

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF ST. PETER

"The Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." – 2 Peter 3:10.

WHILE those of our number who have been for some time familiar with Present Truth well know the presentations which St. Peter gives in this general letter to the Church, it is well that we frequently have our pure minds stirred up by way of remembrance concerning these important things, "lest at any time we should let them slip." – 2 Peter 3:1,2; Hebrews 2:1.

In this Epistle the Apostle is urging upon the whole Church the importance of developing the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Then he reminds them of the vision of the coming Kingdom which he himself and St. James and St. John saw in the holy mount. He points out the need that careful attention be given to the study of prophecy. He warns them of the false teachers who will be manifested among them. He reminds them of the condemnation and overthrow that came to the angels who turned from obedience to God, of the catastrophe that befell Sodom and Gomorrah because of their corruption, of the destruction of the ungodly in the great Deluge, of the perverse and wicked course of Balaam the prophet, and its consequences. Then he charges that some of them were following his course, and next he discusses the fact that things will not always continue as they have been; that evil shall not always triumph; but that a great change impends, which will be the introduction of a new feature of the Divine Plan; namely, the establishment of God's Kingdom upon earth.

St. Peter indicates that this great change will come very suddenly – a radical change such as came in the days of Noah, a very

sudden catastrophe, the coming of which will be scoffed at by those having a form of godliness without its power. (2 Peter 3:3,4.) This catastrophe he pictures as a great conflagration. The "heavens" will take fire and be consumed. Then the "earth" will take fire and be burned up. The "elements" will all dissolve with the fervency of the heat.

THE FIRE A NEEDFUL PREPARATION FOR THE KINGDOM

In reading this prophecy the majority of Christian people seem to think that there will be a literal burning up of the material heavens and earth. But, as we have pointed out for many years, we think that there is a more logical explanation of this prophecy, and that its fulfilment has already begun. This great Time of Trouble, which follows closely the Second Coming of Christ, will be an experience the like of which never was since there was a nation. (Daniel 12:1.) In one figure the Scriptures liken it to a great tidal wave, carrying the mountains into the midst of the sea. (Psalm 46.) This pictures the governments of earth as being overwhelmed, swallowed up, by the raging sea of human passion when the masses become fully aroused. In another figure it is depicted as a mighty "whirlwind" sweeping everything before it. In a third figure it is compared to the letting loose of the "four winds of the earth," "the four winds of the heavens"; in still another picture it is a great "fire." (Isaiah 66:15; Jeremiah 4:13; 23:19,20; 30:23,24; 1 Kings 19:11,12; Revelation 7:1-3; Daniel 7:2; Zephaniah 3:8; etc.) The whole earth is to be devoured by the fire of God's jealousy, the fire of God's righteous anger. The fire of God's anger no more means a literal fire than does the expression a fiery horse. It is the fire of God's wrath against sin that is being manifested at this time and will continue.

We are to remember that the Second Coming of our Lord is to bring a time of refreshing and of restitution to all mankind (Acts

3:19-21); and we must interpret these [R5864 : page 71] symbols denoting trouble in harmony with this Scriptural declaration. The word "heavens" is a figurative term for the present religious institutions – ecclesiasticism. The fire will extend to the social structure, the social order of things. The social, political, financial and ecclesiastical systems together make up our present order. The ecclesiastical systems will, we believe, go into destruction first, according to the Bible. The fire will next affect the social and industrial organization – merchandise, capital and labor, society, etc. It will devour the capitalistic elements, the banking elements, the political elements, the religious elements, the industrial elements. All these will be "melted," "dissolved" – they will separate, part company, fail to keep together, and will be swept away.

If this great cataclysm of trouble were all we had to which to look forward, we would think it the course of wisdom to say nothing about it. We would say, Do not think about it or speak of it; for it will be bad enough when it comes. But when the Bible tells us that the great trouble is designed merely to sweep away these outgrown religious systems, social systems, political systems, etc., and that God will on the wreck of all these things establish the Kingdom of Messiah for the world's blessing, then we are glad of the trouble, and see that it is the necessary thing. This knowledge would be a great comfort and relief of mind to many bewildered ones who see the trouble coming on with increasing momentum, yet who cannot see the ultimate good to result, who feel that revolution and anarchy are confronting the entire world, but see not the golden lining to the black clouds of trouble.

