

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



Continued from [Chapter VI. The Daniel Programme – Part IV. The Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks.](#)

WITH the first advent of Jesus Christ our Lord came the final outburst of prophetic light as yet granted to our world. Through Him personally, and through His Holy Spirit in the apostles, were revealed things to come –the closing section of the Divine programme of the world's history as far as it is at present unfolded. What additions may be yet made to it in the ages to come, who shall say? The infinitude and eternity of God forbid the thought that the section we have now to consider is the last in any absolute sense, but it is the last at present published to mankind.

Previously to the first century of our era, the voice of prophecy had for four hundred years been perfectly silent, and it has been similarly hushed ever since. The century of the first advent stands thus as the only one in the course of twenty-three hundred years during which the Omniscient condescended to reveal the future, and exhibit His Divine prescience for human consideration in future ages. Prophecy has no more been granted lavishly and at all times than miracle. Both have been restricted to special eras when they were needed to attest Divine intervention in the affairs of the human race, and when they could best subserve their all-important ends. These ends are similar in some aspects, different in others. Miracle serves to convince unbelievers, and to confirm faith, in its own age. Prophecy is intended to do the same in distant ages. The one consequently witnesses for God to man at the beginning of great dispensations of providence; the other at the close of such. It is given at the *outset*, that it may by fulfilment demonstrate its own inspiration of God at the *end* of the age.

The miracles of 1,800 years ago have so far lost their force in our days that their very occurrence is doubted and denied. But the power of fulfilled prophecy, to prove the existence and the providential government of God, only increases as time passes on, and will increase until the next great climax in the history of our race. It is the peculiar witness in the last days, and by neglecting it the Church deprives herself of the help of the most effective weapon in her armoury for the combat with modern unbelief.

If Jesus Christ revealed the future well-nigh two thousand years ago, and if intervening ages have fulfilled every one of His predictions,—and can be shown to have done so,—what shall we say? what shall we think? Shall we

lightly esteem His mission? Shall we give no heed to His message from God? Shall we dare to despise His warnings? Shall we argue that, though He foretold a hundred events, and ninety-five of them have come true, we need not anticipate the fulfilment of the remaining five? Or shall we bow the head and worship, and believe with the heart His every word?

The fact that we have 1,800 years of authentic and detailed history with which to compare and by which to test the New Testament prophecies gives them a special evidential value.

There can be no question as to the date of these predictions. Skeptics may raise a cloud of dust about the date of Daniel, though their desperate efforts to assign it an epoch late enough to deprive it of its conspicuously prophetic character fail to conceal its true origin, but they cannot do the same about the New Testament. It was not concocted and published in modern times, or even in the middle ages. Abundant writings still extant of the first and second centuries attest that it was already in wide circulation in Asia, Africa, and even Europe, and that is enough for our argument. We need not pause to settle the exact date of each Gospel, nor of each of the letters of the Apostle Paul. We know that even the Apocalypse of St. John—which was published long after all the rest of the New Testament—dates from the close of the first century, and that therefore, in considering the final section of our programme, we may be confident that it was published to the world 1,800 years ago, the bulk of it between A.D. 38 and A.D. 70, and the last work in A.D. 96 or 97. If we can prove the fulfilment of *its* predictions, consequently, we have unquestionable evidence of inspiration, and of Divine foreknowledge and providence.

No human sagacity could have correctly outlined the history of the eighteen Christian centuries, complicated and marvellous as it has been. Superhuman wisdom prompted the utterances and guided the pens of the prophets of the New Testament as of those of the old. This section of the programme is in some senses the most interesting of any to Christian students, as it deals with our own dispensation, predicts our own experiences, and enlarges on our own hopes. It contains, moreover, chronological statements of peculiar interest, as indicating our own position in the stream of time, and our proximity to the end of the present age. Further, it not only sketches the present condition of Christendom, affording as it does so precious practical guidance, but it reaches out into the ages to come far more fully than any previous portion of the programme, so that its vistas of glory and joy are calculated to sustain faith and hope in these dark and perilous times of doubt and infidelity.

The subject is so rich and full a one that our introductory sketch must be brief, but a few words seem needful to connect this first advent era and Christian outburst of prophetic light with that which occurred in the captivity and restoration era, on which we dwelt in the last chapter.

When the Persian monarch Artaxerxes passed away, his commission to Nehemiah had been executed. Jerusalem was once more the defensible capital of a re-constituted state and nation, and the temple was once more the centre of the reestablished worship of God. Both the national polity and the national

religion were again visible among men, and recognised by neighbouring nations. But the centuries which intervened between the return from Babylon and the advent of Christ were to the restored Jews in Palestine anything but a time of peace or an era of national glory. They were, to some extent, like sheep among wild beasts. Weak, small, and defenceless, they fell successively under the fierce pagan rulers of the second, third, and fourth of the wild-beast Gentile empires which dominated one after the other during the four or five centuries which preceded the advent of Christ.

