

The Word of Truth Ministry Presents Special Full Length Studies #SS33

SORTING PROPHETIC MATERIAL

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The predictive prophecies of the Word of God are great in number. They deal with a multitude of things which must come to pass if the Scripture is not to be broken. The subjects of prophecy are numerous indeed. Those who make a study of the Bible will soon find that they have upon their hands many predictions which deal with “things to come.” In time they must begin to sort this material or else the truth they have found will be lost in irretrievable confusion.

Many years ago Lord Bacon wrote of the imperative need for men to undertake the task of “sorting prophetic material,” and he felt that devout men could undertake no work that would be more fruitful. The task of sorting prophetic material is most certainly a part of the work laid upon us by God when He through the Apostle Paul exhorted us to be “rightly dividing the word of truth.” To have assigned one prophecy to the wrong time is a violation of this precept.

If one undertook the task of sorting a quantity of nails of all kinds and sizes, it would be evident at once even to the most simple, that a bin, box, or pile would be needed for each kind and size. Even so it is when we attempt to sort the predictive prophecies of the Word of God. We will need to learn from Scripture and have firmly fixed in mind certain time periods in which each one must be placed. If in the course of sorting we find unfulfilled prophecies which will fit into none of the periods we have in mind, then it is evident that we are lacking a truth from God's Word which reveals a time period which we have not yet discovered and which we do not have in our calculations.

If the whole of God's revelation in the Scriptures is traversed, we will find that at last we come to a period of time (since it has a definite beginning) which is properly called “the new heaven and new earth.” See Revelation 21:1. Once this period and its character is clearly fixed in our minds by the Word of God, we have one large bin in which to place certain unfulfilled prophecies. For example, in Revelation 21:2 we read:

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Again in Revelation 21:4 we read:

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things passed away.

The mere reading of these passages shows that in them we have two very definite predictions, and that these are two unfulfilled prophecies. The logical questions that come to mind at once are: When will these things be? When will the heavenly Jerusalem descend to the earth? When will God wipe away all tears and there be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain? To these questions there can be only one correct answer—the new heaven and new earth.

However, there are not many prophecies that can be assigned to this period of time. The one who gathers prophetic material will soon find certain predictions which tell of events that must be fulfilled before the new heaven and new earth begin. This naturally leads the student to look for other prophetic times in which these things can find their proper places.

The Thousand years

In harmony with a great host of prophetic students and teachers, this writer understands and believes that preceding the new heaven and the new earth, the Word of God sets forth another definite period of time which in popular language is more simply and properly called the millennium. In Revelation 20:1-3 we read:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years. And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled.

Even though highly figurative language is used in this passage in setting forth the facts; nevertheless, it reveals facts which must be faced. In recent years it has become quite “scholarly” to deny the millennium altogether. A new theory has arisen which is described by those who follow it as being “amillennial.” Since this word has not found its way into any of the major dictionaries it may be helpful to some if it is defined as describing the teaching of those who hold that there is to be no millennium.

The reader of these lines will probably ask, "But what do they do with such passages as Revelation 20:1-3?" The answer is that they explain it away. The "thousand years" is an indefinite symbolical period between the two advents. Dr. George L. Murray, Minister of the First United Presbyterian Church of Boston, Massachusetts, is a leading advocate of this theory. In his book on *Millennial Studies* he says, "There are many people who find it difficult to believe that Satan is bound today when there is such widespread evidence of his influence." To this there are many who would answer, "You said it, brother!"

The Little Season

In sorting prophetic material there are many predictions which must be placed in the millennium, and, as we have already seen, there are other predictions which must be assigned to the new heaven and new earth. However, a careful reader of the Word of God would be sure to ask where one should place the event predicted in Revelation 20:7-9. This undoubtedly will not fit in either the thousand years or in the new creation that follows it. Turning to this portion we read:

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. Revelation 20:7-9.

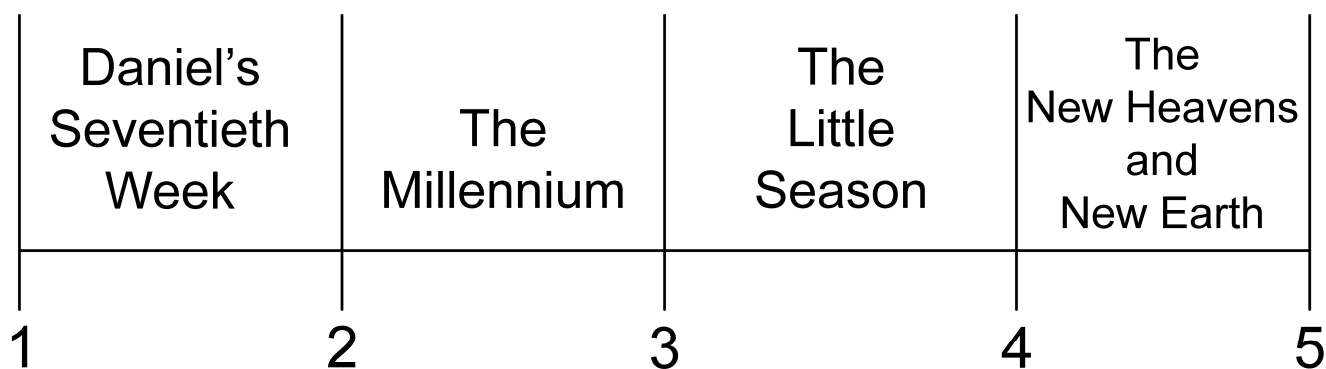
Careful consideration of this passage with its contexts reveals that it does not belong either to the millennium or to the new heaven and earth. It cannot be rightly sorted by placing it in either one of these, for this event belongs to a short period of time called "the little season." This follows the millennium, and it is characterized by Satan being "loosed out of his prison." Thus we have in their Scriptural order, first the millennium during which Satan is bound, then the little season during which Satan is loosed, and finally the new heavens and new earth, at the beginning of which Satan receives his final and irrevocable doom. This gives us three major time periods into which we can assort prophetic material.

