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AN INTERPRETATION OF MATT. XXIV. 29–34.

The difficulty presented in this passage, is the seeming connection of the personal coming of the Lord with the destruction of Jerusalem, as one of the events which should be accomplished before the passing away of the generation then living. The usual methods of getting rid of it have been, either to deny that any other coming was taught than a providential one in mighty judgments, or, to give unusual significations to the words γενια, generation, and γινηται, shall be fulfilled. But all these interpretations seem to me quite unsatisfactory, as not consistent with the obvious and literal meaning of the terms made use of. For if a personal advent is not taught here, it is taught nowhere in the New Testament, and we have no reason for looking for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth at all. The appearing of the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, the wailing of all the tribes of the earth, and the seeing of the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, do as explicitly declare His coming in His glorified manhood, as any passage in the Thessalonians or the Apocalypse. If we are at liberty to explain these away as Oriental hyperboles—mere magnificent ornaments of discourse—we may do it in every place, and so come to the conclusion that there is no Second Advent, save at a man's death, or in some signal act of judgment.

Nor is it any more satisfactory to understand by γενια, a race or class of men, without any reference to the ordinary limits of human life, and so to make the passage mean that the Jewish race or people should not pass away till the accomplishment of the events spoken of; or to understand by γινηται the beginning of such accomplishment, and not the completion of it; for such, undeniably, are not the ordinary senses which these words bear in the New Testament. The passage, naturally and fairly interpreted, means that the men then living should not all have died, till certain things had been fully accomplished. The real point at is-
sue, then, is whether the coming of the Lord be included in the events which were so soon to take place. If it be, we must of course understand by it a figurative coming; but I trust to show that we are driven to no such conclusion.

The questions, to which the whole discourse recorded in this chapter is a reply, were occasioned by our Lord's prophecy of the utter destruction of the temple. There can be no doubt, I think, that the disciples believed that this would be immediately followed by the appearing of the Messiah in glory and majesty, for at this time they had no knowledge of the Gentile dispensation which was to intervene between the overthrow of the Jewish commonwealth, and the setting up of the kingdom of God in the earth. That they supposed the appearing, the appearing, to be the same thing with the destruction of Jerusalem, as Bp. Newton imagines, is inconsistent with all that we know of the expectations which they cherished, in common with the great body of the Jewish people. They all looked for a glorious Messiah, a conqueror and a king, who should set up an everlasting kingdom, and reign over it in person; and it would have been strange indeed, if the disciples, whose natural prejudices were at this time nearly as strong as ever, had abandoned the hope of the personal presence of the Lord, and substituted for it the utter ruin of the holy city. But they might naturally suppose that the appearing of their King would be preceded by sore judgments on the land, for the exceeding wickedness of the people, so that the two events would be nearly synchronous as to time, though in their nature essentially different. And so Zechariah declares it shall be in the day of the restitution—"For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the Lord go forth and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle." They may have supposed that this prophecy was to be then fulfilled—indeed, they must have supposed so, believing, as we know they did, that the manifestation of the Messiah in his glory was not far off.

The questions, which they put to Jesus, must therefore have respected two different events, (however closely connected in time they might have believed these to be,) viz., the destruction of the temple and the personal appearing of the Lord himself; and we should expect to find neither subject omitted in His reply. Down to the 29th verse, His discourse, I think, confines itself wholly to the first question, and treats of the events which should precede and attend the overthrow of Jerusalem. So far, I see no transition to the other subject of His coming and the end of the age, for he speaks of the manner of the appearing, in the 27th and 28th verses, only as the ground of His warning to them, not to be drawn into the wilderness or the secret chamber, and not as if that were one of the events to be then accomplished. The wars and rumors of wars; the famines, pestilences and earthquakes; the persecutions of the Church, and the decay of love within its bosom, by reason of the
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abounding of iniquity; the preaching of the Gospel throughout the whole world, as a testimony to the Gentiles; the compassing of Jerusalem with armies (Luke xxi. 20,) and the great tribulation of the days of vengeance consequent thereon, did all actually take place in the breaking up of the Jewish commonwealth. It is true, indeed, that, as the termination of one dispensation may resemble and typify that of another, similar events may take place when Christendom is destroyed; but, whatever be its typical character, the discourse thus far primarily relates to the judgments on Jerusalem. Some would make the "great tribulation" identical with the "great earthquake" of Rev. xvi. 18, and with the "time of trouble" of Dan. xii. 1; but this is not necessary, for there may have been in the siege of Jerusalem, a concentration and depth of suffering, and a horror of anguish, such as never had been, nor will be again, while yet the convulsions of Christendom, when the hour of its judgment is come, may be on a far grander scale, and break the framework of society in pieces far more effectually, making it become like to the dust of the summer threshing-floor.

