

HOW THE GREAT APOSTASY WILL BE OVERRULED

"They received not the love of the Truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be judged who believed not the Truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

– 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 Rev. Ver.

THE Bible Helps of our day are so numerous and accessible, and the words in the original Scriptures translated Hell, so clearly shown in these Helps, that there is no reason why an honest student of the Word of God may not see clearly what the Bible teaches on this subject. We are not to lay upon our God the responsibility for the erroneous thought on the subject of future punishment; for He is not the Author of sin or darkness or error in any form. All His work is perfect; He is "righteous altogether," His name is LOVE. Such being the case He would never create any being to torture it forever. Nor does the responsibility for doctrinal error rest entirely upon humanity, who have no doubt been more ignorant than wilful in respect to this error of doctrine, though there seems to have been a measure of wilfulness on the part of mankind.

The Apostle Paul, in the first chapter of Romans, declares that when men knew God, they worshiped Him not as God, and did not wish to retain the knowledge of Him in their minds, but willingly departed from Him. (Romans 1:18-28.) This same Apostle elsewhere assures us that "the god of this world," "the prince of this world," Satan, who fell from his holy estate and became the Adversary of God through unholy ambition, has blinded the minds of mankind. (2 Corinthians 4:4; John 12:31; 14:30.) He is the great Deceiver, of whom the Lord said, "He was a murderer from the beginning [of man's creation] and abode not in the Truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar and the father of it." – John 8:44.

Again the Master declared in Revelation, when telling us about the consummation of the Gospel Age and the inauguration of the Age to follow, that at that time Satan should be bound for a thousand years, that he should deceive the nations no more until the thousand years were finished – thus intimating that prior to that time the people of the world had been deceived by him right along. Satan started his lies very early. His first great lie was told to our Mother Eve, away back in Eden. (Genesis 3:4,5; 2 Corinthians 11:3.) The lie that he told to Mother Eve he has ever since very assiduously propagated; namely, "Ye shall *not* surely die" – God has deceived you; *nobody dies*; what is called death is only the dropping off of the mortal body as of a worn-out dress; merely the passing into another form of life – a more desirable change. But the Bible has all the while been assuring us that death is a *reality*, that death *means* death.

SIN'S RAPID DEVELOPMENT UP TO THE FLOOD

There is an irreconcilable conflict between the words of Satan and the declaration of God. But God has permitted man to a large extent to go his own way, just as St. Paul intimates in Romans, already cited. Mankind did not desire to retain God in their knowledge, so for a time He has permitted them to work all manner of uncleanness. (Romans 1:28-32.) But while He has allowed the world liberty in regard to their own wills, nevertheless He has not abandoned them. From the beginning God has purposed that in due time, after mankind have learned the needed lesson, they shall be delivered from sin and death – "whosoever will." For the time being [R5910 : page 179] He has permitted them to take their choice as to whether they would give heed to the voice of conscience still to some extent remaining in man, whether they would listen to His word of instruction, so far as they were able to know it, or whether they preferred the words of Satan and the promptings of evil. The great majority have followed Satan, the opponent of God.

The Adversary has propagated his falsehoods and deceptions in order to oppose God and righteousness. He succeeded so well from the start that in 1656 years from the creation of our first parents in Eden, many of the holy angels had fallen and had joined him in the debauchery of mankind. (Genesis 6:1-5.) Eventually the world became so full of corruption that God destroyed all of humanity from the face of the earth, including the unlawful progeny of the fallen angels, and began anew the propagation of the human race from Noah and his family, who had remained untainted – "perfect in his generation." – Genesis 6:1-22.