The restored remnant was at first too feeble and too obscure to be of much account among men. The Medo-Persian kings were for the most part kind to the Jews, and even Alexander showed them favour.

Judea had been, after the death of Nehemiah, added to the prefecture of Syria, and it ultimately shared in the miserable lot of that province, and became the battlefield of opposing nations. The Jews suffered very severely in the long struggles and incessant warfare which was waged, on the break-up of the Greek empire, between the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucidae of Syria. In the second century before Christ especially, they passed through a most bitter experience.

Antiochus Epiphanes, the infamous monster who—as is agreed by most—foreshadowed a greater persecutor still, caused them the severest sufferings. At one time he took Jerusalem by storm, slew 40,000 of the Jews, and sold as many more into slavery, and defiled the temple by offering a sow on the altar, and sprinkling the broth of it all over the sacred enclosures. He tried to compel the nation to abandon the faith of their fathers, and succeeded in inducing many to apostatize. But after the Babylonish captivity Israel dreaded and detested the idolatry to which in earlier ages they had been so prone, and nothing could induce them to comply with the tyrant's orders. At last, in B.C. 168, he ordered his general, Apollonius, to destroy Jerusalem; and the order was as far as possible carried into execution. The men were put to the sword, and the women and children enslaved. The houses were demolished or fired, and the walls broken down; the temple was re-dedicated to Jupiter, and Antiochus erected his statue on the altar of burnt-offering. It was a rehearsal on a small, brief scale of the subsequent doings of the Roman soldiery of Titus. Antiochus subsequently swore that he would destroy the entire nation of the Jews, and make a common cemetery for them at Jerusalem. But God smote him, and he died in torment, like Herod in after-days.

In these dark and dreadful times Jewish faith and heroism shone more brightly, perhaps, than at any previous or subsequent period. Had it not done so, Judaism might have become extinct, under the combined influences of persecution from without and apostasy within. But Israel's great mission was not over then, any more than it is over now. The people were preserved once more. The bush burned with fire, but it was not consumed. When hope itself was almost dead, up rose the Asmonean Mattathias, and his still more illustrious son, Judas Maccabeus, and did exploits for their faith and people. They delivered Israel, cleansed the temple, restored the Divine worship, and ruled as priests and princes in Jerusalem for many generations. The struggle with this fierce storm had strengthened the faith and courage of

the Jews, and they clung to their monotheistic creed more firmly than ever.

The Asmoneans continued to rule the Jews under the later Syro-Macedonian monarchs until family dissensions arose, and a struggle for power, in which Aristobulus called in the help of the then rapidly rising Romans. Judea soon became tributary to the fourth empire, which was at the time in its full career of conquest, and fast approaching its day of undisputed sway. An Idumean named Antipater was subsequently, by Julius Caesar, made procurator of Judea, and from this man were descended the Herods who ruled the Jews in the days of Christ. An Edomite dynasty would, in any case, have been hateful to the Jews. Its outrageous vices made the Herodian dynasty peculiarly so. But they were powerless to resist the iron will of Rome, though often sorely tempted to revolt; and the Herods, by a cruel tyranny, kept the people down. Never, therefore, was the longing expectation of the advent of Messiah to deliver Israel stronger or more intense than at the time when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea.

It is important, however, to realize that at that time the Jews of Palestine formed only a minority of the Jewish nation. To say nothing of the ten tribes, whose fate and whose locality were more or less unknown, the number of the two tribes which had returned from Babylon to Judea was very small compared with their whole number. This relative proportion continued to exist in the days of our Lord. The home Jews were far less numerous than the foreign Jews, who were known as "the dispersion." (John 7:35) True, they were no longer scattered as a penal judgment, or by the will and power of Gentile conquerors. They were voluntary exiles,—but exiles still,—whatever the motive of business or pleasure, policy or interest, which kept them so.

Year by year the temple courts were thronged with crowds of foreign Jews—Jews "out of every nation under heaven," as they were "when the day of Pentecost was fully come." A Babel of languages might be heard in the streets of Jerusalem, even as there would be now were Jews from every land to congregate in one city.