While these three time periods will take care of every event prophesied in the last three chapters of Revelation, they will not take care of the numerous events that are predicted in the first nineteen chapters of Revelation and in numerous other places in the Word of God. These chapters have to do with tribulation and wrath, graphically set forth under such symbols as seals, trumpets, and bowls. These events do not fit into any of the time periods already set forth, so another division is required.

Daniel's Seventieth Week

Again in harmony with a host of students and teachers of the prophetic Scriptures, this writer understands the Bible to teach that a definite period of time will precede the millennium which is seven years in length. This unique and distinct period of seven years is the amazing final week of years of Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks determined upon Israel. After gathering all available facts, it seems beyond question that the last half of this seven year period is the great tribulation, spoken of numerous times in holy writ. Therefore, if a question should arise as to where this writer places the events of Matthew 24, the answer is given without hesitation that the greater part of them belong to the seven year period that precedes the millennium. The explicit directions in this chapter (see verses 16-20) were written to guide men of God who will live in a future time, not in the present time.

Thus we now have four future time periods under which we can classify prophetic material. A simple chart of a few lines will help in making this plain.



Now if this writer should be asked where he places the second coming of Christ, his answer would be that he places it at that point marked by line number two, which is after the tribulation and before the millennium. This makes him an avowed premillennialist, since he believes that the second coming precedes the millennium, but it does not mean that he accepts all the details of popular premillennial theology as it is proclaimed today. However, it would be the most willful misrepresentation for anyone to call him a postmillennialist.

The Character of the Millennium

Because of their positive bearing on the character of the millennium, certain other predictions need to be classified in relationship to the outline presented above. The first of these is found in connection with the divine interpretation of the parable of the tares among the wheat as recorded in Matthew 13. There we read:

As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity. And shall cast them in a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Matthew 13:40-43.

No attempt will be made here to interpret every detail of this passage.(1) In spite of the figurative language used in it, it reveals positive truths that cannot be denied. It sets forth definite events which have never yet taken place and which must take place if Scripture is not to be broken. And if the question is asked as to when the fulfillment of this prophecy is to take place, or where it is to be placed when we sort prophetic material, the answer is given without hesitation. These events take place at the time of the second coming of Christ, immediately before the millennium, with the final statement giving a picture of the millennium itself.

From these words of the Lord Jesus we learn the absolute truth that just before the millennium begins He sends forth His angels and they remove from His kingdom everything that causes sin (see Weymouth Version), and every being that does lawlessness. Thus we know that “the thousand years” begins without a single thing being present which would cause anyone to sin and without a single being on earth who does iniquity. The chief “doer of lawlessness” removed and incarcerated at this time is Satan himself. Before commenting further on this portion, let us consider another portion which gives additional light on this truth. In his second letter to the Thessalonians the Apostle Paul solemnly affirms:

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power; when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10

The average reader who has any degree of compassion for the wayward and ignorant hesitates to face the stern and unpleasant facts set forth in this prophecy. Numerous attempts have been made to lessen the drastic nature of this statement, but it cries out its warning even after it has been interpreted as not meaning what it says. The time referred to is most certainly the second coming of Jesus Christ. This is declared at the beginning and it is repeated at the end of the passage quoted above. Note: “shall be revealed from heaven” and “when He shall come.” When He comes

He will take vengeance on those who know not God and who obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The punishment of these will be everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. Therefore, since this takes place at His coming, before the millennium begins, it is absolute truth that there will not be a human being left to enter the millennial earth except those who know God and who obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. These words mean what they say. All who lack the knowledge of God and who lack a record of obedience of the gospel of Christ will be purged without mercy before the thousand years begin. Not one of these will be left to enjoy the blessings of that glorious time. The millennium is preceded by a visitation of divine wrath which purges the earth of all who do not know God. All who enter the millennial earth must know God. They must have a record of obedience to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In view of this, if the writer should be asked if it is his desire that the second coming of Christ should take place today, he cannot honestly say "yes" when he thinks how few there are among men who know God and who obey the gospel. Those whose lives have been devoted to the salvation of men will find it impossible to become enthusiastic over an event which if it occurred today would result in such widespread destruction of lost men. If this is God's will and purpose, then this writer will accept it as such and say, "Thy will be done," but to claim that he has any enthusiasm for it would be dishonest. It is his conviction that God can do something better, that God has promised to do something better, and that God will do something better than to destroy as many as would necessarily be destroyed if Jesus Christ should return to the earth tonight. More on this later, this being but a preliminary word to challenge certain egocentric individuals to more serious thinking upon this subject. Many desire the second coming because of all the rich blessings they suppose it will bring to them. They ignore altogether the besom of destruction it would be to the bulk of men. And if at this point any reader of this pamphlet is inclined to cast it aside and read no more, then I beg of them to read for themselves Malachi 4:5,6, and maybe then they will be willing to read on. There God promises that He will do something for this world which will make it unnecessary for Him to smite the earth with a curse when He comes. But we have digressed and must return to our theme.

From the Scriptures cited this far we can now establish positive facts in regard to the character of the millennium. Once we have from God's Word the truth concerning the moral and spiritual conditions of the millennium, it will be a positive aid in the correct sorting of prophetic material.

Just before the millennium begins, Jesus Christ will send forth His angels and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend. Matt. 13:41. This phrase is

translated by Rotherham “all the causes of stumbling”; and by Weymouth “all the causes of sin.” These are good translations. They emphasize the truth that there will be nothing in the millennium that could possibly induce anyone to sin.

This same passage reveals that all men or beings will be gathered out who “do iniquity.” This means all who violate His laws, or, who do lawlessness. The millennial earth will be free from all such men or beings.

