

An Exposition of Isaiah xxiv.—xxvii.

III.

THE END OF THESE THINGS (CHAP. xxxiv.).

THIS is what the prophet heard:—

Behold, Jehovah maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. . . . The earth shall be utterly emptied, and utterly laid waste; for Jehovah hath spoken this word.

And this emptying of its inhabitants shall extend to every class.

It shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the creditor, so with the debtor; as with the taker of interest, so with the giver of interest to him.

The prophet sees “this word” in fulfilment.

The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away. The earth also is polluted under the inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are found guilty; therefore the inhabitants of the world are burned, and few men left.

His eye wanders from land to land, and he sees everywhere emptiness and desolation.

The new wine mourneth, the vine languisheth, all the merry-hearted do sigh. The mirth of tabrets ceaseth, the noise of them that rejoice endeth, the joy of the harp ceaseth. They shall not drink wine with a song; strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it. The waste city is broken down; every house is shut up, that no man may come in. There is a crying in the street because of the wine; all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction. For thus shall it be in the midst of the peoples, as the shaking of an olive tree, as the gleaning when the vintage is done.

The Earth then shall be emptied, so that there shall be few men left; populous cities will be denuded of their inhabitants; fruitful lands shall lie fallow for want of cultivation; among all the nations it shall be as when an olive tree has been beaten, two or three berries left in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost branches,¹ or like the scattered bunches that remain when the vintage is done. And what of those who remain?

¹ xvii. 6.

These shall lift up their voice, they shall shout; for the majesty of Jehovah they cry aloud from the sea.

From all nations overseas,¹ after that tremendous exhibition of the majesty of Jehovah, the God of Israel, voices will be raised in praise of His glory. And so from his standpoint in the Land of Jehovah, and amongst the people of Jehovah, the prophet of Israel calls to all in East or West even now to glorify Him.

Wherefore glorify ye Jehovah in the east; even the Name of Jehovah, the God of Israel, in the isles of the sea.

Glorify Him now, all peoples, for all peoples shall in that day acclaim His majesty. Glorify Him now by doing the right, believing now that to do the right is man's true glory.² This will be everywhere acknowledged in that day. "The goodly fellowship of the prophets" with one voice declare that they have heard it.

From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, Glory to the righteous.

But the days upon the earth of glory to the righteous with their shout and their songs are still far distant. A grievous vision is declared to the prophets.³ His spirit fails at the long vista of earth's sorrows, stretching away from his own dark present, to its final fall.

But I said, I pine away, I pine away, woe is me! the treacherous have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous have dealt very treacherously. Fear, and the pit and the snare, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth. And it shall come to pass, that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare; for the windows on high are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble. The earth is utterly broken, the earth is rent asunder, the earth is shaken violently. The earth shall stagger like a drunken man, and shall sway to and fro like a hammock; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it, and it shall fall, and not rise again.

"The inhabitants of the earth have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. THEREFORE hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are found guilty; *therefore* the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left." The reason for this final and overwhelming visitation is plainly stated. It is a deliberate rejection by men of the laws, the statutes, and the everlasting covenant. There are laws of nature and of conscience wide as the human race, impressed upon all men by their Maker, written in their hearts by His Spirit,

¹ Cf. xlii. 10; lx. 5. ² iii. 10, 11. ³ xxi. 2.

and these will have been transgressed. But the indictment extends further. Men will also have violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. The statutes of the Word of God and the eternal Covenant of grace in Jesus Christ must then have been widely made known and generally rejected before this visitation falls.

Long years have gone by since the prophet spoke, and we see the statutes and the covenant actually made known throughout the world; the statutes translated into every tongue, the Gospel proclaimed in every land. We must expect to see not only the universal laws of humanity transgressed, but the statutes violated, and the covenant broken, before the end comes.

Our Lord's words, which close His summary of Earth's history up to the end, imply the same thing. "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world *for a testimony* unto all the nations, and then shall the end come."¹ For this will be the final condemnation of the world, that light will have come to men, and they will have loved darkness rather than light.

"Few men left." "Behold, the day of Jehovah cometh, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger; to make the earth² a desolation, and to destroy the sinners thereof out of it. . . . And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a man more rare than fine gold, even a man than the pure gold of Ophir."³ "As the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be in the end of the world.⁴ The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."⁵

"It shall be in the end of the world that the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."⁶

There have been "days of Jehovah" upon the nations in which

¹ Matt. xxiv. 11.

