

be? And if any act of presumption could call for vengeance from Heaven, why should not this? If we follow her in this presumption against the commandment of God, how shall we meet it at the last day? Let the Third Angel's Message, of Revelation 14, be our warning in this matter.

It has been shown in the prophecy of Daniel that this same power should think to change times and laws. Dan. 7:25. And here we behold the fulfilment in that church affirming its power to change the highest laws of the Infinite One. It is this, more than all else, that identifies that power as the "man of sin" spoken of in 2 Thess. 2:3,—that man of lawlessness, that man against all law, setting himself to be above all law. In this he has truly exalted himself above God, as having authority to annul the statutes of God. He is not only a sinful man; there are multitudes of such in the world. He is what the Scripture says, the man of sin. He makes merchandise of sin; he pretends to make wrong right, and to make right wrong; for surely there can be no higher standard of right and wrong than the law of God, and this he essays to reverse. Thus in his hands sin loses its sinfulness, and under his touch virtue is no longer beautiful. Every word of this strong indictment is fully justified by the high claims put forth by that church to be above the Scriptures, and above all law.



CHAPTER XVIII.

SIGNS OF THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

It is quite generally believed that we cannot know anything about the time of the second advent of our Lord, until it takes place; that he will come the second time without warning. But no greater mistake could be made. We firmly believe that the great majority do not want to know or hear anything about it, because the thought is unpleasant to them. They realize that it will be a day of terror to those who are not prepared for his coming, and they seem to realize, to some extent, that such an extraordinary event will require extraordinary preparation. Our Saviour said it will be as the days of Noah; and we know that Noah had to make special preparation for the flood—he had to do something entirely different from all that was required of his fathers.

But that day will also be a day of great joy and glory. To the saints who have heeded the warnings given in the prophecies, who are looking for him (1 Heb. 9:28), who love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:1-8), who have kept the commandments of God when persecution raged on every side (Rev. 13 and 14), it will be a day of joyful triumph. The prophet, describing that day, says the saints will exclaim, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." Isa. 25:9. In order to wait for him, they must make the special preparation needed; and in order to make that special preparation, they must understand the warning and instructions of the Scriptures on that subject.

Noah went into the ark seven days before the flood came upon the earth. Gen. 7:1-6. During those seven days he

waited for the flood; he surely did not wait while he was building the ark. When our characters are completely formed in the sight of God—when Jesus has blotted out all our sins, and probation has closed, and the time of trouble comes—then the saints will anxiously wait for the Lord.

The prophet Joel wrote thus:—

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand.” Joel 2:1.

The day of the Lord is a long period of time which will immediately succeed the “day of salvation,” which has now continued many centuries. Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul connected the coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, etc., with the coming of the day of the Lord. 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 5:1–4. And Peter said the perdition of ungodly men, the melting of the earth, and the burning up of all the works of men, will take place in the day of the Lord. That is the day of which the prophet Joel spoke.

Now every word spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets must be fulfilled; and before the day of the Lord comes an alarm must be sounded. This alarm, as we have seen, is the solemn warning of the three angels’ messages (Revelation 14), given just before the coming of Christ. And this proves that the students of prophecy will know when that day of the Lord is near; otherwise they could not sound the alarm.

Paul, in Heb. 9:28, says that Christ will come the second time without sin unto salvation to them that look for him. In chapter 10:25, he exhorts them to faithfulness, especially when they see the day approaching. He has spoken of no other day than that of the coming of Christ. The saints will see it approaching; they will heed the warning; they will love his appearing; they will anxiously wait for him.

This is not a matter of conjecture, but of the most certain knowledge. Jesus made it as sure as the heavens and the earth, in his instruction to his disciples. When he had spoken to them of the destruction of the temple, and the city of Jerusalem, they anxiously besought him, saying:—

“Tell us, when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” Matt. 24:3.

Two questions are here asked; 1. When shall these things be? that is, when shall the temple and the city be destroyed? 2. What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? In the first of these questions we have now no interest; therefore we will attend to only those parts of the chapter which have a clear reference to the second, enough to ascertain the certainty with which we may know when the coming of the Lord is near.