But, though living among other nations, all these Jews looked to Jerusalem as their centre, and felt themselves strangers in the lands where they dwelt. There was an Eastern and a Western dispersion. The Babylonian Jews, and all who dwelt beyond the Euphrates, were much more closely connected with the restored people than were the Western dispersion. From the language which they spoke, they were called Hebrews as much as those who lived in Palestine. They were the "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and dwellers in Mesopotamia" mentioned among the crowds gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. The Western dispersion included all the rest, the pilgrims from Cappadocia, Pontus, Phrygia, Pampylia, Egypt, Cyrene, and Rome. Josephus and Philo estimate that millions of Jews belonged to the Eastern dispersion, which was the most influential and wealthy part of the nation. The Persian monarchs had treated the Jews kindly, Alexander the Great had favoured them, the Parthians, who succeeded the Seleucidae in governing those regions, found them so influential that they avoided making enemies of them, and even the Romans in the first century before Christ shrank from provoking their hostility. They were united, though scattered, and had already become a sort of world nation, as they still are.

The Calendar of the feasts of the Lord observed by this Eastern dispersion was identical with that of Jerusalem, the Sanhedrim indicating to them by fire signals from mountain top to mountain top the visibility of the new moon. The Babylonian Rabbis were very highly esteemed at Jerusalem. Ezra, Rabbi Hillel, and Rabbi Chija, who all three did good service in restoring the law, were from Babylon. This dispersion extended to the Black Sea, northward to the Caspian, and eastward as far as India. They were intensely Jewish, kept their genealogies with the utmost strictness, and observed the customs of the Talmud as well as the precepts of the law.

They must not be confounded with the wanderers of the ten tribes, whose destiny is involved in obscurity, and the only indications of whom from early sources are laid in the countries to the north of India, the Kurdish mountains of Armenia, and the region of the Caucasus. They ceased to be known as Jews at all, with the exception of the comparatively few who settled in Palestine, like the family of Anna, which belonged to the tribe of Aser, and the few who had mingled with the exiles of Babylon, and formed part of that Eastern dispersion which never lost its nationality.

It was otherwise, however, with the Grecian, or Western dispersion. This also was very extensive—Asia Minor, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Spain, and other lands contained at the time of the first advent very numerous Jewish colonies and scattered residents. They were merchants, traders, doctors, craftsmen, and artisans; and though they were regarded as strangers and foreigners by the heathen, and often hated on account of their peculiar laws and customs, yet their higher religious faith had its influence on the Grecianized world which despised them, and their sacred writings, translated into Greek more than two hundred years before Christ, were widely known and read among philosophers. The Jews, in their turn, felt strongly the effect of the mental atmosphere in which they lived. The Stoic and Epicurean philosophies current in those centuries could not but affect the Jewish mind, with its keen and meditative cast. Their faith as Jews rested on authority, on Divine revelation.

But what were the grounds of this authority, what the proofs of this revelation? These questions never troubled the Rabbis of Palestine and the East. But they were rife among the Jews of Alexandria and the Mediterranean. Young Judaism, waking up under the influence of what was to them modern thought, were tempted to compromise, to endeavour to conciliate Greek philosophy, to admit that Socrates as well as Moses was inspired, and to try to blend the teachings of Plato with those of the Pentateuch. The Palestinian Jews so dreaded the influence of Hellenistic writings that they forbade their perusal entirely, and endeavoured to repress the curiosity awakened by them about the philosophies of Greece. When a young Rabbi, Ben Dama, asked his uncle whether, since he had thoroughly mastered every aspect of the law, he might not study Greek philosophy, the old Rabbi referred him to the words of Joshua about meditating in the law day and night: "Go search for the hour which is neither day nor night; in it thou mayest study Greek philosophy."(Edersheim: "Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah," p. 22.)

Not only the books of the Apocrypha, but a whole literature, sprang up, in the two centuries preceding the advent, from the effort to blend Grecian thought and Hebrew revelation. Some of it remains to this day, though much

has perished. Philo of Alexandria was perhaps the greatest of uninspired Jewish writers, and lived about twenty years before Christ. He treated the Old Testament as symbolical, and drew from it, by very arbitrary interpretations, doctrines which approached those of the popular philosophies. His writings and similar ones bridged over to some extent the great gulf between Judaism and Greek thought; and though they were full of error, they led to a Gentile consideration of the Jewish Scriptures. Alexandria, where three worlds meet—Europe, Asia, and Africa—a city then of about a million inhabitants, was the home of this Jewish Hellenism; an eighth of the people were Jews, synagogues abounded, and the city had a great Jewish basilica, or cathedral. Rome also had its synagogues and its large Jewish population, which was cordially hated by the rest of the people.