There will be none in the millennial earth except those who know God and who obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who cannot pass these two divine tests will be purged from the earth before the thousand years begin. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

At the beginning of the millennium Satan is to be bound. He is cast into the abyss. He is imprisoned there and a seal is set upon him. Revelation 20:1-3. These words can mean nothing else but that all his power, wisdom, and skill is rendered completely inoperative for a thousand years. In view of this, while sin will be possible, there will be no sin. Death will be possible, but there will be no death. Sin and death will never be seen again until such time as Satan is loosed and appears again upon the scene. And if any should cite Mark 7:21-23 as proof that the human heart is of such evil nature that even with Satan bound it will still produce wickedness, they should remember that this passage does not describe the hearts of those who enter the millennial earth.

The Scriptural facts set forth in the preceding paragraphs reveal the character of the millennium. It is completely holy and righteous from the beginning, and it remains in that condition until Satan is loosed for a little season. These are positive facts based upon the plain testimony of Scripture, and they cannot be overthrown except by direct attacks upon the Word of God which declared them. Therefore, in view of these truths we must never place in the millennium any prophecy if it in any manner jars against these facts or it is contrary to them. If any prophecy does not harmonize with these plain facts, then it does not belong to the thousand years.

Sorting Other Prophecies

If we were to take every unfulfilled prophecy in the Scripture, and if we would sort them as far as possible into the four future time periods that have already been set forth, we would find that we have no place for some of the most glorious predictions in the Word of God. These prophecies speak of great blessings which are to come upon Israel and the world, and while it has always been customary to dump them in the millennium, they do not belong there as they do not harmonize with the revealed facts concerning the character of that time. To demonstrate this, we will make an examination of some of these predictions. The first we will consider is

spoken to the people of Israel.

Isaiah 60:1-5

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.

This glorious prophecy has been frittered away by many who say that it was fulfilled when Christ came to the earth as a babe in Bethlehem. But this is not a prophecy of kings coming to Christ. It is a prophecy of kings coming to Israel. This passage speaks of a time when a great divine light shines upon Israel. This being a reality, she is called upon to "Arise! Shine!" This takes place at a time when darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the peoples. The word "people" in this passage is plural in the Hebrew, and it means nations when viewed as the beings who form them. At the very time when gross darkness covers the earth and its peoples, Jehovah arises upon Israel and causes His glory to shine forth that enlightens Israel and brings them to Jehovah. The Gentiles are also attracted by this light and are drawn to Israel. The rulers of the earth come to participate in Israel's clear light, as the Queen of Sheba came to the wisdom that God had given to Solomon. Furthermore, Israel's own sons and daughters who are scattered come from afar to be joined and to be blessed by her. But this is not all, for the prophecy continues to speak of other blessings.

And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in My wrath I smote thee, but in My favour have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day or night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For that nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. Isaiah 60:10-12.

If an honest attempt is made to sort this portion of prophetic material, it will be found that it does not fit into any of the time periods set forth. It will not fit into Daniel's seventieth week, the millennium, the little season, or the new heaven and earth. As a rule this prophecy is arbitrarily placed in the millennium, which means that this enlightenment and blessing of Israel and Israel's subsequent blessing of the

Gentiles will occur after the second coming of Christ. But this is an impossibility as the following facts will show.

Consider that we today are living, as described by Isaiah, in a time when darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the peoples. The people of Israel dwell in darkness that is so deep that it arouses the pity of all who have a grain of divine compassion. They do not know God, and the majority of them loathe the gospel of Jesus Christ. The overwhelming majority of Gentiles fall into the same category. Unless God intervenes and brings light to Israel and the nations, they will still be in this same pitiful darkness when the Lord returns to the earth. Therefore, He will have no alternative but to keep His word as recorded in 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9 and destroy Israel and the vast majority of mankind. Being an Israelite will not shield anyone from this wrath (Romans 2:9). If this should happen there will be no "Israel" in the millennium to whom this magnificent prophecy can be fulfilled. Lest the Lord "come and smite the earth with a curse," this prophecy must be fulfilled before He comes again.

Furthermore, in this prophecy Isaiah speaks of the Lord shining forth to give light to those who are in darkness. This cannot take place in the millennium. The only people who pass into that time are those who know God and who obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who measure up to these tests cannot be described as being in darkness. Hence, not even at its beginning can the thousand years be described as a time when darkness covers the earth and its peoples, since from its very inception all men in it will "know God and obey the gospel."

It should also be noted that since all those who "do iniquity" will have been purged at the second coming before the millennium even begins, it is out of the question that there should be present in the millennium any nation of such rebellious spirit that it would not willingly serve Israel. See Isaiah 60:12.

These facts force us to the conclusion that if this glorious prophecy of blessing for Israel and the nations is not fulfilled before the second coming of Christ, it can never be fulfilled after He comes. We cannot sort this prophecy by giving it a place in any of the four periods that have been set forth. Another period is demanded by this prophecy. This must be a time of blessing for Israel and the world, and it must precede the second Coming of Christ.

Let us consider another great prophecy from the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 2:1-4

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house

shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Here is another glorious prophecy which has as a rule been assigned to the millennium, inasmuch as it speaks of the nations beating their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. But it is these very words that make it impossible for us to assign this to the thousand years. These words describe a process in which the instruments of war are turned by men into implements of peace. It must be remembered that before the millennium begins the angels of God gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, so there will never be an instrument or institution of war in that time to be turned in peaceful pursuits. No implement or institution related to the destruction of men will ever enter the millennial earth.

This prophecy also describes the nations or peoples of the earth taking counsel together and encouraging one another to go to the center of light and truth and there to learn the ways of Jehovah. This shows that there has been divine intervention, and it is not that catastrophic intervention related to the second coming of Christ. It is impossible for us to imagine the nations of today confessing that they can learn anything from Israel. This passage reveals an entirely different state of affairs from that which is seen among Israel and the nations today. The blessed state which is described here does not come about from God intervening in cataclysmic punishment, taking vengeance on all who do not know Him. It comes from God intervening to give light and to reveal Himself to Israel first and to the nations afterward. This is a prophecy which must be fulfilled to its zenith before the punishments take place which accompany the second coming of Christ. If we do not have time for this in our tight little systems of prophetic interpretation, then we must enlarge them in order that we might find a true place for every prophecy in the Word of God.

