

THE OBJECT OF OUR LORD'S RETURN.

DISCOURSE I.

[At the request of some of the readers, we will publish reports of six discourses delivered by the editor in Allegheny City in 1878, published at that time in some of the public prints. The edition of "OUTLINES OF SERMONS" published some time ago is exhausted. To those whom we have been obliged to refuse we suggest, that this series may meet the approval of some of you and to some extent serve your purpose. Below is the first one of the series.]

Why does the Lord return? We do not ask if he will return, for as every Christian student of the Bible well knows that is one of the central themes of the Apostles' teaching – the coming of our Lord and our gathering together unto Him. It was repeatedly used by Jesus to comfort the disciples – "I will come again and receive you unto myself."

But while all are agreed as to the fact – the manner and the object are subjects upon which there is great difference of view. As we are now dealing with the latter – the object – let us examine the various leading views on the subject, of which there are six. Four of these views make the coming of Christ "a coming" in name only – devoid of a personal advent. The other two views hold that the coming is a personal presence, but differ regarding its object, etc.

First – Among the former, we find the chief to be, that death is the coming of Christ. The holders of this view scarcely know why they think so. Simply, they have that idea. This is the most unscriptural of all views, for while not a single text supports it, there are hundreds to contradict such a thought. The church is

everywhere taught to look for and "love His appearing," while death is pronounced an enemy. "The last enemy which shall be destroyed is death." "For this purpose Christ was manifested that He might destroy death." Substitute the second coming of Christ for the word death in this passage, and what would you have?

A second view is – That the power manifested on the day of Pentecost evinced Christ's return as having taken place, and to be a coming in spiritual power and energy to His people. Such forget that Jesus characterized this as the coming of another, consequently not of himself, when he said, "I will pray the Father, and He shall send you another comforter, even the Spirit of Truth." There is a sense in which the Spirit represented Christ during his absence. For instance Jesus declared that he would be present with the twos and threes gathered in His name (Matt. 18:20). This He has done by the Spirit; comforting those who came seeking His blessing. In the same spiritual sense He has abode with His church all the way down; as he said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." Matt. 28:20. Yet, personally, he was to be absent until the end of the age, as he taught.

A third view is – That Christ came at the destruction of Jerusalem, because Jesus mentions His coming in the same conversation in which He refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. Overlooking the fact that three distinct questions are asked by the disciples, (Matt. 24:3), which received separate answers. Jesus gave them to understand that His coming was not imminent; there would be wars, etc., but the end is not yet. He said, "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom," (Matt. 24:7). This was not fulfilled before the fall of Jerusalem, for until that time and for long after the Romans held the nations in the quiet and peace of servitude. Again, he says, "These good tidings of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole inhabited earth (NEW

VERSION) for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come." This has only been fulfilled during the last few years. America, Australia and some other large portions of the world were probably unknown to the early church. Then He mentioned certain signs and said, "When YE see ALL these things then know that it is nigh, even at the door." This generation (the one seeing these signs) shall not pass away until all these things are fulfilled. The generation then living did not see all those signs.

Further, John the Revelator, who wrote some 26 years after the destruction of Jerusalem, was ignorant of Christ's having come, and Jesus himself also, for while one says, "Behold! I come quickly," the other answered, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22:20).

A fourth view is – That Christ comes in conversion of sinners; so continually coming, more and more. This cannot be what Jesus referred to when He said, "All the tribes of the earth shall mourn and wail because of him when they see him coming." Do they mourn and wail when a sinner is converted? The chief objection to the four views just mentioned is that the real personal coming is ignored. Of the two classes who hold to a personal coming of our Lord, one is called Pre-millenarian [before the Millennium], and the other Post-millenarian [after the Millennium].

Of the latter class are most of so-called orthodox Christians. They believe that he has been coming all the way down in the growth of the church and the advancement of science and civilization, but that he will also come personally to crown his triumphant church, when she shall have put down all opposing authority and power; and that he, through her efforts, will put all enemies under her feet. Others, who claim only a personal coming, believe, in about the same order of events; that through the

missionary labors of the church the world will be converted and thus usher in the millennial age, at the close of which the Lord will come, wind up earthly affairs, reward believers and condemn sinners. They have much scripture which, if taken disconnectedly, seems to favor this view. But even these we believe, when God's word and plan are looked at as a whole, will be found to favor the view we are advancing, viz: That Christ comes before the conversion of the world; that the church is now being tried, and that the reward promised the overcomers is: that they shall share in this reign: – "To him that overcometh will I give to sit with me in my throne." (Rev. 3:21.) "And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." (Rev. 20:4). "Ye which have followed me," etc. (Matt. 19:28). **[R531 : page 7]** "If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with him." (2 Tim. 2:12).

