated in the thirty-sixth verse of the same chapter:

John 3

³⁶ He that believes on the Son has everlasting life; and he that believes not the Son shall not see life.

Eternal life is the grand object for which man was created. This present life is a period of probation, in which we are proved, to see if we would know how to use so great a boon. If we desire eternal life earnestly enough to comply with the conditions, it will at the last day be bestowed upon us; but if we squander this life, and dishonor God, what encouragement will He have to extend our life to all eternity? He will not do it. And since those who disobey God never get beyond this probationary state, the anteroom, as it were, of life, it can be truly said that they do not see life.

How it is that they who have Christ have eternal life (*John* 3:16), will be considered next week.

7. Immortality

Signs of the Times, September 4, 1884

IN ALL investigation of Bible doctrines it must be borne in mind that the Bible was written by inspiration of God, and must, therefore, be perfectly consistent with itself. If we find passages which seem to conflict, we must conclude that we do not fully understand them.

Besides this, we must always interpret those parts that are obscure and indefinite by those that are definite and plain. This is but reasonable. If we have a friend whom we know to be perfectly honest, and two expressions of his that seem contradictory are reported to us, we do not condemn him until he has had an opportunity to explain. We expect that when we learn all that he said, we will find that the two statements agree.

Neither would we take a statement definitely and emphatically expressed, and offset it by words from which, taken by themselves, we might infer something directly the opposite. It is thus fairly that we must deal with the Bible. We are not at liberty to draw from one passage, an inference that is opposed to the plain declarations of the word.

Now we have brought forward texts of Scripture that have no double meaning, which prove that God's people are rewarded only at the coming of Christ and the resurrection, and that all men are dependent on Christ for eternal life. There are no doubt other texts from which the reader gathers that men are essentially immortal; these will be considered in due time, but in the meantime we ask the reader to let the plain statements that we quote have their full weight.

Last week we quoted Christ's words:

John 3

³⁶ He that believes on the Son have everlasting life; and he

that believes not the Son shall not see life.

This is a plain statement that those who do not believe in Christ will not live eternally. The question now arises,

“In what sense do those who believe on Christ have eternal life now?”

Let us read the answer:

1 John 5

¹¹ And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

Now turn and read the introduction to Paul's second letter to Timoyour:

2 Timoyour 1

¹ Paul, and apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.

Here we have the answer complete. Eternal life is ours by promise, if we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom alone it may be obtained. If a young man possesses the writings which show that he is heir to a certain estate, he will speak of the estate as his, even though he is not in possession of it, and has no voice in its control.

When many of Christ's disciples became offended and left Him, He turned to the twelve and asked,

John 6

⁶⁷ Will you also go away?

⁶⁸ Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

The twelve believed as Christ had said, that:

John 3

³⁶ He that believes not the Son shall not see life.

If this be not true, what a chance for retort the unbelieving Jews had when Christ said to them:

John 5

⁴⁰ And you will not come to me, that you might have life.

They might have said,

“We have no need to come to you for life, for we are immortal by nature.”

And is not this a logical position for those to take who believe that the essential part of man, the real man, can never die? We may not openly repudiate Christ as did the Jews, yet if we say that we already have that which He came to bestow, do we not thereby signify our independence of Him?

The only inducement that He holds out for our accepting Him is that He can give us life. Now if we proudly insist that we have life, do we not treat His offer with contempt, and so dishonor Him? So long as we insist that we are not dependent on Him for eternal life, our professions to accept Him have a good deal the air of patronizing condescension.

Let us have some more plain declarations. In *1 Timoyour* Paul charges Timoyour to...

1 Timoyour 6

¹² ...fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.

A man cannot “lay hold” of something that he already has hold of. And how should he “lay hold” on eternal life? By exercising faith: and this again is in harmony with Christ’s words in:

John 3

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

³⁶ He that believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him.

The apostle then charges Timoyour to...

1 Timoyour 6

¹⁴ ...keep this commandment without spot, and blemish, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:

¹⁵ Which in His times He shall show who is the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;

¹⁶ Who only has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man has seen, nor can see.

This language must refer to God the Father, for although Christ in *Revelation* is called...

Revelation 19

¹⁶ ...King of kings and Lord of lords,

—it is He in this instance who is going to make known the “blessed and only potentate;” and further, the one here spoken of is one “whom no man has seen, neither can see;” but Christ has been seen many times.

But to the gist of the statement. It is that God only has immortality. So long as the Bible remains, this text will be a standing rebuke to those who claim immortality as theirs by right. That is an attribute of God alone.

“But,” says one, “is not Christ immortal? and do we not read of the angels that they cannot die?”

Yes; and we turn to *John* 5:26 and read Christ’s words:

John 5

²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself; so has He given to the Son to have life in himself.

Christ, then, being the only begotten Son of God, partakes of His attributes, and has life in himself. That is, He is able to impart life to others. The text in *1 Timoyour* does not shut off any one from obtaining immortality, but if it is obtained it must be as a gift from God. It is in this way that the angels are immortal.

Turn now to *Romans* 2. There Paul states that:

Romans 2

⁶ [God] will render to every man according to his deeds.

⁷ To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, [He will render] eternal life.

“Immortality” means the condition in which one cannot die, and “eternal life” means unending existence; the terms, therefore, are synonymous, and the verse is equivalent to the statement that God will render immortality to those who seek for it. Two points are here made:

1. In order to gain eternal life we must seek for it. Then those who do not seek for it will never receive it.
2. The only proper way to seek for immortality is by “patient continuance in well-doing.” Then those who do not do well, will not obtain eternal life, even though they may desire it.

Again: In *2 Timothy*, Paul says that the purpose and grace of God, which was given us in Christ Jesus,

2 Timothy 1

¹⁰ ...is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Here then we learn the place in which we are to seek for immortality. It is in the gospel. Whoever looks for it in any other place will fail to find it.

Having learned how immortality may be obtained, we have only one thing to consider, and that is when it will be bestowed; when believers in Christ will come into possession of their promised inheritance. This is definitely settled by Paul in the 15th chapter of *1 Corinthians*, in a text which we have before quoted. We begin with verse 50:

1 Corinthians 15

⁵⁰ Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot in-

inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption.

This statement might raise a query in the minds of some, so Paul adds:

⁵¹ Behold I show you [that is, make known to you] a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

⁵² In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.

