

τὰς γενεὰς τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων (Eph. 3 : 21). Here word is piled on word, each of huge meaning, as the Titans heaped Ossa upon Pelion and Olympus upon Ossa.

Augustine said : " Distinguish the ages, and the Scriptures will harmonize." To discriminate between these five " ages" is essential if we would remove or relieve the difficulties and perplexities in our study of the kingdom. There was a past eternity before time began ; there was an age at the end of which Christ appeared (Heb. 9 : 26)—itself including subordinate ages ; then began the " present evil age," which extends to His advent in glory ; beyond is the coming age, which reaches to the close of the millennium ; and beyond all these lies another and future eternity.

These five ages have a distinct relation to the kingdom of God. In the age before time, that kingdom was undivided, undisputed, universal. The past age, between creation and Christ's ascension, was experimental ; the kingdom was in revolt, and preparation was making for its re-establishment. During the present evil age, the kingdom is invisible, and individual, and elective. In the coming age it is to be visible, general, collective, extensive. And in the age beyond, it will be once more undivided, undisputed, universal, as in the eternity past.

Our present purpose limits our study mainly to the present and coming ages. But it may be well to mark that, in the past age, dominion was given to Adam at his creation and lost by his fall. Satan wrested the sceptre from his hand and became the god of this world. Afterward God called out an elect family and nation to represent His kingdom, and became Himself the Head of a theocracy. His people disowned Him and chose an earthly king, and so came apostasy, captivity, dispersion. When Christ came, He offered the kingdom to the Jews, but they both rejected the offer and crucified the King Himself. This apostasy brought another captivity and dispersion, already lasting for almost two thousand years.

The present age is known in Scripture as an *evil* age, during which evil is dominant, because Satan has usurped control of this world. This is the age of the Church, the *ἐκκλησία*, the outgathering of the Body or Bride of Christ from all nations ; and this age belongs to the times of the Gentiles, because it is by the preaching of the Gospel as a witness to all nations that the elect are to be thus outgathered.

The Church, however, is not the kingdom, nor is the kingdom the Church. The kingdom is constantly referred to, as having an existence in the past age and in the coming age ; but in neither age is the Church found ; that seems to fill the interval between the sufferings of Christ and the glory that shall follow. To confound a mere visible, external organization of believers with the kingdom, or the church of men with the Church of God, is a disastrous blunder ; and still worse is it to confuse the kingdoms of this world with the kingdom of Christ, or trust to that most dangerous and deceitful device of the devil, a superficial union of Church and State. We carelessly talk of " Christian nations," forgetting the fatal fallacy that