BIBLIOTHECA SACRA:

OR

TRACTS AND ESSAYS

ON TOPICS CONNECTED WITH

BIBLICAL LITERATURE AND THEOLOGY.

EDITOR:

EDWARD ROBINSON, D. D.

Professor of Biblical Literature in the Union Theological Seminary, New-York;
Author of Biblical Researches in Palestine, etc.

NEW-YORK AND LONDON:

WILEY AND PUTNAM.

MDCCCLIII.
V.

THE COMING OF CHRIST, AS ANNOUNCED IN MATT. XXIV. 29-31. 

BY THE EDITOR. Pages 531-557.


V.

THE COMING OF CHRIST:

AS ANNOUNCED IN MATT. XXIV. 29-31.

BY THE EDITOR.

Our Lord had taken his final leave of the temple and its courts; and in departing had uttered over it the dread prediction, soon to be so fearfully accomplished: "Verily, I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Retiring with his disciples to the Mount of Olives, he seated himself upon the heights over against the temple, where its courts and edifices, as well as the whole city, were spread out as on a map before him. Here, four of the disciples, Peter and James, and John and Andrew, propose to him privately the following inquiry:

2 Mark 13, 3.
Tell us, when shall these things be? and what the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? 

As the manner in which this inquiry is to be understood, has some bearing upon the main question before us, a few words may here be necessary, in order to set the matter in a proper light. The point to be considered is: To what events was the inquiry of the disciples directed?

Had we only the accounts of Mark and Luke, no difficulty whatever could here arise. They both refer simply and solely to these things; that is, the things just spoken by our Lord in respect to the temple—his prophetic annunciation of its total destruction. They ask: "When shall these things be? and what the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled, or come to pass?" This inquiry then, taken by itself, cannot possibly be referred to any thing but the destruction of the temple; an idea which would naturally connect itself in the minds of the disciples, as it was afterwards connected in fact, with the siege and overthrow of the Holy City.

But Matthew relates the question in a different form: "When shall these things be? and what the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Here these things in the first clause are necessarily the same things as before in Mark and Luke, and can refer only to the destruction of the temple and city. But the "coming" of our Lord and "the end of the world" in the last clause,—do these have respect to the same events? or are they to be regarded as an additional inquiry, referring to that awful day, when the Lord will come to final judgment, and "the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up?" In other words, did the "coming," of our Lord here have respect, in the minds of the in-

1 2 Peter 3, 10.
inquiring disciples, to the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, or to the judgment of the last great day?

Perhaps a correct answer to this question would be, that the disciples in their own minds referred distinctly to neither of these events. They obviously had not, at the time, any definite and distinct notions of that terrible overthrow and subversion of the Jewish people, which was so soon to take place. They were also equally ignorant in respect to the awful events which are to be the accompaniments of the day of judgment and the end of the world. We cannot suppose nor admit, that the inquiry, as Matthew puts it, suggested to their minds the same ideas, nor events of the same character, as the same language, taken by itself, would now suggest to us under the full light of a completed revelation. The Holy Spirit had not yet been given, and even our Lord's most favoured disciples still groped in comparative darkness. A glance at their training and peculiar expectations, may perhaps enable us to perceive, with some degree of distinctness, what they did intend to express by the terms of their inquiry.

The expectation of a Messiah to come, which had long been cherished by the Jewish people, had its foundation in the prophecies of the Old Testament; where the coming of the Messiah, his triumph and his reign, are foretold in the language of poetic fervour and sublimity; especially in the writings of Isaiah and Daniel. His reign is there figuratively described as a golden age, when the true religion, and with it the Jewish throne and theocracy, should be re-established in more than their pristine splendour and purity, and universal peace and happiness should consequently prevail. All this was doubtless to be understood in a spiritual sense. It was the Redeemer's spiritual kingdom that was thus foreshadowed, that "mystery" of God which had been kept "hid from ages," but was now to be revealed to the saints. And so indeed the devout Jews of our Saviour's time, such as Zacharias, Simeon, Anna, Joseph, appear to have received it. But the Jewish people at large gave to these prophecies a temporal meaning. They expected a Messiah

1 Dan. 2, 44. 7, 14. 27. 9, 25 sq. Is. 2, 1-4 (comp. Mic. 4, 1-4). 11, 1 sq. Jer. 23, 5 sq. 32, 37 sq. 33, 14 sq. Ez. 34, 23 sq. 37, 24 sq. Ps. 2 and 110, etc., etc.
2 Col. 1, 26.
who should come in the clouds of heaven; and, as king of the Jewish nation, should restore the ancient religion and worship. reform the corrupt morals of the people, make expiation for their sins, deliver them from the yoke of foreign dominion, exalt them to a pre-eminence over all other nations, and at length reign over the whole earth in peace and glory. A main idea in this mode of representation, was the 'restitution' of all things to the Hebrew nation, and their exaltation to privileges and a rank above the nations of the earth. Their then present condition of humiliation and sorrow was to cease, and be succeeded by a state of power and glory which should never end. The world (so to speak) was to be turned upside down; principalities and thrones were to be cast to the ground, and those who dwelt on dunghills were to be exalted. The coming of the expected Messiah in solemn pomp and glory was to be the signal for these revolutions,—the downfall of the present order of things, and the introduction of the new. The world, as it then was, and now is, was to come to an end; and then all things would become new.