But wherever they dwelt, and however much they were Grecianized, the scattered Jews in east, west, north, and south, were all one in their expectation of a coming Messiah. This especially united them amid many diversities of language, custom, and thought. "The links which bound them together were—a common creed, a common life, a common centre, and a common hope." They all believed in the God of Abraham, in the law of Moses, in the observance of the Sabbath, and feasts and fasts of Leviticus; and they all maintained synagogue worship. Jerusalem was the centre of the world to the Jew, whether he lived on the Euphrates, the Nile, or the Tiber; and thither, whenever possible, the pilgrim proceeded, at least once in his life. The advent of Messiah to deliver and restore them all to Palestine was the common hope of Jews both in the East and in the West, and never was that hope stronger or so full of expectancy as at the time of the first advent. The unrest and expectancy were heightened by the fact that the chronological prophecy of the seventy weeks from Artaxerxes pointed to the near future as the time of Messiah's manifestation. The hour at which the great Deliverer was due would soon strike.

Daniel's prophecy was, it was true, mysterious, and did not say much about the glorious kingdom which they anticipated from other sacred promises and predictions. But still it fixed the time for Messiah's advent; and when He was come, He would restore all things. This prophecy of the seventy weeks would not seem to have been *generally* understood, but it was influential with the pious few who looked for redemption like the godly Anna, and waited like Simeon for the consolation of Israel.

Such then was the condition of the chosen people at the time when the last section of the prophetic programme was published. There was a vast dispersion in all lands: the "Hebrew," or Eastern one, speaking Aramean, intensely conservative, ritualistic, and learned in Rabbinic and Talmudic lore; the Western one, progressive, liberal, Hellenized, and philosophic; and between the two the nation, in its own home, Palestine, gathered around its restored temple, yet oppressed by aliens and under tribute, hating its Gentile rulers, though unable to oppose them, and waiting impatiently for Messiah to deliver them and destroy their foes.

The ancient synagogue referred to Messiah not only all the passages in the Psalms and prophets which Christians so refer, but many more. More than four hundred and fifty passages of the Old Testament are by ancient Rabbinic

writings applied to the coming Messiah; 75 from the Pentateuch, 243 from the prophets, and 138 from the Hagiographa.(Edersheim, p. 163)

To the Jewish mind every hope and expectation centred in the Messianic age. The present night might be dark, but the coming day would be glorious, and meantime the midnight sky was illuminated by the brilliant stars and constellations of Messianic prophecy. Their expectation was of a Messiah King, however, rather than of a Messiah Saviour, and their hope was of One who should be the glory of His people Israel, rather than a light to lighten the Gentiles. Their own national exaltation was the great result to be attained, for there reigned among them an overweening idea of their exclusive divine privileges. In the glory of the prospect of their own universal domination they to some extent forgot the great Deliverer who was to raise them from their low estate to the pinnacle of earthly glory. Yet there are passages in the writings of the Rabbis which intimate that some of them realized that Messiah would be more than human and even super-angelic, and also that through Him reconciliation for Israel's sins would somehow be effected. With passages like Isaiah liii. and Daniel ix., it would indeed have been impossible that such thoughts should *not* have been forced on some minds. But Jewish understanding of these evangelical predictions was hazy, confused, and even contradictory, and the national mind rested only on the contrasted and more numerous predictions of the glorious earthly kingdom which Messiah was to found.

And what was the condition of the Gentile world outside? The fourth empire was in its glory. The "dreadful and terrible and exceedingly strong" wild beast had been for some time in the ascendant, ravaging, devouring, and breaking in pieces the nations with its great iron teeth, and stamping the residue with the feet of it, as Daniel had predicted.

The empire of Rome filled the scene. Julius Caesar had subdued the world; Augustus ruled it. From the Euphrates to the Atlantic, and from the Sahara to the German Ocean, the earth was for the first time crushed, stilled, united under one mighty sceptre. Liberty was dead. The paw of the Roman wild beast had pressed on her heart until it ceased to beat. All nations bowed in submission before the mighty Caesar. The Mediterranean Sea was a Roman lake. "The empire of the Romans," says Gibbon, "filled the world; and when that empire fell into the hands of a single person, the world became a safe and dreary prison for his enemies."

Gibbon, as we saw before, tells us that the empire was 2,000 miles in depth from north to south, from the wall of Antoninus and the northern limits of Dacia, to Mount Atlas and the tropic of Cancer, and 3,000 miles in length, and that it contained 1,600,000 [square] miles of fertile land in the finest part of the temperate zone. The capital of this vast empire was a magnificent city, whose population is variously given as from 1,200,000 to six or seven millions, varying probably according to the amount of suburbs included. The civilized world had been welded into one great monarchy for the first time, and the temple of Janus was closed, announcing that the earth was at peace, twenty-three years before the birth of Christ. This great calm of the stormy sea of nations lasted long, for who could oppose such overwhelming power? The commands of the Roman Caesar were obeyed through all this vast domain, and

its inhabitants were all citizens of one great state.

