

The Approaching End of the Age by H. Grattan Guinness – Part I. Chapter II.



Continued from [The Approaching End of the Age by H. Grattan Guinness – Part I. Progressive Revelation Chapter I.](#)

Progressive Revelations as to the Relative Period of the Second Advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ

IN the light of this principle of Progressive Revelation, let us now consider the most interesting and momentous question in connection with the future, the *relative period* of the return of our blessed Lord and Master.

Before examining the revelations of the Apocalypse on this subject, we will briefly glance at the general testimony of Scripture with respect to it; first that of the Old Testament, and then that of the New.

It is impossible that those who “love his appearing” should be indifferent as to the season of their Lord’s return, Even the prophets searched diligently what manner of *time* the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified. beforehand, the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow. With much more reason, we, who in his sufferings see our salvation, and in his glory our own eternal portion, we, who are espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ, and have his parting promise, “I will come again and receive you to Myself,” may inquire diligently, and long to know, *when* we may hope to see Him as He is, and be for ever with our Lord. The more we long for an event itself, the more anxious we are to ascertain the probable period of its occurrence. It argues little love to the Lord if we do not ardently desire his return; and it argues little desire for his return, if we never search the Scriptures, prayerfully seeking to learn from them when we may expect it. It is true we are to let patience have her perfect work; but our patience should be “the patience of hope,” not the patience of careless indifference; and hope will always suggest the inquiry, how long?

“How long, O Lord our Saviour, wilt Thou remain away?
Our hearts are growing weary, that Thou dost absent stay.
Oh when shall come the moment, when, brighter far than morn,
The sunshine of Thy glory, shall on Thy people dawn?”

It is true that ever since apostolic days it has been the bounden duty of the

church to be ever watchful, ever waiting, for the return of God's Son from heaven. The teaching of Christ Himself and of his apostles, led the early generations of Christians in a very real sense, to expect the speedy return of their Lord. They took his promise "Lo, I come quickly," to mean quickly according to human calculations; we have learned by experience that it meant "quickly," counting a thousand years as one day; and unless we have something more explicit than this by which to shape *our* expectations, we, Christians of the nineteenth century, would have little indeed to sustain our hope. A promise which has already extended over 1800 years might well extend over 1800 more, and the epiphany for which we wait be still ages distant.

But Scripture contains more than general *promises* on this subject; it contains many specific, orderly, and even chronological *prophecies*. We have full and explicit inspired predictions by which to shape our expectations, and these numerous and detailed prophetic statements, do not leave us like shipwrecked sailors on a dark night, on a wild and stormy sea, deprived of chart and compass and ignorant of their bearings. If we will use them aright, they place us rather in the position of a weary crew, at the end of a long and dangerous voyage, exploring by the morning twilight, the chart on which their track has been marked down, noting the thousands of miles they have sailed, recognising each high land and island they have passed on their course, and all the lights and beacons long since left behind, cheering each other as they observe that the faithful chart, whose accuracy their long experience has demonstrated, *shows but two or three waymarks ahead*,—waymarks absolutely coming into sight,—and rejoicing in hope of a speedy entrance into a peaceful port.

But here we are met with an objection, Those who search and study the prophetic word are often rebuked by the quotation, "of that day and that hour knoweth no man." Now though some students of prophecy have degenerated into prophets, and have required to be reminded of these words, yet it is a mistake to suppose that they forbid investigation, or render hopeless beforehand, any well grounded and intelligent conclusions, as to the period of our Lord's return. The day and the hour of this great event have not assuredly been revealed, but its place on the general chart of human history, has as certainly not been concealed.

The analogy of the Old Testament would lead us to expect that dates would be given by which some approximation to a knowledge of the period of Christ's second coming, might, towards the close of the dispensation, be made. For however dark earlier generations of Israel may have been, as to the time of his *first* coming, those who lived during the five centuries immediately preceding it, had the light of distinct chronological prophecy, to sustain their hopes, and guide their expectations. Though Daniel's prediction of the "seventy weeks" was expressed in symbolic language, and perhaps not understood by the generation to whom it was first given, yet as a matter of history, we know that it was correctly interpreted by later generations, that it formed a national opinion as to the probable period of the appearance of Messiah the Prince, and that it taught the faithful, like Simeon and Anna, to be waiting for the consolation of Israel. Is it not likely that the later generations of the Christian church, which is indwelt by the Spirit of truth,

of whom Christ expressly said "He shall show you things to come" *should* have as clear or clearer light, as to the period of the second advent?—light, *not as to its day or hour, not as to its month or year*, but as to its period, and especially as to its chronological *relation*, to other future events. From the fact that the Lord Jesus, as the New Testament abundantly proves, wished his disciples in all ages to be kept constant in love, and vigilant in holiness, by means of the *continual* expectation of his return, we may be sure beforehand, that the period of that event, will not be clearly revealed in *plain words*, either in the Old Testament or the New. Any revelation on the subject, will be sure to be characterized, by a marked and intentional obscurity, and to be of such a character as that only "the wise shall understand" it. On the other hand, as the second advent must bear to other great future events, the relation either of antecedent or subsequent, (even if not of cause or of effect,) its position relatively to them, must be more or less clearly indicated.

For if there exist in Scripture, an orderly chronological prophecy of future events, containing a prediction of the second coming of Christ, as one link in the chain, *its place*, in reference to all the other events, must of course be clear. And if such a prophecy contain *no* direct mention of the second advent, yet if it contain a mention of events, which, from other scriptures we know to *synchronize* with that advent, (such as the resurrection of saints, or the destruction of antichrist and his armies,) the *relative* position of the advent will still be clear.

Such prophecies exist; they are given for our study; and with the Holy Ghost as our guide we may confidently expect to learn from them with certainty, the *general order* of the great incidents, of the fast approaching end of the age. And not only so, but we may also expect, to be able to gather from such prophecies, read in the light of the whole revelation of God, an *approximate* knowledge of the actual period of the coming of the Lord. Of this we are not, we cannot be, intended to remain in ignorance, for it is with regard to prophetic chronology that it is expressly said, "the wise shall understand."

Let us seek then to ascertain, first from Old Testament prophecy, secondly from the more advanced teachings of the New Testament, and lastly from the final testimony of the Apocalypse, the relative period of our Lord's return; and, as far as it is revealed, its actual point, in the course of the ages of human history.

The second advent of Christ could not have been distinctly predicted in the Old Testament as a second; that would have involved a premature revelation of Messiah's rejection by Israel, of his death and re-ascension into heaven, and of the present dispensation of grace to the Gentiles. Prophecies so clear as either to *procure* or *prevent* their own fulfilment, were never delivered by Divine inspiration. The two comings of Christ, at that time both future, and having one and the same object—to redeem and restore humanity and to destroy the works of the devil—are seen as one, in early prophetic vision.

A coming of Christ is, however, extensively and clearly predicted in the Old Testament, of a character essentially different from his past coming, and which is to be accompanied by events of transcendent importance, none of

which took place in connection with his first advent. It is therefore a *future coming*, and in relation to the first it is a *second*. He did come in humiliation as a gracious Saviour; He *will* come in glory as a righteous Judge and King. In other words, without the expression being used, the second coming of Christ is foretold and described in places too numerous to mention, in the law, in the prophets, and in the psalms.

