

JESUS THE PRINCE OF THE WORLD.**BY REV. A. R. ABERNATHY, DRY RIDGE, KY.**

The purpose of this article is to give a new interpretation of John 12:30-32, 14:30-31, 16:8-11. We shall endeavor to show that Jesus and not Satan is the Prince of this world, and in the light of this to interpret these passages.

The argument shall be based almost entirely upon a study of these three passages. The method of procedure shall be translation, paraphrase and comment. The translation of the Revised Version shall be changed only in John 14:30, and the conditional clause in John 12:32 shall be changed to a concessional clause. We shall paraphrase according to both the accepted and the suggested interpretations.

Before we begin our study of these passages, let us notice very briefly the extraneous matter upon which the accepted interpretation of the "Prince of this world" is based. It is based upon the traditional interpretation. We must remember, however, that the Fathers used the allegorical, rather than the grammatico-historical, method of interpretation. For this reason they are not good authority upon questions of close exegesis. It is based also upon some phrases which are, in some respects, similar to, but not identical with, the phrase "the prince of this world." They are such phrases as: "The prince of this age," (This is a Hebrew phrase which is usually mistranslated, "The prince of this world"), the god of this age," (2 Cor. 4:4), "The prince of the powers of the air," (Eph. 2:2). The fact that the same common noun (prince) occurs in these phrases does not prove anything. By the same method, we can prove that the prince of this world is Jesus, (See Acts 3:15; Rev. 1:5). By the same method we can show that the Son of man and the son of perdition are the same person. The fact is that the

phrase the "Prince of this world" is found *only* in the three passages which we are to study, and in our interpretation of the "Prince of this world," we are almost entirely confined to these three passages.

We shall study the passages in the order in which they are found in the Book.

The translation of John 12:30-32, found in the Revised Version, is here accepted, except that we think the subordinate clause in verse 32 is concessional rather than conditional. This idea will be brought out in the second paraphrase. We shall paraphrase first according to the accepted interpretation.

Jesus answering, said to them, "This voice has not come on my account, but it has come for your good; for now the world is condemned, and now Satan is about to be cast out by means of my crucifixion; and, if I am crucified (and I shall be), I shall attract all men to myself."

Those who hold this interpretation have always had trouble in explaining the relation of the ejection of Satan to the condemnation of the world. The ejection of Satan ought to mean the salvation of the world. In fact the same commentators in explaining verse 32 will tell you that by casting out Satan, Jesus made it possible to attract all men to Himself. The two ideas of condemnation and salvation seem to be inexplicably mixed in the same sentence. The condition in verse 32 has to be explained away. There was no doubt in the mind of the speaker. Why put in a condition? When was Satan cast out? Those who hold this interpretation say that the ejection of Satan was only potential, and will be fully consummated, when Jesus has His final triumph. That may be true, but is it in the text? Jesus associates the "casting out" with the present "now" and His approaching crucifixion.

Let us now paraphrase according to the suggested interpretation. Jesus answering, said to them, "This voice did not come on My account, but it has come for

your encouragement; for you will need something to strengthen your faith in the dark days now upon us. From a human point of view the outlook is indeed now gloomy; for *now* the world renders its verdict against (condemns) Me, and *now* I the prince of this world, am about to be cast out (executed), but take courage; for even though I am crucified, I will save all that the Father has given Me.”

The words “now”-“now” are temporal and emphatic. They make a sharp contrast between the dark present and the bright future.

In the clause, “Now judgment is of this world,” we consider the case of “world” to be the subjective genitive. If it is a subjective genitive, the world passes judgment on, or condemns some one. Who was condemned? (See Mathew 20:18-19). We know from the last part of the sentence in verse 32 that Jesus is speaking about His own execution. May we not infer that the one condemned and the one cast out in the first part of the sentence is the same person as the one executed in the last part of the sentence?

In verse 32 the word “men” after the word “all” does not occur in the Greek text. It may mean all men, but if so, it has to be modified, or explained in some way. It may mean all believers—all that the Father gave to the Son. (See John 6:37-40; 17:1-12). This seems to be preferable, since Jesus was speaking for the encouragement of His own, and since it needs neither modification nor explanation.

But who is “the prince of this world,” mentioned in verse 31? Is he Satan? There is nothing in the context to indicate it, and nothing in history to suggest it. Is he Jesus? In the same sentence Jesus speaks of His own execution as if it had been mentioned in the first part of the sentence. It is an historical fact that Jesus was condemned and executed.

How did those who heard Him understand Him? Did

they think He meant Satan, or Christ? Let us see. If they thought that He meant Satan, they said nothing to indicate it. If there was going to be a Titanic struggle between two rival rulers for the possession of the Kingdom, as some interpreters picture it, is it not strange that men with all of their interest in such contests did not ask even *one* question about this approaching battle? They did not ask about the ejection of Satan, but they *did* ask about the execution of the Son of Man, as if that had been the principal thought of the sentence. They said: "We have heard out of the law that the Christ abideth forever, and how sayest thou, the Son of Man must be lifted up?" Take notice that Jesus did not use the word "Christ," nor the phrase "The Son of Man." How can we account for this apparent discrepancy between the words of Jesus and those of the multitude? Did they misunderstand Him? If so, the Master did not correct them, but rather confirmed them in their opinion by continuing to speak about Himself, and neither does the writer of the Gospel make any correction, as he sometimes did. Perhaps, the discrepancy can best be explained by saying that the phrase "the prince of this world" and the pronoun "I" used by Jesus, and the word "Christ" and the phrase "the Son of Man" used by the multitude mean one and the same person—Jesus.