This, then, explains how we may get into the kingdom of God, even though flesh and blood cannot inherit it.

⁵¹ ...we shall...be changed.

And when does this change take place?

⁵² ...at the last trump.

And what will the change be?

⁵² For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

“This mortal must put on immortality.” The Bible writers never speak of man as being anything else than mortal.

Job 4

¹⁷ Shall mortal man be more just than God?

How could they speak otherwise, since God only has immortality? The contrast is sharply drawn in *Romans* 1:23. Paul speaks of the heathen, who had...

Romans 1

²³ ...changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like unto corruptible man.

God is immortal, incorruptible; man is mortal, corruptible. But we are to be changed, and then we shall be like Him, immortal.

1 Corinthians 15

⁵⁴ So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

And this occurs, as the preceding verses show, at the coming of the Lord.

We have now quoted, besides several texts that speak of “eternal life,” every text in the Bible that contains the word “immortality.” Let us see what we have found.

1. God alone has immortality. This, of course, applies to Christ, who, as the Son of God, partakes of His nature, and who is entitled to be called God.
2. If man would have immortality, he must seek for it.
3. The only proper way to seek for it is by patient continuance in well-doing.
4. Man can find immortality only in the gospel, for it is there that it is brought to light.
5. It belongs to everyone who believes in Christ, but only by promise. This life is now in Christ, and whoever has Christ, has eternal life, because he is in possession of that which will bring it to him.
6. This promise of life will be fulfilled, and man’s search for the immortality will be crowned with success, when “the Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.” Then those who have fought the good fight of faith will be crowned as victors with...

1 Peter 5

⁴ ...a crown of glory that fades not away.

8. The Mission of Christ

Signs of the Times, October 30, 1884

John 3

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

IN PREVIOUS numbers of the *Signs*, we considered briefly the subject of eternal life¹³—that which those have who believe in Christ. We learned that eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ,¹⁴ and that therefore none can ever possess it unless they have the Son.¹⁵ The question now arises:

“What shall those have who do not believe in Christ?”

In this article, and succeeding ones, we shall seek a Bible answer to this question. An understanding of this subject is necessary, not merely that we may be driven to Christ through fear of the consequences of unbelief, but that we may have a proper appreciation of the love of God. We cannot praise God, and His love to us as manifested in Christ, as we ought, unless we understand, as far as our finite minds are capable of understanding, that from which His love rescues us.

In the first place, we notice that their condition is different from that of believers in Christ. This has already been shown. Christ said to the unbelieving Jews,

John 5

⁴⁰ You will not come to me, that you might have life.

The obvious meaning is that they had not life, and could not have it without coming to Him, and accepting Him as their Saviour. From *John* 3:17 some would argue that all mankind will be saved, because Christ said,

¹³ See August 28, 1884, “Eternal Life.”

¹⁴ *Romans* 6:23.

¹⁵ *John* 3:36.

John 3

¹⁷ For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.

Such a conclusion shows the folly of basing a theory on a single text, regardless of other texts or the context. The eighteenth verse explains the seventeenth:

¹⁸ He that believes on Him is not condemned: but he that believes not is *condemned already*, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Now we know why God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world. That would have been an unnecessary proceeding. The world was condemned already. His mission was to save as many as possible from a lost world.

Romans 5

⁸ God commends His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

The tenth verse of this chapter shows that being sinners is equivalent to being enemies;¹⁶ and that is why the world was condemned, because all have sinned.

God sent His Son “that the world through Him might be saved;” there was opportunity for all the world to be saved if they would, but they must comply with the condition,—believe on Christ. And now what is to become of those who do not accept this condition? The verse quoted at the beginning of this article tells us:

John 3

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

¹⁶ **Romans 5** ¹⁰ For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

From this we learn that if God had not sent His Son, the whole world would have perished; and since the condition of salvation is belief in Christ, it necessarily follows that those who do not believe in Him will perish; they will accept nothing from Christ, and therefore they receive the same doom that they would if He had not come.

In the passage under consideration (*John 3:16-18*), there are two classes brought to view, believers and unbelievers. The first class receive the reward of eternal life, the second class are left to perish. Now since these two classes are directly opposite in character, it must follow that to perish is the exact opposite of eternal life. The opposite of life is death, and the opposite of eternal life is eternal death. That death is what unbelievers receive, we learn from:

Romans 6

²³ The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In *Romans 5:12* we learn how the whole world came to be in this state of condemnation, on account of which they would all perish if it were not for Christ. Paul says:

Romans 5

¹² Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.

Adam was the one man by whom sin entered into the world. The stream, unassisted, cannot rise higher than the fountain, and therefore Adam's posterity are necessarily born into a state of sin. When Adam sinned, God looked down the ages and saw a whole human race in a state of rebellion, and, consequently, of condemnation; and then it was that His great love was manifested, in giving His only begotten Son to die for a rebellious world. Since the sentence pronounced upon Adam extended to the whole human race, we will turn and examine it.

In *Genesis* 2:15-17 we learn that God placed Adam in Eden to dress it and to keep it, giving him permission to eat freely of the fruit of every tree, with one exception. Concerning that the Lord said:

Genesis 2

¹⁷ But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die.

There has been much bewildering comment on this verse, the conclusion usually being that the death here threatened was threefold, viz.,

“...death spiritual, death temporal, and death eternal.”

But as in the giving of the law, so also in pronouncing the penalty for its violation, the words must be understood in “their usual and most known signification.” When the words of a law or of a penalty are such as are in common use, no one is justified in placing any construction upon them. Now the term “die” in the text is unqualified, and it must therefore mean simple death. It cannot mean *spiritual* death for the following reasons:

1. Nothing is said about any such kind of death.

2. According to the commonly accepted meaning of spiritual death—a state of sin—the act of eating the forbidden fruit would have been spiritual death; and consequently the penalty pronounced upon Adam for a certain act would have been the condition of the act prohibited! But the penalty was not the act itself, but something that should follow that act. Neither could it mean *temporal* death, i.e., death for a time; for that would be equivalent to a pardon before the sin was committed, which would be absurd. As before stated, the penalty was simply *death*.

Right here we are met with an objection. Says the objector:

“You cannot take the words of the penalty in their exact literal signification, because they read thus: ‘*In the day* that you eat thereof you shall surely die,’ and the record says that Adam lived nine hundred years.”