Verses 4–8 speak of wars and rumours of wars, kingdom rising against kingdom, and nation against nation, and pestilences and famines in divers places, which are the beginning of sorrows; the end is not yet. These verses clearly refer to the last days, and the end spoken of is the end of the world, or of the gospel age; for it is not true that these things took place after Jesus spoke these words, and before the destruction of the temple, which was in A. D. 70. Verses 9–14 also refer to the end of the world, showing that the last days will be marked by a declension of piety, love growing cold, and the necessity of endurance on the part of the faithful. For a similar testimony, see 2 Tim. 3:1–5.

Also the great tribulation, verses 21, 22, has reference to the long persecution of the church under the Roman power, specially under papal Rome. Twelve hundred and sixty years were marked off for the triumph of the papacy, and in that time the saints of the Most High were given into his hand. But the days were shortened for the elect’s sake, lest the church of God should be utterly cut off. That is, the persecution did not continue the entire time of the twelve hundred and sixty years.

The false Christs and false prophets of verses 23, 24, also belong to the last days. They are the same as the wonder-workers of Rev. 13:13, 14, and 16:13, 14. These signs and wonders, false and deceitful miracles, will increase unto the end.

In verses 26, 27 is given very important information—a

sure defence against the deceptions of the last days in regard to the Lord's coming. In many parts of the world the church is fast departing from the faith of the gospel; many are denying that the Lord will ever come to this world again personally. All such will readily be deceived by false Christs and false prophets and false miracles. But Jesus says that as the lightning shines from one end of heaven to the other, so will his coming be. "Every eye shall see him." Paul says, "The Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise." 1 Thess. 4:13-18. They who confidently rely upon these scriptures cannot be deceived on this subject, for nobody can counterfeit the lightning's flash—much less the coming of Christ with his myriads of holy angels, the resurrection of the dead, etc.

Verse 29 contains the signs of the Saviour's coming, as follows:—

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven."

Some have thought that other signs follow these, because other things are there mentioned. But among the things mentioned are the coming of the Lord, and his sending his angels to gather his elect. The signs cannot include his coming, for they are signs of his coming. The shaking of the powers of the heavens takes place at his coming, under the sixth plague of Revelation 16; it is not a sign.

In Mark 13:24 the signs are thus spoken of: "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened," etc. The days of papal triumph, twelve hundred and sixty years, ended in 1798, as has been seen, but the tribulation—the persecution of the church unto death—ceased before that time. The Reformation did not deprive the papacy of its power to persecute; but the opposition raised against papal errors and practice made it inexpedient for the popes to try to exercise that power. Nor did it convert them to a different disposition, for the papacy never changes. In the "Syllabus of Errors," published

by Pius IX., the doctrine is condemned that different religions may be tolerated where the power exists to suppress them.

FIRST SIGN, "THE SUN SHALL BE DARKENED."—It is a well-known fact that on the 19th of May, 1780, after the persecution had ceased, but before the days had ended, the sun was darkened in a most remarkable manner, and to a remarkable extent. The darkening was principally on the American continent, just where the miracles of these last days took their rise, and where the Lord in his providence caused the Third Angel's Message to first go forth. The darkening was so extensive and of so long continuance that it fulfilled the prophecy in a striking manner. A few testimonies of the many that might be given will suffice to make the fulfilment apparent.

Noah Webster, LL.D., in his large English Dictionary, gives the following information concerning it:—

"Dark Day, The. May 19, 1780;—so called on account of a remarkable darkness on that day extending over all New England. In some places, persons could not see to read common print in the open air for several hours together. Birds sang their evening song, disappeared, and became silent; fowls went to roost; cattle sought the barn-yard; and candles were lighted in the houses. The obscuration began about ten o'clock in the morning, and continued till the middle of the next night. . . . The true cause of this remarkable phenomenon is not known."

In a valuable work, entitled, "Guide to Knowledge," is the following:—

"On the 19th of May, 1780, an uncommon darkness took place all over New England, and extended to Canada. It continued about fourteen hours, or from ten o'clock in the morning till midnight. The darkness was so great that people were unable to read common print, or to tell the time of day by their watches, or to dine, or to transact their ordinary business, without the light of candles. They became dull and gloomy, and some were excessively frightened. The fowls went to roost. Objects could not be distinguished but at a very little distance, and everything bore the appearance of gloom and night."

