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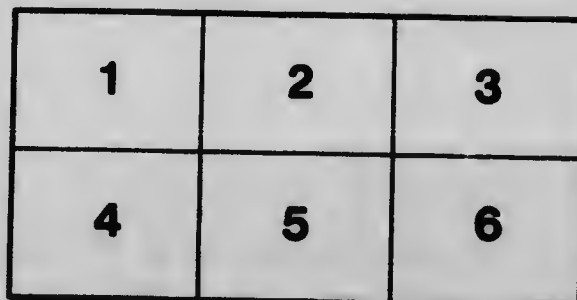
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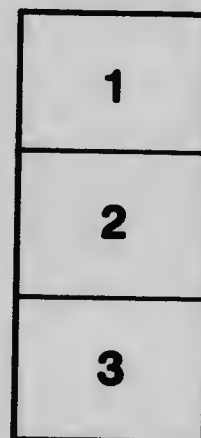
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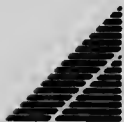
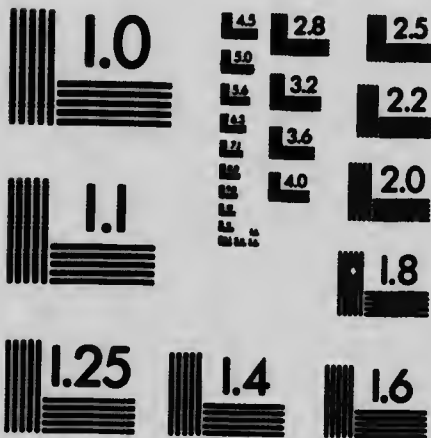
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**THE**  
**Prophecy on Olivet**  
**or**  
**The Sign of His Coming**

**J. J. ROSS**

*Christmas 1909*  
*with Compliments*  
*J. J. Ross*

# The Prophecy on Olivet

or

The Sign of His Coming

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BY

J. J. ROSS

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## NOTE

**"The Prophecy on Olivet" was delivered as one of the monthly public lectures in the Bible Training School, 110 College Street, Toronto, on March 15th, 1909, and is published in this form at the request of a number who heard it. There are many phases of truth in this prophecy relative to our Lord's second coming, which have been completely passed over in this study, such as the manner, the purpose, the results of His coming and the doctrine of rewards and punishments at His coming, all of these aspects of the subject having been taken up in the previous lectures.**

**J.J.R.**



## Introductory

**T**HE prophecy on Olivet according to Matthew is recorded in chapters twenty-four and twenty-five; according to Mark in chapter thirteen, and according to Luke in chapter twenty-one. The prophecy itself cannot be studied with safety without a clear understanding of the events that led up to and occasioned its utterance. These events all took place on Tuesday, the third day of the passion week (Matt. 21:18-23; 39). On Sunday, the first day, there was the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the brief afternoon visit to the temple, the looking around upon all things therein, and the withdrawal to Bethany in the evening (Mark 11:11). On Monday, the second day, He returns to the temple, cleanses it by driving out the traffickers, heals the sick, and, contrary to the wish of the Pharisees, accepts joyfully the Hosannahs of the children. That evening He returned to Bethany. On Tuesday we see Him in conflict with the Jewish rulers. He returns to the temple and His authority is challenged. He gives answer by, first, a counter-question regarding John, a negative reply to which they *could* not give, and a positive answer to which they *would* not give. Then said Jesus "Neither do I tell thee by what authority I do these things." Then He

answers them by three parables. In the first, the parable of the two sons, they are made to declare their own guilt (21:28-32). In the second, the parable of the vine-dresser, they are made to decree and publish their own punishment, (21:33-40). In the third, the parable of the royal marriage feast they are made to see their own fate, and also the fate of those whom they, as blind guides, are leading astray (22:1-14).

The challenge of the authorities has signally failed but more subtle weapons may succeed. There is some doubt as to their success but they will at least try. They will spring upon Him some hard questions which, if He attempts to answer on the spur of the moment, will compromise Him. This now is their only hope. The first question was political (22:15-22), the second was speculative (23-33). The third was theological (34-40). So clear were His answers to these questions that the questioners found themselves entangled in a net, and, silenced, they were driven from the field, while the multitudes marveled at His teaching. It is now time to question the questioners. They are still gathered together. The question that Jesus asks is certainly a puzzling one, its character being Messianic. It is taken from the Old Testament Scripture, which they strongly believe. "What think ye of the Christ, whose Son is He?" The question is intended to teach them that if they would take their idea of the

Messiah from the Scripture, of which they were proud to boast, they would have no difficulty in recognizing the One who stood before them as the Christ, for whom they hoped. They will not repent and receive Him as the Christ and again they are abashed and silenced. "So that no man was able to answer Him a word and neither durst any man from that day forth, ask Him any more questions."

The scribes, Pharisees, Herodians and lawyers are all silenced and there is a lull in the proceedings. He turns to the multitudes and the disciples, and though in the presence of the authorities, He warns them against their spiritual guides. His last address upon that occasion, as found in chapter twenty-three, is a most scathing one. He charges four things upon the Jewish authorities and pronounces eight woes against them. He charges them with inconsistency, despotism, ostentation and pride. Then He denounces them for the most hateful of all the abominations, hypocrisy. They are religiously exclusive, spiritually blind, legal in trifles, lawless in matters of importance, outwardly pious, inwardly impure, making great pretence of reverence for the dead prophets, while at the same time hating and killing those who were alive and among them.