That even our Lord's twelve apostles were deeply imbued with these views and expectations of a temporal prince and Saviour, so long as Jesus lived, and for a time even after his resurrection,—until, indeed, the giving of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost,—is apparent from every part of the sacred narrative. They were still groping in ignorance and darkness; they received Jesus with sincere faith as the promised Messiah; but as to the true character of himself and of his kingdom they had but imperfect conceptions. Their Master often had occasion to rebuke them for their "little faith;" he unfolded to them only gradually the deeper mysteries pertaining to his Gospel; and it was only on the very last evening of his intercourse with them, and after the institution of the Holy Supper, that he spoke openly to them of his departure. Even then they were dull of apprehension; so that our Lord declares them still incapable of receiving the instruction which he would gladly communicate: "I have yet many things to say unto

you, but ye cannot bear them now." No wonder, then, that they looked upon him as one who was about to become a glorious Prince, and reign over the whole earth. In the spirit of this temporal and national expectation, the two disciples, on their way to Emmaus, declared: "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel;" and in the same spirit, after his resurrection, the disciples, when they had come together, "asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

Such then being the state of knowledge and of expectation in the minds of the disciples at the time of our Lord's passion, it is easy to see, that the above inquiry made by them only a few days earlier, must be judged of and interpreted in accordance with this state of mind and feeling. They awaited a temporal exaltation of their Lord and Master, and a restitution of pre-eminency and glory to the Jewish people; the introduction of this new state would be his "coming," and with this they now connected the overthrow of the temple and city which he had just predicted. His "coming" and the "end of the world" were therefore in their minds to be coeval and identical with the "end" of the then present state of humiliation and depression, and with the commencement of the new and glorious era of the Messiah's temporal reign.

The question, therefore, as reported by Matthew, although it affords us a deeper insight into the views and feelings of the disciples, than as given by Mark and Luke, yet does not differ in its general import from the specifications of the two latter Evangelists.

Does our Lord answer the inquiry of his disciples? Not directly. He first warns them of many deceivers who shall arise. He speaks of famine, pestilence, and earthquakes, as about to occur; which seem here as elsewhere to be emblems of great civil and social commotions. He warns his followers, that they will be exposed to dangers and persecutions on every side; from which, if they endure them with the patience of faith and hope, they shall be delivered. The particular time when these dangers shall break forth upon them, will be when they "shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place."

Instead of this expression, and explanatory of it, Luke points to the time when they "shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies." Then they may know, "that the desolation thereof is nigh." Then will be the time for every one to save himself by flight. Then will the eagles be gathered together over the carcass; "and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

In close and direct connexion with this representation, follows in Matthew the passage now more immediately to be considered. I subjoin it here in full; and also the parallel verses of Mark and Luke, in which the connexion is equally close and direct, and which have an important bearing upon the right interpretation of the language of Matthew.

**Matthew**: xxiv. 29–31.

29. Λέγεις δὲ μετὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν τῶν ἡμερῶν έκέλευσον, ὁ ἵλιος σκοτάσθησαι, καὶ ἡ σελήνη οὐ δώσει τὸ φέγγος αὐτῆς, καὶ οἱ αἵτερες πεσοῦνται ἀπὸ τοῦ ὀφρανοῦ, καὶ οἱ δυνάμεις τῶν ὀφρανού ἀπελευθέρωσονται. 30. Καὶ τότε ἰσημότερον τοῦ οὐνοῦ τοῦ Ἱωάνου εἶν τῷ ὀφρανῷ, καὶ τότε κυριαρχήσει πάσας οἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς, καὶ ὄρφανον τὸν οὐνὸ τοῦ Ἱωάνου ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν κεφαλῶν τοῦ ὀφρανοῦ μετα δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς. 31. Καὶ ἀποστελεῖ τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ μετὰ σάλπιγγος φωνῆς μεγάλης, καὶ ἐπισυνάχθουσιν τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν τεσσαράς ἁμών ἐπὶ ἄκρον οὐρανῶν ἐκς ἀκρῶν αὐτῶν.


24. Καὶ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν παρακήπησιν ὑπὸ ἠδών, ἵππης τάξις ἔχοσιν καρφὶ ἠδών. 25. Καὶ εἶπεν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ εκείνῃ ἡ οὐρανός δύναμις καὶ σελήνη καὶ ἀστερεῖς, καὶ η σελήνη ὁμοίως ἐκέλευσαι τὸ φέγγος αὐτῆς. 25. Καὶ οἱ άστερεῖς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐσονται ἐκπληρωμένοι, καὶ οἱ δυνάμεις αἱ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς αποτελεσμέναι.

26. Καὶ τότε ἰσημότερον τοῦ οὐνοῦ τοῦ Ἰωάνου ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν κεφαλῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ μετα δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς. 27. Καὶ τότε ἀποστελεῖ τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀπεστέλλου ὑπὸ τοῖς ἐκλεκτοῖς αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν τεσσαράς ἁμών ἐπὶ ἄκρον γῆς ἐς ἄκρον οὐρανοῦ.

28. Αὐτὸς τόπος ἀνεσχετικός καὶ ἐπισυνάχθησαι τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν τεσσαράς ἁμών ἐπὶ ἄκρον γῆς ἐς ἄκρον οὐρανοῦ.
24. And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. (25) And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; (26) men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. (27) And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. (28) And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.

After these passages our Lord goes on, as reported by all three of the Evangelists, to introduce the similitude of the fig-tree putting forth its buds and leaves as the harbinger of summer. In like manner the disciples, when they shall see all these things taking place, may “know that it (the coming?) is near, even at the door;” or, as Luke more definitely expresses it, they may “know that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.” Then follows immediately a most important designation of time, in which the three Evangelists accord verbatim in the original: “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled.”