This widespread power of Rome was one of the preparations for the advent of the world's Redeemer. Jewish law, Grecian philosophy, and Roman conquest and policy had each done its preparatory work. Conscience had been educated, language refined and perfected, and fitted to receive a new and final revelation, while the habitable world had been united under a wise and strong government, opened up by Roman roads and posts, and tranquillized by Roman civilization.

Morally and socially also the state of things was ripe for a fresh crisis of Divine interference and illumination. The world was, in spite of the peace and plenty which prevailed, profoundly unhappy. The old faiths had lost their power, "The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true, by the philosopher as equally false, and by the magistrate as equally useful." The rankest polytheism was the result, and religion was dissociated from morality. Irreligion was fashionable, immortality was denied, and vice reigned as a result.

One of the strongest indications of the hopeless moral condition of the Roman world was the utter and incredible degradation and suffering of the masses of the people. The great were very powerful, the rich were marvellously and uselessly wealthy. The small and select upper class had all the pleasures and refinements that luxury could invent or selfishness desire; magnificent cities studded the empire, architecture was in its glory, and an elegant literature flourished; but all this was only for the few—the very, very few. The misery of the industrial classes was indescribable. The tillers of the soil, forming everywhere the largest part of the population,—in Europe four-fifths,—and the domestic slaves of the rich and noble,—individuals among whom sometimes held many hundreds or even thousands of such,—were beyond the pale of the law, and regarded as scarcely superior to cattle. Augustus himself at one time gave up to their masters 30,000 slaves, who had fought for Sextus Pompeius, to be *executed*, though he had pledged his word not to do so!

Even the good Trajan amused the populace for 123 days by the horrid spectacle of 10,000 slaves killing each other in fights in the amphitheater! The rural peasantry were oppressed and ground to the earth by cruel bondage. The slaves won in war were treated worst of all. These wretched beings worked almost constantly with chains on their feet; they were worn down with fatigue in order to crush their spirit, and were shut up nightly in subterranean holes. The frightful sufferings of so large a portion of the population its bitter hatred against its oppressors, produced continual servile insurrections, plots, assassinations, poisonings. In vain did a sanguinary law condemn to death *all* the slaves of a master who had been assassinated; vengeance and despair multiplied crime and violence. (Sismondi: "Fall of the Roman Empire," vol. i. p. 23.)

The condition of woman, even in the highest ranks, was one of slavery. The law regarded her as the property of her husband. The bonds of marriage were utterly relaxed, and immorality reigned among all classes. Tacitus speaks with amazement of the purity and fidelity to the marriage bond which existed among the comparatively uncivilized Germans. In every relation of life the

weak were oppressed. Might was esteemed right. There was no fear of God, no hope of life after death, no law of love and brotherhood: Regarded from a moral standpoint, nothing could well be worse than the Roman world into which Christ was born. Darkness covered the nations. But the light of the world arose with healing in its beams, and moral light, religious light, and prophetic light alike streamed forth in abundance. A very era of light succeeded an era of darkness so dense that it is difficult for us even to conceive it.

Such then was the political, moral, and religious state of the Gentile world in the first century of our era, at the crisis when the final section of the Divine programme of human history was given, the foreview of the dispensation in which we live.

And who was the channel of the new revelation? It was neither David, the founder of Jewish monarchy, nor Nebuchadnezzar, the founder of Gentile monarchy, but

CHRIST, THE FOUNDER OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

The *role* of history contains no other name that can for a single moment be placed beside that of Jesus of Nazareth under any one single aspect of His wonderful character and career. He came fulfilling all previous prophecy: the seed of the woman, He crushed the serpent's head;(Heb. ii, 14.) the seed of Abraham, He has brought blessing to all nations; the seed of David, He has founded a kingdom that shall never end; the Messiah of Israel, He has "finished transgressions, and made an end of sins, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness." He proved Himself, moreover, to be the Prophet of whom Moses spoke, and it is in this last character as a prophet that we have now to regard Him as the author of this, the last section of the Divine programme of the world's history.

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days SPOKEN UNTO US BY His SON, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds." (Heb. 1:1,2)

This statement includes the prophetic utterances of Christ, though it goes far beyond them, and refers principally to the revelation made by Him as a whole—that wonderful revelation of God which was the main object of His incarnation, life, and death. "I have declared unto them Thy name" (or character), "and will declare it," He said in His last prayer; and to His disciples, "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father."