His public ministry is now ended. The kingdom has been offered to the nation and they have rejected it. He is about to leave the temple for the last time, but before taking

His final departure He does two things which are very significant. First, He laments the great sin of the nation (chap. 23:37). A day or two before, Christ had wept over Jerusalem, now He sighed and groaned over her. The sin of the nation was twofold. They hated, stoned and killed God's messengers. "Thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee." This sin is especially charged upon the holy city, because there the great council sat, who took cognizance of ecclesiastical matters. It is true that this council had not now the power to put any man to death, but, they killed the prophets in popular tumults, mobbed them, as in the case of Stephen, and urged the Roman authorities on to murder them. The nation had also refused and rejected the Messiah. "How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and ye would not. "Killing the prophets was a sin against remedy; the persistent rejection of the true Messiah was a sin without remedy.

The second significant act of Christ before taking final leave of the temple and its system was the prediction of the nation's doom. "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate, for I say unto you, ye shall not see Me henceforth till ye shall say "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." When He first cleansed the temple He spoke of it as "My Father's house," because He thought of

God, His Father, as the nation's theocratic King. When He cleansed the temple the second time He spoke of it as "My house," for then He presented *Himself* as the nation's theocratic King. But now, He says, "*your* house," because Israel would none of Him. Three things in this prediction must be carefully noted. In the first place He conjoins the nation's desolation with the withdrawal of His presence. "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." And suiting the action to His word, He left the temple forever. Then He conjoins the restoration of the nation with Israel's repentance and their new welcome of Him as the true Messiah of God. "Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." According to this the nation is promised then, a vision of Him again, but only on the ground of their national repentance. He makes clear also, that between the desolation of the nation, which He makes one with His absence, and the restoration of the nation, which He conjoins with His presence, there will be an indefinite period during which time they would not see Him again. During this interim as He afterward explains, their city would be violently trodden down of the Gentiles, the whole nation given over to the sword, and her people subjected to the rule of foreign powers.

Keeping these three things in mind, we will see them unfolded, described and related in the prophecy we are about to study.

He now leaves the temple, passes out of the city, descends into the dark valley, crosses the black brook Kedron, and ascends the western winding slope of Olivet on His way toward Bethany. The disciples are with Him, and all that He had said and done in the temple is still fresh in their minds. As they together round a quick turn in the road, which almost made them face westward, the holy city burst into view. The disciples called His attention to the magnificence of the city as it lay spread out before them, and the glory of the temple with its gilded dome, glittering in the light of the setting sun. His word to them was startling. Lifting His hand toward the city and its temple He said, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down." Thus He announced the nation's destruction, the speedy passing of her glory and the overthrow of the whole system in blood. But the disciples are eager for full information upon the subject, and therefore, four of them interview Him. They approach Him privately with two questions: (1) "*When* shall these things be?" and (2) "*What* shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the consummation of the age?" The prophecy on Olivet is our Lord's reply to these two questions in their inverted order, He answering the first one second, and the second one first; an order which is frequently overlooked and which has resulted in great confusion in the proper understanding of the address itself. Observ-

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ing this fact, the Olivet Prophecy falls into four distinct parts.

I. *The Sign of His coming*, Matt. 24:4-35; Mark 13:5-31; Luke 21:8-33.

II. *The Time of His coming*, Matt. 24:36-48; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 21:34-36.

III. *Readiness for His coming*, Matt. 24:44—25:30.

IV. *The Event Itself as it relates to the nations of the earth*, Matt. 25:31-46.

## I.

### The Negative Sign of His Coming

Let us consider, then, the Sign of our Lord's Coming. "What is the sign of Thy coming?" the disciples asked Jesus. He, perceiving the danger of their being led astray by false views upon this subject, answers the question fully, first, negatively; and second, positively. We will consider carefully both aspects of our Lord's answer.

His negative answer is found in verses 4 to 18 inclusive. There are certain events which He warns the disciples against taking as signs of His near approach. He first mentions the appearance of false Christs, "For many shall come in My name, saying, I am the Christ." There was at that time a general expectation that the Messiah would soon come. He had come, but the nation had rejected Him. There were those who, ambitious to make for themselves a name, took advantage of the situation and set themselves up as pseudo-Messiahs. Josephus speaks of several such imposters who appeared between 30 and 70 A.D. There was Theudas, who was defeated by Cospus, and Fadus, who was defeated by Felix, and still another who was overthrown

by Festus. Dostheus said that he was the prophet foretold by Moses, while Magnus claimed that he was the great power of God Most High. Up till the last moment on that 8th of Sept., in 70 A.D.—that fatal day on which the holy city was destroyed, thousands would not surrender, believing that the Messiah would come with deliverance, and since that time there have been many such pretenders. History is full of them. In 132, A.D. prior to the final dispersion of the Jews, the Doctor Abika gave full place to the brave Barcochebas, the last of the national heroes who claimed to be "the son of a star." Many were the legends which declared his claims as the Messiah. His size and strength were vaunted as more than human. "It was the arm of God and not man," said Hadrian when he saw at last the corpse, encircled by a serpent, "that alone could strike down the giant." At last this great national hero's character was made manifest and he was proven the son of a lie.

Take another instance a little nearer our own time. About 150 years ago Sabatti-Levi set himself up as the Messiah in the Turkish Empire, and for some time was worshiped by the Jews, but his folly, too, was at last disclosed. From the beginning to the present there have been many false Christs, and, seeing the danger of the disciples being led astray by them, the Master uttered the warning note, "See that ye be not troubled

... the end is not yet." The appearance of the pseudo-Messiahs is not, then, to be taken as a premonition of our Lord's near approach.

