

ARTICLE III.

ON "THE MAN OF SIN," 2 THESS. II. 3-9.

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This is a passage of acknowledged difficulty. The fact of difficulty should not deter from its investigation, cannot excuse crude speculation or reckless disregard of the legitimate laws of language; but may invite to the exercise of candor, not to say charity, toward any well-meant endeavor to fathom its mysteries. Such an endeavor promises well and deserves candid attention only as it shall apply faithfully to the passage all the means at command for bringing its salient points to the surface, and drawing the line between the known and the unknown.

As to the value of the results to be sought for in this passage—if it be a chapter of the future history of our race; if it tells us of the "last times," immediately preceding the final coming of the Lord; if it opens new and most extraordinary developments in the great sin-problem of this fallen world—then, surely, the truths it has in it, if we may but reach them in very deed, must have momentous interest to every Christian mind.

The passage proposed for special consideration from Paul's second Epistle stands related to these words: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For 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 first: Then we which are

alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. iv. 13-18).

Paul is here exhorting the brethren against excessive grief for those who "sleep in Jesus." To this end he testifies that these sleeping ones are at no disadvantage compared with the saints living at the time of Christ's final coming, because all the pious dead will be raised *before* any even of the living will ascend to meet the Lord, and so all will ascend together. This point is put in its strongest light by tacitly supposing that the glorious coming were to break upon themselves—the "we" of that generation. Even in such an event, the saints then living must needs wait for the raising of the dead before they can ascend. Hence they had not the least occasion to bewail the comparative loss of those who "slept in Jesus." There *is* no such comparative loss or disadvantage.

Apparently some of the Thessalonian brethren missed the real thought of Paul; took his supposed case as direct teaching; and therefore understood him to say by authority that the final coming of Christ was then near at hand. This view begat an unwholesome agitation of mind; they were undesirably "troubled," and were in danger of being seriously misled. Hence Paul hastens to write his second letter, in which we read thus:

"Now, we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us as *that the day of Christ is at hand*. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first [*ἡ ἀποστασία*, the great apostasy], and that man of sin [*ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀμαρτίας*] be revealed, the son of perdition [*ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας*], who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing

himself [*ἀποδεικνύντα ἑαυτόν*, pretending to prove] that he is God. Remember ye not that when I was yet with you I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work, only he who now letteth [holdeth back] will let until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked [*ὁ ἄνομος*] be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming, even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders."

The major points made here are: (1) That the final coming of Christ was *not* then near at hand; (2) That "the great apostasy" must precede that coming, in which apostasy a somewhat, designated as "the man of sin," "the son of perdition," "the wicked one" (vs. 8), bears a principal and leading part; (3) That this "man of sin" will immediately precede Christ's final coming, inasmuch as the blaze of that coming will be his destruction.

I would class the following as minor and less important points in the passage: (a) What is meant by "the mystery of iniquity"? (b) In what sense was this mystery then already working? (c) What was the withholding agency? (d) How and when was this to be "taken out of the way"?

Of the major points, the first needs not a word of argument. It was Paul's main proposition — the very thing he wrote this letter to say and to prove. And to us the revelations of history sufficiently confirm his doctrine. The second point is Paul's great argument in proof of his main proposition. Christ cannot come yet, or soon, *because* there must first be "the great apostasy," and "the man of sin must be revealed." The third point locates this "man of sin," *in time*, immediately before Christ's second coming. This point should have special attention. The important words are: "Whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (vs. 8). That this "coming" [*παρουσία*] must be the final one, his coming for the general resurrection

and last judgment, I maintain on two grounds: (a) The uniform meaning of this word [*παρουσία*], of which see examples, Matt. xxiv. 3; 1 Cor. xv. 23; 1 Thess. ii. 19; iii. 13; iv. 15; v. 23; 2 Thess. ii. 1, etc., etc. The constant usage of this word in these two Epistles to the Thessalonians in the sense of the final coming should suffice to settle this point conclusively. (b) The special coming of Christ which was before the mind of both Paul and his readers was this last one, and no other. No anterior, subordinate coming was thought of. The very point of discussion was the time of Christ's final coming and its immediate antecedents. Of this, therefore, the Thessalonians must have understood Paul to speak; of this, therefore, he did speak. Hence there can be no question that this "man of sin" is located in time immediately before Christ's second coming, to continue down to that great event, and to meet his destruction in the overwhelming terrors which shall befall the wicked, and especially himself, on that day. One somewhat important point respecting "the man of sin" is therefore settled. We know his date — his place in time relatively to Christ's final coming.