To enlarge their system of prophetic interpretation seems to be impossible for those who have adopted the idea of the imminent coming of Christ, the idea that He may come at any moment. This is a mistake, even though it is devoutly held by many sincere people. If any statement is frequently made and greatly emphasized, it stands a good chance of being accepted as absolute truth, without any questions as to whether it harmonizes with the facts in the case. The statement so commonly made

from many pulpits over an open Bible that, “Christ is coming, it may be today,” is a sample of this. That Jesus Christ is coming back again in person is a Biblical fact that no one believes any more strongly than this writer. But that He may come today, tomorrow, or this year is contradicted by a thousand and one facts in the Word of God. His coming is accompanied with wrath of such drastic nature that were it to take place now to a world in darkness it would make impossible the literal fulfillment of most of the glorious predictions recorded in the major and minor prophets. The prophecy under consideration is one of these.

Another reason why Isaiah 2:1-4 cannot be assigned to the millennium is that the Spirit has declared expressly that the things predicted here shall come to pass “in the last days.” The term “the last days” stands for a definite period of time which cannot be the same as the thousand years. The Hebrew phrase which is here translated “the last days” occurs fourteen times in the Old Testament, though it is translated “latter days” in ten of these occurrences. These fourteen occurrences are Genesis 49:1; Numbers 24:14; Deuteronomy 4:30, 31:29; Isaiah 2:2; Jeremiah 23:20, 30:24, 48:47, 49:39; Ezekiel 38:16; Daniel 2:28, 10:14; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1.(2)

The term “the last days” also occurs in the New Testament. When all passages are examined, one would reveal himself to be a very crude expositor if he insisted that this term always refers to the same period of time. However, of this we can be sure and speak with certainty. There is no prophecy of anything that is to come to pass in the last days that can rightfully be assigned to the millennium. That period of time which is called “the last days” in Isaiah 2:2 can be positively identified in Scripture. It is not the thousand years.

The Last Days

We need to seek the true meaning of this important phrase. With us the word last is usually taken to mean “that's all there is” in regard to the matter concerning which it is used. Thus, a man's last dollar means that when it is gone he has no more money. But it cannot mean that in Isaiah 2:2, Acts 2:17, or 2 Timothy 3:1. The “last days” of Acts 2:17 precede the day of the Lord, which is definite proof that there are “days” that follow “the last days.” And it is doubted if anyone would want to take the stand that “the last days” of 2 Timothy 3:1 are the final days that mankind will experience.

In the Hebrew the word “last” is a noun, not an adjective. Great difficulty is found in translating it as a noun in English. This Hebrew word occurs 63 times and is translated as follows: end 21 times; last 5; last end 4; last of them 1; latter end 8; latter time 1; length 1; posterity 3; remnant 1; residue 1; reward 2; hindermost 1; latter 13; uttermost 1. This shows that this word gave the translators quite a bit of

difficulty. They translated it “end” more times than any other, and this probably comes nearest to expressing the meaning of the Hebrew. It is as if one should say, “I gave him the message, but I do not know what the end will be.”

After carefully considering every occurrence of this word, and its corresponding Greek word in the New Testament, this writer finds that the idea of outcome, or result is the true significance of this term. See Psalm 37:37 where it is translated “end”; Proverbs 20:21, translated “end”; Proverbs 24:14, translated “reward”; Proverbs 24:20, translated “reward”; Proverbs 29:21, translated “at the length”; Jeremiah 29:11, translated “end.” The idea of outcome or result is the prominent thought expressed by this word in these passages.

Applying these truths to Isaiah 2:2 will show that it means that the things predicted there will come to pass in “the result of the days,” or as we might say it “the resultant days.” The days referred to here are all the days of God's dealings with Israel, all the days in which He worked in their behalf from the call of Abraham to that moment when the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles at Acts 28:28. The outcome or the result of all these days will be the glorious condition described in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4. It will be helpful here if it is remembered that a day or days in Scripture is put for what transpires in them, the things done in them, or existing in them. We still do this when we report that “it has been a good day,” meaning that the things that took place were good. Read Psalm 78 for a partial record of some of the days of God with Israel. In Isaiah 2 we have a prophecy of what it will be in the outcome or result of the days of God's activities in behalf of Israel. In 2 Timothy 3:1-8 we have a prophecy of the result or the outcome of the grace that God has showed to mankind for over 1900 years. See also Isaiah 26:10.

This truth should forever silence the taunt of the atheists who have gleefully pointed out that Paul and Isaiah flatly contradict each other as to the character of the last days. Isaiah speaks of the result of the days of God with Israel. Paul speaks of the days of God with mankind in which He has dealt only in grace. These two are not the same. The “last days” spoken of by Isaiah have not yet begun. The “last days” spoken of by Paul are upon us now. The “last days” period spoken of by Isaiah follows the “last days” period spoken of by Paul. Paul shows his harmony with Isaiah by declaring that in the next great period of time, God turns on the light, manifesting the folly of wicked men. 2 Timothy 3:9.

The Day of the Lord

The time of “the last days” of Isaiah 2 in relationship to the time periods already set forth can be accurately fixed by Scripture. In Acts 2:16-20, Peter, quoting from

and enlarging upon the prophecy of Joel, sets forth seven distinct things that will come to pass in the last days, and he also declares that these things will take place before the great and notable day of the Lord comes. Since these things take place in the last days, and since they take place before the day of the Lord comes, only one conclusion is possible. The “last days” is a period of time which precedes the day of the Lord.