² Surely, in this context, "earth" and not "land."

³ xiii. 9-13.

⁴ Or, *the consummation of the age.*

⁵ Matt. xiii. 40-42.

⁶ *Ib.*, 49, 50.

sources of pollution or rebellion have been rooted out. Such a day of Jehovah was the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. Such also was the day when the iniquity of the Amorites became full, and the command for their extermination was given. Such also was the breaking of the Assyrian in the land of Israel, and the downfall of Babylon before the Medes and Persians. But all these, and others like them, are but signs of the great and universal overthrow. "This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth; and this is the Hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For Jehovah of hosts hath purposed, and who shall annul it? and His Hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" "For there shall be a day of Jehovah upon *all* that is proud and haughty, and upon *all* that is lifted up, and it shall be brought low; and upon *all* the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon *every* lofty tower, and upon *every* fortified wall, and upon *all* the ships of Tarshish, and upon *all* pleasant imagery. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; and Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day."

As the angel of the Lord in one night smote in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000 men; as Jehovah passed through the land of Egypt and smote the first-born of man and beast; so in the day of His wrath He will send forth His angels through all the world, and with unerring discrimination "destroy them that destroy the earth." ¹

"Fear of the pit and the snare." These shall mark Earth's closing days. Beset with dangers and harassed by fears, fleeing from the noise of the fear, men shall fall into the pit; struggling out of the pit they become entangled in the snare; heaven pours down judgments, the foundations shake beneath their feet. Forsaking the laws and statutes and covenant, society is rent asunder, and is shaken violently; it staggers like a drunken man, it sways to and fro like a hammock; its transgression lies heavily upon it, it stumbles to its fall. "And there shall be signs in sun and moon and stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows; men fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then

¹ Rev. xi. 18.

shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh." ¹

For all this is the prelude to the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

And it shall come to pass in that day that Jehovah will punish the host of the height on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison; and after many days shall they be visited. Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed; for Jehovah of hosts will reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before His elders shall be glory.

"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father." ² Then shall "the kingdom of the world become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever." ³ Then is "the time to give their reward to God's servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to those that fear His Name, the small and the great." ⁴

From the uttermost part of the world will be heard songs of glory to the righteous, for in mercy will the earth have been emptied; so that justice may dwell in the wilderness, ⁵ and righteousness abide in the fruitful field, and the work of righteousness be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and confidence for ever.

THE NEW THINGS (CHAP. XXV. I-8).

The prophet, borne by the Holy Spirit, has spoken of things to come. Now, under the influence of the same Spirit, he turns to his God.

O Jehovah, Thou art my God; I will exalt Thee, I will praise Thy Name; for Thou hast done wonderful things, even counsels of old, in faithfulness and truth.

Those things which Jehovah has secretly decreed are as good as done ⁶; those things which He has revealed appear to the prophet as fulfilled—

For Thou hast made of a city a heap, of a fortified city a ruin, a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built. Therefore shall a strong people glorify Thee, a city of terrible nations shall fear Thee.

The prophet foresees much increase of strength in the world;

¹ Luke xxi. 25-28.

² Matt. xiii. 43.

³ Rev. xi. 15.

⁴ Ib. v. 18.

⁵ xxxii. 16, 17.

⁶ Rev. xxi. 6.

much city and fortress and palace building by those who are strangers to God. He seems to see men welded into one compact society, and becoming "a strong people." He has a vision of terrible nations combining to build "a city." Similarly the Seer of the New Testament Apocalypse is shown "spirits of demons working signs, which go forth unto the kings of the whole world to gather them together unto the war of the great day of God, the Almighty¹"; and is told of kings "who have one mind and give their power and authority unto the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished."² And he saw "the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against"³ the King of kings and Lord of lords. But they were overthrown in his sight, even as here the prophet sees their city made a heap, their combination broken up, never to be reformed.

For Thou hast been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. As the heat in a dry place wilt Thou bring down the noise of strangers; and as the heat by the shadow of a cloud, the song of the terrible ones shall be brought low.