Then He warns them against taking certain political events as signs of His coming. "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled, for all these things must needs come to pass, but the end is not yet; for nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom." At the first advent there was universal peace, but Christ did not come to continue that peace. From the time He left the temple and their house was left unto them desolate, the sword of the Lord has never been quiet, because He had given authority against the hypocritical nation by bringing His sword down upon them. The rumors of war here mentioned refer to three great threats of war against the Jews by Caligula, Claudius and Nero. From that time to this these horrors of war have been terrible. In 40 A.D., 50,000 Jews were thus murdered in Babylonia. At Durham, 1346, there fell 50,000; at Hollidon Hill and Agincourt, 20,000 each; at Bautzen and Lepanto, 25,000 each; at Austerlitz and Luptzen, 80,000 each; at Eylau, 60,000; at Waterloo and Quatre Bras, in one engagement, 70,000; at Borodino, 80,000; at Yarmouth, 150,000; at Chalons, no less than 100,000. The Moors in Spain, about 800, lost in battle, 70,000; in another engagement four centuries later, 108,000 besides 50,000 prisoners, and in a third, even 200,000.

Thus have there been wars and rumors of wars throughout this dispensation and they will continue until the end, when He will come whose right it is to reign. But for the present the Master says, "See that ye be not troubled, for these things must needs come to pass, but the end is not yet."

Again we notice that He warns them against taking certain social events, in the history of the race, as signs of His near approach. "And there shall be *famines*." There is no doubt but that this prophecy also has had a repeated historical fulfilment since the day of its utterance. Periods of extreme suffering through scarcity of food have occurred in all parts of the world and from remote ages. Extended lists have been made of the most distressing famines, with more or less particularity of detail, and scientists have presented thoughtful speculations upon their cause. Among the avoidable causes are enumerated war, defective agriculture, deficient transportation, legislative interference, speculation in food products and misapplication of grain; and among natural causes are excessive rain, frost, drought, earthquakes, hurricanes, hailstorms and plagues of vermin. A few years after the opening of the Christian era we read of a great famine in Judea which was most impoverishing (Acts 11:28). In the year 42 A.D., Egypt experienced a famine when many thousands of the population perished. So great was the famine and the plague that fol-

lowed it in Rome, in the autumn of 66, that 80,000 perished in less than three months. During the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, in 69 and 70 A.D., so terrible was the famine that parents were reduced to killing and eating their own children. In 272 Great Britain was visited by such a sore famine that people were forced to eat the bark of trees. In 806 both famine and plague spread over Scotland, carrying off thousands, and four years later England lost 40,000 people from the same causes, and in 825 all of Great Britain suffered from famine. Phrygia experienced its terrors in 870, Constantinople in 446, and Italy in 450, where parents again were driven to the awful extremity of eating their own children. Since the year 1000 India has suffered the most from famine of any country in the world. In less than 100 years no fewer than thirty millions have perished in that country from famine and plague. In 1877 about five hundred thousand died in Bombay and Madras, and as a result the government determined to lay aside seven million five hundred thousand dollars annually for provision against future famines, the same to be known as the famine insurance fund and to be used in construction of protective works, such as railroads and canals. How many human beings have perished in the famines, of which some records have been kept, since the first advent of Christ, cannot be computed, but it is certain that the number has already

extended into hundreds of millions. It is clear, therefore, that the prophecy of our Lord in reference to this great evil has been fulfilled over and over again and is not now and was never intended to be taken as a sign of His second advent.

Again He predicts that there shall be earthquakes in divers places. Earthquakes are woes in nature, and the Master warns His disciples against considering these as signs of His coming. This prophecy, like the others I have mentioned, has had a near, continuous and far fulfilment. In Asia Minor in 60 A.D., there was an earthquake when some 20,000 perished. In Campania, in 66 A.D., an earthquake swept away 20,000. In 67 and 68 A.D., when the Roman soldiers were invading Palestine and subjugating Galilee, there were several earthquakes in Crete, Phrygia, at Apania and Laodicea, and also in Judea, which destroyed upwards of 60,000 souls. In after ages there were severe earthquakes in divers places, and, strange to say, notwithstanding our Lord's warning, many Christians the world over, were led into a false expectation of our Lord's coming. It is estimated now that there are twelve or thirteen earthquakes destructive more or less to life and property, occurring every year. Indeed those who know tell us that the earth is never free from tremors, as indicated by delicate instruments, which also record the fact that in even violent shocks the actual movement of

the ground is surprisingly small, and moreover, is often in direction so complicated that different persons give conflicting reports. In the most destructive shocks whole cities and districts have been laid waste, and enormous masses of human beings have lost their lives. In 1755 no less than 60,000 people perished in the great Lisbon earthquake. In the last century 50,000 lost their lives in Calabria alone. What of the great earthquake in Sicily and Calabria within the last few weeks, when upward of 200,000 people perished. It is estimated now that upward of 20,000,000 of the human race have thus perished. It is evident, then, that the Saviour does not intend that His disciples should make the earthquakes or any of these woes I have mentioned assigns of His approach, for He says regarding them, "These are the beginning of sorrows."

Now He gives a prophecy of the persecution of His own people and cautions them against receiving that as a sign of His near approach. "Then shall they deliver you up unto tribulation and shall kill you," (verses 9-12).

In the previous four warnings Jesus addressed Himself exclusively to the disciples individually. In this passage He addresses the disciples in their corporate capacity. The events mentioned before are the *beginning* of the birth-pangs; this one is the *continuation* of the birth-pangs, and like the others has had a

historical fulfilment. Thirty years after the Ascension, under Nero, multitudes of Christians were apprehended, covered by the skins of wild beasts, torn to pieces by devouring dogs, fastened to crosses, wrapped up in combustible garments, so that when the daylight failed they might, like torches serve to dispel the gloom of night. By such a scene as this Nero lighted his own gardens and thus the shrieks of Christian women burning to ashes supplied music and diversion for the circus.