The subject is now before the reader; and the question to be considered is: Whether the language of Matthew in the passage above quoted, is to be referred to the judgment of the last great day; or, rather, to the then impending destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation? It is a question on which good men have ever differed; and on which, perhaps, entire unity of opinion is not to be expected, until the night of darkness and ignorance in which we are here enveloped, shall be chased away by the morn of pure light and perfect knowledge.

It is conceded by all, I believe, that the representation as far as to the end of the 28th verse of Matthew, and in the parallel verses of the other Evangelists, applies solely to the overthrow of Jerusalem. Or, if there be still those who would refer any portion of these preceding verses to the judgment-day, it seems to me that they must first show, that the “abomination of desolation” spoken of by Matthew and Luke has nothing to do with the “compassing of Jerusalem with armies,” mentioned in the same connexion by Luke; and then, further, that all these things could have no connexion with the “treading down” of Jerusalem by the Gentiles, which Luke goes on to speak of as the result of all these antecedent circumstances. This, however, cannot well be shown, without disregarding every rule of interpretation, and without violating the very first principles of language.

But with the 29th verse a new specification of time is introduced: “Immediately after the affliction of those days” shall appear the harbingers of our Lord’s coming; and these are depicted in language which elsewhere, it is said, is employed only to describe his coming to the final judgment.1 The “coming” here meant, is then to be subsequent to the downfall of Jerusalem; and can therefore only mean the coming of the Messiah in his kingdom at the judgment day. This opinion is perhaps, at the present time, the most prevalent one among commentators, and even with those whose views in other respects have little in common; as in the case of Olshausen and De Wette.

But on the other hand, it is replied, that the phrase “immediately after” indicates a very close connexion of this “coming” of

1 See Matt. 25, 31 sq. Also the explanation of the parable of the wheat and the tares, Matt. 13, 40, 41.
our Lord with the preceding events; and the Saviour himself goes on to declare, that “this generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled.” We must then assume, it is said, that the prediction had its fulfilment within a period not long subsequent to our Lord’s ministry; or, if it is to be referred to the day of judgment, then we must admit that our Lord was in error, inasmuch as he here foretold that it would take place immediately after the downfall of Jerusalem. For these reasons many commentators have understood the language as applicable only to the destruction of the Holy City; forgetting, apparently, that the very expression which they urge against a remote future application, is equally stringent against an exclusive reference to the latter catastrophe.

It is very obvious that both of these different opinions cannot be true; while it is also very possible, that both of them may be more or less wrong. Before proceeding to develop the manner in which the subject has presented itself to my own mind, it will be necessary to examine the language of the prediction and the attendant circumstances, and to bring into view some other preliminary considerations. All this may be best done under a number of heads, as follows:

I. The destruction of Jerusalem was the topic of our Lord’s discourse with his disciples, and the subject of his predictions at the temple and on the mount of Olives, as related by Matthew in c. 24, 1—28 inclusive; and also by Mark and Luke in the parallel verses. This point has been already sufficiently considered; and requires here no further elucidation.

II. The “coming” foretold in v. 29-31 of Matthew, was to be subsequent to the time of the “abomination of desolation,” and the compassing of Jerusalem by armies, and also to the “treading down” of the city by the Gentiles. By this latter phrase is usually and rightly understood the capture and destruction of the city by Titus, as related by Josephus. This same event is doubtless shadowed forth in the language of Matthew: “For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together;” not indeed through any verbal allusion to the Roman eagles, as some assume; but in the general application of a proverbial expression, viz. that where the guilty are, there punishment shall find them; or, in other words, the guilty are sure to be overtaken by the divine
punishment. When this catastrophe shall have taken place, then *immediately after* (ἐκ τοῦ ναὶ μετέπειτα) this affliction, there shall be distress and anxiety, and the shaking of the powers of heaven, all which are to accompany and introduce our Lord’s coming. The word ἐκ τοῦ ναὶ means literally straightway, and implies a succession more or less direct and immediate; so that there can be no doubt as De Wette justly remarks, that the coming of the Messiah, as here described by Matthew, was straightway to follow the destruction of Jerusalem. Indeed no meaning can possibly be assigned to ἐκ τοῦ ναϊ, which will admit of any great delay; much less of an interval so enormous as that between the destruction of the Holy City and the end of the world, as understood by us. From this it is manifest, that “the coming” of Christ here spoken of, as occurring after the downfall of Jerusalem, could not be meant to refer solely to that event.

III. Our Lord himself limits the interval within which Jerusalem shall be destroyed and his “coming” take place, to that same generation: Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. The language is here plain, definite, and express; it cannot be misunderstood, nor perverted. It follows, in all the Evangelists, the announcement of our Lord’s “coming,” and applies to it in them all, just as much as it applies to the antecedent declarations respecting Jerusalem; and more directly, indeed, inasmuch as it stands here in a closer connexion.

But what is the meaning of the phrase “this generation”? and what the interval of time thus designated? The specification is, and must be, at any rate, indefinite; for the tide of human life flows on in an unbroken stream, and no man can mark or tell the point where one generation ends and another begins. Yet modern chronology, with some degree of definiteness, reckons three generations in a century; and thus allows to each an interval of thirty-three and a third years, or, more loosely, from thirty to forty years. The ancient Hebrews, on the other hand, appear to have counted a hundred years to each generation. God said to Abraham, that his seed should be afflicted in Egypt four hundred years; but that in the fourth generation they should return to the Promised Land.¹

LIMITATIONS.