In the days of their strength and glory they were as a storm against the wall; irresistible, as it seemed, in their power. The poor and needy, who were conscious of the innate weakness of man apart from God, and who feared the transgression of laws and statutes and covenant, and who still walked humbly with their God, were hard put to it to maintain their ground. Facts seemed to be against them, their mental distress was often great; the heat and glare scorched and blinded them; the noise of strangers to God increased; their triumphant song rose high; but these did not forsake their stronghold, and it has proved firm. O Jehovah, Thou wast their stronghold all the time; the noise is brought down, their scorching sun is shadowed, the song of the terrible ones is brought low; and now, if a strong people appears again it is strong only in Thee, if all nations build one city again it is in the fear of Thee, so that the whole world makes common cause with the poor and needy. O Jehovah, Thou art and shalt be my God; I will exalt Thee and praise Thy Name; for Thou hast done wonderful things, even counsels of old in faithfulness and in truth.

And in this mountain will Jehovah of hosts make unto all people a feast

¹ Rev. xvi. 14.

² Ib. xvii. 13.

³ Ib. xix. 19.

of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

“The mountain” in the mouth of Isaiah can only mean Mount Zion of Jerusalem, where, he has just told us, Jehovah of hosts will then be reigning. And the feast of fat things and of old vintages has been described through him elsewhere:—

“It shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, and will decide concerning many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” “For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea.”¹

And He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering that covereth all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations.

We have an inspired commentary on these words when we read of the Jews that “unto this day, whensoever Moses is read, a veil lieth upon their heart,” but when the day comes that Israel turns to the Lord, the veil will be taken away, and upon their upturned faces will stream the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.² Not only upon the Jews however is this veil and covering at present spread. “If our Gospel is veiled,” as it is veiled for vast numbers still in every nation, “it is veiled in them that perish, in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn on them.”³ But in that day the scale shall fall from all eyes, the veil be taken away from all faces, and all men shall see with unveiled face.

He will destroy the veil “in this mountain.” The convincing proof, the ocular demonstration of the glory of Jesus Christ will take place there, and there it will be resident. “His feet shall

¹ ii. 1-4; xi. 1-9.

² 2 Cor. iii. 15, 16.

³ 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east . . . and Jehovah my God shall come, and all the holy ones with Thee . . . and it shall come to pass in that day that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem . . . and Jehovah shall be King over all the earth ; and in that day shall Jehovah be one, and His Name one." ¹ When the Root of Jesse stands for an ensign of the peoples, and all the nations seek to Him, " His resting-place shall be glorious." ² " The moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed," when He reigns in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, " and before His elders," the chief of His Kingdom, there " shall be glory." ³ " For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west, so shall be the coming of the Son of Man." ⁴ And " as the lightning, when it lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven, so shall the Son of Man be in His day." ⁵

To this time, almost certainly, the promise of our Lord Jesus to His believing disciples must be referred. " Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." ⁶ Not only then the veil that hides the glory of the Lord Jesus from the nations, but that which separates the unseen world from this will then be drawn aside. Jehovah shall come, and *all the holy ones with Him*. Not only the holy angels, but with them the holy dead. When Christ is manifested, they shall be manifested with Him in glory ; for those who now sleep in Jesus God will certainly bring with Him when He comes.

The glory of our JESUS is hidden from the world, our hope is still anchored behind a shrouding veil ⁷ ; but in that day, in one moment, when the Son of Man comes forth, and " the armies which are in heaven follow Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure " the veil shall fall away, and the unseen will become manifest.

Then shall be brought to pass this saying which is written here—

He hath swallowed up death for ever ; and the Lord Jehovah will wipe away tears from off all faces ; and the reproach of His people will He take away from off all the earth ; for Jehovah hath spoken it.

¹ Zech. xiv. 1-11.

⁴ Matt. xxiv. 27.

² xi. 10.

⁵ Luke xvii. 24.

⁷ Heb. vi. 18, 19.

³ xxiv. 23.

⁶ John i. 51.

"He hath swallowed up death for ever" will be fulfilled when the trumpet sounds at the first resurrection,¹ but the whole prediction only when Christ Jesus comes to the world with His risen and glorified saints.

O Jehovah! Thou art my God! Now I will exalt Thee, now early will I praise Thy Name!

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¹ 1 Cor. xv. 51-57.