From the full and glorious moral and spiritual revelations made by Christ, from all His wonderful and new doctrinal teachings, we must, however, turn our thoughts. They are not here our theme. He illumined every subject of vital importance to mankind; to receive His teachings was and is to have eternal life. But our present subject is limited to *that foreview of future events* given directly or indirectly by the Prince of prophets, and which has come down to us from the first century of our era. We must not, indeed, dwell on the whole, even of *it*, for it is too vast, and it extends to yet future

ages. We must confine ourselves mainly to that portion of it which has already been fulfilled by history.

The New Testament prophecies, as will at once be recognised, divide themselves naturally into four groups.

I. There are first the beautiful annunciatory predictions of the approaching advent of Christ by the angels,—to Zacharias and Mary, and then to the shepherds,—followed by the exultant prophetic songs of Zacharias and Mary, and by the words of Simeon and John the Baptist. These were partly fulfilled in gospel history, though in their full scope they embrace the present and the future. But on them we need not dwell; they are but as the porch to the temple. They mark, however, the commencement of the new prophetic era.

II. The predictions, parabolic (similar to a parable) and plain, of our Lord Himself in the days of His flesh.

III. The revelations given by the Holy Ghost to the apostles, and through them—and especially through Paul—to the Church.

IV. The latest revelation of Christ risen and glorified, from heaven to John in Patmos: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass,” and which He sent and signified by His angel to His servant John.

This last prophecy of the Bible is closely related to the entire Old Testament, and to the prophetic parables of Christ. It is given by the same person, deals with the same theme, is couched in the same symbolic form, and is perfectly harmonious in its statements with all the rest of the programme.

For brevity's sake we shall not refer in detail to all the Scriptures to which we must now allude, much less quote them in full. This is not, indeed, needful. We may count on our readers' familiarity with the text of the New Testament. Our endeavour will be merely to recall their knowledge, both of predictions and events, in order to lead them fairly to compare the two, and draw the supremely important inferences which are suggested by the comparison. We begin, then, by a consideration of

OUR LORD'S OWN PREDICTIONS

during His earthly life, both parabolic and plain. That many of even His earliest parables are prophetic none can question. Of the thirty or three and thirty parables in the Gospels, fifteen or sixteen, at least, are of this character. Take, first, the group recorded in Matthew xiii, which were given near the commencement of Christ's public ministry. In them, omitting—for the sake of simplicity of statement and clearness of impression—all *detail*, He drew an outline blank map, as it were, of the eighteen Christian centuries. He described, in advance, the broad aspects of the new dispensation He was about to inaugurate.

Under various *similitudes of the kingdom of heaven*, He presented the essential characteristics of the Christian age as contrasted with the Jewish age, then drawing to a close. The revelation made in the parables of the

sower sowing the seed, the wheat and tares, the mustard seed, the leaven working in the three measures of meal, the treasure hid in the field, the pearl of great price, and the net cast into the sea, was a startlingly new one when it was given, though long familiarity with its fulfilment makes it seem most natural to us.

It is the same with our Lord's later parables, and especially with His plain predictions in non-parabolic form. Perplexing, and almost incredible, even on His authority, to Jewish minds, filled with expectation of the future such as we have previously considered, must have been the predictions given in such parables as those of the wicked husbandman who killed the heir, and lost the vineyard; the marriage of the king's son; the nobleman who went into a far country, and of whom his citizens said, "We will not have this man to reign over us"; of the talents used or wasted in a long interval which was to elapse before the establishment of the kingdom; of the dark night-watch of the ten virgins for the expected bridegroom, which was so prolonged that they all slumbered and slept;—all these foreviews were not only puzzling, but painfully startling, to men convinced that Messiah had come, and that the long-promised kingdom of God, in all its glory, was on the point of being introduced by Him.

For what did all these parables with ever-increasing clearness foretell? A course of history with which we are acquainted as well as with the air we breathe, but which in the first century of our era must have seemed to Jew and Gentile alike not only unnatural, improbable, impossible, but absolutely inconceivable. As a matter of fact, they *could* not, and did not, conceive it, even after all the prophetic instructions of their Lord and Master. Notwithstanding all He had foretold them to the contrary, they still thought that the kingdom of God would immediately appear; and even as they stood around the ascended Saviour in their last earthly interview, they asked: "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

It is exceedingly difficult for us to divest ourselves of our Christian knowledge and consciousness, and transport ourselves in imagination back into the mental and moral condition of the society in the midst of which Jesus Christ promulgated this programme of the future. Yet we must endeavour to do this if we would estimate aright the altogether supernatural character of the foreview. It was like a description of the tropics given to Lapps and Esquimaux (the old spelling of Eskimo who are now called the Inuit, the people of Arctic North America and Greenland. Inuits hate be called Eskimo!), who have seen nothing but snow and ice, aurora borealis, and the midnight sun! It was like a sketch of the wide ocean presented to men who had no conception of anything but the inside of a temple! *They could not take it in*: it was too strangely incredible! He could not mean what He said! They sought explanation, hoping to elucidate the mystery, but His interpretations only added to it instead. For, combining in one view all the predictive utterances of Christ, what did He announce as the main features of the age which He was about to inaugurate? Let us try, as we enumerate them one by one, to regard them from the standpoint of Peter or John, as if we were wholly ignorant of all that has since happened in the world.