The Old Testament also largely prophesies, another great future event; it plainly teaches that before this world's history is wound up, before time gives place to eternity, an age is to occur, which is to be earth's sabbath, man's jubilee, Christ's reign: the antitype of all sabbaths from Eden onward, the antitype of Israel's jubilees, the antitype of Solomon's glorious reign of prosperity and peace. Certain Scripture statements and analogies, (apart from the Apocalypse,) lead us to suppose that the duration of this period will be 1,000 years, whence it is commonly called THE MILLENNIUM.

By the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began God has announced these "times of refreshing." The Lord Jesus when on earth alluded to this period, and presented it as an object of hope to his people. "Ye who have followed Me," He said on one occasion in reply to a question from Peter, "in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel;" to Nathanael He said, "Hereafter ye shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man," This age is called "the dispensation of the fullness of times," in which God "will gather together in one all things in Christ" (Eph, i. 10), in which every knee shall bow to Jesus, and every tongue confess Him Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. ii. 10). It is the oft foretold, oft promised kingdom of the Son of man; of God's reign over the world in providence; that has existed from the beginning, and could never therefore be the object either of prophecy or of promise; not Christ's present reign in the hearts of his people; not the present period at all, for Satan is at present usurping the throne of this world as king and God; two thirds of mankind still worship *him* in worshipping idols, and are his obedient slaves and miserable victims; the greater part of the other third worship and obey him indirectly, in serving sin; and even Christ's people, the little flock who own Him as Lord, fail to obey Him perfectly.

If Christ be king now, where is his honour? How does the dread majesty of his throne assert itself? He endures with much longsuffering all manner of rebellion; He allows his authority to be insulted, and his name blasphemed. He avenges not his own elect, who cry day and night unto Him; He permits the oppressor to triumph, and the wicked to prosper in the earth, These things shall not be in the day of his kingdom, Ps. lxxii. presents the manner of that kingdom. Its features are righteousness and judgment, flowing from Himself as fountain head, and from all subordinate rulers as his ministers; the poor and needy delivered, and their oppressors crushed; complete and universal submission of all kings and nations to Christ; abundant peace and eternal praise. Clearly this kingdom is not come yet, and clearly therefore it is yet to come. It is true that numerous passages speak of this present dispensation as in a certain sense the kingdom of God; but the expression

also designates a still future period, altogether distinct from the present in its character. *This* is the kingdom of God in a mystery, *that* will be the kingdom of God in manifest power and glory.

And let it be remarked, this kingdom is no part of the eternal state which shall ensue when "the former things are passed away." It is the kingdom of the *Son*, the kingdom in which Christ as *Son of man* is supreme; but in the eternal state the Son shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, and shall Himself be subject, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. xv. 28). Now the period during which the Son *possesses* the kingdom, and the period which *dates from his delivering it up*, cannot be the same.

Again, the dispensation in question, though blessed and glorious beyond all that have preceded it, is yet governmentally and nationally imperfect; mankind will be still divided into nations (Zech. xiv. 16), speak divers languages (Dan. vii. 14), be distinguished as Jews and Gentiles, and as governors and governed (Ps. lxxii.); whereas in the eternal state all will be under the sole and immediate government of God.

And further, it is a period which, though characterized in the main by righteousness, life and bliss, will yet be marred by sin, death and judgment; men will still be mortal, and judgment will follow every transgression (Isa. lxxv.; Zech. xiv.), while in the eternal state there will be no more sin, no more death, no more curse (Rev. xxi).

During this reign of Christ, He will have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth (Ps. lxxii. 8); but in the eternal state there will be "no more sea." In short the former will be a kingdom characterized by the gradual and progressive subjugation of all things to Christ, in which "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death," while the eternal state *dates from* death's destruction, and in it in subjection is unknown.

This glorious age, is then a distinct one, which is to *follow* the present period, and to precede the new heavens and the new earth, in which the tabernacle of God shall be for evermore with men.

We have therefore a great future event, and a glorious future age, clearly predicted in Scripture, and it is a deeply momentous question which of the two is to come first. Is the millennial sabbath to be introduced by the coming of Christ, or to be followed by it? Ought the church to be expecting the millennium, or expecting her Lord first? Is the Divine programme of the future, first the millennium and then the advent, or first the advent and then the millennium?

It is strange that many children of God are content to leave this great question an open one, and to continue in willing ignorance on the subject. And it is doubly strange that too many who ought, as teachers of the truth, boldly to declare the whole counsel of God, should be content to promulgate through the entire course of their ministry, views which they hold from education and from habit, rather than as the result of research, and of strong conviction that they are *the truth*, views which they would be at a

loss to sustain by solid scriptural argument. They never perhaps preach on prophecy at all, but they constantly make use of forms of expression, and quote Scripture in connections, which tacitly and very effectually teach error. They thus endorse the vaguely held traditional creed, that death is the certain prospect before each individual, and that as regards the church at large and the world, the present state of things will continue to improve gradually, until it merges into that blessed period of righteousness and peace, in which "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea." This is a serious evil; scriptures misquoted are an efficient means of conveying unscriptural views. Multitudes of persons who have never studied the Bible on this subject, or received any direct instruction on it, have nevertheless, from this practice on the part of their teachers, imbibed views directly contrary to the truth.

And the views thus thoughtlessly imparted, and thoughtlessly received, are yet firmly held; for mental habits are strong. That which we have always heard and supposed to be true, that which most people appear to hold as true, assumes the authority of ascertained truth in the mind, and the moment it is attacked, prejudice rises in arms to defend it. The consequence is, that notwithstanding the late large and rapid increase in the number of those who look for the coming of Christ as their own individual hope, and as the next great event in the history of the church and of the world, the majority of professing Christians, and especially those who have little or no leisure for reading and study, still retain the opposite view, look for death personally, and expect the coming of Christ to take place, only at the end of the world. Yet that coming is the grand motive uniformly presented in the New Testament to love, to obedience, to holiness, to spirituality of mind, to works of mercy, to watchfulness, to patience, to moderation and sobriety, to diligence, and to all other Christian graces.* "That blessed hope" is essential to the production of the Christian character in its perfection, What consolation it affords in bereavement and affliction! What holy restraint it is calculated to exercise, in prosperity and joy, and what an incentive it supplies to exertion in the Christian work and warfare!

* 1 Thess. iii. 13; Col. iii. 4, 5; Titus ii, 11-13; 1 John ii. 28, iii. 2, 3; Phil iii. 20,21; Matt. xvi. 27; Rev. xxii. 12; Matt. xxv. 13; Luke xii. 35, xviii. 7; James v. 7, 8; 1 Pet. i. 13; Matt. xxiv. 46; 1 Pet. v. 1-4.

And who is to blame that its power is so little felt by Christians in general? How shall they hear without a teacher? If their ministers never directly teach them the truth on this point, by expounding to them the numerous passages bearing on it in the New Testament, but leave them in ignorance or lead them indirectly into error, will the Great Shepherd of the sheep hold such under shepherds guiltless? Earnestly would we entreat all our brethren in the ministry, to "*preach the word*" on this great subject, *to give it in their ministry, the prominence it has in their Bibles*; to bring it in, whenever and wherever Scripture brings it in, and that is in connection with almost every topic of Christian privilege and duty.