I may remark, in passing, that what our Lord says of His παρουσία, in the 27th and 28th verses, conclusively shows that neither He nor His disciples understood by it the actings of His providence in destroying Jerusalem. False Christs should arise, persons assuming the name and character of the Messiah; and men would say, Behold he (a person) is in the wilderness; or he is in the secret chambers; but they should not believe it. And why should they not believe that Christ was personally in the desert, or the secret place? Because His coming was not to be in such a stealthy way, that it would be needful for one to say to another, Behold, He is here, or there; but His coming should be as observable as the lightning, which, in an instant, fills the whole heaven with its brightness; and as the eagles take their swift and unerring flight to the carcass which they scent from afar, so should his disciples be caught away, like Enoch and Elijah, to meet Him descending in the cloud of glory. How would it destroy the beauty of this divine discourse, to suppose that by His coming, our Lord meant the gathering of the Roman eagles around the doomed city!

At the 29th verse, the transition to the second question takes place, and the remainder of the chapter, together with the whole of the 25th, is devoted to the subject of His personal appearing. The interval between the two events is bridged over by the word ἄμεσα, quickly. "And quickly after the tribulation of those days, shall the sun be darkened," &c. By turning to the corresponding passage in Luke, we find that the same chasm of time is overarched by the "times of the Gentiles." "And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled;" Luke xxi. 24. Then follow the "signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth, distress of nations, with perplexity;" and after that, "they shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with power and great glo-
Hence it appears that the same interval of time is covered by the word εὐαγγέλιον in Matthew, which in Luke is denoted by the "times of the Gentiles," because the same signs in the heavens are seen in both cases. Now it is remarkable that we find these signs at the opening of the sixth seal, which is at the close of the Gentile dispensation. The fifth seal, during which the martyrs under the Pagan persecutions, are seen under the altar crying for judgment, and are bidden to wait till another band of martyrs should be completed, covers the time of the Papacy, which reaches down to the close of the "times of the Gentiles." And when the sixth seal is opened, the sun becomes black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon becomes as blood, and the stars of heaven fall unto the earth—which are the very signs which in Luke follow the "times of the Gentiles," and in Matthew "quickly" follow the tribulation of Jerusalem's downfall.

Nor is it any objection to this interpretation, that so long a period as the whole duration of the Gentile dispensation is denoted by the word "quickly," for this is the uniform strain of the New Testament. "For a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry;" Heb. x. 37. "Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh;" James v. 8. "Behold, the Judge standeth be-fore the door;" verse 9. "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer;" 1 Peter iv. 7. "And behold I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be;" Rev. xxii. 12.

So our Lord speaks of the time of his absence as "a little while;" (John xv. 19,) and in the 37th Psalm, the whole time down to the utter destruction of the wicked from off the earth, is also called "a little while;" Ps. xxxvii. 10.

In truth, such designations of time are relative, and are to be differently understood, according to the circumstances of each case. If a steamer crosses the Atlantic in ten days, she is said to have made a quick passage; but if a messenger sent for a physician, is gone as many hours, he is chided for his long absence. So the time that our Lord is absent in the heavens, is a little while, compared with the long, long ages of glory that are to follow in the kingdom; though it may not seem so to his Church, amidst the humiliation and shame and travail pains of her afflicted state.

If our interpretation thus far be the true one, it follows that the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven, the mourning of the tribes of the earth, and the sending forth of His angels to gather together His elect from the four winds, are all subsequent to the "times of the Gentiles," or that period during which Jerusalem is to be trodden down. And that it is the true interpretation the parable of the fig-tree, which immediately follows, helps to establish. For as the tender buds and leaves of the tree are signs that summer is near, so when they should
see certain signs (πάντα ταῦτα, "all these things," ) they should know that the kingdom of God, the coming of the Lord, was near, even at the doors. But the buds and leaves of the fig-tree are not the summer, they are only the precursors and tokens of it: so the coming of the Lord cannot be included in the πάντα ταῦτα which are the signs of it, but is as distinct from them, as the summer is from the first stirrings of vegetable life which herald it. When our Lord said, "this generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled," He used the phrase "all these things" in the same sense as in the 33d verse, to designate the signs of His coming, and not the coming itself. It was as if He had said, You shall live to see the fig-tree bud; not, You shall live till the summer come. The fig-tree did bud in the lifetime of that generation, but the summer did not come; nor did He say that it would come. It has not yet come; but a long, frosty spring has kept it back. The swelling buds of March are heralds of the harvest, but the frosts of April, and the chilling winds of May, may long delay it. The desolation of Jerusalem was the budding fig-tree, and from that time the watch-word has ever been, The Lord is at hand; and though an inclement, wintry time, (the spiritual death of the Church,) has so long hindered the fruits and flowers of the kingdom, yet, "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." W. W. A.