There are two texts in particular used by our Post-millennial brethren to which we would refer. One is, "This gospel must first be preached in all the world for a witness. Then shall the end come." They claim this to mean that the gospel will convert the world before the end of the gospel age. We, Pre-millennial believers, claim that witnessing to the world does not mean converting the world, that the object of the present witnessing is principally "To take out a people for His name," the church, who at Christ's coming are united to Him and receive His name. (Rev. 3:12.) The other text is – "Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." The thought generally gathered from this Scripture is, that in heaven God has a throne on which He sits continually, and then when "Christ sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High," He sat down also upon the same throne. This is a misconception. The throne of God as referred to is not an ivory or golden seat, but refers to His supreme authority and rulership, for "Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool," and Paul says, "God hath highly exalted Him (Christ) and given Him a name

above every name," etc. He has given Him authority above every other, next to the Father. If Christ sits upon a material throne until His enemies are made His footstool, (all subdued) then of course He could not come until the Millennial reign was fully inaugurated. But if it means the exalting to power, it [R532 : page 7] would not interfere with His coming and subduing all things unto Himself."

"Right hand" signifies the chief place – position of excellence or favor. And the words of Jesus to Pilate agree with this thought: "Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14:62). He will be on the right hand when coming and remain at the right hand during the millennial age.

These two last named views demand a thorough examination. There are able arguments possible on both sides; yet both are not true. We propose, therefore, to take a glance at the plan of God for saving the world, believing that in so doing we shall find the relation and bearing of both the first and the second comings, and know where to locate the latter.

First, then: Has God a plan? All must agree that He has; although, almost all are inclined to think and talk of His dealings as though He were dealing by a rule of chance, and governed entirely by circumstances. No; He that would condemn a man for building a tower without first counting the cost, shall He build and people a universe without matured plans and due forethought? No, brethren, "known unto the Lord are all His ways from the beginning." God has a plan or purpose, and we know that "all His purposes shall be accomplished." But how shall we find that plan? It is revealed to us in God's Word. "Search the Scriptures," as Paul says. "Compare Scripture with Scripture," for

"God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain."

We are too much inclined to ask What does my church say?, about any question, instead of "What saith the Scriptures? Too much theology is studied and the Bible not enough. With the thought, then, that "The Scriptures are able to make us wise," that the "Testimonies of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple" (teachable), and that "all Scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished," let us study.

Notice first that the Scriptures divide human history into three great successive periods, called "The world that was," (the age ending with the flood), "The present evil world," (the age commencing at the flood and ending with the coming of Christ a second time), and lastly, "The world to come," (the age commencing with the second coming of Christ) the endless age, or "World without end." This arrangement is not mere fancy, but is strictly scriptural. A proper understanding of these ages enables us to "rightly divide the word of truth," and it seems impossible to understand his plan without first recognizing them.

Peter mentions all of them. (2 Pet. 3:6,7,12.) Paul speaks of "the present evil world, and of the world to come." Jesus also distinguished between them, and calls the devil the prince of this world, (John 14:30), and promised reward to His faithful followers "in the world [or order of things] to come, etc.

While Christ has all power in heaven and earth, for wise purposes, He has not heretofore made use of it, permitting evil to reign and measurably control the world, and the devil to be "prince of this world," or order of things. But the time is promised when "He shall take to Himself His great power and reign," exalting His church and giving her "power over the nations," so that instead of as now, being "subject to the powers that be," she shall "rule the nations."

But when will He thus assume control? When the Gospel church, "His body" – Ecclesia – is complete, evil now being permitted, for the trial of faith, and the perfecting of the saints. This time is synchronous with the sounding of the "seventh trumpet." (Rev. 11:15.) Here the mystery (church) of God is finished – and "the kingdoms of this world" become the kingdoms of our Lord and His anointed (church). Now, we inquire, is this transfer of authority from Satan to Christ caused by the conversion of the nations to Christ through preaching the Gospel? We answer, no; at this time the nations are not converted. See the eighteenth verse: "And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come." If converted, they would not thus be hostile, neither would God's wrath come upon them. On the contrary, God teaches in many Scriptures that a great time of trouble will come upon the nations. "Come, behold the desolations which the Lord hath made in the earth; He maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth." (Psa. 46:8-10). This is the way God tells us He will make wars to cease. The next clause informs us that then He "Will be exalted among the heathen and in all the earth." This chastisement of nations is designed for their good, and is as necessary to them as chastisement to the children of God now, and it will have this effect; for "When the judgments of the Lord are abroad in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. (Isa. 26:9). It is in this new dispensation that, with Evil or Satan bound, the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth as the waters do the sea." The conversion of the world, instead of being due now, while the devil is "prince of this world," will, David says, be "When the kingdom is the Lord's and He is the Governor among the nations, (then) all the ends of the world shall remember, and turn to the Lord, and the kingdoms of the nations shall come and worship before Him." (Ps. 22:27-28).