The American Tract Society publish the "Life of Edward Lee," an eminent minister of the gospel, in which is the following testimony. Particular attention is called to its expressions:—

"In the month of May, 1780, there was a very terrific dark day in New

England, when 'all faces seemed to gather blackness,' and the people were filled with fear. There was great distress in the village where Edward Lee lived, 'men's hearts failing them for fear' that the judgment-day was at hand; and the neighbours all flocked around the holy man; for his lamp was trimmed and shining brighter, amidst the unnatural darkness. Happy and joyful in God, he pointed them to their only refuge from the wrath to come, and spent the gloomy hours in earnest prayer for the distressed multitude."

These writers speak of the sun being darkened till the following midnight; how could this be known? It is easily explained by what follows.

SECOND SIGN, "THE MOON SHALL NOT GIVE HER LIGHT."—Matthew Henry, a commentator on the Bible, well remarked on this text:—

"The moon shines with a borrowed light, and therefore if the sun, from whom she borrows her light, is turned into darkness, she must fail, of course, and become bankrupt."

An eye-witness of these scenes, speaking of the dark day, said:—

"The darkness of the following evening was probably as gross as has ever been observed since the Almighty first gave birth to light. I could not help conceiving at the time, that if every luminous body in the universe had been shrouded in impenetrable darkness, or struck out of existence, the darkness could not have been more complete. A sheet of white paper held within a few inches of the eyes was equally invisible with the blackest velvet."