Let us now proceed to other points. And, next, this "man of sin" is *an individual man*, not a corporation, not a society of men, not an indefinite succession of men spanning centuries of time; for, if so, then his being "revealed" (vs. 3) could have no point of time to it; it never could be known when his "coming" (vs. 9) took place, or his "destruction" (vs. 8); and, consequently, these events of history could not help at all to show when the Son of Man shall come; could not fix the point *before* which he could not come — the very purpose for which "the man of sin" is spoken of at all.

Again, this "man of sin" must be some one man; for every descriptive name given him implies it. For example, "the man of sin," i.e. the one man of whom sin is the distinctive characteristic — the man of surpassing wickedness, overshadowing and eclipsing all other men in sin. Also, "the son of perdition," one whose destruction should be as signal as his sin had been — a man of the stamp of Judas Iscariot,

to whom our Lord applies this very phrase (John xvii. 12). And, again, that "wicked one" [*ὁ ἄνομος*], the impious one, the very incarnation of bold and blasphemous impiety. By all legitimate laws of language, these terms in the singular number describe some one man, not many. They are made yet more specific by the article — "*the* man of sin," "*the* son of perdition," "*the* law-breaker, or the lawless one." Further, the singular number is used of him throughout the passage invariably.¹ The argument is still heightened by the things

¹ On some of these points the citation of authorities may not be amiss. Olshausen (p. 314) says of the article: "*the* man of Sin"; "*the* Son of perdition," that "it admits only of reference to a definite, known individual, to whom sin and destruction belong in a special sense, so that he not merely *has* sin and *falls* into destruction, but that sin and destruction *proceed* from him as their source, and that he drags every one else into sin and destruction after him." Also, "the name 'Anthropos' characterizes him as a real man with body and soul, whom Satan thus makes his dwelling." Ellicott speaks of the final Antichrist as to be "made manifest in a definite and distinct bodily personality" (p. 118). He expands the idea of "*the* man of sin," thus: "The fearful child of man of whom sin is the special characteristic and attribute, and in whom it is as it were impersonated and incarnate." On the words, "He that opposeth himself," etc., thus: "The adversary, though assimilating one of the distinctive features of Satan, is clearly not to be confounded with him whose agent and emissary he is, but in accordance with the almost universal tradition of the ancient church, is *Antichrist*; — no mere set of principles, or succession of opponents, but one single individual, as truly man as he whom he impiously opposes." Under "*Antichrist*" in "*Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*," the writer (Rev. F. Myrick) says (p. 104): "The words used by Paul to the Thessalonians could not well have been more emphatic, had he studiously made use of them in order to exclude the idea of a polity. 'The man of sin,' 'the son of perdition,' 'the one who opposeth himself to God,' 'the one who exalteth himself above God,' 'the one who represents himself as God,' 'the wicked one who was to come with Satanic power and lying wonders'; if words have a meaning, these words designate an individual." Also, "that Paul describes the adversary as being distinctly a man" (p. 107). He testifies moreover that "the individual view was held unanimously in the church for upward of a thousand years," as distinct from and opposed to the notion of "a polity like that of Romanism, or a succession of rulers working it, e.g. the Popes." "The only point on which any question arose was, whether he should be a man armed with Satanic powers or Satan himself." "They all agree in representing him as a person about to come shortly before the glorious and final appearance of Christ, and to be destroyed by his presence." "Justin Martyr describes him as the man of the apostasy"; "Irenæus, as summing up the apostasy in himself"; "Origen, as the child of the devil and the counterpart of Christ"; Jerome, "as the son

which he is said to do, viz. thrust himself into the temple of God, and claim to be himself God. As God is one, not many; so this incarnation of blasphemy and sin must be some one man, claiming to be the very God and demanding the homage due to God only. And yet further, even these arguments are strengthened (if greater strength is possible) by the tacit comparison of his revelation ["shall be revealed," vs. 3] to that of Christ, of whose personal coming the same word is used (2 Thess. i. 7; also Luke xvii. 30); also by the comparison of his *coming* [*παρουσία*] (vs. 9) to that of Jesus-Christ, to whose *coming* the same word is applied in this same connection. And yet further, by the assumed analogy between his working and that of Satan, of whom he is represented as a sort of incarnation or embodiment—a second Satan, the special vicegerent of the first. It may at least be said that if the case of this "man of sin," as presented here, does not describe an individual man, then no language, no description, can do it. Therefore it cannot be safe to force any other or modified sense upon these words. To do so upon the demand simply of some foregone hypothesis is for every reason inadmissible; and the more so, because the entire strain of the passage is historic, not poetic; dealing with matters of fact, and not of fancy or imagination, i.e. proposing and aiming to give the last immediate precursor of Christ's second coming—the last and chief embodiment of Satan in human flesh, whose awful destruction will be with the same fearful blast that will arouse to life the sleeping dead—the same blaze of glory that will usher in the final judgment.