It is vain to urge that the uncertainty of life and the possible nearness of death, are motives as powerful as the coming of Christ. Death can never be an object of hope to a Christian, nor a source of consolation; God never

intended it to be such; it has lost its sting indeed to a believer, but it remains and must ever remain, a painful, humbling, afflictive, repulsive prospect; salvation itself imparts no lustre to death. It must be so; "it is sin's great conquest, and Satan's chief work, the fulness of sorrow and affliction, the triumph of corruption, the fulfilment of the curse. Oh it is a strange delusion of Satan to have made the capital curse of God eclipse the capital promise of God! Satan's consummated kingdom over the body to take that place in our thoughts, which Christ's consummated kingdom in the body and spirit, even the resurrection, was meant to take."

Nor is it believers only who suffer from the habitual omission of a cardinal doctrine of Scripture in the teaching they hear from the pulpit. Who shall estimate the injustice done thereby to unbelievers? *The coming of the Lord draweth nigh!* Why is not the fact, the (for them) *awful* fact, proclaimed aloud in their hearing, and applied with all the earnestness of love, to arouse the sleeper from his dream, to destroy the delusions of the false professor, to unmask the hypocrite to himself, to warn the wicked from his way? The coming of the Lord draweth nigh; to them who know not God and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, that coming must bring everlasting destruction; on them it must fall as a fiery vengeance. Should they not be faithfully forewarned of their danger? Should they have the right to reproach their teachers that they sounded not the trumpet though they saw the sword approaching? What saith the Lord? "If the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand" (Ezek. xxxiii. 6).

Let sinners be startled by the announcement "THE JUDGE STANDETH AT THE DOOR," and not soothed by the sound of a softly approaching millennium. Let them be warned of the speedy dawn of a day of retribution, and not led to conclude it at least a thousand years distant. If the preachers of the word will fling carelessly aside one of the best weapons in the armoury of truth, can they wonder that their work is not as effective as it might be? If they would fain see conversions numerous as in apostolic days, let them preach the apostolic preaching, in which not only the *past*, but the *future* advent of Christ, had a grand and prominent place.

The two prophets of the Old Testament who furnish the most conclusive evidence on this subject are Daniel and Zechariah. The former, a royal captive from Judea, was a pure and faithful witness for God in the corrupt, gentile court of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, during the time of the Babylonish captivity of Israel. There is something singularly magnificent and massive in this prophet's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's divinely sent dream, unencumbered by detail, the grand outline of this fundamental and far reaching prophecy, is sketched with the few but firm and telling touches of a master hand; like the blue vault of heaven, "majestic in its own simplicity," and embracing in one vast span the whole extent and circumference of earth, it seems to arch in the entire future of the world, with celestial ease and stability.

It starts from the time then present, and terminates on the verge of eternity. Its language is intelligible, and indeed can scarcely be

misunderstood. Brief and condensed in the extreme, it lights only on the salient points, the mountain tops as it were, of human history; but in so doing it must of course light on its most elevated and important summit, the glorious epiphany of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. *Whereabouts* in the chain does it place that summit? This is the point on which we now seek its testimony. Let the reader ponder it and reply.

THE VISION OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR, KING WHOM GOD HAD GIVEN UNIVERSAL OF BABYLON, DOMINION.

1. Thou, O king, sawest and behold a great image.
2. His head was of fine gold;
3. His breast and his arms of silver;
4. His belly and his thighs of brass;
5. His legs of iron, and his feet part of iron and part of clay.
6. A stone was cut out without hands;
7. It smote the image on his feet;
8. It brake in pieces the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold;
9. It became a great mountain;
10. *It filled the whole earth.*

THE INTERPRETATION.

- 1, Thou art this head of gold;
2. After thee shall arise another kingdom;
3. And a third kingdom of brass;
4. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron;
5. That kingdom shall be divided;
6. In the days of these kings,
7. *The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom;*
8. It shall never be destroyed,
9. It shall consume all these kingdoms,
10. It shall stand for ever.

The dream is certain and the interpretation thereof is sure.

A succession of four similar universal earthly empires is foretold, and that they are to be followed by a fifth, the empire of the stone, The first four would be established and ruled by men, the last by "the God of heaven." The first four would be destroyed, the last would destroy them. The first four would be smitten and broken in pieces, the last would never be destroyed. The first four would form one great *image*; the last would become a great *mountain*, and fill the whole earth. The first four would be consumed and carried away; the last would stand for ever.

By the universal consent of the church of all ages, and of all sections, the first four are allowed to be the Babylonian, the Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman empires; and the last the still future kingdom of the Son of man. The internal scriptural and historical evidence in favour of this interpretation, is so overwhelming, and the agreement of all students and commentators, of the early church, of the Greek and Roman Catholic churches,

and of all Protestant churches, so complete, that the few who have of late years ventured to call it in question, must be regarded as rash, unsafe, presumptuous guides, who would destroy the very basis of all sound and solid interpretation of Scripture prophecy. It were superfluous to argue the point in a work like this; those who require it can easily find abundant evidence, and that of a most convincing character and edifying nature.*

* See Birks' "Elements of Prophecy"

We take it for granted therefore that this vision presents us with a brief historic outline, of the four great empires which have in succession held universal sway. It presents the last of the four, in two successive stages, first as legs of pure iron, secondly as ten toes composed of a mixture of iron and clay; representing under these emblems, first the Roman empire in its undivided imperial strength, and secondly the same empire in its divided condition.

During this last stage of the last empire, occurs a supernatural and tremendous revolution. All the previous changes had followed each other in the ordinary and natural course, and the kingdoms were in some senses a continuation of each other, for the great image is one. But now a kingdom that is no part of the image, that owns a supernatural origin, smites the image, grinds it to powder, takes its place, blots it out of existence, and fills the whole earth. This fall of the stone cut out without hands, must symbolise something immensely more important and fundamental, than any political change the world has ever seen. Tremendous critical revolutions, such as the overthrow of Babylon by Cyrus, and of Persia's power by Alexander the Great, have in this prophecy been portrayed simply by the quiet change from one metal to another, in the parts of an unbroken image. What then is the great event symbolised by the *falling of the stone*, which puts an end to the image altogether, and precedes the establishment on earth of the kingdom of the God of heaven?

Is it, as some assert, the first advent of Christ, to establish Christianity? Impossible! for the stone falls *on the feet* of the image. The first advent took place in the time of the undivided imperial iron strength of the Roman empire, not after its decay and division into many kingdoms. Christianity had already been established for centuries, as the religion of the Roman empire, before the state of things symbolised by the ten toes of iron and clay arose.

Besides, the destruction of the image is attributed to the *fall* of the stone, of to its gradual expansion into a great mountain which fills the whole earth. Now Christianity did not destroy all earthly monarchy, at the time of its advent, or in its early ages. On the contrary! Its Founder suffered under Pontius Pilate the Roman governor, and his apostles were martyred by Nero and Domitian. Nothing whatever answering to the crushing, destructive fall of the stone took place at that time. The development of the stone into a mountain does not begin till the image *has been* "broken to pieces together, and become like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor." Now the gradual growth of Christianity has been taking place while the image still stands, and cannot therefore be the thing intended by this striking symbol. Besides this, the spiritual kingdom of God now established in the hearts of men, is in no

respect similar to the great universal earthly empires which form the four first of this series, It is not of the world; it employs not the sword of conquest; it does not embrace as its subjects all within a certain territory; it is invisible, spiritual, heavenly. The empire of the stone is a fifth analogous to the other four, though of supernatural origin, wider extent, and longer duration; it is the universal empire of earth ruled directly by the God of heaven.