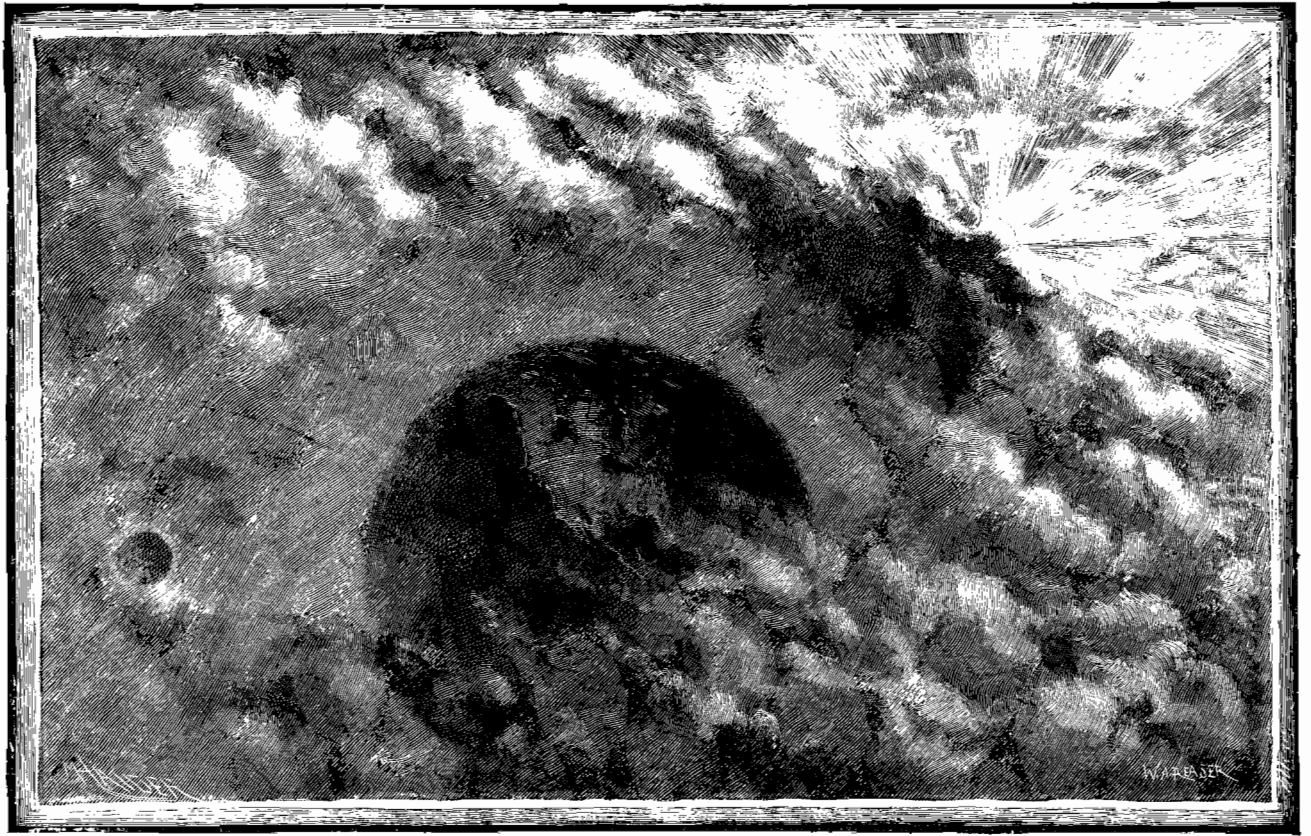
Another writer said:—

"Almost everyone who happened to be out in the evening, got lost in going home. The darkness was as uncommon in the night as it was in the day, as the moon had full'd the day before."

In regard to the continuance of the darkening of the sun, it is to be judged from the continued darkening of the moon, which was at the full, when her clearest light was to be expected. Another writer said:—

"About midnight the clouds were dispersed, and the moon and stars appeared with unimpaired brilliancy."

This shows that the sun gave no light to the moon till midnight, and the darkness continuing from ten in the morning till midnight, shows that darkness was on the earth fourteen-twenty-fourths of the entire surface, from east to west. A remarkable darkness indeed!



THE DARKENING OF THE SUN AND MOON.

THIRD SIGN, "THE STARS SHALL FALL FROM HEAVEN."— This is the last of the three signs given by our Saviour, and was altogether the most glorious and magnificent in its fulfilment, which was November 13, 1833. Rev. Henry Dana Ward, of New York City, thus described the appearance of the falling stars:—

"At the cry, 'Look out of the window,' I sprang from a deep sleep, and with wonder saw the east lighted up with the dawn and meteors. The zenith, the north, and the west also, showed the falling stars in the very image of one thing, and only one, I ever heard of. I called to my wife to behold; and while robing, she exclaimed, 'See how the stars fall.' I replied, 'That is the wonder;' and we felt in our hearts that it was a sign of the last days. For, truly, 'the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.'" Rev. 6:13. This language of the prophet has always been received as metaphorical. Yesterday, it was literally fulfilled. The ancients understood by aster, in Greek, and stella, in Latin, the smaller lights of heaven. The refinement of modern astronomy has made the distinction between stars of heaven and meteors of heaven. Therefore the idea of the prophet, as it is expressed in the original Greek, was literally fulfilled in the phenomenon of yesterday."

In regard to the extent and nature of this heavenly display, Professor Olmstead, of Yale College, speaks as follows:—

"The extent of the shower of 1833 was such as to cover no inconsiderable part of the earth's surface, from the middle of the Atlantic on the east, to the Pacific on the west; and from the northern coast of South America, to undefined regions among the British Possessions on the north, the exhibition was visible, and everywhere presented nearly the same appearance. The meteors did not fly at random over all parts of the sky, but appeared to emanate from a point in the constellation Leo, near a star called Gamma Leonis, in the bend of the sickle."

This shows that they were not mere atmospheric phenomena, but came from the regions far beyond our atmosphere. It was the privilege of the writer of these pages to behold this scene, and it was one never to be forgotten. They began to fall about an hour before midnight, increasing in frequency until, in a few hours, they became a perfect shower. They could no more be counted than one can count the fast-falling flakes of snow in a hard storm. They continued to fall without any diminution of numbers until the dawn of day obscured them. And when the approaching light of the sun paled them in the