Still we say that the penalty means just what it says. If it does not, then Adam had no means of knowing what would be the penalty if he should sin. The objection arises from the erroneous supposition that the sentence has been carried into effect. Those who make it seem to forget the words of Christ,

John 3

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

If God had not so loved the world, the sentence would have been executed, Adam would have died that very day, and we, his posterity, would never have existed. It was not Adam all alone whom God loved, but the whole race whom He had created in him. On account of this great love, the execution of the sentence was stayed, and man was granted another trial. The plan of salvation was devised, and Christ agreed to take the sins of the world upon himself, and rescue man from his lost condition.

Bear in mind the fact that God did not revoke the penalty; He merely stayed its execution, in order to give men a chance to accept the conditions of pardon. If none of Adam's race should accept these conditions then they would all suffer the penalty threatened to him; if a few accept the conditions, then they alone escape the threat of doom. And so when we read that Christ was given that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, we understand that the original penalty announced to Adam was that he should perish. “To perish” signifies,

“...to be destroyed; to go to destruction; to come to nothing; to be blotted from existence.”

That this will be the doom of all who disregard the love and mercy of God in Christ Jesus, is fully borne out by the Scriptures, as we shall see.

It may not be out of place to briefly consider the marginal reading of *Genesis* 2:17:

“Dying you shall die.”

By some this is supposed to afford an answer to the objection that Adam did not immediately die and that therefore the words of the penalty cannot be taken literally. From this marginal reading they gather that the penalty threatened was that the seeds of death, as it is expressed, would be sown in Adam as soon as he sinned, or, in other words, that he would become mortal, and would eventually die.

But this does not help the matter at all; for if we substitute “you shall die,” for, “you shall surely die,” we are still shut up to the fact that this was to occur “in the day that you eat thereof.” The truth is that the marginal reading does not express to us the meaning of the original so correctly as to the words of the text, “You shall surely die.” It is a construction that often occurs in the original, when emphasis is required. It is used in *Genesis* 2:16:

“Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat.”

The marginal reading is, “eating you shall eat.” This does not mean that he should begin to eat and continue to eat until the act of eating should be consummated, but was an emphatic permission to Adam to eat.

The same construction is used in *Exodus* 3:7, where the Lord says,

“I have surely seen the affliction of my people.”

Had our translators done as they did in *Genesis* 2:16-17, they would have placed in the margin, “Seeing I have seen.” Then,

according to the interpretation given to the marginal reading of *Genesis 2:17*, it would mean that God began to see, and continued to see, until finally He saw. This would make nonsense of the text, yet it would be as legitimate an interpretation as the other. The expression is simply an emphatic statement that God had seen the affliction of His people; and Stephen, in his discourse,¹⁷ marks this emphasis by the repetition of the statement:

“I have seen, I have seen.”

So the statement in *Genesis 2:17* did not mean that man should begin to die and continue to die until he should finally be dead, but it was an explicit and emphatic declaration that death should immediately follow his sin. If we should translate this passage as Stephen did the similar construction in *Exodus 3:7*, it would read:

“In the day that you eat thereof you shall die you shall die.”

This would well express the meaning. A parallel to this emphatic declaration of the death penalty is sometimes heard in human courts.

Genesis 2

¹⁷ ...you shall *surely die*.

This penalty was unequivocal and unconditional. But for the merciful forbearance of God, and His love as manifested in the promised sacrifice of Christ, the human race would have been blotted from existence, in Adam.

We have now found how man incurred the wrath of God; and in succeeding articles we shall learn more fully how that wrath will be manifested to all who do not flee to the refuge offered. The consideration of the words spoken to Adam after

¹⁷ **Acts 7** ³⁴ I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them.

he had sinned:

Genesis 3

¹⁹ Dust you are, and unto dust shall you return,

–must be deferred until we have finished this subject now before us.

9. Everlasting Fire

Signs of the Times, November 6, 1884

LAST week we considered the condition of the world without Christ, the state from which Christ saves those who believe in Him, and what unbelievers are to receive. It was bound to be perdition—the exact opposite of life eternal.

In our further investigation of this subject, in order that doubts may not embarrass the mind of any, we will first consider those texts that are supposed to teach just the opposite of what we have found to be the case.

And first, we will say that it is not a subject on which philosophy or mere human reason can throw light. We can know nothing about it, except what we learn from the Bible. It is not for man to say what God will or will not do. Believing that the Judge of all the earth will do right, we must prepare our minds to accept what His word says concerning the fate of those who rebel against His Government.

If we should find that they are to be kept alive through eternity, suffering infinite torture, we are bound to accept that view, even though it is repugnant to our ideas of justice. And so, also, if we find, as we have already, that they are to perish, i.e., be blotted from existence, then we must accept that view, however contrary it may be to our previous instruction.

We have said that there are, and will be at the end of the world, but two classes—believers and nonbelievers, or righteous and wicked. In the 25th of *Matthew* these two classes are brought to view. The King is represented as separating the two classes, setting the righteous on His right hand and the wicked on His left.

Matthew 25

³⁴ Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand,
Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

This disposes of the righteous; they then receive the reward of eternal life. The time will then have come for the saints to...

Daniel 7

¹⁹ ...take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.

But what of the wicked?

Matthew 25

⁴¹ Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

Does the fact that the wicked are to go into “everlasting” fire, prove that they will live and be tormented to all eternity? We will not presume to decide without an examination of the Scriptures. Let the Bible be its own interpreter. In the seventh verse of *Jude* we read that:

Jude

⁷ Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

The reference will be understood by all. On account of the wickedness of the cities of the plain, God rained down fire from heaven upon them, and their fate,

⁷ ...suffering the vengeance of the eternal fire,

–is given as an example and warning to other evil-doers. Now must we understand, because those cities suffered the vengeance of “eternal fire,” that they are therefore now in existence, and will be eternal? Turn to *2 Peter 2:6*, and read:

2 Peter 2

⁶ And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.

What was the result of that eternal fire? The cities upon which it fell were turned to ashes. And Jeremiah shows that, instead of its requiring an eternity for eternal fire to accomplish its work, it takes but a short time. He says:

Lamentations 4

⁶ For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her.

Now if the cities were “overthrown,” and turned to ashes, then the fire must have long ago ceased to burn. And this is the case, for the waters of the Dead Sea now roll where those cities once stood. The “eternal fire” in that case did not burn to all eternity. If that was so in one instance, it may be in another.