Jesus used the expression "The prince of this world" just as He elsewhere used the expression "The Son of Man." With a very slight change in the translation of John 14:30, we can, as the multitude seems to have done, substitute the one for the other, wherever either occurs. Things that are equal to the same thing are equal to each other.

This interpretation coincides with the known facts of history, explains the meaning of the voice from Heaven, and accounts for the apparent discrepancy between the words of Jesus and those of the multitude.

We now come to a study of John 14:30-31, which is,

in some respects, the most difficult of the three passages. It has probably given commentators as much trouble as any other passage in the New Testament. However, we shall find that with a slight change in the translation, and a change in the interpretation of "the prince of this world" this passage will yield most gratifying results.

The accepted translation has four possible constructions, but we shall paraphrase according to the construction that seems to be most in harmony with the accepted translation and interpretation: "I will not talk much longer with you, because (for) Satan the prince of the world is coming, and he has no power over Me; therefore I am not going away on his account, but I am going, in order that the world may know that I love the Father, and because the Father commanded Me to do so, and I always obey Him."

This seems to make Jesus contradict Himself. This makes Him say that He will not talk much longer with them, because Satan was coming, and then He said that Satan had no power over Him. Why let him interrupt the conversation? Why mention Satan at all, if he (Satan) has "no claim on, or interest in, or power over" Jesus?

The ellipsis in this construction is so great that we can never be certain that we have correctly supplied the missing part of the sentence. This is well attested by the fact that our best scholars have differed so much in their efforts to explain this hard passage, and some of them confess that the best explanation advanced is not very satisfactory.

Practically all agree that the purpose clause in verse 31 explains why Jesus is going away. However, the idea of going away is foreign to the text as translated. We cannot get the idea of going, unless we supply the principal clause, as we did in the above paraphrase. Then we have to supply some reason for His sudden change from the thought of the coming of Satan to His

own going away. This requires too many inferences, but without some inferences we cannot consistently bring in the idea of going, or connect the lines of thought between the first and the last parts of the sentence. As translated, and constructed the sentence is very defective in sequence and unity.

Let us try a new translation. We suggest the following: "I will no more speak much with you; for the prince of the world goes (away), and in Me it (the going) has nothing, but (I go) that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do."

We have made only two slight changes in the accepted translation. Can we justify ourselves in making these changes?

The verb (*erxetai*), translated "cometh" in the Revised Version, and "goes" in the above translation, expresses movement, but not direction. The direction, whether coming, or going, must be determined by the context. (See Bruce in his commentary on Mat. 16:5-12. See also Mat. 14:29, and John 21:3).

What is there in the context to suggest the meaning "cometh"? There is nothing, except the interruption of the conversation, and we shall see that the meaning "goes" is better even here. What is there to suggest the meaning "goes"? There are four suggestions: 1. The theme of Jesus' long discourse is His going away; 2. In the verses immediately preceding, Jesus is speaking of His going away; 3. The best interpreters agree that the purpose clause in verse 31 explains why Jesus is going away; 4. His going away from His disciples would put an end to His talking with the disciples.

Now, if the meaning "goes" is in harmony with the theme of the long discourse, continues the thought of the preceding verses, supplies the action the motive of which is explained in the purpose clause, and fully explains why

the Master will not talk much more with His disciples, why not so translate it?

The other change was in the subject of the verb (*exei*). This verb has no subject expressed in the Greek. In the Revised Version the verb is translated "he hath," and is translated "it has" in the above. If there were no difficulties, we would at once translate "he has." This is probably the cause of the wrong interpretation of all three of these passages. But this translation makes both the interpretation and the construction very difficult—almost impossible. "It has" is just as grammatical as "he has." This removes the difficulties of both the interpretation and the construction. The "it" refers of course to the going away. This is not putting in something foreign to the facts of the text, to the genius of the language, or to the style of the speaker. In the preceding verse (29) we find two verbs without any subjects expressed in the Greek. The translators of the Revised Version in both cases supplied the subject "it," and, what is more to the point, both of the "its" refer to the going away. If this is so in verse 29, why not in verse 30 which is more closely connected with the idea of going?

Do these changes help us in the interpretation and construction? Let us paraphrase, and see.

"I will not talk much longer with you, for I, the prince of the world, am going away, and this going away is not on My own account, but I am going that the world may know that I love the Father, and I am going because the Father has commanded Me to do so, and I always do as He commands Me."