Between 87 and 98 A.D., 50,000 Christians were torn to pieces by the lions in the Roman Coliseum. In 95 A.D., 210,000 Christians perished. From this time on the persecutions continued without abatement. when houses were filled with Christians and set on fire and whole crowds of them were knotted together by ropes and cast into the sea. It is estimated that in the year 308 A.D., 17,000 were slain in one month. In this year no less than 144,000 Christians died by violence besides 700,000 who died through banishment or the public works to which they had been condemned. Church history bears out the fact that these persecutions of the Christians by the nations of the earth has continued from the beginning of the Christian era to the present, to a greater or less degree. The word of prophecy assures us that it will continue until this dispensation closes. There-

fore we may not look upon the persecution of the Christians as a sign of our Lord's near approach.

The ill effects of the persecution are also foretold. (1) There will be the apostacy of some, "then many shall stumble." Through the trial they get into darkness and stumble not knowing whither they are going. They apostatize from the faith and thereby offend against the stumbling stone. When faith in Christ and the public profession of it begin to cost certain ones a price, they first fall out with their faith and then fall from it. (2) Malignity of others. When persecution is in fashion enmity and malice possess the minds by contagion. Those who betray their faith in Christ will generally blaspheme those who remain true to it. Apostates from the faith have been the most notorious persecutors of those who remain true to Christ. (3) Heresy. "And many false prophets shall arise and lead many astray." These false prophets will claim for themselves the authority of the Messiah and by lying wonders will deceive many, so strong will be their delusion, that man's large gifts, eminent station and long profession will not secure him. Nothing but the almighty grace of God, pursuant of His eternal purpose, will be his protection. (4) Declension in love. "And because iniquity shall be multiplied the love of many shall wax cold." The iniquity here is particular. It is stumbling iniquity when Christian men

fall through unbelief; malignant iniquity when Christian men and women deliver up one another and hate one another; heretical iniquity when the false prophets seek to lead astray even the elect. When this iniquity abounds the love of many for sainthood, Christ, God's Word and the Church, shall decline. The results have been seen in all the persecutions of this dispensation. They are not to be taken as the sign of our Lord's near approach.

## II. The Positive Sign of His Coming

We come now to consider the positive answer He gives to this question, "What shall be the *sign* of Thy coming?" In so far as it is necessary for the disciples to have definite knowledge upon this subject, Jesus answers them. In this address He speaks of three positive signs which if they would read aright, would indicate His near approach.

In the first place there is the *evangelistic* sign. He foretells the preaching of the gospel in all the world. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto them and then shall the *end* come." The good tidings of God's grace to men is here spoken of as the gospel of the *kingdom*, because it claims the supreme rule of God in the *life*, sets up the kingdom of God among men and secures ours in the eternal world. There is only one gospel. This gospel says Christ shall be preached as a *witness*. The purpose of a witness is either to convict and condemn or to justify and save; the gospel as witness for those who believe that they might be saved and against those who rebel that they might be damned. "He that believeth not shall be damned." The good tidings of divine grace is either a savor of life unto life or of death unto death. This pro-

phesy does not only say that the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached for a witness but it shall be preached unto all the nations *as a witness* and when this is done then shall the end come. There are many things left unsaid here which in our curiosity we would like to know. How extensive a proclamation is intended by these words to anyone of the specified nations, we are not told and cannot know, the reason being that we do not know where the Lord draws national lines. There are more nations now in the earth than when the Lord uttered this prophecy. Neither are we told how much preaching to any given nation will satisfy the demands of His prophecy. Moreover we are not told what shall be the particular results to any of these nations. The Lord is not speaking here of the mere preaching of the gospel as a sign of His coming, but of its universal proclamation to all the nations of the earth as the premonition of His second advent. Let us keep this clearly in mind. In one sense this prophecy has already been fulfilled. Within forty years after Christ's death the gospel had been preached in all the then known world, (Rom. 10:18). Paul preached the gospel as a witness from Jerusalem and round about into Illyricum, and during this time the other apostles were not idle. The Spirit speaks of the gospel as having come into the world or inhabited earth and of being preached even to every creature. But these facts did not

satisfy the demands of the prediction uttered by Christ that day. Just as soon as the gospel is preached unto all the nations sufficiently to serve the purpose of a witness unto them, then shall the end come. The more the gospel is being preached the nearer we know the coming of the Lord to be. This is His first *positive* sign.

The second sign of our Lord's near approach is a *National* one. What we have in Matt. 24: 15-28 is a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus in A.D., 70 and as fulfilled in that event. But putting beside this passage its parallel as found in Luke 21:20-28 we get certain particulars which we must distinguish for the sake of clearness.

1. The word "abomination" means an extreme hatred and is used to signify an idol, (1 Kings 11:57). The Jews applied this name to the idol set up in the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes, hence our Lord would be understood to mean an idolatrous power, conquering, polluting and destroying. The Roman standards were objects of extreme hatred to the Jews who regarded them as idols from the fact that divinity was attributed to them by the Romans. This abomination was to bring "desolation" which began when the Roman armies, 60,000 strong, invaded Judea under Vespasian in 66, A.D.

2. The flight into the mountains. According to Josephus this did actually take place when the Christians escaped to Pella on the

east side of Jordan. On the first sight of the Roman standards they were to escape in all haste. Nothing was to deter them. But they were forewarned of certain difficulties. Expectant and nursing mothers with their children would be the most likely to suffer, hence He urges them to pray that their flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath. Not in the winter, for then the days would be short, the fruit food scarce and the weather cold. Not on the Sabbath for then the gates of the city would be shut. Their prayer was wonderfully answered for the escape of the Christians from the doomed city did take place on the most convenient day and season and according to Eusebius, not one believer perished.

3. The great tribulation. This was to follow upon the flight of the Christians. It was to be great in at least two senses. First, it was to be great in degree. "All the calamities of mankind since the beginning of the world, in my judgment, are inferior when compared with those of the Jews," says Josephus. The siege of Jerusalem by the Romans took place at the time of the Passover when nearly all the males in the kingdom were in the city. One million one hundred thousand perished in the city by the sword, famine and pestilence, 250,000 in the country around and 97,000 were taken captive to Rome of whom 11,000 perished from want. The tribulation at that time was great too, because of its duration.