What then must be the transcendent event symbolised by the *falling* from above, with destructive force, on the feet of the image, (or final form of earthly monarchy,) of a stone cut out without hands? What can it be but the second coming of Christ with all his saints, to execute judgment on the ungodly, and to reign in righteousness and glory?

The symbol employed, a stone cut out without hands, is a most appropriate emblem of Christ and His church; that church which, as other scriptures show, is to be associated with Him in the work of judgment. A stone cut out without hands is a miracle; Christ in His birth, in His resurrection, was such; and we His people are even now, "born not of the will of man, or of the will of the flesh, but of God" as to our spiritual natures, and our bodies are to be in the resurrection "quickened by his Spirit which dwelleth in us." Many other emblems present Christ and His people as one. They form one vine, one body, one temple; so here, one stone. Our Lord applies this emblem to Himself, in a way that seems almost an allusion to this prophecy: "whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder." Peter applies it to the saints, "ye also as living stones." And Paul speaks of believers under the same figure as "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." For more than 1800 years this mystic stone has been in process of cutting out. When "the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed," the separation will be complete, and the stone will *fall* on the feet of the image; that is, the Lord will come "with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all." Earthly polities will then crumble for ever into dust; empires, monarchies, and republics alike, will become as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor; "the Lord shall be king over all the earth," and alone exalted in that day.

Here then we have the first distinct answer to our inquiry, as to the relative position of the second advent.

On the authority of this prophecy alone we may boldly assert, that it is destined to occur at the close of the present divided state of the Roman empire, and prior to the establishment of the millennial reign of Christ. And moreover, as the parts of the image bear a certain proportion to each other, we have some data by which to form an approximation to its actual period; for the tenfold division of the Roman empire having already existed twelve or thirteen centuries, a strong presumption arises that its close must be at hand.

We turn now to the second great prophecy of Daniel in the seventh chapter of his book. The following are the leading points of the vision and of the interpretation respectively.

DANIEL'S VISION OF THE FOUR GREAT BEASTS.

1. Four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another.
2. The first like a lion, another like a bear, another like a leopard.
3. A fourth beast, dreadful. and terrible, and strong exceedingly.
4. It was diverse from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.
5. There came up among them another little horn.
6. In this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.
7. The same horn made war with the saints and prevailed against them.
8. UNTIL THE ANCIENT OF DAYS CAME, and
9. Judgment was given to the saints of the Most High; and
10. The time came: that the saints possessed the *kingdom*.

THE INTERPRETATION.

1. These great beasts which are four, are four kingdoms.
2. The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth.
3. The ten horns are ten kings (or kingdoms) that shall arise.
4. Another shall arise after them, diverse from the first (ten).
5. And he shall speak great words against the Most High.
6. He shall wear out the saints of the Most High;
7. They shall be given into his hand, until a time, and times, and the dividing of time.
8. BUT THE JUDGMENT SHALL SIT, and they shall take away his dominion.
9. The kingdom shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High;
10. Whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.

Nebuchadnezzar beheld the former vision, and Daniel interpreted; now the prophet beholds, and an angel interprets.

The subject is in both visions in the main the same; but the second has many additional features. The four great empires of earth, appear under strangely contrasted symbols, to the king and to the prophet.

In the former case a worldly idolater looked up, and beheld a great fourfold image of earthly dominion; it was terrible, yet attractive to him in its brilliancy. In the latter case a man of God looked down, and beheld four great beasts, terrible only in their fierce brutality.

Power is a dazzling object of ambition; dominion has a fascinating attraction for men; but the humblest saint of God can afford to look down on earthly glory, as from a lofty elevation, in the calm consciousness of undeniable and immeasurable superiority. Four great beasts: that was all the earth produced to the eye of the holy Daniel!

The divinely selected symbols have an evident allusion to the two leading characteristics that have marked the four great Gentile empires, in contrast to the Jewish theocracy, and in still darker contrast to the coming kingdom of Christ. *Image* worship and *inhuman cruelty*, idolatry and persecution, have been their characteristics. The image embodies the one thought, the wild

beast the other. Nebuchadnezzar made an image, probably of the image he had seen, and demanded for it worldwide worship, persecuting even to the fiery furnace, those who refused to bow down to it; and Daniel experienced the wild beast character of the second great empire, when condemned to the lions' den for his piety toward God.

That the four empires symbolised in this vision are the same four previously symbolised in the image can hardly be questioned. "The number is the same, four in each. The starting point is the same, for each was given while Babylon was the ruling power. The issue is the same, for both are immediately followed by the visible kingdom of Christ. The order is the same, for the kingdoms in the first vision, as all admit, are *successive*; and in the other there are no less than seven or eight clauses which denote a *succession* in time. There is the same gradation, for the noblest metal and the noblest animal take the lead in each series. Further, the kingdoms in each vision are described as occupying the whole space, till the dominion of the saints of God . . . The first empire is that of BABYLON, for to the king of BABYLON it was said, 'thou art this head of gold.'

If we require the names of the two next kingdoms, the angel Gabriel continues the message of the prophet: 'The ram having two horns are the kings of MEDIA and PERSIA ,.. the rough goat is the king of GRECIA.' If we ask the name and character of the fourth empire the evangelist supplies the answer, 'there went out a decree from CAESAR AUGUSTUS that all the world should be taxed'; 'if we let Him alone, all men will believe on Him, and the ROMANS will come and take away both our place and nation.' Four supreme and ruling kingdoms, and four only, are announced *by name* in the word of God, from the time of Daniel to the close of the sacred canon." *

* Birks' "First Two Visions," p. 20.

The main difference is that the latter prophecy, like a telescope of higher power, presents an enlarged and more detailed view, especially of the fourth empire. The image showed that it had two distinct stages: one pure iron, unmixed and undivided; the other iron and clay mixed, the metallic parts divided. In this fourth beast we discern a new element, *the dominion of the little horn*; and we thereby learn the moral reason for the judgment, which, in both visions alike, falls on the fourth empire in its last state. In connection with this last vision, the coming of Christ to judge is expressed in a clearer form, and the share which his people shall have in his reign, But the evidence it affords as to the *relative period* of the second advent, is in unison with that of the earlier vision. It places it at the end of the last phase of the fourth empire, and determines its *immediate* object to be the execution of judgment, and its *ultimate* object, the establishment on earth of the everlasting kingdom of the Most High, in which dominion shall be given to the saints. It thus announces that the coming of Christ, will be *prior* to His reign over the earth, in company with His saints and it furnishes more accurate data also as to the actual period of the second advent. This latter however cannot be adduced in the present stage of our inquiry, since it is connected with two points of disputed interpretation, the consideration of which must be adjourned to the second part of this work. For the same reason the evidence of Daniel's last visions must here be

presented but very imperfectly, and without any attempt to enter into detail.