REMARKS BY THE EDITOR.

The matter discussed in the preceding article, from the pen of a valued correspondent and very dear friend, is one of great interest to the students of prophecy. For this reason we venture, though with diffidence, to append one or two observations.

The questions of the disciples, embracing, as is remarked above, the predicted desolation of the temple, and the personal return of the Master, it may well be taken for granted, that our Lord's reply, reaching to the close of the 25th chapter, has an equally extensive reference. Nor is this doubted by any one, so far as we know, whatever differences exist as to principles of interpretation, and arrangement of details. The difficulty of finding the link, by which the prophecy passes from the one event to the other, and the emphatic annunciation in the 34th verse of the 24th chapter, "This generation," &c., have indeed suggested the idea, that what is said of the coming of the Son of Man was primarily, though figuratively, fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem—a theory in which very many expositors are faint to acquiesce, who do not think for a moment of denying a secondary, but more glorious, accomplishment, in the literal advent of the Lord.

This view, however, of the structure of Matt. xxiv. we believe to be entirely erroneous, and fraught with peril. It is well worthy of the serious consideration of our brethren, how far the prevailing lax notions about Christ's having come to besiege and subvert Jerusalem, as well as of His coming every instant throughout all the generations of time, whenever a human being dies, may have exerted a fatal influence in tempting such a man as Prof. Bush, boldly to cast from him the blessed hope of the glorious re-appearing of Him, who died upon the tree.
The object, then, of W. W. A. is to show, that no necessity exists in the prophecy itself for any such desperate resort of criticism, and the careful reader, we think, will agree with us in saying that he has succeeded.

But we are not so sure, that he has exactly hit the joint, if we may so speak, that binds together the two sections of the prophecy. The reasons for our hesitation are the following:

1. While there can be doubt of the justness of the observation with regard to the "relative" import of "designations of time," we do not find that the word in the 29th verse, rendered "immediately," is ever used with the latitude of meaning, which W. W. A. here assigns to it; on the contrary, it denotes almost invariably an instantaneous sequence, as when the miraculous result followed the word of Christ; — e. g., Mark i. 42; "And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him." Mark xiv. 43; "And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas," &c. It is twice in our version translated "by and by," (Luke xviii. 7; xxi. 9,) but in both instances to the obscurcation of the sense. — Now, between "the great tribulation," and the "coming of the Son of Man," our friend would interpose the protracteded "times of the Gentiles," and our first objection is, that the term σοφως, immediately, is nowhere else employed to express such a chronological relation.

2. The evangelist Mark, in his report of the same prophetic discourse, distinctly intimates, that the signs of the advent will follow so close upon the tribulation, as propely to fall within those very days of vengeance. "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened," &c.—xi. 24.

3. And, lastly, it appears to us, that W. W. A. does not get rid of the argument for the identity of the tribulation of Matt. xxiv. with the trouble of Dan. xii., and the earthquake of Rev. xvi. — the argument, to wit, drawn from the remarkable characteristic of all these three woes, that they are each in its turn said to be absolutely unparalleled. At least, if we take the matter strictly, it is obvious, that there cannot be two catastrophes, of which each is greater than the other. Besides, W. W. A. admits that the final convulsions are to be "on a far grander scale" and more destructive, than any previous visitation of God.

On these grounds it is, that we scruple about fixing on the 29th verse, and the word "immediately" there, as connecting the former overthrow of Jerusalem with the time of the end. We incline strongly to the belief, that the real explanation is given by Mr. Birks, in his volume, entitled "First Elements of Sacred Prophecy." We quote from p. 220 his remarks on the "great tribulation," and the shortening of the days, referred to once and again in v. 22:

The shortening of the days denotes a suspense, for an indefinite period, of the severity of judgment upon the Jews, that the elect Church may be gathered in, and also that the nation may be brought into a state to profit unto repentance, by the closing acts of divine indignation and vengeance. The tribulation is thus one and the same at the beginning and close of the period, in its moral and judicial character—"the days of vengeance, that all things
which are written may be fulfilled." It would also be one even in its chronology, were it not for this express departure from the natural order of Divine Providence, for a peculiar object, the ingathering and salvation of the elect people of God. And, in strict accordance with this view, the interval is styled in St. Luke, "the times of the Gentiles"; which may denote equally the times of Gentile domination; and the times of peculiar favor, when God is visiting the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for His name.