We have seen¹⁸ that fire is to be the means by which the wicked are punished. What will be the result of this fire? Read *Malachi 4* and we shall see:

Malachi 4

¹ For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

³ And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the Lord of hosts.

So we see that this “eternal fire,” into which the wicked are to go, like that which fell upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, will turn into ashes. That seems reasonable enough. Fire always turns to ashes that which is thrown into it, if that thing be combustible; and in this case we are told that the wicked “shall be stubble.” Why should they not be ashes when the fire has done its work?

¹⁸ *Matthew 25:41.*

On *Jude* 7, Dr. Barnes has the following comment:

The phrase “eternal fire” is one that is often used to denote future punishment—as expressing the severity of the intensity of the suffering. As here used, it cannot mean that the fires which consumed Sodom and Gomorrah were literally eternal, or were kept always burning, for that was not true. The expression seems to denote, in this connection, two things:

(1) That the destruction of the cities of the plain, with their inhabitants, was as entire and perpetual as if the fires had been always burning—the consumption was absolute and enduring—the sinners were wholly cut off, and the cities forever rendered desolate; and

(2) That in its nature and duration this was a striking emblem of the destruction which will come upon the ungodly.

But does the Bible also say that the fire into which the wicked are to be cast shall not be quenched? It certainly does; let us read:

Mark 9

⁴³ And if your hand offend you, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched.

⁴⁴ Where their worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched.

⁴⁵ And if your foot offend you, cut it off: it is better for you to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

⁴⁶ Where their worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched.

⁴⁷ And if your eye offend you, pluck it out: it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:

⁴⁸ Where their worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched.

We would not in the least evade the full force of this text; we believe in it, and yet we still hold that the wicked are to become ashes, and cease to be. Let us see if we cannot also find an instance of unquenchable fire that has already existed and ceased to be.

In the 17th chapter of *Jeremiah*, the Lord, by His prophets, warned His people against the sin of Sabbath-breaking. He told them that if they would keep the Sabbath according to His commandment, their city, Jerusalem, should stand for ever.

Jeremiah 17

²⁷ But, [said He,] if you will not hearken unto me to hallow the Sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.

But the Jews did not heed this warning; they continued to violate the Sabbath, and the Lord brought upon them that which He had threatened. Read what is said of it:

2 Chronicles 36

¹⁵ And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling-place:

¹⁶ But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy.

¹⁷ Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary,...

¹⁹ And they burnt the house of God, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof.

²¹ To fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah.

Here we see that as the result of that fire that was not to be quenched, the palaces were burned, and the vessels were destroyed. Is the fire burning on yet? Certainly not. Are the palaces and walls still in existence? No; the fire made an end of them.

But suppose the fire that was kindled in the gates of Jerusalem had been quenched; what would have been the re-

sult? Why, the walls and palaces would not have been devoured, as Jeremiah had said they should.

Take a common occurrence. A fire breaks out in a city. The wind fans the flames so that every effort to extinguish them is in vain. The next day the papers say that certain blocks of buildings were burned to ashes. Why was it? Because the fire could not be quenched. If it could have been, the buildings would have been preserved. But does the fire still continue to burn? No; it went out as soon as the buildings were consumed. There was nothing then for it to feed upon, and it died.

Now what did we read in *Malachi* that the fate of the wicked shall be?

Malachi 4

³ They shall be ashes under the soles of your feet.

But this result would not be accomplished if the fire into which they are to be cast should be quenched. The fact that the fire shall not be quenched is the fullest proof necessary that they will be utterly consumed. Mark the strong language used by John the Baptist:

Matthew 3

¹² Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Here, as in many other places, the wicked are likened to chaff; now if they are to assist in the flames of punishment to all eternity, this would be an inappropriate figure, for chaff does not long withstand the fire. And the fact that they who are represented by the chaff will not be proof against the destructive action of the fire, is indicated by the statement that He will “burn up” the chaff.

Right here we may notice a passage in *Isaiah*.

Isaiah 33

¹⁴ The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?

This is a very pertinent question. Shall we conclude from this that the prophet teaches that the wicked will dwell in the fire to all eternity? That would be a hasty, shortsighted conclusion. The very next verse answers the question:

¹⁵ He that walks righteously, and speaks uprightly; he that despises the gain of oppressions, that shakes his hands from holding of bribes, that stops his ears from hearing of blood, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil.

Such, and such alone, can dwell with the devouring fire, and with everlasting burnings. While the “devouring fire” seizes upon the chaff, and burns it up, the righteous ones, gathered into the garner of the Lord, shall dwell in safety. Well may the sinners in Zion be afraid, for the day is coming that...

Malachi 4

¹ ...shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

10. Everlasting Punishment

Signs of the Times, November 13, 1884

IN OUR last article, based upon *Matthew* 25:41, we found that the “everlasting fire” into which the wicked are to be cast at the last day, will have the effect to “burn them up,” so that they will “be ashes;” that the fire is “unquenchable,” thus showing that there will be no hope of escape for those who are cast into it, but that it will continue to burn as long as there is anything left for it to feed upon.

We now come to the forty-sixth verse, and here we are obliged to make another stand, for so firmly is the doctrine of eternal torment fastened on the minds of men, that simple proof to the contrary is not sufficient, unless every text bearing upon the subject is examined, and shown to be in harmony with that proof. In summing up His discourse, the Saviour marks the final disposition of both the righteous and the wicked in these words:

Matthew 25

⁴⁶ And these [the wicked] shall go way into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

In order to a perfect agreement on this text, we will state that the two words “everlasting” and “eternal” mean in this place exactly the same thing. They are both translated from the same Greek word. If, instead of two different words the translators had rendered both by the same word, making it either “eternal punishment” and “eternal life,” or “everlasting punishment” and “everlasting life,” it would have saved much unnecessary controversy.

We are taught, then, from this text, that the punishment of the wicked is to last as long as does the reward of the righteous. This we most firmly believe. But it must be borne in mind that this verse conveys no intimation of what that punishment shall be. To say that one who violates a certain

statute shall receive the penalty of the law, does not determine how, nor to what extent, he is to be punished. It may be by fine, imprisonment, confiscation of goods, or death. In the text before us, however, we are told that the length of the punishment; it is to be as long as the reward of the righteous.