We observe merely that the very comprehensive, (and consequently complicated,) prophecy of the "things noted in the Scripture of truth" (Dan. xi.), announces one unbroken series of wars, revolutions, persecutions, apostasies, disasters, and desolations, as occupying the whole scene of vision, until Daniel's people should be delivered, and many of the dead arise (Dan. xii. 1-3). Now these two events, the deliverance of Israel from their great tribulation, and the resurrection of the just, are invariably associated in the prophecies with the personal coming of Christ (Zech. xiv. 5; 1 Thess. iv., 1 Cor. xv.). Therefore, though Daniel does not mention a second advent of Christ, for reasons before alluded to, yet he marks its place in this series, by the position assigned to the events which synchronize with it. Thus a third time he places it, at the close of the four great empires, or of the times of the Gentiles, at the close of Israel's dispersion and tribulation, and prior to the commencement of that kingdom, in which "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever," —*at the close of the fourth empire and before the millennial reign.*

The reign of Christ on earth is distinctly predicted in Zechariah xiv. 9, and many of its peculiar features are mentioned in verses which follow. This is an orderly and detailed prophecy, of the events that shall usher in that reign; and we have a definite statement, that foremost among those events, "*the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee: . . . and the Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one.*" In other words, we have in this prophecy a clear declaration that the advent will *precede* the millennial reign.

Again it is written "when the Lord shall build up Zion He shall appear in his glory." The building up of Zion, that is the restoration and conversion of Israel, must of course precede the millennial reign of Christ, over Israel and the earth, since it is inconceivable that Israel's dispersed and desolate condition, could continue during its course. A glorious epiphany of the Son of God, is to accompany according to this prophecy, the building up of Zion,—a premillennial event. The second advent of Christ, therefore takes place *before* the millennium.

The history of Israel is a typical history, prefiguring alike in its broad outline and in its minor features the history of the church, What is the general outline of that history? Is it a gradual and steady progress from bad to good, and from good to better, culminating at last in something very good and glorious? Nay, but the very reverse! It is a downward progress, a succession of backslidings and apostasies, from the days of Solomon to the Babylonish captivity, and from the restoration to the fall of Jerusalem under Titus, and the final judgment and dispersion of the ancient people of God. Now there would be no analogy, but a most marked and marvellous contrast between the type and the antitype, if the history of the church were to be a gradual *rise* from the state of things we now have, into a millennial condition of blessedness, purity, and peace. It would do violence not only to the analogy which exists between these two dispensations, but to the general moral analogy of *all* God's dispensations. Without exception hitherto every

dispensation has ended in apostasy and judgment. Eden ended thus; the antediluvian world ended thus; the theocracy of Israel ended thus; the kingdom of Israel ended thus; the ministry of the prophets ended thus; the ministry of Christ in person ended thus; the ministry of the Spirit by the apostles ended thus, in the full and final rejection of Israel and in the giving of the kingdom of God to the Gentiles. So far the Gentile church has pursued a precisely similar course, and trodden the downward road of apostasy; and can it be believed, that the last stage of her course is to afford a total contrast to all previous analogies, and culminate in a millennium of moral perfection and physical glory? No! "when the Son of man cometh shall He find faith on the earth"? that is the question.

When we turn to the pages of the New Testament the conclusions to which these ancient prophecies have led us are in the fullest way confirmed.

There are in the New Testament, apart from the Apocalypse, about a hundred passages, in which the second coming of Christ is more or less fully presented. About half of these afford no clear information on the subject we are considering, though indirect premillennial arguments might be drawn from most of them. About twenty passages teach with various degrees of explicitness, that the coming of Christ will precede "the times of the restitution of all things"; and there are four or five, which at first sight appear to favour an opposite view, but which on closer examination are found to harmonize with the rest. We will briefly review the leading passages of these two latter classes.

The most cursory survey of them as a whole, however, suggests two strong *prima facie* arguments in favour of the premillennial view. It is a remarkable fact, that while in these scriptures, *the return of the Lord Jesus* is everywhere prominent, the truth of a millennium to come is scarcely asserted. It is assumed as an acknowledged hope in one or two places, and alluded to in a few others; it is implied in some of our Lord's parables, but nowhere distinctly predicted, nowhere described, or presented as an object of hope. What is the natural inference? That no millennium is to occur? No! but that something else is to occur before it; and that the intervening event is the one, which the Holy Ghost would keep before the eye of the church, that intervening event being the glorious epiphany of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

For, supposing for a moment that a thousand years of righteousness and rest, purity and peace, were designed in the counsels of God, to succeed this age of sin and strife and suffering, *before* the oft promised return of the Lord Jesus, how unaccountable, how incredible that so little should be said about it! Supposing it were to occur on the other hand *after* that return, and consequent upon it, how perfectly natural, that in prophecies designed to comfort and guide the church during the interval of Christ's absence, it should be scarcely mentioned. Its character had been described in the Old Testament, and was well understood by Jewish Christians and by the early church. They expected its commencement indeed, in connection with Christ's first coming: "wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" and would never have entertained the thought, that it could occur during his absence. The events that should transpire during that absence, and the return

that should introduce the kingdom, were therefore naturally the great subject matter of the prophecies of Christ and his apostles; the subsequent millennial reign, taken as it were for granted, occupied a very subordinate place. The silence of the Lord Himself, and of the whole New Testament about the millennium, can be explained on no other supposition.

The period of the millennial reign is long; its character is glorious, its events gigantic, its sphere universal; it will be no less than the subjugation of the entire world to Christ, the putting down of "all rule, and all authority and power," by the Son of God. If all this be to take place *prior* to his second coming, how impossible that He should overlook or omit it, in all his great prophetic descriptions of the entire course of the present dispensation.

In Matthew xxiv. Christ describes his second personal advent and the great events which shall precede it. He reveals the course of this evil age, and its close. He foretells wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecutions, false prophets, iniquities, apostasies, the preaching of the Gospel "as a witness" to all nations, false signs and wonders, desolations, woes, including the great tribulation, and then He adds, "*immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; 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, 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.*"

That these words describe his personal advent in glory is certain, and equally certain is it, that this comprehensive prophecy, contains no allusion to a millennium of blessedness and peace. Can this be reconciled with the view that our Lord expected that golden age previous to his coming? The same thing may be said of the series of prophetic parables in Matthew xiii. They certainly describe his second personal advent, and as certainly portray the leading features of the age which shall end with that event; but they speak of no millennium. They describe exactly what we see around us, exactly what we know has characterized the past eighteen hundred years, a partial spread of truth, a vast upgrowth of apostasy and corruption in the professing church, a gathering out of the great sea of humanity a mingled mass of good and bad; but no subjugation of the entire world to Christ, no signs of righteousness from shore to shore. If any one asserts that the parable of the leaven foretells a universality of godliness in this dispensation, let him reflect, that in order to give his assertion any value he must first *prove* that the "leaven" means good and not evil (a disputed point),* and secondly, that the "three measures of meal" means the entire human race, and not a definite part of it: *neither of which can be proved*. This is a parable without an inspired interpretation; men can do no more than surmise its meaning; such surmises should *accord*, not *clash*, with clearer revelations, and with the Lord's own interpretation of the parable of the tares and the wheat.

* Indeed, it may be remarked that in every other place in Scripture where "leaven" is spoken of, it clearly signifies evil.

The same thing may be said of all the prophetic passages in the epistles of Paul: take for example that in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. He first describes the second coming of Christ with his mighty angels in flaming fire, to be glorified in his saints, and to take vengeance on the wicked. He then foretells THE great antecedent to that coming. What is it? A millennium of righteousness? No! a mystery of iniquity, the rise of the son of perdition, the manifestation of the man of sin, the fearful reign of Antichrist. Had *he* expected a long day of millennial light before Christ's return, how could he have foretold nothing, but a long night of spiritual darkness?