In which of these senses is the above expression of our Lord to be understood? If in the former, then certainly the destruction of Jerusalem, which is usually held to have occurred in A.D. 70, took place within the time thus generally specified; that is, within an interval of less than forty years after our Lord's passion. But of the events which were to follow that catastrophe, we know of none that can be referred to the same interval. The destruction of the city itself occurred at the very latest point of time that can be reckoned to that generation thus understood; and no events of importance in Jewish history took place for quite a number of years afterwards.

But our Lord was speaking in a popular manner, and would naturally employ expressions in their most popular sense. He did not mean to point out definitely the exact time when this or that event was to take place. He says himself, immediately afterwards: "Of that day and hour knoweth no one, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." It seems necessary, therefore, to understand the word "generation," as thus used by our Lord, in its largest sense, and in accordance with popular Hebrew usage, as implying a hundred years. But this again must not be construed too definitely. It is rather a general expression, designating time by a reference to the duration of human life; and is apparently neither more nor less than equivalent to our mode of expression, when we say: "There are those now born, who will live to see all these things fulfilled." Our Lord himself, in another passage, relating to the same subject, presents the same idea in this very form: "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."

IV. The question now arises, Whether, under these limitations of time, a reference of our Lord's language to the day of judgment and the end of the world, in our sense of these terms, is possible? Those who maintain this view attempt to dispose of the difficulties arising from these limitations in different ways. Some assign to εὐθὺς the meaning suddenly, as it is employed by the Seventy in Job 5, 3, for the Heb. צָאֵר. But even in this passage, the pur-


Comment. in Chr. Sermones qui de ejus reditu agunt, Jena 1820. p.
pose of the writer is simply to mark an immediate sequence—to intimate that another and consequent event happened forthwith. Nor would anything be gained, even could the word εἰσήκουσα, be thus disposed of, so long as the subsequent limitation to "this generation" remained. And in this, again, others have tried to refer πρόεδρος to the race of the Jews or to the disciples of Christ; not only without the slightest ground, but contrary to all usage and all analogy. All these attempts to apply force to the meaning of the language, are in vain; and are now abandoned by most commentators of note. Two or three general views, however, are current on the subject, which demand some further remark.

One is that of De Wette and others, who do not hesitate to regard our Lord as here announcing, that the coming of the Messiah to the judgment of the last day would take place immediately after the fall of Jerusalem. This idea, according to De Wette, is clearly expressed by our Lord, both here and elsewhere; and was likewise held by Paul. But as the day of judgment has not yet come, it follows, either that our Lord, if correctly reported, was himself mistaken, and spoke here of things which he knew not; or else, that the sacred writers have not truly related his discourse. The latter horn of this dilemma is preferred by De Wette. According to him the disciples entertained the idea of their Lord’s return with such vividness of faith and hope, that they overlooked the relations of time, which Jesus himself had left indefinite; and they thus connected his final coming immediately with his coming to destroy Jerusalem. They give here, therefore, their own conception of our Lord’s language, rather than the language itself as it fell from his lips. They mistook his meaning; they acted upon this mistake in their own belief and preaching; and in their writings have perpetuated it to the world throughout all time.

This view is, of course, incompatible with any and every idea of inspiration on the part of the sacred writers; the very essence of which is, that they were commissioned and aided by the Spirit to impart truth to the world, and not error. To a believer in this fun-
damental doctrine, no argument can here be necessary, nor in place, to counteract the view above presented. To state it in its naked contrast with the divine authority of God's word, is enough.

But there may well be a further inquiry here raised, viz. Whether there was in fact, in the minds of Paul and other apostles and early Christians, so strong an expectation of the speedy coming of Christ to judgment, as is thus assumed? The main passage on which this assumption is made to rest, is the very one now under consideration; which in this way is first employed to demonstrate the existence of such an expectation; and then that expectation is assumed to sustain this interpretation of the passage. In respect to Paul, reference is made to his language in 1 Cor. 15, 51 sq. and 1 Thess. 4, 15; where, in speaking of our Lord's final coming, he uses the first person of the plural: "we shall not all sleep;" "we which are alive," etc. The inference drawn by some is, that Paul expected the coming of the judgment-day in his own life-time, so that he himself would be one of those who would then be alive and would be changed without seeing death. But nothing is more evident, than that the language of Paul here, as often elsewhere, may be understood merely as including himself and those to whom he was writing, as a portion of the great body of Christians of the church universal in all ages, the dead as well as those living at our Lord's coming. So Chrysostom and others; and even De Wette regards it as certain, that the phrase "we shall all be changed" refers both to the dead and the living. And further, it would seem that Paul's language addressed to the Thessalonians, had in fact been so understood by some, as to imply the near approach of the judgment-day; and therefore the apostle, in his second Epistle, takes occasion expressly to warn them against any such misapprehension of his words: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together with him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand." The very application of his language now (as then) made, the apostle here protests against. In the face of this protest, I do not see how we can well affirm, that Paul regarded

1 Exeget. Handb. in 1 Cor. 15, 51. 2 Thess. 2, 1-2.
the final coming of our Lord as an event which was speedily to take place. That it was already so regarded by some, is evident from the apostle's teaching to the contrary; and that the idea continued in the church, and was occasionally current in the early centuries, is matter of history. Yet for this, not the teachings of our Lord and his apostles, but the suggestions of human fancy, are responsible.