Now what is that punishment? Return to *Romans* 6:23 and read:

Romans 6

²³ The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life to Jesus Christ our Lord.

The punishment, then, is to be death; and since that punishment is to be everlasting, we conclude that eternal death will be the portion of the wicked. This agrees exactly with our previous investigation. As corroborating this conclusion, we cite:

2 Thessalonians 1

⁷ And to you who are troubled [God will recompense] rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

⁸ In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

⁹ Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.

This destruction comes “from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power,” and this agrees with the eighth verse of the next chapter, which says:

2 Thessalonians 2

⁸ And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming.

And this again is in harmony with the statement in *Revelation*, concerning the wicked:

Revelation 20

⁹ And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and com-

passed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city; and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

That which has caused the misunderstanding in regard to *Matthew 25:46*, is the mistaken idea of the punishment. Because...

Romans 2

⁸ ...indignation and wrath,

⁹ Tribulation and anguish, [are threatened to] every soul of man that does evil,

—men seem to think that tribulation and anguish constitute the sum of the punishment. All these things are threatened, they are nowhere declared to be eternal, as in the death which is “the wages of sin.” Everywhere in the Bible, death and life are the alternatives set before the individual. He may believe and live, or he may do evil and die.

Deuteronomy 30

¹⁵ See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil;

¹⁶ In that I command you this day to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you mayest live...

¹⁷ But if your heart turn away, so that you will not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them;

¹⁸ I denounce unto you this day, that you shall surely perish,...

¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live.

Whatever of anguish may be accessory, the above language shows that so surely as life shall be given to the obedient, death shall be the portion of the sinner. If not, what force is there in the words of the prophet:

Ezekiel 18

³¹ Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby you have transgressed; and make a new heart and a new spirit: for why will you die, O house of Israel?

Here the prophet, like Paul,

2 Corinthians 5

¹¹ Knowing the terror of the Lord,

—persuades men to turn from sin. But his persuasion from that standpoint loses all its power if he has made a mistake as to what that “terror” is. Let it be borne in mind that the punishment—“the wages of sin”—is death. Until death has been inflicted upon the sinner, he has not been punished, however much he may suffer. Now the Saviour does not say that the wicked shall go into an everlasting condition of being punished, which would be everlasting dying, but into everlasting punishment, which is everlasting death.

The wise man has said,

Proverbs 14

¹² There is a way which seems right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.

And the apostle James only repeats the statement in another form when he says:

James 1

¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.

In short, throughout the inspired record, we find only a repetition of our Saviour’s words:

John 3

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The death that was threatened to Adam, the execution of which was stayed that he might, by the aid of Christ, have another chance for life, still hangs over his posterity. They may escape...

Matthew 3

⁷ ...from the wrath to come

—by believing in Christ, and thus becoming new creatures. If they do not accept this offer, the penalty will be allowed to fall upon their guilty heads. And to these are the words of Christ:

John 3

³⁶ He that believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him.

“But the wrath of God abides on him.” Let us see how much force there may be in this statement. The 2nd *Psalm* is devoted to a brief history of those presumptuous mortals who...

Psalm 2

² ...take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed, saying,

³ Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

Unto these the Lord...

⁵ ...shall speak...in His wrath, and [He will] vex them in His sore displeasure,

—even giving them to the Son to be broken...

⁹ ...with a rod of iron, [and dashed] in pieces like a potter's vessel.

In view of this threatened punishment, they are exhorted to be instructed, and to repent, and believe on Christ; or, in the words of inspiration, to...

Psalm 2

¹² Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little.

The wrath of God and of the Son is the same, for:

John 5

²² The Father...has committed all judgment unto the Son,
—and has given Him authority to execute it.

²⁷ And has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man.

Now what is the result of the manifestation of this wrath? Even when it is “kindled but a little,” its effect is to cause those against whom it is directed to “perish from the way.” Then if a slight manifestation of God’s wrath will cause the sinner to “perish,” i.e., “to die; to be blotted from existence,” what will be the effect if the wrath of God abides on him? It can be nothing less than to keep him in everlasting death.

And thus we find, from whatever portion of the Scripture we approach the subject, that the verdict is the same.

Nahum 1

² The Lord...reserves wrath for His enemies.

The effect of that wrath, when let fall upon them, is to blot them from existence;¹⁹ they will never afterward, to all eternity, have any existence.

¹⁹ *Psalm 2:12.*

11. Punishment of the Wicked: Forever and Ever

Signs of the Times, November 20, 1884

THERE is one text that should have received attention in connection with the article concerning the “everlasting fire” into which the wicked are to be cast. Before introducing it, however, and we will briefly review the points already made.

1. Those only who accept Christ receive eternal life; all others perish. *John* 3:16. That is, they will be blotted from existence. This is the penalty which was threatened in the beginning, before sin entered, and which is now simply delayed a little in order to allow mankind an opportunity to repent. Thus it is that “the long suffering of our Lord is salvation.” *2 Peter* 3:15.
2. The agent by which the death penalty is to be executed, is fire—“everlasting fire.” We saw that it was “eternal fire” that destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah,²⁰ and that by means of “unquenchable fire” the walls and palaces of Jerusalem were devoured.²¹ We learned also that the “eternal fire” that fell upon the cities of the plain turned them to ashes,²² and that this is what is always accomplished when fire is unquenchable. The wicked being likened to chaff, and stubble, it does not tax our imagination in the least to understand how, when cast into unquenchable fire, they will be burned up, and be ashes.²³
3. We have also seen that the wicked go into “everlasting punishment.” But this punishment is death,²⁴ so that

²⁰ *Jude* 7.

²¹ *Jeremiah* 17:27; *2 Chronicles* 36:18-21.

²² *2 Peter* 2:6.

²³ *Matthew* 3:12; *Malachi* 4:1, 3.

²⁴ *Romans* 6:23.

Matthew 25:46 simply teaches that from the death which the finally impenitent suffer, there will be no resurrection. This point was still further shown by the statement in *Psalms* 2:12, that even a slight manifestation of God's wrath causes the one against whom it is directed to perish, and that since that wrath abides on the sinner²⁵ there will be no recovery from that perdition.

The texts already cited are amply sufficient to prove the final utter destruction of the wicked; but we have no desire to evade the point, or to pass by any text which would seem to militate against the positions taken. We therefore turn our attention to:

Revelation 14

⁹ And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,

¹⁰ The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

¹¹ And the smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receives the mark of his name.