SATAN'S EVIL WORK CONTINUED

But soon Satan again got in his evil work, so that in Abraham's day, only a few centuries later, the whole world was again corrupted by idolatry and sin. Evil spirits – the fallen angels – denied by the Lord after the Deluge the power of materialization in human bodies, continued their deceptions by using human beings as mediums of communication with men, either by developing in them powers of clairvoyance, clairaudience, guiding their hands to write, etc., or by taking actual possession of their bodies and using these as if their own. All this has been done by Satan and the other fallen spirits over whom he made himself prince (Ephesians 2:2; 6:12), in order to prove to **[R5910 : page 180]** mankind that God had deceived them and falsified in His pronouncement of a sentence of *death* upon the father of the human race, to effect as well all his offspring. They wished to make men believe that people who had gone into death were *not dead* – that they had not ceased to be – but were more alive than before.

This gigantic falsehood has greatly hindered mankind from seeing the Truth and the real facts of the case. God has all along been Master of the situation to the fullest extent, but has been permitting Satan and His legions to thus exercise power over the rebellious race that He may ultimately teach a lesson to both men and angels.

Four hundred and twenty-seven years after the great Deluge, God called Abraham, and after testing his loyalty and obedience, made a covenant with him, as a reward for faithfulness, to the effect that in his Seed all the families of the earth should ultimately be blessed. In due time, the descendants of Jacob, Abraham's grandson, were chosen to be the special people of God, under the terms of the Law Covenant. These people were used to picture forth in types God's great Plan for the salvation of all mankind. They were to be a separate people from the other nations of the earth.

Although God established a special Covenant with the nation of Israel, and they promised full obedience to His Law, yet they became, like the nations about them, idolatrous, and sought after wizards, witches, and necromancers, mediums of the fallen spirits. This became so pronounced that God commanded that any amongst them who became such a medium should be put to death. They had agreed to be the people of God, and He had warned them to be on guard against these evil spirits.

In the days of our Lord, these fallen spirits had intruded to such an extent in Israel that many of His miracles were for the healing and deliverance of those afflicted of the Devil, possessed by one or more of these wicked demons, and thus rendered insane. Israel had become to a considerable extent affected by the false doctrines of paganism, this being especially true of certain parties among the ruling class. The Sadducees were infidels, materialists, denying totally the resurrection of the dead and believing in neither angels nor spirits. The mental afflictions and confusion of mind amongst the people seemed more widespread even than were bodily diseases. In the time of our Lord, Grecian philosophy had attained great prominence, notably the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Thus was Satan's great lie, "Thou shalt not surely die," prospered. Like all Gentile nations, Greece had many gods, divinities; and thus were the Greeks worshipers of devils, fallen angels. – Deuteronomy 32:16,17; Psalm 106:34-38; 1 Cor. 10:19,20.

JEWISH NATION UNWORTHY, CALL GOES TO GENTILES

Because of the world-wide prominence of the Greek language, Greek philosophy, "science falsely so-called" (1 Timothy 6:20), had become entrenched in the minds of thinking people generally. This was true to quite a degree even in Palestine. Only to Israel had God sent His Law and given His prophecies. To them He had said, "You only have I known [recognized] of all the families of the earth." (Amos 3:2.) When Jesus came, He said, If you had received the witness of John, you would have been ready to be My disciples. Many of the Jews had merely a form of godliness. They thought God would save them by the Law whether or no. But Jesus told them that they should not boast that they had Abraham for their Father, for God was able even of the stones about them to raise up children to Abraham. He assured them that God would find a worthy Seed of Abraham.

The work of Jesus during His ministry was the starting of this new Seed. Jesus Himself was the Head of this Seed. The special work of the entire Gospel Age has been the calling and preparing of this Spiritual Seed of Abraham. The promise was first to the Jews, but since they did not prove worthy as a nation, God, after taking out the faithful "remnant" from that people, turned to the Gentiles, to take out from them a sufficient number to complete the foreordained 144,000 to comprise this Seed, the Church of Christ, the members of His Body. After the accomplishment of this work, Christ, who would then be present in the world the second time, would again visit the natural seed of Abraham, for their enlightenment and blessing. But this blessing would come to them through the Spiritual Seed of Abraham, the faithful Seed.