From the time the Roman soldiers under Vespasian invaded Palestine to the time when the holy city was destroyed under Titus was just four years. From the time when Titus first laid siege to the city to the time when the city finally fell and was burned, was a hundred and forty-three days. So long was this period of tribulation that unless God had interfered by His grace and power and shortened the days for the elects' sake no Jewish flesh would have been saved.

4. The pseudo Christs and their false prophets. There were as many false Christs between the time when Christ uttered this prophecy and the destruction of Jerusalem as there have been in all after ages. In the Jewish mind there was great expectation that the Messiah would come at the last moment and bring them deliverance. The "elect" disciples were also possessed with these erroneous thoughts, hence they were an easy prey to the enemy. The false prophets would seek by their lying messages concerning the Messiah to lead astray the very elect. They would say "Christ is here and is in the chambers." What if the disciples had believed this message! They would have rushed back into the city looking for Him and have perished in the final overthrow. These prophets will come, says Christ, and will affirm "Behold He is in the wilderness." Had the disciples believed this they would have ventured from their place of security in the mountains and

gone into the desert, and there perished in search of Him. "But," says the Lord, "Believe them not, for as the lightning cometh forth from the east and shineth even unto the west so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." That is to say, the destruction of Jerusalem and the coming of the Son of Man are two distinct events and must be kept apart. The one is gradual, destructive and polluting; the other is sudden, surprising and restoring. The one is local; the other is universal. In other words, the Saviour here conjoins the desolation of the nation with His absence and the restoration with His presence. From that day until this there have been many false prophets who have sought to join together the destruction of Jerusalem and the coming of Jesus but the Master says, "Believe them not."

5. Another important point to notice here is that the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews among the nations at that time did not terminate, but only began the tribulation of the Hebrew race. The word "immediately," in verse 29, has given rise to much difficulty on account of the hasty conclusion to which some have come, that the phrase "immediately after the tribulation of those days," must mean immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place forty-two years after the utterance of this prophecy, according to which all of this must have been completely fulfilled long ago. It is sufficiently obvious that the tribulation began

with the besieging of Jerusalem in 69 A.D., under Titus. But when did it end? As soon as the city was destroyed, on Sept. 8th, 70 A.D.? Nay. If we wish to get some idea of the extent and duration of those days of tribulation we must turn to the same place in this prophecy as given by Luke 21:28, 24, where it appears that it embraces the whole period of the Jewish dispersion and of the creation and formation of the Gentile Church. Luke tells us that the Jews shall be given over to the sword, be scattered among the nations and that Jerusalem shall be trampled down by foreign powers, "until the *time* of the Gentiles be *fulfilled*." The time of the ingathering of the Gentiles to form the Church began with the first advent and will end immediately prior to the second advent. "The tribulation of those days," then, is going on still, and the events in connection with it as predicted are now in the process of fulfilment, just as the Lord foretold them. From A.D. 70 to the present the holy city has been trodden down of the Gentiles. First the city was ruled by the Romans, then by the Saracens and for a short period by the Crusaders, and now by the Ottoman Turks. But this condition of things for the Hebrew nation will not last forever. There is a time coming, tokens of which are now apparent, when Israel's tribulation will end and the rule of Gentile powers over them will forever cease. Following upon the cessation of the tribulation of Israel the

Jew will rule Palestine, in some form, as the Greek rules Greece and the Italians rule Italy; but the Greeks are not all in Greece, nor are all the Italians in Italy, and it is not necessary to believe that the Jews will all be in Palestine in that day. The Master prophesied the desolation of the nation and it has all come to pass, even as He said. The very same Christ has predicted the national restoration of the same nation to her pristine place of power in the land, when foreign rule over her will forever terminate and not a jot or tittle of His Word shall fail. The "great tribulation" of Rev. 7:15, is now in progress and has been in progress for over eighteen hundred years and will continue until the number of the elect are gathered out to form the Church. The moment the Church is formed, then the tribulation period for the Jews will end. This event is still future. The moment the tribulation ends, then and not until then will the Son of Man appear a second time. "But immediately *after* the tribulation . . . *then* shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven." The second positive premonition of our Lord's second coming is the complete cessation of the tribulation for the Hebrew nation.

This position makes plain a difficult passage in the Olivet prophecy, (Matt. 24:34.) He gives the parable of the fig-tree and then immediately adds, "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things are fulfilled."

Two things are to be noted for a proper understanding of this passage, first the word "generation," and second the phrase "shall not pass away." The word generation is used nine different times in Matthew, and in every case describes the nation of Israel as distinct from all the other nations around about them. In one place Peter speaks of the believers of all time as a chosen generation. In the gospel by Matthew, when the word is applied to Israel, it does not mean the people of any given period or a period of time loosely defined by the life of a man or his family, but, a race, offspring, a line of descent, and in time covers the current age or world period. By the word generation, then, Jesus meant the race or nation of whom He was speaking at that moment. But what is the meaning of this race or nation passing away? Some have supposed by the passing away that the Saviour meant the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, which would take place within a period of thirty years. This view is fully contradicted by (a) the meaning of the word generation as used by Matthew; (b) by the fact that the destruction of Jerusalem did not take place until about forty-two years after the prophecy was uttered; (c) and also by the fact that it would make the Saviour contradict Himself in his discourse. He described the time of the destruction of Jerusalem as quite unknown. Would He not be contradicting Himself did He predict the fulfillment of

this prophecy within a period of thirty years? But the place this passage occupies in the discourse and the connection it bears to the parable of the fig-tree make plain that it describes for the Jewish nation an event which has not yet taken place but will transpire in the future. What, then, does Christ mean by this generation or race passing away? The phrase is used to describe a change through which the earth and the heavens shall pass, out of which there will come the new earth and heavens wherein dwelleth righteousness. This does not mean that the heavens and the earth will pass out of existence. The original Word is one that never signifies the termination of existence, but one which is of a wide and general meaning, such as "to go" or "come" to a person; to pass, as a man through a bath, or a ship through the sea from one port to another; to quit one place or condition and pass into another. When it is used of time, it means going into the past, as events now present give place to other events. The Word never means annihilation or the passing of things out of being. The chief thought is *transition*, the passing from one state into another—not extinction.