An induction of all the truth revealed in Scripture concerning the day of the Lord will bring the conviction that it is a long period of time which includes Daniel's final week of seven years, the millennium, and the little season. It does not include the new heaven and earth, for that is the day of God. The second coming of Jesus Christ is an event that takes place early in the day of the Lord. Therefore, it logically follows that the last days of Isaiah 2 and Acts 2 is a period of time which precedes the second coming of Christ. All events which take place “in the last days” as related to Israel, take place before the great and notable day of the Lord comes.

Thus it can now be seen that the acceptance of the plain testimony of Scripture will give us another time period to which we can assign many prophecies. The book of Isaiah is filled with predictions of divine blessings which must be fulfilled before the millennium. Even a casual reading of Isaiah will reveal many more promises of future blessing which if they are not fulfilled before the second coming of Christ, then the people to whom they should be fulfilled will no longer remain. They will have been wiped out by the all-consuming punishment which attends the return of Jesus Christ to the earth.

We will next consider a major prophecy in the book of Ezekiel, which even on the first reading will show that it must be fulfilled before the Lord comes.

Ezekiel 20:33-38

As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the Lord.

This passage should be carefully read until its contents are mastered.(3) The divine activity in behalf of Israel described in this prophecy begins while they are still scattered among the nations. God reveals His determination to rule over them. His rulership over them is to be accomplished with a mighty hand (great skill), a stretched out arm (mighty and miraculous power) and with fury poured out (the punishment visited upon those who resist or hinder His purposes). He will bring them forth from the peoples (denationalize them) and from the countries wherein they are dispersed (repatriate them). This effort also will be accompanied with divine skill, divine power, and divine wrath. They will be brought by Him into “the wilderness of the peoples” (the place of separation) and there He will plead with them face to face. This does not mean that He begs them, but that He brings to bear upon them every fact, every truth and all evidence that has a bearing upon His claims upon them, like a lawyer pleads a case in court. Those who rebel against this gracious work are purged. The end of all this will be that Israel will come to know the Lord, and declaration is made that as the result of His work they will come to know that He is Jehovah. See Ezekiel 20:38, 42, 44.

It is certainly pointing out the obvious to say that the action described here is diametrically opposed to that of punishing with everlasting destruction those who know not God. Here we read of God taking those who do not know Him and doing a work that brings them to knowledge and submission. In 2 Thessalonians 1:9 we read of God destroying all who do not know Him. God can do either one of these works, but He cannot do both at the same time. This prophecy from Ezekiel must be fulfilled in every detail before the second coming of Jesus Christ. It will be too late to fulfill it after He comes.

It is evident from His own words that our God desires that the number of those destroyed when Jesus Christ comes shall be as small a number as possible. This is revealed in the final passage which we will consider from the Old Testament.

Malachi 4:5-6

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

This declaration of Jehovah reveals that if Jesus Christ comes to the earth and certain conditions exist, there will be nothing that He can righteously do but smite the earth with a curse. This is not God's desire, and to make such drastic action unnecessary He has declared that He will send Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great day of the Lord. Elijah will be used of God to bring about a great spiritual

work which is here described in highly figurative language as turning the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers. The first of these phrases means to bring to submission, the second means to bring to wisdom. To turn the heart of “fathers to children” is to take the worldly wise, experienced, self-sufficient ones and bring them into the submissive character of children. Then to turn the heart of children to fathers is to take the submissive ones and bring them into the wisdom of the just. See Matthew 18:3, Luke 1:17. This is to be done by Elijah the prophet, lest when the Lord comes He would find it necessary to smite the earth with a curse.

It is futile to say that this prophecy was fulfilled by John the Baptist.(4) John himself declared that he was not Elijah (John 1:21). This prophecy speaks of divine intervention and a gracious work which precedes the second coming of Christ. If after this any man remains obdurate or rebellious, he will be ruthlessly purged from the earth (Matthew 3:12).

The Kingdom of the Heavens

As prophecies such as these are considered (and there are many more) it becomes increasingly evident that the four time periods set forth earlier in this study are not adequate when we begin to sort prophetic material. Another definite period is needed, and it must be a period which is characterized by the blessings of God. We do not need to manufacture this period. It is already clearly set forth in the Word of God. It is that period of time and state of things called in the Old Testament “the last days” but which is more fully set forth in the New Testament as “the kingdom of the heavens.” It is a period of time characterized by heavens' government upon the earth. This was announced by John the Baptist and the Lord as being at hand. Its foundations were being laid by God throughout the Old Testament and the final work was done by Christ in His death, resurrection, and ascension. With these facts in view the following order can be established which will appeal to all who have a working knowledge of the Word of God, and who have faced the innumerable problems that arise when a penetrating study of the prophecies have been made. We proceed on the theory that the Hebrew and Greek words translated “kingdom” mean *government*, a fact that is fully established in Scripture.(5)

The Old Testament Times

The inspired writers through whom God gave us the Old Testament are unanimous in their testimony that the day is coming when God will overcome all Satanic influences and will establish His government in the earth. “He shall crush thy head (Gen. 3:15) is the first statement concerning this, and Malachi 4:5, 6 is the last. These

inspired writers from Moses to Malachi recognize and point out the hand of God in the affairs of men at that time, yet they proclaim that a time is coming when God will govern the earth and its inhabitants in a manner that would leave no detail untouched or unregulated. “He maketh wars to cease to the ends of the earth” (Psalm 46:9) is a characteristic passage that speaks of this coming time. “The Lord has prepared His throne (the seat of His government) in the heavens; His kingdom (government) ruleth over all” (Psalm 103:19), is another glorious testimony concerning the character and extent of this government. In summing up the Old Testament message concerning the kingdom of God we find that in it His government over mankind is predicted. “The kingdom prophesied” can be written over the whole of it.

The Gospel Period

By this term is meant the thirty-three years in which our Lord was upon the earth, of which the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are the history. This period began with the birth of Christ and ended with His resurrection. This time in relationship to that government of God which the prophets predicted can best be designated as, “The Kingdom Heralded.” This was first done by John the Baptist and later by the Lord Jesus. Their simple proclamation was, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand.”