Our Lord, in the parable of the Wheat and Tares, shows that of those who would constitute, nominally, the Spiritual Seed, there would likewise be but a faithful "remnant" who would prove worthy

to be exalted to reign with Christ; and that the remainder, like the majority of the natural seed, would lose this great favor. The words of the Apostle Paul have proven true, that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

SATAN SOWED TARES IN THE WHEAT-FIELD

In this parable Jesus showed how after the Apostles had fallen asleep the great Adversary, Satan, would come and sow "tare" seed in God's wheat-field, the Church. This tare seed would spring up and bring forth "tares," imitation "wheat," who would associate with the true Church and count themselves as of the Elect. They would consider themselves as real "wheat," In the parable, the servants are shown as coming to the Master and asking Him whether they should root up the tares from among the wheat. But the Master replied that they should not then do this, lest, in pulling up the tares, they might also root up the wheat. He bade them let both grow together until the time of "Harvest," when He would again be present and would say to the reapers, "Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them into bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into My barn." The field was really a wheat-field always; the tares had no right there.

This indicated a separating work to come in the end of the Gospel Age, in the time called by our Lord the "Harvest." The "field" in the parable, as Jesus said, represented the world, the masses of mankind. This evil seed which Satan sowed in the wheat-field was largely the Greek philosophies. Prior to this time, when the persecutions of Nero and, later, Diocletian, Roman emperors, came upon the growing Church, there was a faithful company of disciples, which had held firmly to the Truth and were loyal to Christ; and they endured much hardness, many of them even unto death by violence.

But later came prosperity and freedom from persecution, and this proved the downfall of many. The Church attracted the attention of the Greek philosophers. They said, "You Christians teach much that is good. Your teacher Jesus was a great man, a great philosopher.

But we also have great philosophers and teachers. We would like to come in with you, but in order to do that we must all be broad-minded; none of us must be narrow. We must each be able to see the great truths of the others. Socrates and Plato and others of our great teachers taught the doctrine of a future life long before Jesus was born."

So the Christians thought it would be fine if all the Gentiles could be united in religion. Thus the majority gradually worked in with the Greek philosophers and fraternized with them. Numbers of the adherents of paganism made a profession of Christianity, being reinforced. [R5910 : page 181] later by many others from the more northern tribes of Europe, these all joining some of their heathen philosophies and theories with Christianity.

GRADUAL RISE OF THE PAPACY

Thus it came about that the poisonous draught was mixed which was poured into the "golden cup" of Truth, and held out to the world by the apostate "Woman," the professed Church of God. And she "made all nations drunk with the wine of her fornication." (Jeremiah 51:6-13; Revelation 17:1-5,15.) As error spread and the spirit of ambition gradually superseded the spirit of humility and loyalty to God, bringing the desire to avoid suffering and to be esteemed of men, the Church, as conditions [R5911 : page 181] favored her advancement, organized herself as the Papal hierarchy. The Bishop of Rome was declared Pope, and claimed to represent our Lord Jesus to the Church and to the world. The Pope sat upon a throne of glory and became an autocrat in power; commanding kings, and ruling as both a spiritual and a temporal prince. The pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul, combined with the idea, also imbibed from paganism, of the torture of the wicked after death, was made the basis of the doctrine of the eternal torture of heretics and of the Purgatorial sufferings after death of practically all Catholics to fit them for Heaven.

These ideas and theories were presented by Dante in his great epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*. According to his presentation, it was written over the gates of the Inferno that all who entered abandoned hope. This place was for those who were to suffer eternal torment. This included all heretics; for no good Catholic entered that abode. Then there was another place – Purgatory – where different punishments were administered for various sins, the process of purgation to vary in time according to the degree of the sin and the masses said for them by their friends on earth and the money paid for their deliverance. Thus the work went on, and the "tares" in the Church were multiplied. People were threatened with eternal torment if they did not go to church, and support the hierarchy; and their infants who died were denied salvation.