To Peter, Paul, Jude, and John, the future of this dispensation was overshadowed with portentous gloom. They gaze with sorrowing hearts into its dark depths; they warn the church of approaching apostasy, and nerve it to meet coming persecution, encouraging it to hope for relief from both, only at the coming of the Lord (2 Thess. i. 7), Had *they* foreseen the Christian dispensation gradually developing into universal brightness, how would the blessed prospect have chased their sorrow and lit their countenances with smiles of gladness! But no! Their looks brighten only, as they turn from the present dispensation to its close, and catch a glimpse of the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." If then the apostles expected no millennium before the second advent of Christ, why should we?

The second argument suggested by a glance at the general tenour of these prophecies is stronger, for it is positive rather than negative. The Lord and his apostles not only do *not* foretell a millennium of blessedness before the second coming, but they do foretell a series of events which could not coexist with such a millennium. They predict a succession of wars, famines, plagues, earthquakes, persecutions, apostasies, and corruptions, the working of a mystery of iniquity, which culminates in the manifestation of the man of sin. Can these coexist with a millennium, whose characteristics are the absence of war, peace to the ends of the earth, universal prosperity of the righteous, times of refreshing, the subjugation of all kings to the "King of kings," the putting down of all rule and authority and power, the subjugation of his enemies beneath his feet, the triumphant reign of his saints, the filling of the world with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea? If the *former* series of events are to characterize the entire course of this dispensation, which is clearly the teaching of Scripture, *the latter cannot*; they mutually exclude each other. There can therefore be no millennium before Christ comes,

There are a number of passages in which the duty of constant watchfulness, is urged on the church. Take that in Luke xii. as a specimen. The Master bids us be like men that wait for their lord, pronounces a blessing on such as shall be found "*watching*," speaks of the uncertainty as to the time of his coming, whether it should be in the second, or in the third watch, uses the illustration of the thief, and adds, "be ye therefore ready also, for the Son

of man cometh at an hour when ye think not."

Now, though it may be difficult, to watch and wait for an event, the time of whose occurrence is altogether uncertain, and may be very distant, yet it is not impossible. But it is impossible to watch and wait for an event which we *know* cannot occur during our lifetime, nor during that of our children, nor for many, many, subsequent generations. The millennium has not commenced yet; we know it is to run a long course of a thousand years. If we know it is to precede our Master's return, how can we be, like men that wait for their Lord? The thing is impossible, and Christ never commanded an impossibility; therefore we must expect the millennium *after* his coming and not *before*. The early church with one consent placed the millennium revealed by St. John, *after the advent*, and felt it consequently no hindrance to their obedience to the Lord's command, "be ye ready also." An interval nearly twice as long, has it is true actually elapsed, and was of course foreknown to our Lord. But it was not *revealed*, and though a portion of it is prophetically announced, it is announced in such symbolic language as to secure its not being understood, until the understanding of it would be no hindrance to watchfulness. The Lord Jesus knew that fifty or sixty generations of men would live and die ere He would come again; and He wished each one, to pass the time of its sojourning here, under the hallowing and cheering influence of "that blessed hope." He cannot consequently have *revealed* anything, that would justify the conclusion, "my Lord delayeth his coming." The thousand years of blessedness that He did reveal in the Apocalypse, through John, must consequently be subsequent to his return.

The apostle Paul twice uses the expression "we who are alive and remain, unto the coming of the Lord"; whether we regard these words, simply as the natural utterance of his own feelings, or as dictated by the Holy Ghost, they bear equally strong testimony to the fact, that the coming of Christ, and not the millennium, is the event for which Christians should look and wait. Taken as the language of Paul merely, they show how thoroughly imbued *he* was with the expectation that the then living generation of saints, his own contemporaries, might witness the second advent. Clearly he expected no millennium first, unless he also expected to live beyond the age of Methuselah! And why after the lapse of eighteen hundred years, should we regard the coming of the Lord as more distant from us, than he did from him? Taking these words as an inspired expression, placed by the Holy Ghost in the lips of each successive generation of Christians, they are still more conclusive.

It is a Divine warrant to all, to expect what Paul expected. The sorrowing mourners around each successive sleeper in Jesus, are to take up the glad strain, "we who 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." The hope was never to lie in abeyance, never to be out of date; but to be ever glowing, bright and warm, in living hearts. Therefore the Holy Ghost cannot have revealed a millennium, before the second coming of Christ; for such a revelation must render the hope of that coming dim and distant, and comparatively powerless, for the purposes of consolation to which it is here applied. All the Christians that have yet lived, would have been unable to

use the words of Paul; and since the millennium has not begun yet, thirty or forty generations more, must be equally incapable of adopting the language; only those in fact who shall live in the tenth and last century of the millennium, could do so.

Again the apostle Paul (Rom. viii. 18) uses two remarkable expressions, "the sufferings of this present time" and "the glory which shall be revealed in us." They respectively apply to *this dispensation*, and to the *millennial age*. He speaks of this present time as a period of suffering, not only to the sons of God, but to the whole creation, which is under the bondage of corruption and subject to death. He speaks of that future age as a time of the manifestation of the sons of God, a time of "glorious liberty." He says that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together, and that we ourselves, in like manner groan within ourselves, while awaiting that period. He defines the point at which the transition from the one state to the other will take place, the point at which the millennium will commence, the point for which we wait. It is "*the redemption of our BODY*" that is *the resurrection*. But the resurrection will not come till Christ comes, we know these two events synchronize even to the twinkling of an eye. Therefore *the millennium will not come till Christ comes, and Christ will come before the millennium*. This conclusion can only be avoided by asserting, that during the millennium, the saints and the whole creation will be groaning and travailing in pain together, and with "earnest expectation" awaiting a better state of things.

In 2 Thessalonians ii. 8, in speaking of the destruction of the man of sin, the apostle declares that it will be effected by the brightness of Christ's coming, the *ἐπιφάνεια τῆς παρουσίας*. Either therefore the man of sin, the great enemy of Christ, will live and reign throughout the millennium, which is incredible, or Christ will come before the millennium and destroy him.

The loving words of our Lord, "Ye now therefore have sorrow, but I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice," though they may have found a fulfilment, in the joy that filled the disciples' hearts, when they saw the Lord after his resurrection, have yet a prophetic bearing on the effect of His future coming. They harmonize with all the scriptures which represent the church as an espoused bride awaiting an absent bridegroom, and teach us that for the church that loves her absent Lord, joy can come only with his return. Either then prolonged sorrow, deep unsatisfied yearnings of soul, a painful sense of loneliness and bereavement, are consistent with millennial bliss; or else there can be no millennium for the church, till after the coming of Christ.

The millennium will be a peculiar period, unlike any period that has as yet been known on earth. If it were immediately to precede the coming of Christ, it would surely have been mentioned among the signs of that great event which we are exhorted to note. But it is never so mentioned; *it is never mentioned at all in connection with an advent following it*. In no one single passage of Scripture can the two events be found in this order; nor can a single text be produced in which the second advent of Christ is spoken of *in connection with a preceding millennium*. We must therefore conclude that the millennium is to follow the coming of Christ.*

* The order of the visions in Rev. xx. is no exception to this rule, as shown in the following pages.