In a wealth of other statements our Lord went on to reveal many details as to the character of this coming kingdom, even revealing secret truths that had not been made known before.⁽⁶⁾ One of the most important truths He revealed was that this kingdom would not begin with great outward show, but that it would be progressive in its development, comparable to seed developing into ripened grain. See Mark 4:26-29. The heralds of the kingdom were told to give the most positive demonstrations as to what men could expect under heavens' beneficent rule. They were to “heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils.” Matthew 10:5-8. The Lord declared that some of His twelve disciples would not experience death until they had seen the Son of man “coming in His kingdom” (Matthew 16:28). This is not a personal coming, for it is said to be a “coming in His kingdom.” This promise would be fulfilled if even one of these men lived to see God's government begin on the earth in a stage comparable to the blade stage of growing grain. Eleven of these men lived to see this. This is an exceedingly important truth that has often been missed, and the reader is asked to give it careful consideration.

The Acts Period

By the term “the Acts period” is meant the thirty-three years of which the book of Acts is the recorded history. In relationship to that kingdom which was prophesied in

the Old Testament and heralded as being at hand during the earthly ministry of Christ, the Acts period can best be described as the kingdom in progress. Heavens' government began the moment Christ arose from the dead. This was openly affirmed when "many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." See Matthew 27:52,53. Following this, all the strange events that took place as recorded in the book of Acts had to do with those preliminary labors which were necessary before the kingdom entered into its next great stage. The kingdom in the Acts period was in a stage that was comparable to the blade stage in growing grain. The next stage would be one of more definite manifestation, comparable to the ear of growing grain. In this God would do everything necessary to bring about the triumph of His government in the earth.

But there is no fact in human history that is more manifest than that something happened. The bright prospects of the early Acts period were never realized. The kingdom did not advance from "the blade" to "the ear" (Mark 4:28). Why? What happened? These are questions that demand answers.

There is only one truth that explains this. God's kingdom purposes have been suspended and are now in abeyance. The event that marks this historically is Paul's declaration found in Acts 28:28:

Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

The Present Period

In rightly dividing the word of truth, no more important distinction can be made than between grace and government. These two things are exact opposites. Under God's government men receive what they deserve, while under God's grace, love and favor are shown to the undeserving. In the Acts period both grace and government are seen in action. Both were playing their parts at that time, so neither principle was operating to its fullest extent. These principles never conflicted. Where grace operated, government stood aside. Where government operated, grace was not in the picture. This is clearly seen in Corinth where grace had reached down and saved some of the vilest (1 Corinthians 6:11), but government had brought sickness and death to some because of their walk (1 Corinthians 11:30). Government could not save a sinner, and grace could not punish the wicked.

The time in which we now live is the dispensation of the grace of God,(7) during which divine government is not in operation. The grace that today saves us does not bring us under divine government as in the Acts period. It leaves us entirely under

human government. It dishonors God for us to say that He is now governing mankind, for this makes human government to be God's kingdom. It glorifies God when we say that at this time all of His kingdom purposes are suspended or in abeyance. His present purpose in this dispensation of grace is to demonstrate and establish once and for all the graciousness of His character. This is a study by itself and it can only be referred to in this study.

The one great question which is now before us is, "What is next?" This dispensation of grace is not going to continue forever, "What follows it?" The time will come when God will have completed His demonstration of His grace, "What will He do then?" There are numerous answers given to these questions, one of which is so popular today that we will need to examine it briefly before going on to give what is believed to be the true answer.

The system of prophetic interpretation which can be accurately designated as the *Darby-Scotfield* system holds that this dispensation will come to a cataclysmic end by the sudden removal from the earth of all living believers. This is commonly called "the rapture," and it is supported by quoting the declaration of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. It is further held that this will mark the beginning of the final week of years of Daniel's seventy weeks of years, at the end of which Jesus Christ comes back to the earth to establish His millennial kingdom, in which He will fulfill all the glorious prophecies of peace and blessing that are found in the Old and New Testament.

That events such as these are predicted in Scripture, all who believe the Bible will freely admit, but that they happen in this order or that they are the next great event to take place, this writer firmly denies. Those who stand for these ideas steadfastly refuse to recognize that 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is a promise made to those "who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord" and that this Greek word is *parousia*. If they will take this word and trace it through Matthew 24, they will discover that the *parousia* of Christ is an event that takes place at the close of the great tribulation, not at its beginning.

If this order is the correct one, if the next great event is the sudden removal of all living believers, then all left upon the earth would have to be classified as those who know not God and who obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ. Since all such are to be destroyed at the second coming, this would make impossible the fulfillment of most of the glorious prophecies of the Old Testament.

In his earlier ministry, Dr. C.I. Scofield, the Editor of the *Scotfield Reference Bible* recognized the problem that this creates and he solved it by teaching that between "the coming of the Lord for His church, and His return to the earth with His saints,

the overwhelming majority of living humanity will be saved.” (*Scofield Correspondence Course*, Volume 2, pages 344, 345.) This idea was supported by the statement in Revelation 7:9-14, but there is not a shred of proof that this innumerable company will enter the great tribulation as ungodly sinners and a few months later come out of it as godly saints. If Scofield's idea were true, it would of course mean that only a small minority of men would be punished with everlasting destruction when the Lord comes. But the idea cannot be true because it is contradictory in itself. If in a seven year period the overwhelming majority of living humanity is to be saved, that would mean that the world would experience the greatest spiritual blessings that God has ever poured out. How can the great tribulation be a time of unparalleled trouble if in it mankind is experiencing his greatest blessings? Furthermore, if in that seven year period the overwhelming majority of living humanity is to be saved, there is no reason for removing all the saved before starting this work. This writer, for one, would prefer to stay right here and see this glorious work.