It was the claim of the Papacy that the thousand years of Christ's Reign, the Millennium, promised in Scripture to follow Christ's Second Advent, began in the year 800 A.D., under Pope Leo III., who claimed to be the representative of Christ, His Vicegerent, to begin Christ's Reign in His stead. In that year the "Papal states" were ceded to the Church by Emperor Charlemagne. Their "Millennium" ended, it was claimed, in the year 1799, when Napoleon confiscated the territories granted to the Church and took the Pope, Pius VI., a captive to France, where he died. The succeeding freedom from Papal persecution, and the widespread circulation of the Bible in the languages of the people, was declared by the Papal leaders to be the "little season" foretold in Revelation to follow the thousand-year Reign of Christ on earth; and they are hoping that soon they will regain their former power and prestige and once more reign supreme, and that their rule will be permanent.

This Papal Millennium is known in history as the "Dark Ages." During that time many were the erroneous doctrines and practises brought in and forced upon the peoples of Europe by the Papacy. Their theory was that they must conquer the world. They endeavored to do this by force, which led to great persecutions, notable among

them being the Inquisition. During those dark centuries millions were tortured, exiled, and murdered in multitudinous ways, for refusing to bow to the mandates of the apostate Church, under the leadership of Popes, Bishops and priests. Agents and spies were employed to apprehend and bring to punishment any who were found to express sentiments contrary to the Papal hierarchy, or who failed to bow in abject submission to their authority.

Thus were the nations of Europe paganized and steeped in error and superstition and in reverence for men who falsely claimed to be the special and authorized representatives of God on earth. Yea, these pseudo-apostles of God, as declared in the prophecy of Daniel (7:25), thought to "change times and laws." They presumed to have authority to alter the laws of God when it seemed advisable to them to do so. They thought to change the time for the Reign of Christ, as we have shown. They also set up the abomination of the Mass, which was the taking away of "the continual [once for all] Sacrifice" of Christ, claiming that in the Mass Christ is offered again and again, in a bloodless manner. Thus they set at naught the Scriptural teaching that the one offering of Jesus on Calvary was all-sufficient for the cancellation of sin. See STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES, Vol. II., Chapter 9.

We do not charge that these religious leaders of the Dark Ages were all doing these things knowingly. We believe that many of them were themselves deluded by the Adversary into thinking that they were doing the Lord's will. These errors were gradually fastened upon the Church. The leaders became to a large degree confused. God alone can judge of the culpability of each one. By degrees this paganized Christianity, more cruel and relentless in its propagation and enforcement than even Paganism itself, was adopted by the European nations, and they became what was, and still is, known as "Christendom" – Christ's Kingdom. The glorious Scriptural doctrine of the *resurrection* also fell largely into the background; for what use had an immortal soul which could not die, for a resurrection from the

dead? Plato's doctrine of the immortality of man was much more agreeable to the flesh than was the true idea of death. It was not pleasant to think of death as the enemy of man, as the curse which God had pronounced because of Adam's sin.

WORK OF REFORMATION – "A LITTLE HELP"

The work of reform, which in spite of violent opposition gradually developed, in the sixteenth century, into what was known as the Great Reformation, brought some measure of relief to the persecuted, hunted, crushed saints of God – His true Church. Even through the darkest years of the Dark Ages there were a few saintly ones who never bowed their knees to Baal. These sealed with their blood their declaration of faith in the vital doctrines of the Scriptures. However, in due time, their teachings gained sufficient headway to bring about the Reformation, by which the saints "were holpen with a little help." But their leaders were in time overcome with "flatteries," and also succumbed in a considerable degree to the desire to gain power and influence among the nations. See SCRIPTURE STUDIES, Vol. III., pp. 34-39 and pp. 108-113.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION AND ITS ANSWER

Why has God permitted these appalling conditions, is it asked by some? Why did He allow His wheat-field to become so overrun with tares? Our Lord knew that these conditions would later develop, as is shown in this parable of the Wheat and Tares. It was God's purpose to permit this experience as a great lesson to the Church, to angels, and eventually to the whole world. These errors were to be permitted to be introduced, to grow and bring forth their bitter fruitage, and thus to manifest the terrible effects of error, unholy ambition and sin. It had the effect, too, of developing and separating in spirit the true saints of God from the great mass of tares. Both were to grow **[R5911 : page 182]** together in the Babylonian System, however, until the Harvest time. Then would come the entire separation of the two classes.