They were convinced that Christ was the long-looked-for Messiah, and they

were expecting that He would bring consolation to Israel, deliverance, exaltation, and supremacy. They had heard out of the law that He was to abide for ever, that of the increase of His kingdom there would be no end, that He would sit on the throne of David for ever, and be the glory of His people Israel. They expected, and rightly expected, from Old Testament prophecy, that He would exalt the Jews, and destroy their enemies, and make Jerusalem the joy of the whole earth. Having long delayed His advent, the Anointed of God, the Christ, the King, the Lion of the tribe of Judah was at last come. They had no doubt of it. "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel." At last the Son and Lord of David was in their midst, the King was present, the kingdom must follow!

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But the parables and predictions of Jesus assured them, on the contrary, that a future of a wholly different character lay before them and the world. He did not set aside or destroy their hope and expectation of the oft-predicted kingdom of God on earth. On the contrary, He confirmed their expectation of it, and put into their lips a prayer for its advent: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven." It would come at last, it *would* be revealed in due time. But

AN INTERMEDIATE PROSPECT

of an entirely different character was opened to their astonished gaze. It was predicted by our Lord—

I. That He Himself, the King, would be rejected. The husbandmen would say, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him." The invited guests would refuse to come to the marriage, and would even slay the messengers sent to invite them. The citizens would say, "We will not have this man to reign over us." The builders would reject the stone which should become head of the corner. And mingled with these and similar symbolic intimations were still plainer hints of the foreseen issue. He told them that the Son of man would be "lifted up," like the serpent in the wilderness; that He, when He was "lifted up," would draw all men to Him. He spoke of His blood, or sacrificed life, being the life of the world; told them He was going to lay it down, and at last distinctly predicted that the Jews would deliver Him to the Romans, and that they would crucify Him; that, like Jonas, He would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth; and that though, like Jonas, He would rise again, yet that it would not be to destroy His enemies and establish His reign on earth. On the contrary, before He did that, the King would go into a far country, to receive investiture of His kingdom and to return,—as Archelaus, king of Judea, had recently gone to Rome to be invested by Caesar with his crown,—that there would be opportunity for the evil servant to say, "My Lord delayeth His coming," to smite his fellow-servants, and eat, and drink, and be drunken; that there would be time for a prolonged probation of the King's servants, and for use or misuse of the talents committed to their care; that it would not be till "*after a long time*" that the Lord of the servants would return to take account of them; and at last, in plainer words, that He was returning to heaven, where He would prepare a place for them,—going back to the Father from whom He had come forth; and that the only

kingdom which would then be established would be a *kingdom of heaven*,—that is, a rule which would be exercised by a king unseen on earth —exalted in heaven.

This was the first main, clear, strong feature of Christ's programme of the future. No one can question its prominence in His predictions, and no one can doubt that it was a strange, unexpected, and incredible announcement to those who heard it. The Jews express their astonishment and mental confusion. "How sayest Thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? The law says that the Christ will abide for ever!" But the great Prophet repeated again and again, without a shadow of hesitation or wavering, that it would be even so.

Was it mere human foresight that gave this prophecy? Was it likely that the eager, impatient, enthusiastic, and ambitious Jewish people would reject and murder their mighty, miracle-working, Divine Messiah, when, after ages of waiting expectation, He was at last in their midst? Was such a prediction one which a mere man in Christ's position would have put forward? Would authors of spurious gospels put such a programme into the lips of their imaginary hero? Would one who was merely acting the *role* of Israel's Messiah have counted certainly on his own rejection, and persisted in predicting it? The adhesion and enthusiasm of the crowds that shouted "Hosanna!" never misled for a moment or blinded Christ to what was coming. He foresaw the cross; He foretold the cross, and the grave, and the ascension from Olivet, when none but Himself could have even conceived such events. And we know what happened.

II. But that was not all! Christ foresaw and foretold also *the twofold result* of this apparent miscarriage of His mission as Messiah: *the fall of Judaism* and the *rise of Christianity*. Apart from all question of the invisible *spiritual* consequences, the eternal salvation of millions—a consideration which as an invisible, intangible one to sight and sense, we must not here adduce—He foresaw and foretold the approach of *two conspicuous and contrasted series of outward events*, each series extending over ages—events of national and cosmopolitan importance; events of a mundane, material, historic nature, about which no two opinions can possibly be entertained; events which submit themselves to the evidence of our senses, which historians could record and artists paint, and poets and musicians sing; events most momentous in the history of humanity. Such have unquestionably been the fall of Judaism and the rise of Christendom.