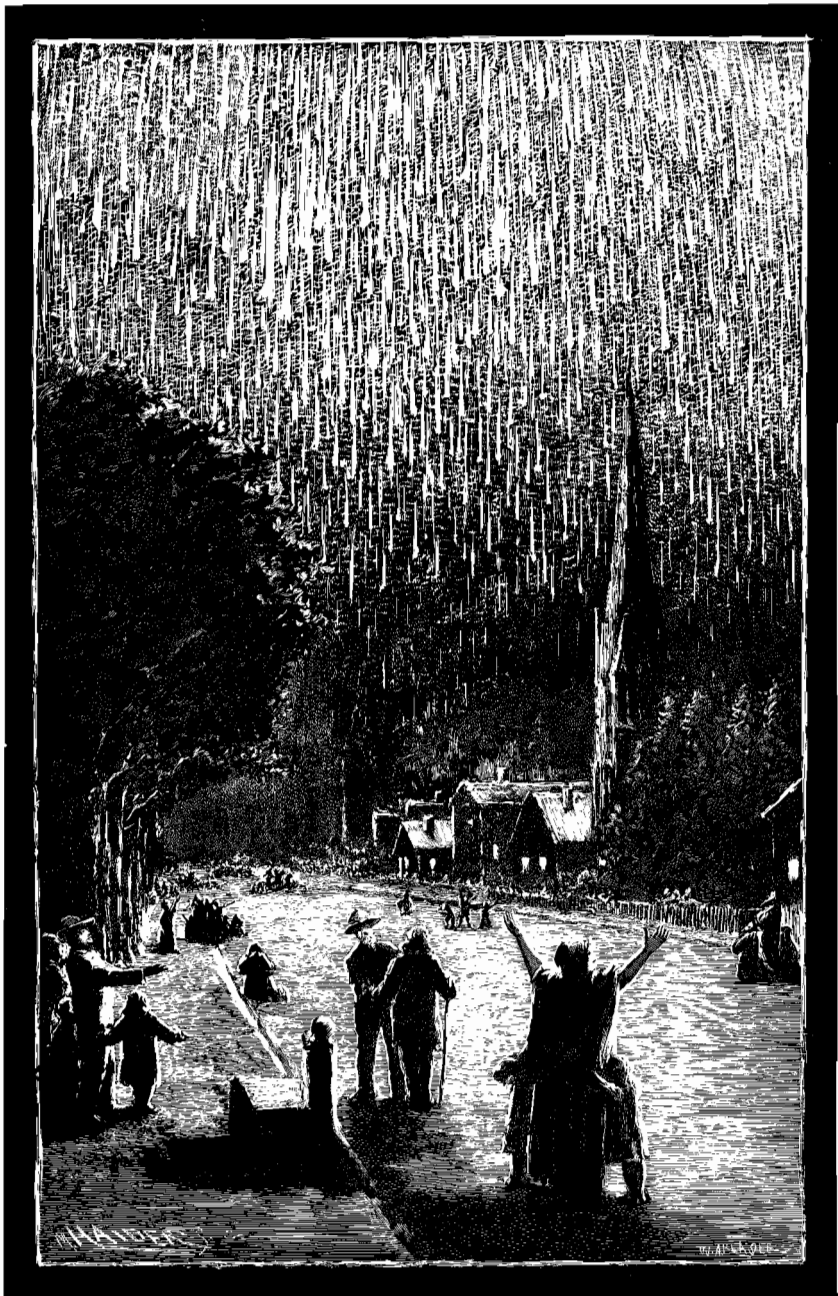
cast, they still coloured the western sky. And when the spreading light obscured them in every direction, occasionally one of great brilliancy would leave its trace in the west, showing that they were still falling.

After giving these signs, the Saviour spoke a parable, in application of his instruction. He said:—

“Now learn a parable of the fig-tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh. So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.”
Matt. 24:32, 33.

In Luke 21:29, 30 it reads, “Behold the fig-tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand.” Even so; we do not doubt it; we do not need that any should offer us proof; we know it. And thus, says the Saviour, shall we know when his coming and the end of the world is near, even at the doors. It is true that he says that of that day and hour knoweth no man. This we firmly believe; but that is not all the truth. He gives signs by which we may positively know when it is near; he commanded us to know, and gave the days of Noah as an example of the danger of not knowing. We may know, and it is our duty to know; and if we would not be neglectful of our Saviour’s words, we shall search diligently to know all the truth of his sacred word. By so doing, we may be the children of the light, and that day shall not overtake us as a thief. 1 Thess. 5:4.





THE FALLING OF THE STARS.