Another form of the same general view is that presented by Olshausen. He too refers the verses of Matthew under consideration directly to the final coming of Christ; but seeks to avoid the difficulty above stated, by an explanation derived from the alleged nature of prophecy. He adopts the theory broached by Hengstenberg, that inasmuch as the vision of future things was presented solely to the mental or spiritual eye of the prophet, he thus saw them all at one glance as present realities, with equal vividness and without any distinction of order or time,—like the figures of a great painting without perspective or other marks of distance or relative position. "The facts and realities are distinctly perceived; but not their distance from the period, nor the intervals by which they are separated from each other." Hence our Lord, in submitting himself to the laws of prophetic vision, was led to speak of his last coming in immediate connexion with his coming for the destruction of Jerusalem; because in vision the two were presented together to his spiritual eye, without note of any interval of time.—Not to dwell here upon the fact, that this whole theory of prophecy is fanciful hypothesis, and appears to have been since abandoned by its author; it is enough to remark, that this explanation admits, after all, the same fundamental error, viz. that our Lord did mistakenly announce his final coming as immediately to follow the overthrow of the Holy City. Indeed, the difficulty is even greater here, if possible, than before; because, according to the former view, the error may be charged upon the report of the Evangelists, while here it can only be referred to our Lord himself.

It may, indeed, be further asked, whether the limitation to "this generation," in v. 34, may not be referred solely to the prediction

of the destruction of Jerusalem ending with v. 28; and then vv. 29–31 be understood of the general judgment without being affected by this limitation? The reply to this question has already been given under our third head above. The limitation has a clear and distinct reference to all the events foretold in the previous discourse; and therefore, as Lightfoot says, "it is hence evident enough, that the preceding verses are not to be understood of the last judgment, but of the destruction of Jerusalem."  

V. We come now to our last preliminary inquiry, viz. Whether the language of Matthew in vv. 29–31 is in fact applicable to merely civil and political commotions and revolutions and whether the solemnity and strength of the language, and the grandeur and pomp of the mode of representation, do not necessarily imply a catastrophe more general and more awful, than the fall of a single city or the subversion of a feeble people? Can it be, then, that the language of these verses should refer merely to the destruction of Jerusalem or of the Jewish nation?  

Not to dwell here upon the well known facts, that the language of the Orient, and especially that of the Hebrew prophets, is full of the boldest metaphors and the sublimest imagery, applied to events and things which the manner of the Occident would describe without figure and in far simpler terms; it will be sufficient to show, that similar language is employed both in the Old and New Testaments on various occasions arising out of changes and revolutions in the course of human events; and especially in respect to the judgments of God upon nations. We will take the verses in their order.

Verse 29. Here it is said, that after the preceding tribulation, the darkness of the sun and moon, the falling of the stars, and the shaking of the powers of heaven, are to be the harbingers of the Lord's coming. The "powers (δυνάμεις) of heaven" are the sun, moon, and stars, the הַבָּשָׂם נַחַל host of heaven of the Old Testament. Now that the very same language and the same natural phenomena are employed in other places to mark events in human affairs and to announce God's judgments, is apparent from the following passages:

1 Page 540 above.
2 Hor. Hebr. in Matt. 24, 34. 3 Is. 34, 4, where Sept. δυνάμεις תַּנָא עֹבָארְנָו.
In Is. c. 13, woes and judgments are denounced against Babylon. In v. 9 it is said, "the day of the Lord cometh . . . to lay the land desolate;" and in v. 10 the following signs and accompaniments are pointed out: "For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine."

In Is. c. 34 similar woes and judgments are proclaimed against Idumea; see vv. 5, 6. The prophet in v. 2 describes "the indignation of the Lord upon all nations, . . . he hath utterly destroyed them;" and in v. 4 he continues: "And all the host of heaven (Sept. dārāmēz rōv qīvarōn) shall be dissolved; and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll; and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as the withered leaf from the fig-tree."

In Ez. c. 32 the prophet takes up a lamentation for Pharaoh, v. 2; in the succeeding verses his destruction is foretold; and then the prophet proceeds in v. 7, as follows: "And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God."

In Joel 2, 30. 31 [3, 3. 4, Heb.] the very same phenomena are described as appearing "before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come." In Acts 2, 19. 20, this passage is quoted by the Apostle Peter, and applied directly to the great events which were to accompany the introduction of the new dispensation,—including obviously the signs and wonders attendant upon the death and resurrection of our Lord; the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost and upon the churches afterwards; the spread and establishment of Christianity; and the final termination of the Mosaic dispensation in the subversion of the temple-worship and the irretrievable ruin of the Jewish nation.

These examples are enough to show, that the language of the verse under consideration may well be in like manner understood as symbolic of the commotions and revolutions of states and kingdoms. In respect to the other two Evangelists, the words of Mark are entirely parallel to those of Matthew; while Luke interweaves
a further allusion to terrestrial phenomena, and to the distress and faintness of heart among men "for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth."

Verse 30. After the phenomena described in the preceding verse, is to appear "the sign of the Son of man in heaven." This of course is not the Messiah himself, as some assume; but it would seem to be something immediately connected with his personal appearance, perhaps the dark clouds and tempest, the thunders and lightnings, which are ascribed as the usual accompaniment of a Theophania, and in which the Redeemer is at first shrouded. Then the Son of man himself is seen "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Can this magnificent and awful representation have reference merely to events in the world's past history?

Let this question also be answered by an appeal to the Old Testament. There Jehovah is represented as appearing in a similar manner, both for the judgment of the wicked and the protection of the righteous.

Thus in Ps. 97, 2 sq. "Clouds and darkness are round about him,—a fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about," etc.

Ps. 50, 3 sq. "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people."

So too in respect to particular nations. In Is. 19, 1, it is said: "Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt; and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence;" etc.

In like manner, Ps. 68 is the description of a continued Theophania, in behalf of the people of Israel; see vv. 1. 2; 7. 8; 17. 18; 33. 35.