"The present evil world" contains three separate ages; the Patriarchal age, lasting from the flood to the death of Jacob; the

Jewish age, lasting from the death of Jacob until the death of Christ – when He gave them up, wept over them, and said: "Your house is left unto you desolate." (Matt. 23:38.) The Gospel age, lasting from Christ's baptism and anointing until the full company of "the church of the first born" is complete, and He comes – the "sounding of the seventh trumpet, the resurrection and reward of saints and prophets." (Rev. 11:16.)

We know not how many ages may be in "The World to Come," but that there is more than one we are assured, for Paul speaks of "The ages to come." (Eph. 2:7.) The first of these alone is dealt with in Scripture – the millennial age, during which the saints shall live and reign with Christ a thousand years. (Rev. 20:4).

Having gotten an outline, let us look more particularly at God's doings and sayings; and now, I will astonish you, doubtless, until you reflect, when I say that, according to His word, God is not now trying to convert the world, nor has He been during past ages. What has He been doing? "Taking out a people – Church – for His name." Don't think this wonderful, as it is only putting in a striking form what all Calvinists believe, among whom are Baptists, Presbyterians and others, viz: That God is now electing – or choosing His Church out of the world. Yes, and all our brethren who believe in free grace must admit that if "all His purposes shall be accomplished," and "God's word shall prosper in the thing whereto it was sent"; if these Scriptures are true God did not purpose the conversion of the world during the past 6,000 years, else it would be accomplished. Neither did He send His Word to convert the world up to the present time, else it did not prosper in the thing whereto He sent it. These two views have been dividing points in the churches for centuries, viz: Election and Free Grace.

We believe the Scripture to teach both, but that it requires the observance of "Heaven's first law," order, to rightly divide the Word of truth on this subject.

There is no scriptural account of God's giving mankind any law, nor but very little light of revelation during the age preceding the deluge. One promise shines out: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head"; but even this required future revelation to be comprehended. God had, however, a few faithful servants, some of the patriarchs, who had light above the masses; these shone as lamps in a dark way.

The Patriarchal age had increase of light. It was now revealed that this seed was not only to crush evil (the serpent) but to "bless all the families of earth." Still God's church was represented by but one man at a time – Noah, Abraham, Isaac, etc.

These Patriarchs were elected or chosen. "God called Abraham, and said," etc. Abraham and his kin was called. His parents were idolaters. He had many sons and daughters, but only one son was chosen. "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." "Of Isaac's two sons, only one was chosen, "as it is written (says Paul, Rom. 8:11 and 12), Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (loved less). God chose before they were born, "That the purpose of God according to election might stand." Now, remember, I do not say that God elected one to go to heaven and the other to hell. Far from it. We will talk of Esau's portion and the non-elect on a future occasion.

At Jacob's death another advance step in God's plan is taken, and typical or fleshly Israel is formed. From this time one man no longer represents God in the world; but a nation; all the sons of Jacob and their posterity. And now we have an elect nation or church, and God gives all His special blessings to it. Other and larger nations – Egypt, Chaldea, &c. – are passed by; left without

light and without knowledge, while these are given to Israel. "What advantage then hath a Jew? Much every way, chiefly because to them was committed the oracles (laws and testimonies) of God." This is Paul's statement. (Rom. 3:2). God speaking to them says: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." (Amos 3:2). This people alone was recognized, and this continued until Christ came, [R533 : page 7] and after that – until for lack of faith they were given up and their house left desolate.

During Christ's ministry he preached to them and would not suffer His disciples to go to any others, saying as he sent them out, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not." Why so, Lord? "I am not sent save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." All His time was devoted to them until death, and here was his first and grandest gift, not for Israel only, but for all; for Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man. (Heb. 2:9). And now, also, in the Gospel age, a certain sort of election obtains. Some parts of the world are more favored than others with the Gospel (which is free to all who hear). Contrast yourself with your privileges and knowledge with yonder heathen man who never yet heard the call.

When this called-out company (called to be the "sons of God," "heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord" – "our high calling") is complete, then the plan of God for the world's salvation is only beginning. Not until then can THE SEED "bruise the serpent's head" and bless all the families of the earth. For the seed is not Jesus, the head alone, but the church also, which is His body, as Paul informs us (Gal. 3:29), "Which seed is Christ; and if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." The same company are to bruise the serpent. (Rom. 16:20.) "The very God of Peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

The Gospel age makes ready the chaste virgin (church) for the coming bridegroom. In due time the bridegroom comes and they that are ready are united. The second Adam and the second Eve become one, the new creation and the glorious work of elevating mankind in the world begins. The river of living waters will flow from the New Jerusalem – the symbol of the glorified church (Rev. 22:1-3). Then the conversion of the world will be due. The church, now the "espoused virgin," will then be "the Bride, the Lamb's wife," and, with her Lord, she shall share in ruling, teaching and restoring mankind from the curse. Then shall the Spirit and the Bride say, come! and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." (Rev. 22:17). What is now a "well of water in you," will then be a bountiful river – enough for all. Thus seen, the object of the Lord's return is to exalt and glorify his Bride – the elect church – and with and through her to "bless all the families of the earth."