Now we are in this separating time. Now we whose eyes of understanding have been opened can see that these errors and evil practices are not of God, are not taught in His Word. Now we see that, as our Master forewarned, "The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." But the great majority of professed Christians are still largely blinded by the smoke of the Dark Ages which for so long has filled their eyes. Violence to the persons of the saints of God is not often indulged in today, because of present laws and public sentiment, though with some this persecuting spirit still exists as formerly, if only they could gain the power. But the same unscriptural doctrines are still preached, modified to some extent to suit the refined ideas of our day. The Bible doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is relegated to the scrap-heap.

Ministers of today, though they sometimes read passages of Scripture bearing upon the resurrection, straightway give them an interpretation utterly at variance with the Scriptural presentation. Some still preach that there is to be a final resurrection of the *body*, to be joined to its spirit – a doctrine nowhere taught in the Bible, and the veriest nonsense in view of their own theory of the immortality of the soul, which they say is translated at death to its eternal abode. The Bible teaches that the dead are *dead*, and that there is to be a resurrection of the soul, the being, the *Ego*. Our Redeemer *died* to buy back the human race who died in Adam; and He was *raised from the dead* on the third day by the Father. If the body is "shuffled off" at death, that the spirit may be free from its encumbrance, why would the spirit come to need it again sometime in the distant future? And what an eternal degradation this would be for a spirit which had been freed from its former animal body for years or for centuries!

The church systems of today are thoroughly permeated with all manner of pagan doctrines – Greek philosophies, Pantheism, Buddhism, Rationalism, Spiritism, etc. The doctrines of the immortality of the soul, a trinity of Gods in one, torment after death,

re-incarnation of the soul after death, communion of the living with the dead – all these have been borrowed from paganism and are purely heathenish. Truly the nominal systems of today have become Babylon, confusion! And now in the Harvest time of the Age, God is calling His people out of them, and the work is nearly completed. He has spewed these nominal systems out of His mouth. – Revelation 3:14-20; 17:1-5; 18:1-24; 19:1-8.

At one time we wondered why it was God's will to permit this condition of things. But in the light now shining we believe we can clearly see the reason. We believe that God saw what we are now coming to see; namely, that who had never known of the nature and results of sin, who had never known the baneful effects of these monstrous doctrines, could never have appreciated the Truth as can those who have been influenced and bound by them.

What wonderful relief came to our minds and hearts when we emerged from this gross darkness out into the glorious light of God's Truth as it is in Jesus! What a marvelous impression it made upon us! We fancy that **[R5912 : page 182]** mankind, when awakened from the sleep of death, will be on the lookout, as they awake, for the conditions which they had been taught would be theirs beyond this life. Many will look around in terror to see the fiery flames and tortures, and will shout, "Where is the Devil?" Then when the love of God in His wonderful provision for mankind shall be shown to them, when they are told that they are now under the righteous Reign of Messiah, which designs only good for all men, when they come to realize God's matchless goodness, what a revelation of joy it will be to the poor, benighted, sin-cursed world!

Surely all who are sincere of heart, all desirous of doing right, when the conditions are made favorable for so doing will appreciate, as they never could have done otherwise, the glorious character of our great Creator! So we can see that God has had a purpose in permitting for six thousand years the evil conditions which have

prevailed – a purpose for the Church and for the world and for all His created intelligences, even those yet to be created. We hope and believe that when God makes the matter fully plain all will see that His ways are just and righteous altogether. We are waiting for Him fully to demonstrate His character in due time; and this time, we believe, is now very near at hand.