The great tribulation, in this view, may be defined as the season of special divine retribution on the people of Israel—the days of vengeance, which, as the words of St. Luke imply, are the burden of all the prophecies. This season has two parts—one in the apostolic age, when the Jews were destroyed, the temple overthrown, and the remnant led captive into all nations; the other, a little before the second advent, when there shall be distress of nations and perplexity, and men's hearts shall fail them with fear. These two seasons are morally one; but in chronology they are widely separate through this provision of divine wisdom and forbearance, in shortening the days until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

It must now be observed, that, whether we adopt this view of the true place of transition, or that proposed by W. W. A., the interpretation furnished by our correspondent of the 34th verse, which he more especially designed to illustrate, remains equally valid and satisfactory. For the fuller confirmation of it, we subjoin some important remarks taken from the same admirable work of Mr. Birks, simply asking the reader to bear in mind, that it was our Lord's previous intimation of the ruin then impending, and of the advent that should follow, that gave occasion to this whole discourse; and also that, when the disciples came with their inquiries respecting the time of that dreadful calamity, and the signs of their Lord's promised return, their very language plainly showed what was uppermost in their minds; "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

It is well known that the choice of the demonstratives may depend either on the order of mention, or on the actual situation of the objects described. Now the disciples were sitting in view of the temple, surrounded by the very scenes of the approaching desolation, which our Lord knew well to be near at hand. On the other hand, the second advent had reference to a far wider range in its theatre, and to a remoter period, after the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled. Hence the words "these things" and "that day" would naturally refer to the contrast between these two distinct events, separated by an undefined interval of the times of the Gentiles.

The words will, therefore, admit of this easy paraphrase:—This very generation shall not pass away till all these events, which answer the first inquiry, shall be fulfilled. The irrevocable sentence of God is pronounced against the city and the temple. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but these warnings shall not be unfulfilled. But with regard to that other day of which you inquire, and the sign of Messiah's return, no man knoweth, nor is the Son himself commissioned to declare it. "Watch and pray, for ye know not when the time shall be."

Let us only place ourselves in the position of the disciples when our Lord addressed them, and this explanation of the verse will be found both natural and simple. They had inquired, "When shall these things be?"—the ruin of the temple and vengeance on the people. Our Lord
reveals the time, and says to them, "Verily this generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled." They had further asked, "What shall be the sign of thy coming?" Our Lord mentions the attendant signs, but refuses to declare the time: "Of that day and hour knoweth no man." At the same time he substitutes a lesson of practical caution:—"Watch and pray, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." These solemn declarations at the close of the discourse thus answer fully to the inquiry from whence it arose.

Our readers, we are happy to announce, may expect frequent essays from W. W. A.

IS CHRISTIANITY TRUE OR FALSE?

More than eighteen centuries ago there appeared in Jerusalem a wonderful man, mighty in word and deed, who sought not to promulgate His doctrine by the arts of soft persuasion, but who "taught as one having authority." This drew upon Him the jealousy of the priests and rulers of the day, who said unto Him: "By what authority doest thou these things, and who gavethat authority?" And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying: If we shall say, From heaven, He will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men, we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus and said: We cannot tell." (Matt. xxi. 23–27.)

The Jews of the present day are in precisely the same dilemma with regard to Christianity, that these priests and rulers were in regard to the mission of John the Baptist. Were they to admit that Christianity is true, all men would naturally ask: "Why then do ye not believe it?" If they boldly and consistently denounced it as false, they would fear that the people among whom they dwell would on this account refuse to grant them that highest object of their ambition, an equality of civil rights. Ask any Jew of the present day this plain question: "Is Christianity true or false?" His reply will be, in substance at least, if not in words; "I cannot tell."

It is impossible to read modern Jewish writings without being struck by the difference of their tone, according as it is pitched for Jewish or for Christian ears. If intended for the latter, Judaism appears as the most tolerant and accommodating of all religions; it can not only live in peace with all others, but it can concede, that while Judaism is the best religion for Jews, Mohammedanism is, at the same time, the best religion for Musselmen, and Christianity the most suitable to Christians. "Every man to his mind;" is its avowed tenet; and we may all believe what we like, and not only all live peaceably, but strange to say, may all be in the right.

"Judaism," says Dr. S. Hirsch, * "does not stand inimically towards Christianity, and never has done so. Judaism rather regards Christianity as its most beloved child; as a fair fruit, over which it has to rejoice. It was not until long after the death of Jesus, that Christianity set itself in hostile opposition to Judaism; and though this rude ingratitude of the spoilt child has cost the mother tears of blood, still maternal love knows how to forget it all. The child will come to perceive that a godly chastisement for its unrighteousness has not been wanting; it has wounded itself with the weapons wherewith it attempted to drive its mother from the paternal roof, where there was