The question is, Does the expression, "the smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever," necessarily imply that the torments of the wicked will never cease? If it does, then there is an unexplainable contradiction between it and those texts which speak plainly of the final extinction of the wicked.

But this cannot possibly be; it cannot for a moment be admitted that there are contradictions in the sacred record. This text, then, must harmonize with the great mass of testimony

²⁵ *John* 3:36.

already quoted. We might quote authorities on the meaning of the Greek word rendered “forever,” but we shall let the Bible explain this text, just as we have all the others, for it is only when men take it by itself, without regard to other Scriptures, that it presents any objection to the position we have taken in regard to the destruction of the wicked.

In the 21st chapter of *Exodus*, the first four verses, we find the law in regard to the length of the time a Hebrew might be kept as a servant. Six years was the limit; after he had served six years, his master was bound to let him go free, for nothing, and allow him to take away as much as he brought with him. If during his term of service he had married one of his master’s servants, she and her children were to remain with the master. In such a case, however, it would often happen that the servant would rather stay with his wife and children than have his liberty; if so, the law made the following provision:

Exodus 21

⁵ And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free:

⁶ Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever.

Now will anyone claim that the life of that servant, as well as that of his master, was to be prolonged to all eternity? Certainly not; no one can be found who would gather from the above text that either the servant or his master would live any longer than a natural lifetime. The text simply teaches that under the special circumstances mentioned, the servant should remain with his master and serve him continuously, as long as he should live. So we find that “forever” does not necessarily mean “to all in eternity.”

Take another instance: In *Isaiah* 34 we read, concerning the land, here called “Idumea,” as follows:

Isaiah 34

⁹ And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch.

¹⁰ It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever; from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever.

In a similar strain the prophet continues to the close of the chapter; and then we read:

Isaiah 35

¹ The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

² It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.

These words are spoken of the same land from which, in the preceding chapter, it is that the smoke should ascend for ever. So we see that there does come a time when the smoke does not arise from it; and that is when...

Isaiah 34

² The indignation of the Lord...upon all nations,

—shall have been accomplished. Thus again we find that “forever,” even “forever and ever,” does not necessarily imply that there shall be no end.

This text is the more important to note, as it has a direct bearing on *Revelation* 14:11. The time when the smoke shall thus ascend forever, is...

⁸ ...the day of the Lord’s vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion,

—and the time when...

Isaiah 34

² The indignation of the Lord is upon all nations.

This being so, and the fact having been proved that the land does afterward cease burning, and become renewed, we find that we are positively bound to admit that there will come a time when the smoke of the torment of the rebellious ones will cease; and that the statement that it shall ascend for ever and ever, means, as in the other two cases cited, but that it will ascend continuously, as long as there is any wicked in existence.

There will be no reprieve in their case, or relaxing of the punishment. The fire which causes the smoke is unquenchable; it utterly devours the sinners; but when they have been devoured, and have become ashes, then the fire will of necessity cease to burn, and likewise the smoke will cease to ascend.

Read the verses²⁶ once more. They (the rebellious ones)...

Revelation 14

¹⁰ ...shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture.

In our last article we learned²⁷ the effect of the wrath of God when it is kindled even a little against the people of the earth; is to cause them to “perish,”—“to come to nothing.” Now if the wicked are made to drink of the “wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture,” certainly the result can be nothing less than their utter destruction.

We are not attempting to fix the duration of the “tribulation and anguish”²⁸ which the wicked shall suffer previous to their death, nor to limit it in any way. The statement that...

²⁶ *Revelation 14:9-11.*

²⁷ *Psalms 2:12.*

²⁸ *Romans 2:9.*

Revelation 14

¹¹ ...they have no rest day nor night,

–implies that it will not be of short duration. That they will suffer anguish for a long time, there can be no doubt; neither can there be any more doubt that this anguish will eventually be terminated by death,

Romans 6

²³ For the wages of sin is death;

James 1

¹⁵ ...sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.

If we insist that the torments of the wicked never cease, then these texts have no meaning. Yet it must be borne in mind that there is no restoration to the favor of God. No; the wicked...

Matthew 25

⁴⁶ ...shall go away into everlasting punishment,

even...

2 Thessalonians 1

⁹ ...everlasting destruction.

Revelation 14:10 is not the only place where the “wine of the wrath of God” is mentioned. In *Jeremiah 25* we read:

Jeremiah 25

¹⁵ For thus says the Lord God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it.

The different nations that shall drink of it are then specified, and the list closes with these words:

²⁶ And all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another, and all the kingdoms of the world, which are upon the face of the earth...shall drink after them.

This corresponds with:

Psalms 75

⁸ For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and He pours out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them.

Now what will be the result of their drinking of this cup? We turn again to the prophecy in *Jeremiah*:

Jeremiah 25

²⁷ Therefore you shall say unto them, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Drink and be drunken, and spue, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you.

²⁸ And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at your hand to drink, then shall you say unto them, Thus says the Lord of hosts; you shall certainly drink.

²⁹ For, lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by my name, and should you be utterly unpunished? You shall not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, says the Lord of hosts.

³¹ A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with the nations, He will plead with all flesh; He will give them that are wicked to the sword, says the Lord.

³³ And the slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground.

Thus we see that the drinking of the wine of the wrath of God produces death. They who drink it,

²⁷ ...fall, and rise no more.

This is perfectly in harmony with what we have previously learned of the effect of God's wrath, when it abides on the sinner. But there is one more text to be noticed in this connection, which settles the case absolutely. It is *Obadiah* 15, 16, which reads thus:

Obadiah

¹⁵ For the day of the Lord is near upon all the heathen: as you have done, it shall be done unto you: your reward shall return upon your own head.

¹⁶ For as you have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been.

What stronger language could be used to show the final utter extinction of the wicked?

And let it be remembered that this language is used concerning those who drink of “the wine up the wrath of God,” threatened in *Revelation* 14:9-11. Certainly all must agree, then, that this latter text, instead of teaching the endless torture of the wicked, plainly shows that they, after suffering for an unknown length of time the “tribulation and anguish” which is their just due, will finally receive the full wages of sin, which is death.