That this is the meaning of the phrase when used in this passage by our Lord is evident when we notice that it is employed in giving the application of the parable. When He cursed the barren fig-tree and it withered up from the roots He said unto it, "No more:

let fruit spring from thee until the remotest age." Without question this was a symbol of the nation's impending doom. On seeing the fig-tree wither up, the disciples became curious, drew near and asked Him, "How did the fig-tree immediately wither away? He evaded the full meaning of their question because at that moment they were unable to perceive the complete answer, but He gave them a beautiful lesson on the subject of believing prayer. But when they are alone with Him, having withdrawn from the temple and uttered the nation's doom, He says unto them, "*Now* from the fig-tree learn her parable." Methinks this was the very fig-tree He had cursed the day before, and now, sitting under its shadow, by the secret exercise of His power, He sees it budding again. In this He illustrates a prophecy of the nation's restoration to her national glory. "When the fig-tree's branch is now tender," says the Master, and putteth forth leaves ye know that summer is nigh, even so when ye see all these things know ye that He is nigh, even at the doors." Here is a marked transition, even a passing away from death into life, from mere profession into profound reality, from barrenness into fruitfulness, and from the cold, slippery winter season into the bright, warm summer clime. Such is the passing away that awaits the Jewish nation, the signs of which already appear. The national fig-tree, which was cursed in 70 AD.,

and has been withering down to the roots ever since, is now putting forth tokens of new national life, which indicate that her summer is nigh, even at the door. The fact that the nations of the earth are now more friendly to the Jew than ever before in this dispensation, that the Jew is being allowed high places in the political world, all indicate that the period of tribulation for the nation is about ended. In Jerusalem alone there are now 40,000 Jews, out of a population of some 60,000, and the number is increasing rapidly. Let the Jew look up for his redemption draweth nigh.

The glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ will follow upon the cessation of the great tribulation. But immediately upon the termination of the Jewish tribulation and before the Lord personally appears in glory, there will be two other signs which will directly usher in the coming of the King. One of these signs will be in heaven and the other on the earth, and, as it seems to me, they will co-exist. In Luke they are thus stated, "And there shall be signs in sun, in moon and in stars; and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity, for the roaring of the sea and the billows; men fainting for fear of the expectation of the things that are coming upon the world."

The signs in sun, moon and stars will be, according to Matthew, the obscuring of their light. This will bring distress to the nations upon the earth. Some have questioned

whether all of this may be figurative of the downfall of rulers and powers in the political world, but there is absolutely nothing to justify such an interpretation. This whole prophetic discourse up to this point is barren of figure and is to be taken as literally as history. Similar signs in the heavenly world appeared in the past and each of them marked a crisis in the Jewish history. A thick darkness preceded the exodus from Egypt and heralded the final judgment. A darkness of three hours at mid-day over all the land of Palestine, veiled the cross on which hung Israel's rejected Messiah. Without the desire of substantiating the truth of the Saviour's prophecy, Josephus assures us that for five years before the final overthrow of the city, there were many celestial signs of the coming judgment. If we can believe that the sun withheld its shining when the Messiah hung under judgment for sin before the world, why not believe that the sun will again withhold its shining when He comes in judgment upon the world. This prophecy will be as literally fulfilled as all the others have been, and when these signs appear, be patient, brethren, for it is the dawning of the eternal morning.

### III.

## The Time of His Coming

"Tell us," said the disciples, "at what time shall these things be?" There are those who claim that our Lord completely ignored this part of the disciples' inquiry. I do not think so. It is true that He answered them that the hour, day and season cannot be known. The fact of the Lord's coming is certain, but the time, as far as the date is concerned, is kept a secret by the Father. None of the angels know the date, nay, not even the Son Himself. "But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only." This settles the question as to the authority of those who try to fix dates for the end of this age. Nor are calculations, from data given in Daniel, as to the exact time of our Lord's return to be trusted. It is a part of God's purpose and method in dealing with man to keep them in uncertainty on this question. In Acts 1:7 we read, "And He said unto them it is not given unto you to know the times or the season, which the Father hath put in His own power." Let us leave the exact time where God hath placed it, namely in His own power. God does not desire us to know when Christ shall come again but He does long that we should be ready when He shall appear a second time.

But though the day and the hour cannot be known, yet the *days* may be. The time in which the Saviour will appear may be described by their moral character. Accordingly the Master proceeded to describes those times. The days of His coming in their moral character will be like those days which immediately preceded the Noachian flood. "And as were the days of Noah, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." What, then, will be the moral character of the time on earth when the Son of Man appears? It will be a time of great unbelief. In the days before the flood. Noah, the preacher of righteousness, proclaimed the coming wrath, but the people with scorn rejected his message. Angels who had fallen from their high estate were abroad in the land while sin covered the earth as the waters cover the sea. The wickedness of man was so great in the earth, then that every imagination of his heart was only evil continually. So great was the sin of unbelief and its consequent wickedness that it repented God that He had made man and grieved Him to His heart. Therefore did He purpose the almost total destruction of the human race. Such will be the moral character of the time when the Son of Man comes again. Again, the days of the Son of Man will be a time when men will be immersed in wordly pleasures. In the days before the flood men and women gave themselves over to eating and drinking and marrying and giving in

marriage. Had they accepted the message of judgment they would have fasted and wept. Such also was the condition of the time just before Jerusalem was besieged and taken. They were also marrying and giving in marriage until the very day that Noah entered the ark. This implies the expectation of the continuance of things just as they are. These pursuits are not spoken of as evil in themselves as they, in the life of man, practically give the lie to the warnings of God.