"In me it has nothing" (v. 30), was interpreted in the above paraphrase as follows: "This going away is not on my account." This idiom is similar to our expression. "It is nothing to me," meaning that it is not for my gain, or is not in my favor. Can we justify the above rendering of the idiom "in Me it has nothing?" We may consider the phrase "in Me" to be a locative. Then the

cause, or origin of the act, is not found in the speaker. He is not personally responsible for it. Or we may consider "in Me" a dative of advantage. It is so used in the New Testament. See Greek text, 1 Cor. 9:15; 1 John 4:9. The going is not for the speaker's advantage; he is not going on his own account. We have, also, the testimony of those who hold the accepted interpretation. They, reasoning backward from the purpose clause in verse 31, find that some clause is necessary to connect verses 30 and 31, and they supply it. The clause, supplied by them, is almost identical with our interpretation of "in Me it has nothing." They supply as follows: "Jesus is not going away on Satan's account." We interpret: "Jesus is not going away on His own account." They say that the explanation of verse 31 demands this, and they supply it. We say that the text not only demands it, but also contains it, and we so interpret. They bear us witness that it *ought* to be there, and so confirm us in our interpretation of the idiom.

"But that" introduces a clause that gives the motive of an act, either expressed, or implied in the preceding part of the sentence, and this motive excludes another motive, either expressed, or implied in the preceding part of the sentence. In the accepted translation and interpretation, the act explained and the motive excluded, must be supplied. On the other hand in the suggested translation and interpretation, we find expressed both the act, the motive of which is given by the purpose clause in verse 31, and the motive excluded by clause in verse 31. The "act" is the going away of the prince of the world, and the "motive" excluded is that He is going on His own account.

In our translation and interpretation, we have given practically nothing which has not been supplied by those who hold the accepted interpretation. If they demand these thoughts to be supplied, why not accept them when we find them already there?

We come now to the study of the last of the three passages, John 16:8-11. The translation of the Revised Version is accepted, and we begin our study with the paraphrase according to the accepted interpretation.

“When the Holy Spirit comes, He will convict the world of its sin, of My (Jesus’) righteousness, and of its own condemnation. He will convict the world of sin, because they do not believe on Me, and He will convict the world of My righteousness, because I go back to My Father, and shall be no longer present with you, and He will convict the world of its own condemnation, because Satan, the prince of this world has been condemned.” (When and by whom?)

The word “Satan” seems to be out of place among so many pronouns of the first person. It has to be dragged in by force.

What is the relation between the condemnation of Satan and the condemnation of the world? Some say that the world will feel sure of condemnation, when it sees its prince condemned. This indirect method of conviction seems unworthy of the power of the Holy Spirit, who operates directly upon the human heart.

Let us paraphrase according to the suggested interpretation.

“When the Holy Spirit comes, He will convict the world of its sin, and of My righteousness, and of its own condemnation. He will convict the world of sin, because they believe not on Me as the Messiah, and He will convict or convince the world of My righteousness, because I am going back to My Father, and shall be present with you no longer, and He will convict the world of its own condemnation, because the sinful, and unbelieving world has unjustly condemned Me, the righteous prince of this world.”

We will now examine some of the phrases of the above passage.

1. “Of sin; because they believe not on Me.” The

sin of unbelief on Jesus was rebellion against the Father who sent the Messiah, was the rejection of the Messiah who came from the Father, and was the refusal to accept God's plan of salvation wrought out by Jesus, the Messiah.

2. "Of righteousness, because I go to the Father." Time and again, Jesus emphasizes the fact that He came from the Father. He commends His disciples because they believe that He came from the Father, and He reproves the world for not believing it. His return to the Father will prove that He came from the Father, and will, therefore, justify Him in all of His Messianic claims. (See Eph. 4:9-10).

3. "And ye behold Me no more." This is probably the negative way of saying that He is going away. To make a statement both in the positive and the negative is quite common in the Bible. The fact that they do not see Him will be evidence that He has gone back to the Father.

4. "Of judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged." The wicked world had unjustly condemned its righteous prince. The proof that He was righteous would be proof that the world was unrighteous in condemning him. This is the argument that Peter uses against them on the day of Pentecost. (See Acts 2:22-37). Verily! the world was to be convinced that "with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged."

Let us notice some things common to all three of these passages. In each of these Jesus is the speaker, and is speaking about Himself. He does not mention Satan in the immediate context. This would argue that the prince of this world is Jesus, not Satan.

Jesus is the only one who uses the expression "the prince of this world," and He alone calls Himself the "Son of Man," both of which He uses in the same way—suddenly changing from the first to the third person.

This would argue that both of these phrases mean the same person.

All three of these passages have given no end of trouble to the commentators. This would argue that something was wrong, either with the translation, or the interpretation, or both.

The evidence in each of these passages is almost entirely in favor of the suggested interpretation. Then the cumulative evidence must be convincing. For would it not be strange indeed if this interpretation should fit all the facts, remove all the difficulties, satisfy all the demands of language in all three of these passages, and still be wrong?

Since this interpretation satisfies the demands of language, coincides with the known facts of history, makes easy that which was difficult, clear that which was obscure, simple that which was involved, and satisfies the mind in every particular, is there even *one* good reason why these passages should not be so translated and interpreted that Jesus shall again receive His own title which has been worn so long by the usurper—Satan?