12. Punishment of the Wicked: Direct Testimony

Signs of the Times, December 18, 1884

IN THE preceding articles on the punishment of the wicked, we have confined ourselves principally to a consideration of those texts which are popularly supposed to teach the endless existence of the wicked in torment. We have found that, on the contrary, they teach most emphatically their final utter extinction. Indeed, the strongest proofs in favor of the position which we have taken concerning the future destiny of the impenitent, is to be found in those texts which are generally used by the opponents of that doctrine.

We will now proceed to the consideration of a few texts that are so plain that they of themselves should be allowed to settle the question. Some of these we shall quote without comment.

Psalms 37

¹ Fret not yourself because of the evil-doers, neither be envious against the workers of iniquity.

² For they shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb.

⁹ For evil-doers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.

¹⁰ For yet a little while and the wicked shall not be; yea, you shall diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.

Compare this with:

Obadiah

¹⁶ For as you have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been.

We should like to know how these texts can be harmonized with the doctrine of the endless existence of the wicked. That

theory cannot be held except by denying these texts, or, what is the same thing, ignoring them.

Psalm 37

²² For such as be blessed of Him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of Him shall be cut off.

Isaiah 5

²⁰ Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

²³ Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!

²⁴ Therefore as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

Hosea 13

² And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.

³ Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passes away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney.

Dr. Scott, after quoting this text, says,

i.e., violently and speedily made to banish and disappear.

The *Speaker's Commentary* says of this passage:

The tone of indignant derision passes into that of stern wrath the inflexibility of the purpose to punish is expressed by the accumulation of four several images, all describing utter extermination.

That is just what the language signifies,—“utter extermination.” If it does not mean that, we do not see how it can be

anything.

The preceding texts have compared the wicked to the most combustible material—stubble and chaff. In the following, the prophet makes the case stronger yet; the wicked are declared to be stubble:

Malachi 4

¹ For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

³ And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the Lord of hosts.

With this agree the words of John the Baptist:

Matthew 3

¹² Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

We turn once more to the 37th *Psalms*. In verse 20 we read:

Psalms 37

²⁰ But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lamb; they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.

The psalmist could have given no illustration of the final destiny of the wicked that would have been more forcible to the minds of the Jews. Every morning and every evening, according to the law, a lamb was placed on the altar and consumed.

Beside this, the fate every sin-offering, whether it was a bullock, a goat, or a lamb,²⁹ was burned upon the altar. They saw the fat of lambs continually vanishing into smoke, and in that column of the ascending smoke they had an ever-present re-

²⁹ *Leviticus 4.*

minder of the fate of the incorrigibly wicked. They knew that when the fat was placed in that sacrificial fire, it was not preserved, but was speedily destroyed; and so when the psalmist said,

Psalm 37

²⁰ ...the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs; they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away,

—they knew that the fate of the unrepentant sinners would be utter extinction. The last part of the verse only confirms the first clause:

²⁰ The wicked shall perish;

—for as we have already seen, the word “perish” means,

To be destroyed; to go to destruction; to pass away; to come to nothing; to be blotted from existence.

“Why, [says one,] you are an annihilationist.”

Our reply is, We believe what we have just been reading from the Bible; if that is what you call annihilationism, all right; we shall not be frightened from our position, whatever name may be applied to us. This word “annihilation” is a great bug-bear to many. Say they,

“It is impossible for a matter to be annihilated.”

Now while we should not dare place any limit to God’s power, we do not believe that He will blot out of existence any of the matter which He has created; but that He will and does change the form or combination of parts of many things, we have the most abundant evidence. Webster defines “annihilate” thus:

1. To reduce to nothing; to destroy the existence of; to cause to cease to be.
2. To destroy the form or peculiar distinctive properties of, so that the specific thing no longer exists, as, to annihilate a

forest by cutting and carrying away the trees, though the timber may still exist.

The Bible says that the wicked “shall not be;”³⁰ that “they shall be as though they had not been.”³¹ There was a time once when they were not; they had no existence; but the matter of which they are composed was even then in existence. So likewise the matter of which they are composed will remain after they cease to be.

When the fat was placed on the altar it was destroyed; no one removed it, yet in a little while there was no fat there. What had become of it? It had become smoke. The fat was annihilated, if you please; but the matter which had composed it was not. Thus, we are told, will it be with the wicked.

If any one disagrees with the statements concerning the wicked, his quarrel is with the Bible, not with us.

³⁰ *Psalm* 37:10.

³¹ *Obadiah* 16.

13. Safety in the Time of Trouble

Signs of the Times, January 20, 1887

IN CHAPTER 9, “Everlasting Fire,” we quoted *Isaiah* 33:14 as a text which is to some a stumbling-block in the way of their believing that the wicked are to be eternally destroyed. The text reads thus:

Isaiah 33

¹⁴ The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?

The difficulty arises from the supposition that the prophet means,

“Who of us shall suffer from the devouring fire?”

Or in other words,

“Who of us shall in the last day be found sinners?”

But that is not the idea of the text. The true meaning is found when we read the answer to these questions:

¹⁵ He that walks righteously, and speaks uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shakes his hands from holding of bribes, that stops his ears from hearing of blood, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil;

¹⁶ He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.

From this we learn that the prophet does not mean to ask who among us shall be sinners; but who among us shall be righteous. And, therefore, when he says,

¹⁴ Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?

—he does not mean to ask who shall be punished with this fire, but who shall escape it. Thus the text has no reference whatever to eternal torment. But the question will be asked,

“How can it be said that the righteous shall dwell with devouring fire and with everlasting burnings?”

This will be understood after we have quoted a few texts. The psalmist, speaking of the coming of the Lord, says:

Psalms 50

³ Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him.

And again:

Psalms 97

³ A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies round about.

In *Habakkuk 3* we find the following:

Habakkuk 3

³ God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah.

⁴ His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise.

⁵ And His brightness was as the light; He had horns coming out of His hand; and there was the hiding of His power. Before Him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at His feet.

⁶ He stood, and measured the earth: He beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow; His ways are everlasting.

From the sixteenth verse³² of this chapter we learn that this is the description of the time of trouble that shall just precede the coming of the Lord. It is the same that is referred to in the 91st *Psalm*, where we read of the...

Psalm 91

⁵ ...terror by night;...

⁶ ...the pestilence that walks in darkness;...the destruction that wastes at noonday,

—and the plagues which the wicked shall suffer, and which the righteous will see although they shall be unharmed by them. Now if with these texts we read *Joel* 1:15-20, which also describes the time of trouble, we shall understand about the devouring fire and the everlasting burnings. That text reads thus:

Joel 1

¹⁵ Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.