This time will also be a period in which men are absorbed in their usual occupations. Two will be reaping in the field, the one shall be taken and other left, two slaves will be grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken and the other left. Likewise as it came to pass in the days of Lot, they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded, but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all; after the same manner shall it be in the days that the Son of Man is revealed. These occupations are lawful in themselves, but the fault will be, as it was then, that men will have set their hearts upon them inordinately so that they will have no heart to prepare themselves in Christ against the coming judgments. Even to-day men are lovers of pleasure and of business more than they are lovers of God. In such a condition will the Lord find them when He comes again.

There will, in this time, also be a great

apostacy from the faith, as it was once for all delivered to the saints. "And many false prophets shall arise and shall lead many astray. And because iniquity (the iniquity of false teaching and doctrine) shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." At that time the Lord will not only find the poor oppressed, labor ground down by capital and the Church in the embrace of a godless world, but He will find Christians, His own beloved children, preachers and professors of theology, fallen and falling from the faith into error that is most damning. If the apostacy from the faith and vital godliness be a sign of the Lord's coming, the hour of the second advent is not far distant.

The time of His coming will be that hour when He is the least expected. "When shall these things be?" "For in such an hour as ye *think* not, the Son of Man cometh," is His answer. The second coming will not be like the sun rising, which is expected and gradual, but like the lightning flash, which is sudden and surprising. The thief's coming is generally sudden, surprising, destructive and vehement. When the flood came it found men unprepared and ignorant, and took them all away. "They knew not until the flood came" because they refused to credit the divine prediction of the coming wrath. There are many to-day who are willingly ignorant of these great truths of the future because they will not believe the testimony given and through their unbelief they are as unprepared as though they had never heard. To these the Lord's coming is as unexpected as the flood was to the people in Noah's day.

## IV.

### Readiness for His Coming

In the third place, let us consider what is the proper conduct of the believer in view of the Lord's coming. From chapter 24, verse 44, to chapter 25 and verse 30, the Master gives Himself to the presentation of this phase of His subject. He instructs the disciples and us not only in the signs and times of His coming, but He also teaches us how to be ready when He does come. He introduces this phase of His theme by using an illustration of the householder and thief. Being ignorant of the exact time when the robber would come, the householder slept, and though he had the earnest desire to protect his property, he was unable to do so. He woke in the morning and found Himself robbed. But suppose notice had been given the householder of the time of the thief's intended visit, then he would have armed himself and kept watch, and being prepared, would have suffered no loss. "Such," says our Lord, "is the position you, My disciples, occupy. You have the advantage over the householder in that you have been advised that I am coming suddenly and secretly. You will therefore be inexcusable if you are not ready." Can temporal interests keep a man awake? Shall not eternal interests at stake urge the Christian to watchful-

ness? "Therefore," He says, "be ye also ready." But how may one be ready and watchful for the Lord's coming? This is the great question. Let the Lord Himself give answer in this part of the discourse.

The Christian is ready and watchful for His Lord's coming when he is engaged in the quiet and constant discharge of appointed tasks, (Matt. 24:54-51.) This is set before us by a pair of contrasted parabolic pictures. There are two servants, who by their Lord, have been set over the household, to give the children food in the appointed season. The one is faithful to his Lord during His absence, and wise in the exercise of his duty toward all his inferior servants. The other is evil and says in his heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming," and he becomes cruel to his fellow-servants and eats and drinks with the drunken. The first servant was ready and watchful for his Lord's coming because he was found doing the duties which the Lord has given him to discharge. The other servant is taken by surprise and judgment, because he is found eating and drinking with the drunken. That was a wise judge, who, when sudden darkness came on, and people thought the end of the world had come, said, "Bring lights and let us go on with the case." We cannot be better employed if the end has come, than in doing our duty.

Again, let me say, that the Christian is ready, and watchful when he keeps ever be-

fore him the vivid conviction of his Lord's certain advent, and maintains an attitude of hope and expectancy for His coming. Those who do not desire, pray for and eagerly expect the Lord's re-appearance upon earth are not ready. This is brought out in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13.) In this picture the Saviour is looking forward into the future of the kingdom. As in the previous parable the time is night, when it is natural for a man to be asleep or drunken. There is a marriage and the banquet is already spread. According to the custom of the time a number go forth to meet and welcome the Bridegroom. In this case the reception committee were virgins, five of whom were wise and five foolish. These two classes represent the followers of Christ. They were all virgins, which is symbolic of purity, and they were all looking eagerly and joyfully for the coming of their Lord. They all had light, and a certain measure of oil. The difference between them was essential. The one had the source of light and the other had not. The foolish had a temporary supply, and the wise had their vessels together with their lamps, filled with oil, and so possessed a permanent provision. They all prepared for the coming of the bridegroom and went forth to meet him. Then they are ready for His advent. But in their long night vigil they grow weary, drowsy and then fall into slumber and sleep. While asleep there was indifference, inactivity and insensi-

bility and no looking for the bridegroom, and perhaps wild fancy was holding high carnival in their brain. While they slept they were not ready, for the simple reason that their minds were not in that attitude of expectancy and hope which should characterize those who are watchful for the Lord. "Be ye therefore ready."