Neither of these great changes was in the days of Christ within the range of the most keen-sighted mental vision; no human sagacity could descry anywhere on the horizon a cloud as big even as a man's hand portending their approach. The prescience that anticipated and foretold them was and must have been, therefore, supernatural— Divine.

And first, as to THE FALL OF JUDAISM. The Saviour's revelations on the subject were, as usual, progressive—hints only at first, then statements, then full and clear descriptions. The moral reason for and cause of the event is also exhibited: the Jews are made to pronounce their own doom. What would the householder do to the disloyal men who had killed the heir of the vineyard? "He will miserably destroy those wicked men," say the chief priests and elders of the people, "and will let out the vineyard to other husbandmen,

who will render him the fruits in their season." The Lord endorses their judgment, and adds, "Ye are the men!" For He says, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Here is foretold a loss of all the peculiar privileges of Judaism, as a result of their rejection of Christ; as well as that *others*—some who had never enjoyed it previously—would gain "the kingdom of God," which they would lose.

The same prediction was oft repeated. The carefully cultured but still fruitless tree would, after long and patient waiting, be cut down. The barren fig-tree afforded a visible symbol of what was to happen to the nation when it withered away. The enemies who would not have the King to reign over them would be slain before His face. Strangers from the east and from the west would sit down in the kingdom with Abraham, while the children of the kingdom would be cast out. As the great tragedy drew near its climax, and the leaders of Israel ranged themselves decidedly against their Messiah, the utterances of Christ became plainer. Not that His convictions were deepened by such indications of what was likely to come, but that He would not anticipate rejection too distinctly before it had been resolved on by His foes.

It was only in the last week of His earthly life that He spoke out fully on this subject, and His most memorable and touching utterance about it was made on that festive Palm Sunday, when, for a brief moment, it seemed as if the result might be different. Amid thousands of grateful disciples—the lame and the blind whom He had healed, the lepers whom He had cleansed, the very dead whom He had raised, and the multitudes whom He had taught—Zion's King came to her that day, meek, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass. The crowd were waving palms of victory as they escorted Him from Bethany, and laying their garments for Him to ride over. The children sang "Hosanna!" and greeted Him as Son of David. But the present could not conceal from Him the future, and as He approached Jerusalem His tears flowed as He bewailed, in tender and animated utterance, her terrible approaching fate and self-inflicted doom. She had rejected all His loving efforts, and failed to recognise her day of gracious Divine visitation.

In sad and solemn prophecy Jesus foretold, "The days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another."

This seemed a strange future to be announced to Israel by the Messiah, for whom she had so longed and waited, as the harbinger of better and brighter days. It was enough to shock men who were indulging half-worldly and half-religious ideas of approaching deliverance from their enemies, and triumph over all Gentile foes. What! their enemies not only to rule them as Herod, Pilate, and Caesar were already doing, but actually to raze Jerusalem to the ground !

Judea was then a flourishing province of the mighty Roman empire. Jesus Christ was simply a young Galilean prophet to the outward eye, nothing more. The Herodian dynasty was safely seated on the throne, and the temple—of which

Jesus said, "Your house is left unto you desolate"—had been rebuilt in much magnificence and almost regardless of cost; cities and palaces of Roman and Grecian architecture studded the land; Roman soldiery guarded the country, and kept the people in order. Nothing boded change, ruin, banishment, extermination for some, and age-long exile even unto this day for others. How could even the unjust execution of any individual involve such consequences? Could anything be more unlikely than the delivery, not to say fulfilment, of these predictions? Imagine a parallel case. Some young and humble religious teacher who has, however, great power and originality, comes up to London from the northern counties, takes the position of a bold reformer, claims the right to overthrow existing religious abuses, upbraids the Church leaders of the land for their simony, worldliness, and traditional customs opposed to the word of God ventures to purify the Church by some bold, practical, measures, is, in consequence, arrested and accused by those who reject his religious pretensions. He is tried and condemned—and then, without the least personal feeling, but seriously, sadly, and even solemnly, he predicts that the result of his rejection will be the utter overthrow of the Protestant religion, the downfall of the British empire, the complete destruction of St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey, so that not one stone will be left on another, and ages of a foreign occupation of England!

Yet it was thus Jesus of Nazareth, the prophet of Galilee, forewarned the Jews as to the results of their rejecting Him; and the wonderful fact is that *the event justified the prediction*, and all subsequent history attested its Divine inspiration.

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