¹⁶ Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God?

¹⁷ The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered.

¹⁸ How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.

¹⁹ O Lord, to You will I cry; for the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame has burned all the trees of the field.

²⁰ The beasts of the field cry also unto You; for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

Read also:

³² **Malachi 3** ¹⁶ When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when He comes up unto the people, He will invade them with His troops.

Joel 2

¹ Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord comes, for it is nigh at hand;

² A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there has not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.

³ A fire devours before them; and behind them a flame burns: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them.

We find from this text that just before the coming of the Lord, there is a time of trouble for the wicked, in which there is pestilence, and plagues, and devouring fire; and that the righteous witness these plagues that are poured out upon the wicked, but are protected. The enemies of the Lord will be consumed by the devouring fire, but those who are described in *Isaiah* 35:15, will be able to dwell with everlasting burnings. Of such a one *Isaiah* says:

Isaiah 33

¹⁶ He shall dwell on high.

David says,

Psalms 91

¹ He...shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

While the meat is cut off because the corn is withered, and the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness,

Isaiah 33

¹⁶ Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure.

And while the wicked behold only a desolate wilderness he...

Isaiah 33

¹⁷ ...shall behold the land that is very far off.

This last reference also shows that the time of the everlasting burnings is before the coming of the Lord. The 34th chapter of *Isaiah* gives the result of this time of trouble. There it is said of the earth that:

Isaiah 34

⁹ The streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch.

And to show that it is the same everlasting burnings that accomplishes this, verse ten says:

¹⁰ It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever; from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever.

Now, to show that even this is limited in duration, and that the fire ceases to burn when that upon which it feeds is consumed, read the next chapter, especially the first two verses:

Isaiah 35

¹ The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

² It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.

Happy indeed will be the lot of the man who in that awful time of trouble can say of the Lord,

Psalms 91

² He is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in Him will I trust.

They who in this day of salvation wash their robes of character, and make them white in the blood of the Lamb,³³ can say in that day when God stands and measures the earth, scattering the everlasting hills, and causing the perpetual hills

³³ *Revelation 7:14.*

to bow:³⁴

Psalm 46

¹ God is our God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

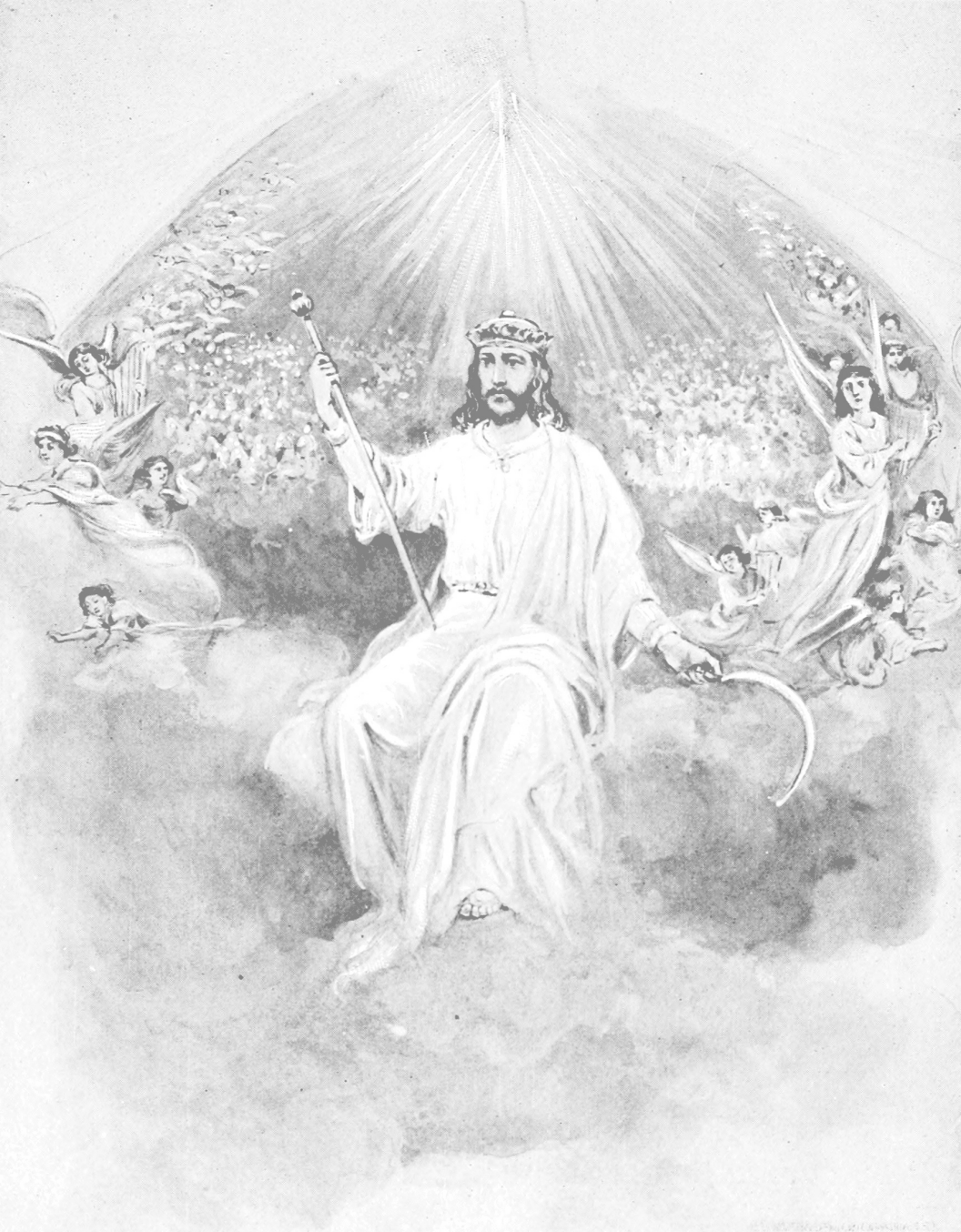
² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

³ Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.

Who would not wish for such confidence in a time when fearfulness surprises the hypocrites?³⁵

³⁴ *Habakkuk* 3:6.

³⁵ *Isaiah* 33:14.



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