The same sublime imagery is likewise employed in Ps. 18, in describing God's appearance for the deliverance of an individual—his chosen servant David. A passage more full of poetic sublimity and overpowering grandeur can hardly be found in the sacred writings,

---

1 See Ps. 18, 11-14. 2 See also 2 Sam. c. 22.
than is contained in vv. 7-15 of that Psalm. The application of it to David follows immediately in v. 16: "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters," etc. The whole passage is too long to be inserted here; but the reader will not fail to turn to it and peruse it.

If then language of this kind relating to Jehovah is employed in the Old Testament, with reference both to nations and to individuals, we surely are authorized to apply the like representations of the New Testament to an event so important in the Divine economy as the overthrow of God's own peculiar people, and the chosen seat of their national worship.

The source of the particular form of representation in v. 30, is doubtless the seventh chapter of Daniel. There in vv. 13, 14, the prophet says: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages, should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away; and his kingdom, that which shall not be destroyed." Here then is the Messiah, coming not for the day of judgment, but to introduce his spiritual kingdom upon earth. Analogically, therefore, the like language of our Lord in the verse before us, must be understood in the same way, and not made to refer to the day of judgment.

Verse 31. Hosts of angels and the sound of the trumpet belong to the Christophania here and elsewhere, as also to the Theophania. Here too it is said: "He shall send his angels . . . and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds;" and the same is said in the corresponding verse of Mark. This "gathering," it has been thought, can refer only to the assembling of all nations for the final judgment, as more fully depicted in Matt. 25, 31 sq. and also as implied in the explanation of the parable of the tares in Matt. 13, 40 sq. But on comparing the modes of expression in the two cases, they do not appear to be parallel. Here the angels simply "gather together the elect;" there (in 25, 32) all nations are gathered before him, and the wicked are then separated from the righteous. The representation is the same in Matt. 13, 41, 43.

1 Ex. 19, 16, 19. 1 Cor. 15, 52. 1 Thesa. 4, 16; comp. Rev. 8, 2, etc.
The idea of such a separation before the judgment-seat, is indeed essentially connected with every representation of the day of judgment; and indeed cannot be separated from it. Why then are only the elect here said (in v. 31) to be gathered together? For judgment? Nothing of the kind is expressed or implied in the passage itself; nor is it elsewhere ever said of the elect, that they alone will be “gathered together” to the judgment of the great day.

But the idea of “gathering together” those widely dispersed, sometimes includes also the accessory notion of deliverance and protection, as the end and purpose of the act. Thus it is said of Jehovah, that “he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel;”1 he will gather them out of all lands whither they are scattered, will deliver them from all dangers, and secure to them his protection. So too our Lord, in his touching lament over Jerusalem, exclaims: “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not?” Here the idea of deliverance and protection is strongly prominent. Now this idea we may apply in the verse under consideration. In the commotions and distress antecedent to our Lord’s coming for the destruction of the Jewish state, he will send his angels “to gather together his elect,” so that they may be delivered and protected from the dangers which threaten them. Indeed, precisely this idea is strongly expressed by Luke in the parallel verse: “And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; FOR YOUR REDEMPTION DRAWETH NIGH!”

We come then to the general result, that the language of the three verses under consideration does not necessarily in itself apply to the general judgment; while the nature of the context shows that such an application is inadmissible. On the other hand, there is nothing in the language itself to hinder our referring it to the downfall of Judaism and the Jewish people; but rather both the context and the attendant circumstances require it be understood of these events.

In further illustrating the language of our Lord as thus applied, I would remark, that “his coming,” as here foretold, includes as its object not only the overthrow of the Jewish nation, but also the

1 Ps. 147, 2. Deut. 30, 3.
establishment and spread of his own spiritual kingdom upon earth. This is clearly indicated in the words of Daniel, as above cited; and also in those of Joel, as cited and applied by the apostle Peter. The latter prophecy began to have its fulfilment in the signs and wonders attendant upon our Lord's death and resurrection, and in the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost; but it was fully accomplished only in the later catastrophe of Jerusalem and Judaism. The tenacity with which that people clave to the outward rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic dispensation, to the worship of the temple, and to their hopes of restoration and exaltation under a temporal Messiah; as also their fierce and unrelenting opposition to the claims of the lowly Jesus;—all this was the first great and prominent obstacle to the introduction and prevalence of his spiritual reign. This was at that moment the great enemy to be vanquished; and the downfall of this opposing power was to be the triumph and the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom. Both these great results, therefore, were to be accomplished by this his coming.

The destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple, although standing out as a prominent catastrophe in this great series of events, was yet not the only one, and perhaps not the most important. Through the minute and vivid description of Josephus, who was himself an actor and eye-witness in all those scenes of blood and desolation, the fall of the Holy City has been brought out before the world for all time with a distinctness and prominence, greater, perhaps, than any other like event of ancient history. Hence it has become the great central point in the later history of the Jews; and thus has overshadowed and shut out from view the slighter notices of other events, in themselves perhaps not of less moment, but which have not been recorded by the graphic pen of a native historian. In this way the overthrow of the Jewish capital and temple has come to be regarded as the final catastrophe of the nation; after which their existence and name, as a nation, were utterly blotted out. Hence the frequent application of our Lord's prediction to this event alone.