Since this teaching was so contradictory, it was modified in Dr. Scofield's later writings, and it has not been adopted by those who follow Scofield in almost every other detail.

The Kingdom Manifested

In answering the question concerning that which will follow the dispensation of grace, it will be well to begin by pointing out that the followers of the Lord Jesus in the time when He was upon the earth confidently expected that they would soon see the kingdom of the heavens come in its initial stage. As stated before, this would be a stage comparable to the blade stage of growing grain. They expected this, and they were not disappointed, for their hopes were realized when He arose from the dead. Ten days after His ascension there was a public display in which men saw the curse of Babel lifted for 120 disciples, allowing them to speak freely the language of any nation.

In the Acts period the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ confidently expected that the next thing would be the second great stage of heavens' government. This stage would be a more open manifestation in which God would bring forth His power in such manner as to insure the complete triumph of His government in the earth. The time of this second great stage was purposely left indefinite. See Acts 1:6,7. We know now that there was another purpose in the mind of God which had never been revealed to men. The fulfilling of this purpose demanded a suspension of all kingdom purposes.

The kingdom was not suspended because of Israel's rejection of the risen Christ. It was suspended in order that God by means of an administration of grace might demonstrate the graciousness of His character. This demonstration will stand as a monument throughout all ages to come even in that day when grace shall no longer be manifested and absolute government will prevail. When this purpose is complete, our God will resume His kingdom purposes which were suspended at the close of the Acts period. He will bring in the second great stage of the kingdom of the heavens.

God's present display of grace is not to be brought to an end by catastrophic punishments being poured out upon men. Neither is it to be brought to an end by the sudden removal by rapture of all believers, nor by the second coming of Jesus Christ. It will come to an end by God reversing that which marked its beginning. The salvation of God will return to His people Israel.

The next stage of heavens' government is not characterized by Jesus Christ being personally present upon the earth. Its character is clearly set forth in Psalm 103:19:

The Lord has prepared (established) His throne (the seat of His government) in the heavens; and His kingdom (government) ruleth over all.

The oft repeated cliché, “There can be no kingdom until the King comes again,” is seen to be false reasoning when it is examined in the light of the verse quoted above. To insist that there can be no kingdom unless the King is on earth is to deny His ability to rule from the heavens. The next stage of heavens' government is related to the Lord sitting at the right hand of the Father until His enemies are made His footstool. This is quite different from the Lord coming to destroy His enemies.

The Character of the Kingdom

God's government, when it is a reality in the earth will be so different from anything that man has ever known or experienced under human government that many are inclined not to believe when some of its features are pointed out. Human government is limited to the abilities of men, while heavens' government is as unlimited as the ability of God. From the Word of God we can learn many things which will be true when God rules over the earth. We will consider some of these things in a series of numbered paragraphs, repeating some things in order to present a more complete picture.

1. God's present purpose to provide a demonstration of the graciousness of His character will close when His present purpose is complete. His present graciousness will stand as a memorial through all ages to come, as the trophies of His grace extoll the glories of His grace to all the universe. When His present purpose is complete,

His kingdom purposes will be resumed. Then the salvation of God will return to His people Israel, reversing the great declaration made in Acts 28:28. This will bring Israel again into direct contact with God's channel of blessing, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jehovah, the great Shepherd of Israel, will again be "among His people." See Ezekiel 34:12.

2. Through this channel the Spirit will be poured out upon Israel from on high, bringing an end to their long isolation from God, and bringing them under full accountability to light and truth. Isaiah 32:13-18. Isaiah 29:18, 24.

3. God will then miraculously bring them out of all peoples, and gather them out of all countries wherein they are now scattered. Ezekiel 20:34. He will bring every pertinent truth to bear upon their hearts. He will plead with them face to face, that is, directly apart from all human instruments. Ezekiel 20:35, 36. All who rebel against this work will be purged from Israel. Ezekiel 20:38. This is the process by which He thoroughly purges His floor. Matthew 3:12.

4. Their long awaited light comes to them. The glory of the Lord rises upon them. Other nations are attracted to and are blessed by their light. Isaiah 60:1-3. They rebuild their temple on its ancient site, and it becomes a house of prayer for all nations. Isaiah 56:7, 60:10. God removes all dross from them. Isaiah 1:25. They remove every detestable and abominable thing from the land of Israel. Ezekiel 11:17-18.

5. God pours out of His Spirit upon all flesh. Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17. The world (mankind) is reprov'd (enlightened) concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. (8) John 16:7-11. All men are drawn to Christ. This puts upon mankind the greatest responsibility ever laid upon the human race. These acts of God bring every man on earth under full accountability and responsibility to God-given light and truth. This will result in the submission of the overwhelming majority of mankind to Jesus Christ. Those who rebel will be purged from mankind.

6. God's judgments (His due order) will be established in the earth. The inhabitants of the earth will learn righteousness. Isaiah 26:9; 29:18, 24.(9)

7. Under God's government by means of the heavens, the righteous dead will be raised progressively and in order. John 6:39, 40, 44. 1 Corinthians 15:23. The believers of God's present calling will enter into their glorious allotment as the Lord Jesus judges (sets in order) the living and the dead. 2 Timothy 4:1.

8. Longevity will be restored. Death in Adam will be overcome. Physical health will be the portion for all under heavens' government. Psalm 118:17; Matthew 8:17;

John 14:19.

9. The kingdom of the heavens which precedes the millennium will not be of short duration. The blessings under it which are to come upon Israel are perpetuated through many generations. Ezekiel 28:25, 26. Ezekiel 37:25. This writer's studies have convinced him that the next great stage of the kingdom of the heavens cannot be less than 500 years in length. It may be much longer than this. The development of the kingdom is progressive. Under it men are taught God's ways. Jesus Christ will not fail nor be discouraged until He has set justice and judgment in the earth. Isaiah 42:1-4.