Moreover, that Christian is ready and watchful for His Lord, who is engaged in some form of service for Him. This is clearly expressed in the parable of the talents, (Matt. 25:14-30.) The message from the parable of the two household servants is primarily for those who occupy special positions of trust in the Church of God. In the parable of the ten virgins all the saints are included, and the message it contains upon how to wait for the absent Lord, is for all the disciples. In the parable of the virgins there is nothing said about service. In this parable of the talents it is all about service. There is the bestowment of certain talents by a man who is about to take his journey into a far country. These talents are wisely distributed according to the particular ability of each servant. The Master departs into the foreign country and forthwith two of the servants, with true, intelligent love for Him, proceed to invest their Lord's money, that at His coming they may be able to present a good balance-sheet. The third servant, hating and falsely judging his master, went away and hid his Lord's money in

the earth. He represents that class, who, because they have not the great tasks to perform, refuse to do the little ones. He would not invest his Lord's money himself and he would not allow others to trade with it for the Master. The Master here represents the Christ, who is now in the far country, the servants representing the believers on Him, of all grades of ability, while the goods or "talents" illustrate everything in our national, spiritual and providential conditions which the ascended Christ has given us for service and usefulness. The Lord has put us each in the very best position to accomplish our work for Him. The talents may consist in natural or acquired ability, social influence, financial resources or position in this world, which is ours in connection with life. The Lord has given us these that we may invest them for Him during his absence. The Christian who is thus using his talents for Christ is in the highest form of Christian service, and is ready and watchful, and, when the Lord returns, will be rewarded accordingly. "In like manner, be ye also ready."

## V.

### The Event Itself

The Saviour concludes His Olivet prophecy by giving the disciples a vivid and sublime picture of His coming and the final judgment as it respects the nations of the earth, (Matt. 25:31-46). This vision is the climax of the Lord's teaching on the subject and is unsurpassed for its magnificent power and pathos. It bears the marks of perfection whether we consider it from the standpoint of the speaker's divinity or from the point of view of His humanity. It is divine in its simplicity and yet most human in its tenderness. Let us learn from this parable what the final judgment of the nations will be.

We note that when the final judgment of the nations is set, Christ Himself in His divine humanity will be the judge upon the throne. He is the man in the glory now and will be the man of the glory when He is revealed a second time (see John 5:27; Acts 17:31). In His coming for judgment of the nations, His appearance will be most glorious, for He will be manifested in the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, and will be attended by all the angelic host. We learn also that the final judgment of the nations will be universal. "Before Him shall be gathered all the nations." This is in perfect accord

with many other passages, (John 5:27, 28; Rev. 20:12, 13; Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 1:7). The final judgment of the nations will be no partial one. Moreover in the final judgment of the nations there will be a separation. Easily, quickly and unerringly; the kingly Judge will "separate" them one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, placing the goats on the left hand and the sheep on the right. There are sheep and goat individuals as well as sheep and goat nations. What partings and surprises there will be! Oh! God save the people!

But we also learn from this sublime vision the basis upon which the judgment will be given. Those on the left hand are goats; those on the right hand are sheep. There is a difference of *nature*. Those on the left are the evil, those on the right are the justified. There is a difference of *character*. Those on the left are the "cursed" of God; those on the right are the "blessed of the Father." There is a difference of *attitude* toward Jehovah. Those on the left go away into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; those on the right enter into the kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the world. There is a difference of *destiny*. All these differences you will observe, will be occasioned, then, by the difference of relation sustained to Jesus Christ now. Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto Me." And "Inas-

much as ye did it unto one of these My brethren, even these least, ye did it unto Me." Our treatment of the Lord's brethren here is our treatment of Him.

Finally, this vision brings before us the solemn truth of Christ's exhaustive knowledge of all those who then stand before Him for judgment. He perceived the nature, habits and innermost secrets of each class here. Each individual is made to see his own past life just as the King described it to him. Nothing is hid now that shall not be made manifest then, nor anything kept secret now that shall not come into light then. "Wherefore," says the apostle, "judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the very secrets of the heart and then shall each man have his praise from God."

A young man decoyed his companion into the forest and there, in cold blood, murdered and robbed him. Then he built a fire and burned the body of his victim to ashes. Afterward he dug a grave and buried deep in the earth the charred remains. He then left the spot, thinking that no other human being knew anything about his crime. In a few days the young man was reported missing, and for weeks search was made for him, but without success. After two years time suspicion was thrown around the young man who did the deed. He was apprehended and through a competent jury he was charged

with the deed and sent forward for trial. In a few days after the pronouncement of the jury a brilliant lawyer called to see the prisoner and offered gratuitously to defend him.

The young man protested his innocence, thanked the lawyer for his kindness and refused to have an advocate. The lawyer called again and again, until finally the prisoner became angry and ordered his would-be advocate from the cell, whereupon the lawyer arose and looking the young man in the face said, "Sir, you are guilty! I saw you commit the deed. I am the only man living that witnessed the crime. If you will give me your case and allow me to defend you I promise you a sure and speedy acquittal." But again, the prisoner protested his innocence and positively refused to give the lawyer his case. The lawyer went out for the last time. The trial came on. But in the meantime that brilliant lawyer was appointed to the position of judge and it became his duty to preside over that case. The prisoner was brought into the court. The judge took his seat and the court rose to do him honor. For a moment the prisoner fixed his eyes on the throne, and when he realized who the judge was his blood almost congealed in his veins and with a shriek that thrilled the court, he cried, "My God! I am guilty! The judge saw me commit the crime." He stood self-condemned. He would not have him as his advocate, who would give him life and free-

dom, and now he must have him as his judge, to pronounce the sentence of death. The one before whom the nations of the earth will stand, then, is the one before whom "All things are naked and open now," and the one with whom we will all have to do.

"Brothers, this Lord Jesus  
Shall return again  
With His Father's glory,  
With His angel-train;  
For all wreaths of empire  
Meet upon His brow,  
And our hearts confess Him  
King of glory now. Amen."

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