Having thus reviewed some of the general teachings of Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments, concerning the relative period of the second advent, we now turn to the final prophecy of the Bible, in the expectation of finding there, fuller and clearer light on the subject. The conclusion we have reached is abundantly confirmed by the *general tenour* of the Apocalypse, and by the *direct evidence* of its closing visions.

This book presents the church as exposed to tribulation, and having need of patience, as bearing a painful and dangerous testimony to Christ, and as enduring temptation and persecution, right up to the time of the advent. Its author was in his own person, a representative of the church in these respects. "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." Never in the whole course of the book do we see the saints exalted and reigning, until after the second advent. The sweet picture of heavenly glory in chap. vii, occurs in unbroken sequence after a succession of war, famines, plagues, martyr deaths, and political convulsions. No period of holiness and peace on earth is mentioned as intervening. The seven trumpets announce an uninterrupted series of judgments, up to the moment when it is said "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever" (xi, 15). The trumpets clearly represent, not millennial blessings, but providential judgment; they leave no room for a millennium before the coming of Christ. But any remains of doubt ought to be dispelled by the closing visions of this book. There, bright, clear, full, and harmonious with every previous prediction, stands out on almost the last page of inspiration, a grand and detailed *description of the epiphany* of Christ. It is a symbolic description it is true, for the revelation in which it occurs is a symbolic prophecy; but its symbols, interpreted by other scriptures, can hardly be mistaken; they serve rather as the steps of a ladder, to enable the mind to mount to the majesty of the theme. And there too, immediately succeeding it, stands out a second prophecy of THE REIGN of Christ and his saints, symbolic too, yet simple in its symbolism, and with even its simple symbols explained to make them simpler. As we look into these last unveilings of the counsel of God about the future, once more we ask the question, what is the prospect before us? A thousand years of bliss on earth, and then our Lord from heaven? or our Lord from heaven first, and then a thousand years of bliss? We remember as we await the reply, that it is the last testimony we can have, till the event itself give an answer, the last prophetic utterance of the Holy Ghost on the subject.

THE VISION OF THE ADVENT OF THE KING OR KINGS.

And I saw heaven opened,
And behold a white horse;
He that sat on him was called Faithful and True:
In righteousness He doth judge and make war:
His eyes were as a flame of fire;
On his head were many crowns:
He had a name written that no man knew but He Himself

He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood;
His name was called the WORD OF GOD.
And the armies which were in heaven followed Him,
Upon white horses;
Clothed in fine linen white and clean;
Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword;
That with it He should smite the nations;
And He shall rule them with a rod of iron,
He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God,
He hath on his vesture and on his thigh, a name written,
KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.
Rev. xix.

Every clause of this magnificent vision, determines the rider on the white horse to be Jesus Christ and none other. Heaven was opened to give Him exit; a door *in* heaven had been previously opened for John to gaze on its hidden mysteries; now heaven itself opens, and its armies follow their great Captain. He bears a fourfold name; He is called Faithful and True; who can He be but "Jesus Christ the faithful and true witness"? He has also a *name that no man knows* but He Himself; who can He be but the Son, whom "no man knoweth but the Father," the one, who of old said to Manoah, "Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?" His name is called "the Word of God"; who can He be but He who in the beginning was with God and was God? And on His vesture and on His thigh, are emblazoned the unmistakable words, "*King of kings and Lord of lords.*"

He comes to do a threefold work, each part of which belongs to Christ and to Christ alone, as other scriptures abundantly prove. "*In righteousness He doth judge and make war*" against the Beast and his armies (ver. 20). Who can He be but the Lord who shall consume that wicked son of perdition and man of sin, with the spirit of his mouth and the brightness of his coming? (1 Thess. ii. 8.)

"He shall *rule the nations with a rod of iron.*" Who can He be but the only begotten Son of God, to whom are addressed the words of the second Psalm, "ask of Me and I shall give Thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron"?

"He *treadeth the winepress* of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." Who can He be, but the glorious One, mighty to save, who says "I will tread down the people in mine anger," and "trample them in my fury" (Isa. lxxiii.)? His vesture dipped in blood identifies Him with this red-apparelled Conqueror and solitary Saviour.

"His eyes are as a flame of fire," as were the eyes of the one like unto the Son of man, seen by John in the first vision of this book, Who can He be but that God who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity? that God who searches the heart and tries the reins, and from whom no secrets are hid? "On his head were many crowns," for "dominion and glory and a kingdom are given Him, that all nations and languages should serve Him." Who can He be but that Son of man who is also the Ancient of days,

Israel's long looked for Messiah, earth's oft desired King; the King of righteousness, the King of Salem, which is the King of peace? On his head were many diadems: the royal crown, the victor's crown, the priestly crown, the nuptial crown, all befit his blessed brow; and on it rest the many diadems which recently adorned the bestial horns, united now on the head of Him who has vanquished them all. Who can He be but the One to whom every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess, the One who has received a name above every name? He is followed, not by angelic hosts, but by the saintly armies of heaven; who can He be but the one, of whom Enoch prophesied, "the Lord cometh, with ten thousands of his saints"; the one of whom Zechariah wrote, "The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee"; the One who shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe, in that day?

And this vision can be a vision of nothing else but a *personal* advent of Christ, It cannot be a vision of a *spiritual coming*, every clause forbids the thought. For *such* a coming, it needs not that heaven should be opened; for *such* a coming it needs not attendant armies of saintly warriors. The coming of the Lord *with ten thousands of his saints* has been regarded even from antediluvian ages, as His personal appearance to execute judgment on the ungodly.

It cannot be a vision of a *providential coming*; the previous chapters of this book, afford illustrations of the kind of Divine interference in the affairs of earth, which is intended by this expression. In the opening of the seven-sealed book, in the scattering of the coals of fire on the earth, in the sounding of the seven trumpets, Christ is seen acting providentially. But He is seen *in heaven*; thence He directs his various angelic and other agencies, for His *providence* needs not His personal *presence* on earth. "The heavens do rule" in providence on *behalf* of the saints, not *in conjunction* with them, whether man perceive it or not. If this vision represent merely a providential coming, to what end the opened heaven, and the forth issuing armies, following the King of kings? Nowhere is it promised or prophesied, that the saints shall share with Christ his present *providential* government; but it *is* promised that they shall share his future work of judging and ruling the world.

But further; if it were a figurative spiritual, or providential coming that is here represented, its character and its objects must needs be in harmony with those of all the spiritual and providential comings with which we are acquainted. In other words, if the coming here prefigured be an event belonging in any sense to this dispensation, it should harmonize with the known actions and operations of Christ during this dispensation. It does not do this; it is on the contrary in abrupt and violent contrast to them. The line of action here ascribed to the Lord Jesus, and the line of action which we know Him to have been pursuing ever since incarnation, are so antagonistic, as to preclude their characterizing one and the same dispensation, In the *vision*, "in righteousness He doth judge" in *this age*, in grace He refuses to judge, saying "I came not to judge"; "man, who made Me a judge over you?" "I judge no man"; "neither do I condemn thee." In the vision, in righteousness He makes war; in this age, in grace He makes peace:

He came to bring peace on earth, "He is our peace," "He is the Prince of peace." In the vision, "out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations"; in this dispensation we are not smitten, but renewed by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever; the Gospel does not smite the nations but quickens and blesses them. In the vision, "He ruleth the nations with a rod of iron"; in this age Christ does not ostensibly "rule *the nations*" at all, for Satan is the God of this world; but if He did, He would rule them in grace and by love, even as He rules his church, and not by the iron rod, of inflexible righteousness; He spares the nations, He is kind to the unthankful and unworthy, His longsuffering is salvation. In the vision, "He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God," that is, He executes the holy indignation of God against sinners, In this dispensation, He manifests the love of God to a guilty world, He receives gifts even for the rebellious, He beseeches sinners to be reconciled to God. Who would ever think of describing Christ's present actions in the words of this vision? The coming here prefigured, cannot then be an event of this age at all, it is the inauguration of a future age.