But such was not, in fact, the case. The destruction of Jerusa-

1 Dan. 7, 13, 14. Acts 2, 16 sq. 2 See also Matt. 16, 27.
lem by Titus, although terrible, was nevertheless not total. The city slowly revived. The Jews in Palestine, though reduced completely to the condition of a Roman province, were not driven out from their own land. The chief men, indeed, were allured to Rome, or found employment elsewhere; but the merchant in his shop, and the husbandman at his plough, were not interrupted in their labours. Yet we cannot suppose that the national hatred towards the Roman yoke was laid aside. Under the reign of Trajan insurrections broke out among the Jews of Cyrenaica and Egypt, which soon were quelled. Fifty years after the ruin of Jerusalem, Adrian began to rebuild the city, in order to convert it into a heathen capital, and probably also with a view to render it a stronghold for keeping in check the national spirit of the Jewish people. This new attempt served as a spark to kindle the long smothered embers of hatred and discontent; and caused them to burst forth into a flame, which overran and consumed both the land and the people with terrible desolation. The leader was the celebrated Bar-cochba, "Son of a Star." His success at first was great; he soon obtained possession of Jerusalem, and of no less than fifty fortified places and one hundred and eighty-five important villages. Adrian at length awoke from his lethargy, and troops poured in upon Judea from the remotest quarters of the empire. The Jews were harassed and worn out by degrees; and the bloody tragedy was at length brought to a close at the unknown city of Bether, in the eighteenth year of Adrian, A. D. 135. Thousands and thousands of the captives were sold as slaves at the Terebinth near Hebron, at Gaza, and in Egypt. By a decree of Adrian the Jews were forbidden thenceforth even to approach the Holy City; and guards were stationed to prevent them from making the attempt. This severe decree probably included, or at least effected, the removal of the Jewish inhabitants from Judea. Two centuries later, we find Tertullian speaking of them as still deprived even of a stranger's right to set foot upon their paternal soil. It was not until the days of Constantine, in the fourth century, that they were first allowed again to approach the Holy City; and at length, to enter

* Tertull. c. Judaeos, c. 15. Apol. c. 21, "quibus [Judaeis] nec advena-
rum jure terram patrim saltem vestigio salutare conceditur."
it once a year, and buy the privilege of wailing over the ruins of their former sanctuary.¹

Such is an outline of the great final catastrophe of the Jewish people, as it can be collected from the few scattered notices found in ancient foreign writers. These few fragments have been collected and arranged by Munter, in a treatise translated and published in the present volume. To this the reader is referred. Had there been a Josephus to give us a history of this war with equal completeness and graphic power,—who can say that the catastrophe, in its magnitude and its horrors, would seem to us in any degree to come short of that of Jerusalem?

After these illustrations I may sum up here in a few words the views suggested to my own mind in respect to the discourse of our Lord under consideration. In reply to the question of the four disciples: "When shall these things be?" Jesus first points out what was to happen after his departure,—the trials and dangers to which his followers would be exposed. Then comes the "abomination of desolation;" Jerusalem is "compassed by armies," and is "trodden down by the Gentiles;"—all this referring to its desolation by Titus in A.D. 70. Immediately afterwards the Lord would come and establish more fully his spiritual kingdom, by crushing in terrible destruction the last remnants of the power and name of Judaism; and this within the general limit of a generation of a hundred years from the time when he was speaking. There might, therefore, literally have been some then "standing there, who did not taste of death till they saw the Son of man [thus] coming in his kingdom." Then it was, when this first great foe of the Gospel dispensation should have been thus trampled down, that Christians were to look up. "Then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh!" The chains of religious despotism and the terrors of Jewish persecution would then be at an end forever; and the disciples of Christ, thus far disenthralled and triumphant, might rejoice in the prevalence of the Gospel of peace and love,—the coming of Christ's spiritual kingdom upon earth!

I add here a few remarks upon the remaining part of our Lord's discourse in the 24th and 25th chapters of Matthew. It is well known that commentators differ in respect to what portions of this discourse are to be referred to the destruction of Jerusalem, and what to the judgment-day; and also as to where the one topic ends and the other begins. Thus Doddridge finds the transition from the former to the latter event in Matt. 24, 36; Flatt and Kuinoel place it at v. 43; Eichhorn, in c. 25, 14; and others, as Wetstein, not until c. 25, 31.

All interpreters, of any name, I believe, are agreed that the vivid representation in Matt. 25, 31-46, has reference only to the day of final judgment. Perhaps an exception may be found among some in this country, who deny the doctrine of future punishment. But it cannot well be otherwise than evident to every candid mind, that if the doctrine of a future judgment-day be found at all in the New Testament, it is prominently and expressly asserted in this passage,—a day when all flesh shall rise from the dead and be gathered before the omniscient Judge; when the righteous shall be separated from the wicked; and every one be rewarded or punished, according as his works shall be. The same general view is taught also by our Lord in his exposition of the parable of the tares, and in his teaching as recorded by John. It is found also in Daniel, and is more fully developed in the writings of Paul and in the Apocalypse. Paul often dwells upon the mighty theme: “For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” In the sublime visions of the Apocalypse, the writer “saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; ... and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in those books, according to their works.”