The principle of disintegration and reconstruction is constantly operating in nature. The rocks are disintegrating; and this process keeps the soil enriched and promotes vegetable growth. Animal and vegetable organisms are continually disintegrating, and furnishing elements for new formations, new organisms. There will have to be a thorough breaking up of the fallow ground of men's hearts, and a

thorough disintegration of present arrangements before the seed of Truth can be planted that will bring forth the fruitage of the New Dispensation. During this Gospel Age God has been guiding those who have already been disintegrated, and who are yielding themselves to His reconstructive processes. The world will need this great Time of Trouble. They are not in the attitude of the class who are now seeking God and endeavoring to do His will. If we had the power to shield any of our worldly friends from this trouble, we believe that by so shielding them we would be doing them a real injury instead of good.

PROPER ATTITUDE OF THE SAINTS

God's dealings with the world in this time will be the work of a skillful surgeon, who wounds to heal, whose knife must go down to the depths of the abscess that would otherwise take the life of the patient. The Lord intimates that during this Time of Trouble those who shall seek righteousness and meekness may have at least a measure of protection granted them. (Zephaniah 2:2,3.) But as for those who are not seeking after righteousness and meekness, it will be better for them to go through the trouble, in order to prepare them for the great blessing to come later. The Apostle's argument is that the present order of things is not satisfactory to anybody who has the right attitude of heart.

The long foretold Time of Trouble, such as never was [**R5864 : page 72**] and never will be again (Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:21,22), has begun. Daily the heat of human passion is growing more intense. In view of this approaching dissolution, now at the very door, what should be our attitude of heart? What should be the course of those who are prospective citizens of the great Government about to be established, which will control the affairs of earth under the headship of Christ Jesus, earth's rightful King? We should remember that in order to become of the Kingdom class which is to have the rulership of earth for a thousand years, we must be separate

from the aims, ambitions and policy of the present order. One of the essentials is that we recognize the vast difference between the present order of things and the New Order now at hand, and that we take our stand accordingly. In the meantime, we should do good unto all men as we have opportunity, especially to the Household of Faith, our brethren in Christ.

As loyal children of the Great King of the Universe, who is now about to inaugurate His Kingdom in the hands of His Son, we pray, "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in Heaven." We rejoice in the evidences which we see all about us that our prayers for this Kingdom are now to be answered. Meantime we must live in harmony with this prayer. As St. Peter reminds us, "What manner of persons ought we to be," in all holiness of life, in separateness from the world! The Apostle puts this solemn question right home to us. It is applicable now as never before.

Let us lay these precious words to heart; for we stand in the very presence of the Great Judge of all the earth. These exhortations and encouragements, which were primarily addressed to the Church who lived over eighteen hundred years ago, and which have served a purpose of good all along down this Gospel Age, are especially meant by the Spirit for those of the Church who are living in this very Day of God. How favored are these above all the people of the world and above the masses of professed followers of Christ, who have not this knowledge!

The Apostle's words near the close of his Epistle, should be of special comfort and cheer to us now, in this brief waiting time since the close of Gentile Times. He says, "And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." (2 Peter 3:15.) How glad of this little extended time some of the Lord's dear ones are, who have come into the knowledge of Present Truth and consecrated themselves to God since October 1914! And how glad are many of Christ's followers who have longer known of these precious truths,

that the Lord has mercifully granted them a little further time to make their calling and election sure! Perhaps some of these were not ready when the Gentile Times closed.

"Wherefore, brethren, seeing that ye look for these things [the overthrow of the existing order and the establishment of the glorious Kingdom of God's dear Son], ***be diligent*** that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless"; for our Lord "is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy....Amen." – 2 Peter 3:14; Jude 24,25.

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