But it is argued this vision cannot prefigure a literal personal advent, its symbolic language proves that a figurative one only is intended. This is virtually to assert that a prophecy of the second advent of Christ is impossible in the Apocalypse; for it is throughout a book of symbols, it is written in the language of symbols, if it contain a prophetic vision of the second advent, it must therefore be expected to be a symbolic vision. Now seeing the second advent is the one climax to which everything in the book tends, can we suppose, that there exists in it no description of the great event itself? Impossible! *This then must be it, for there is no other.*

There is nothing in the nature of symbolic language to preclude its being used in describing literal events. The language of symbols is in this respect, on a par with any other language. The Egyptian hieroglyphics formed a symbolic language, but are the events of Egyptian history narrated and preserved in that language therefore figurative? on the contrary, plain, substantial, literal history is *recorded* in those hieroglyphics, and plain, substantial, literal events may in like manner be *predicted* in hieroglyphic or symbolic prophecy. Now a literal personal advent could not be predicted more clearly in the language of symbols than it is here.

Besides which, the judgment scene immediately succeeding, requires this vision to be a real *personal* advent. Scripture is ever harmonious with itself, elsewhere we find the work of judgment is committed by the Father to the Son, and that the Son executes it personally, not by proxy; He does not delegate the task to others, though He employs the assistance of saints and angels. The husbandman who sowed the seed, comes himself to put in the sickle, when the harvest is ripe; the lord of the vineyard comes himself to tread the winepress; so here. In former parts of the Apocalypse angels had been extensively employed. But now the Lord of hosts prepares Himself for the final battle, and comes personally to inaugurate by the judgment of the living,—the destruction of the antichristian hosts,—that great day of judgment, and day of the Lord, which lasts a thousand years, and ends with the final assize of the great white throne.

In short, a personal advent of Christ, is the theme, the main theme, of the whole Bible. The past advent did not accomplish the full results predicted; since *it* became *history*, a second advent has been the dominant note in every prophetic strain, and in the Apocalypse it becomes more prominent than ever. From the "behold He cometh with clouds" of the first chapter, to the "behold I come quickly" of the last, this theme pervades the book. The Apocalypse is a grand drama, the epiphany is its climax. "Hold fast till I come," is Christ's own word to Smyrna; "behold I come quickly," His encouragement to Philadelphia; the redeemed in heaven, rejoice in the prospect, "we shall reign on the earth." On the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the elders fall down in worship before God, because the moment is at last come, when He is to take his great power and reign on earth. Under the sixth vial the Lord repeats the warning note, "behold I come as a thief"; and the Apocalypse, yea the Bible itself, ends with the same promise, "surely I come quickly."

"Now the present vision is the passage, and the only passage, where such a glorious advent of our Lord is distinctly described. Till then He is seen in spirit, as the Lamb in the heavenly places, as the priest at the heavenly altar, as the mighty angel, the mysterious messenger of the covenant, while the hour of mystery still continues, and still repeats the warning '*behold I come.*' Here in the vision heaven is opened, and *He is seen to come*, in manifest glory as the Word of God. After this He is spoken of as already come. In the very scene where the powers of evil have just been overthrown, and from which Satan has just been banished, his people 'reign with Christ a thousand years.' When the white throne is seen, He is seen already present to occupy it; and not a word is given to indicate a fresh arrival, of Him who sits to execute the judgment. All converges on the advent before this vision, all centres on a personal advent of the Word in the vision itself, all implies a previous advent in the visions which follow. And hence the internal evidence that the real advent is here described, is complete."* Now this vision which presents Christ and his saints coming forth to judge and to reign is followed by others which present the judgment and the reign; i.e., the destruction of the hosts of Antichrist, and the millennial reign of the risen saints with their Lord. We have therefore in the *last* prophecy on the subject, the *clearest* proof that the second coming of the Lord is to 'be premillennial.

* "Outlines of Unfulfilled Prophecy," Birks, p. 83.

Will any one assert that a millennium, *unnoticed and undescribed in the Apocalypse*, has preceded this advent vision? What! the glorious times of restitution of all things, passed over in silence, as unworthy of a place in the great chart of the future? Impossible! And even granting it possible, whereabouts could we insert a millennium, in the long list of evil events and sore judgments of which the book consists? And even if any one find room for it, and satisfy himself by conceiving it may come in here or there, what then will he do with the millennium that *is noticed and after* this advent vision? Are there to be two millennia? Does the word of God sanction such a thought? Are we to have a spiritual millennium preceded by a spiritual coming, and then a literal millennium preceded by a literal coming? To ask the question is to answer it! The whole Bible forbids the notion of a third advent and second millennium!

The only other alternative, is to deny that this is a vision of a personal advent of Christ at all. But then *what is it?* It cannot, as we have seen, be a figurative coming. What can it be? Does it describe nothing at all? Is the most magnificent vision in the book destitute of signification? Is it conceivable, that the greatest event in the future history of our world is not made the subject of a vision in the Apocalypse at all? Where else can we find it? Nowhere! Christ acts on earth afterwards, He does not *come to earth*. This then is the ADVENT VISION, or—there is none! And why should we doubt that this is its character? Does it clash with any previously revealed truth? Nay, but it harmonizes most sweetly with all! He is to come after the resurrection, for He brings the risen saints with him. Here the marriage of the Lamb, that perfect union of Christ and his people, which cannot take place prior to resurrection, immediately precedes this advent vision. He is to come to destroy Antichrist and to take vengeance on those that know not God and obey not the Gospel. Here this destruction of Antichrist and the kings of the earth and their armies, immediately follows this advent vision.

Suppose for a moment, that the place occupied by it were left a blank, that the prophecy passed at once, from the marriage of the Lamb, to the destruction of the antichristian host. *Other scriptures would force us to place the second coming of Christ between those two scenes.* The destruction of the beast and the false prophet, demand a previous epiphany, according to 2 Thessalonians ii.; and the rapturous marriage of the Lamb in heaven, the meeting in the air of Christ and his saints, requires a subsequent manifestation, according to 2 Thessalonians i. 10.

When therefore we find a vision, symbolising in the most consistent and magnificent way, a personal advent of Christ, just where we might have expected to find it, just where all prophecy would conspire to fix its place, just where its absence would render it impossible to harmonize multitudes of other predictions; when we find it written large in letters of light, and stamped with a sublimity of symbol and circumstance worthy of such an event, and too grand for any other, we bow to this final testimony of the prophetic word, and admit that Scripture leaves no room to doubt, that the Lord Jesus will come again in person, to this earth, before the millennium, in other words, that the second advent will be premillennial.

Continued in [Part I. Chapter III.](#)