With all these representations the language before us in c. 25, 31-46 is perfectly accordant; nor is there any thing either in the cir-

1 Family Expos. in loc.
2 Flatt de paulula ῥῶρ ὦπ. in Velthuysen Comm. II. p. 471. Kuinoel Comm. in loc.
4 Dan. 12, 2.
5 2 Cor. 5, 10. See also Rom. 2, 5-8. 14. 10. 1 Cor. 15, 51 sq. 1 These 4, 13 sq. etc.
6 Rev. 20, 12 sq. Comp. 22, 12. etc
cumstances or in the context, to lead us on any philological or historical grounds to a different interpretation of the passage. The 46th verse of itself decides this point: "And these [the wicked] shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal." There is no possible way of evading the force of this antithetic declaration, which on the face of it relates to the eternal destiny of mortals as fixed by the judgment-day, except by denying the idea of endless duration ascribed to the word αἰώνιος, in respect both to future punishment and to future life. This is said to be done by some, who, denying the doctrine of a state of retribution in another world, refer this whole passage to the destruction of Jerusalem; and are thus ready to barter away the hope of a future life of glory, in order to get rid of the terrors of a future state of punishment. According to them, in this verse, both the condemnation and the promise have respect only to this life; and then it follows, that the life of man, or threescore years and ten, is life eternal! I am unable to see why this is not, in the strictest sense of the term, both philologically and theologically, a reductio ad absurdum.

This whole passage, then, I hold without doubt to refer to the general judgment.

Let us now go back to the preceding parable, that of the talents, in Matt. 25, 14–30. Here the awful scenes of the dread tribunal are not indeed depicted; yet the subject is the same as before, the great doctrine of final retribution. Here it is the Master who returns after a long absence; calls his servants to an account; invites those whom he finds worthy to the splendid banquet of rejoicing prepared to celebrate his return; while he casts out the unfaithful servant into outer darkness and woe. The whole description is entirely consonant to that of the judgment day which follows; and is not analogous to any representation of the New Testament having reference merely to matters of this life.

If we go back now still further to the parable of the ten virgins, Matt. 25, 1–13, we shall find, I think, that it is the great object of the parable to inculcate the same important truth, the acceptance or non-acceptance of those professing to be the followers of Christ,

1 Καὶ ἀπελεύσονται οὗτοι εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον, οὐ δὲ δίκαιοι εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον.
according to their several characters and deserts,—their admission or non-admission to the state of future bliss in the kingdom of God, here depicted under the imagery of a marriage-festival. The same idea of future bliss to the righteous, is expressed by the same imagery in the Apocalypse: "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage-supper of the Lamb."\(^1\) Along with this great idea, there is also strongly inculcated in this parable the necessity of a state of constant preparation, with reference to the future judgment and its dread account; since no man knoweth when the Lord will call him to enter upon this state of retribution.

Thus far, then, there seems to be no reason why the three different representations contained in c. 25 should be separated, or not all referred alike to the transactions of the last great day.

If now we look at the latter portion of the preceding chapter, c. 24, 43–51, we find it intimately connected with the parable of the ten virgins; so closely, indeed, that the idea of separating the two has apparently never occurred to any interpreter. We have here the same great lesson inculcated,—the necessity of continual watchfulness in the performance of duty, under the imagery of servants waiting for their master's return; who then will reward the faithful, and punish the slothful and wicked. The punishment, it may here be noted, is expressed in terms similar to those employed in respect to him who hid his lord's talent, in c. 25, 30. All this seems to furnish a sufficient ground, why we should regard this passage also as having been spoken with reference to the future judgment.

There now remains to be considered only the passage in Matt. 24, 36–42. Our Lord, after declaring that his coming to destroy the Jewish nation would take place before that generation should pass away, goes on here to say, that "of that day and hour knoweth no one, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." This he illustrates by the example of the deluge; which, although long predicted by Noah, yet came suddenly and unexpectedly upon the men of that generation. Hence he urges upon his disciples the necessity of constant watchfulness, in order that, as Luke expresses it, "ye may be accounted worthy to escape all those

\(^1\) Rev. 19, 7–9.
things that shall come to pass, and to stand (i.e. be approved, not destroyed) before the Son of man.”

On this passage two remarks present themselves, which go to show that it is to be connected with what precedes, rather than with what follows; and is therefore to be taken as referring to the overthrow of Jerusalem and the Jews.

First, both the grammatical and logical connexion of the language itself require it to be so referred. The very expression, “that (ἐκείνη) day and hour,” can mean nothing but the day and hour of which our Lord had been speaking, viz. that ‘coming’ of his which should take place before that generation should pass away. It is that coming which would be so sudden; for as yet he had here described no other, and therefore his words could apply to no other.

Secondly, it is somewhat remarkable, that throughout this whole discourse of our Lord thus far (to v. 42), from his departure out of the temple and through his whole prediction relative to his then immediate coming, the Evangelists Mark and Luke both give parallel reports, serving alike to confirm and to illustrate the language of Matthew; while at this very point (v. 42) their reports cease. All that follows in this and the next chapter is here given by Matthew alone. Mark nowhere has anything corresponding. Luke indeed gives the subsequent charge to watch (vv. 43–51) in a different place and connexion; and also elsewhere the parable of the talents. But the parable of the ten virgins and the description of the last day, are found only in Matthew. All this goes to show, that Mark and Luke intended to report the language now under consideration as connected with what precedes; inasmuch as they give nothing further. It goes also to show, that they regarded the discourse of our Lord, up to this point, as a whole, having reference to his coming for the overthrow of Judaism; and also that the subject, which thus far was one, was here completed.

It follows, then, that our Lord, as further reported by Matthew, here takes up (with v. 43) a new topic; which thus apparently begins, as it evidently ends, with the enforcement of the duty

---


ANCIENT TEMPLE ON MOUNT LEBANON.

of watchfulness upon all, in reference to the terms of their acceptance with God, and of their admission to the Messiah's kingdom, when he shall come to judge the world and reign in bliss and glory.

If these pages shall serve to afford light to any mind upon this difficult portion of the sacred volume, and thus aid in the exhibition and enforcement of divine truth, the aim and prayer of the writer will have been answered.