10. Under heavens' government the Holy Spirit will act as an effective restrainer of evil to such an extent that the flow of sin will be stopped. But in order that men might be fully tested, this restraint will in time be loosened and removed. This will not affect the overwhelming majority of men for they have learned righteousness, but it will demonstrate that some are held in by restraint and not by character. These will come forth in open revolt against the kingdom. 2 Thessalonians 2.

The Revolt Against the Kingdom

This is set forth in numerous passages. In Psalm 2 the nations are seen taking counsel together against Jehovah and against His anointed. They encourage one another to revolt, to break the bands and to cast off the cords which He has laid upon them. Inasmuch as God today permits all nations to walk after their own ways, there are no bands or cords upon them. This Psalm speaks of a revolt that takes place after God has intervened and imposed His order upon men and nations. When they first begin to grow restive under these restraints and plan to rebel, they are openly warned against such steps, and are told that retribution will be swift and sure.

In Matthew 24 when the Lord was asked about the sign of His coming (parousia) He spoke of a resurgence of false prophets, of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquake. These are to be the beginning of sorrows. It is natural to ask how these things can be of any significance when they have been the constantly recurring experiences of mankind ever since these words were spoken. How can these events mark the beginning of sorrows to a world that has never been free from sorrows. But if these things should cease for many centuries (and they will), their reappearance would be highly significant.

In 2 Thessalonians 2 we read that the day of the Lord will not come except there come a falling away (an apostasy) first. These words speak of men suddenly standing apart from a position in which they formerly stood. This links up with and is explained by Psalm 2. In the true meaning of the word there is no apostasy today. It

cannot be shown that the bulk of men who stand apart from God today ever stood with Him. There is an apostasy at the end of the kingdom of the heavens. In this, men who had been submissive to God's government will become rebellious. This apostasy will be immediately followed by the coming of the Lord to put down the revolt against His kingdom. Those who have willfully participated in it will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.

A Key to Scripture

The world still waits to partake of the glorious results of Christ's redemptive mission. The second coming will not take place until after mankind as a whole has reaped the benefits that were purchased by the first coming of Christ. The glorious blessings that were to come to mankind through His great self-humiliation and sacrifice have never yet been realized. To recognize that these blessings are coming, and that they are next on the program of God's declared purposes is the true key to Old and New Testament prophecy. The truth that as a result of God's intervention the world will enjoy a long period of peace, righteousness, and blessing before the second coming of Christ explains many difficult passages of Scripture, causing them to shine forth with a new glory. This writer feels that he renders a real service to students of the Word when he points out the fact that some parts of the New Testament were inspired by God with men of the future primarily in view, and that they are inapplicable in this dispensation of grace.

Take, for example, Hebrews 6:4-6. Read this in the light of the truth presented in this pamphlet. This passage can only be applicable to a time when men have been enlightened, have tasted of the heavenly gift, have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come. Under grace if these facts were true they would establish an indissoluble relationship between God and man that could never be altered. Yet under heavens' government such blessings as these can be the privilege of men without such relationship being established. The fact that these blessings will be granted to men will bring them under such responsibility that if they should fall away it will be impossible to renew them again to repentance.

Hebrews 10:26-29 also belongs to that coming day when men will have received from God the knowledge of the truth. If they sin willfully after this, there remains no further sacrifice for sin. All they can look forward to is a certain "fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries."

From this we see that this truth not only makes possible the sorting of prophetic material, but it also makes possible an honest interpretation of many passages which

heretofore have been most obscure.

In the interpretation of Scripture the greatest possible confusion has been caused by making the kingdom of the heavens and the millennium to be one and the same.(10) This eliminates the kingdom altogether, although some of its truth is salvaged by wrongly dividing it between the present time, the tribulation, and the millennium. This modifies the true character of all three periods. Grace is no longer grace, the tribulation is a mixture of affliction and blessing, and the millennium is neither righteous nor unrighteous. This method of sorting prophetic material is destructive to much truth. It places prophecies where they do not belong, reinterpreting their message so that they will fit. It can create nothing but confusion if we fail to distinguish between that time when the seat of government is in the heavens, and the time which follows when the seat of government will be upon the earth. In the next great dispensation of God the seat of government will be in the heavens. This is clearly portrayed in Psalm 103:19:

The Lord has prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom rules over all.

The day is going to come when God's government is going to reach out to reclaim the earth and bring it into subjection to Christ. As His light comes in, darkness must flee. Error must yield to truth. Sin must give way to righteousness. Sickness will be replaced by health. Human government will be replaced by heavens' government. Men must submit to God. Man's day will be superseded by the day of Christ. Then He will see the travail of His soul and be satisfied. May God speed the day.

The End SS33

NOTES

1. For a full exposition of this parable see *The Word of Truth* Volume 11, Number 5, page 102, also Volume 12, Number 4, page 87.
2. A more detailed examination of these passages will be found in the writer's pamphlet *The Last Days*.
3. Additional material on Ezekiel 20 will be found in *The Word of Truth*, Volume 12, Number 2, page 31.
4. See article on The Coming of Elijah, Volume 11, Number 6, page 146, *The Word*

of Truth.

5. A study on *The Word "Kingdom"* will be found in *The Word of Truth*, Volume 12, Number 6, page 168.
6. See studies on *The Kingdom of the Heavens*, beginning in Volume 12, Number 2 of *The Word of Truth*, and continuing through Numbers 3,4,5 and 6.
7. The writer's pamphlet on *SS08 - The Dispensation of the Grace of God* contains additional information on this subject.
8. This truth has been dealt with in numerous studies. See *The Word of Truth*, Volume 11, Number 5, page 112; Volume 11, Number 6, page 141; Volume 12, Number 4, page 1.
9. See study on *God's Judgments*, *The Word of Truth*, Volume 12, Number 1, page 4.
10. See leaflet *SS29 - Thirty-five Contrasts Between the Kingdom of the Heavens and the Millennium*, by Otis Q. Sellers.