The current view, adverse to this, should receive attention, viz. that this "man of sin" is the *papacy*, or, as some would say, the *popes of Rome*. I am not aware that, loosely as this general theory is held, there are any who would restrict

of the devil, sitting in the Church as though he were the Son of God"; also, "that we may not suppose him to be a devil or demon (as some have thought), but a man in whom Satan will dwell utterly and bodily." "Theophylact, as a man who will carry Satan about with him."

the description to *some one pope* in particular, e.g. to the first, or the mightiest, or the last in the series. Yet the words of Paul most manifestly demand a restriction to some one. If Paul means pope at all, he should certainly mean some one pope — most naturally the worst one in the long series, and certainly the last, for who but the last can meet his death as here described? Surely, after this "man of sin" is so destroyed, there can be no other. [This, it will be seen, shuts off Paul's words from being applied to any pope thus far, unless it be to Pius IX.] Now, the series of popes has already run some twelve hundred years, more or less. If this "man of sin" means the popes of Rome in general and in mass from the beginning hitherto, how could it supply any data to relieve the agitation of the Thessalonian brethren, or any other Christian brethren during the next two or ten thousand years, in regard to the near coming of Christ? How could they know whether Paul referred to the first pope of history, or to pope Pius IX. at the distance of some twelve hundred years after him, or to some pope several hundred years further on? Obviously, the main purpose for which Paul wrote this passage is defeated by this utterly indefinite construction.¹ Furthermore, no pope has ever yet claimed to be himself the one true God. Every pope has claimed to *derive his power from the one God*, which certainly amounts to recognizing the Supreme Being, and is utterly unlike what is here described, viz. setting up one's self to be the one supreme God, and claiming divine homage as such. Some Protestant interpreters may, perhaps, need to be reminded of the ninth commandment. Nothing is gained for truth by "bearing false witness against our neighbor." Still further, "the mystery of iniquity"

¹ Thus Olshausen: "To establish the view that Popery is Antichrist would oblige us previously to give up the doctrine, expressly demonstrated as scriptural, of the personality of Antichrist; he could in that case be conceived as a spiritual principle only. As however, the principle of Popery has prevailed during a whole series of centuries, it is not to be perceived how its appearing can constitute a fixed time for the beginning of the kingdom of God, in which sense Paul here (vs. 3) treats of the revealing of Antichrist" (pp. 326-27).

(of the same sort, we must suppose, which ultimately culminated in the "man of sin") was even then working, when Paul was writing; but is there any evidence that the distinctive, characteristic sin of the popes of Rome had then come to the surface, so as to be visible to the Thessalonian brethren; and could they also see what was "withholding" it, — i.e. holding it in check?

Shall we arrest, for the moment, the course of this discussion upon our major points, to refer to the minor and less important points touched in the passage? "The mystery of iniquity" (vs. 7), then already working, should naturally mean some development of bold, heaven-defying, blasphemous sin, which foreshadowed the spirit and work of the arch-sinner of whom Paul specially speaks. More definitely than this, I see not how any one at our distance of time can outline it. The very man or clique may have been at once suggested to the Thessalonian brethren by this reference of Paul; he may have spoken of it while with them. The "withholding" power [τὸ κατέχον], twice referred to by the same Greek word, translated, vs. 6, "withholdeth," and vs. 7, "letteth," must be, of course, the power that restrained, kept down, and held back those horrible developments of wickedness. If we ask, *Whose* powerful hand counteracts the devil and all his wickedness, wicked men and all theirs? but one general answer can be given — Christ's. His, ultimately, is the great antagonist, restraining power. If, pushing the question, we still ask, What agent, if any, did he use in the case before us? I am compelled to answer, that, having no revelation on the subject, I do not know. To what secondary agency, if any, Paul had special reference, he has not told us, and I have no knowledge. The field is ample for any amount of speculation; but of what avail? A similar darkness is left by Paul upon the question, How and when is this withholding agency to be "taken out of the way," i.e. withdrawn? So far as this prophecy of Paul is concerned, we are left in absolute ignorance. It should be remembered that on such a question guessing is not

knowledge. On subjects of this character upon which so little is said by the inspired prophet and so much left unsaid, of which the statements are so very general and the particulars and details are withheld, it is our wisdom to draw the line sharply and firmly between the known and the unknown, following none but valid principles of interpretation, and claiming to know only what such principles bring out and sustain.

Resuming the main discussion, it will be in place at this stage to speak of one possible objection to the view here advocated; viz. How can it be supposed that any one man can wield a power so prodigious as is here ascribed to "the man of sin?" Let us lay alongside of this objection certain very prominent facts in the history and progress of the present century; taking in, also, some arts of an older date. Let the reader consider what immense facilities the art of printing has furnished for an extraordinary development of "one-man" power. Also, consider how ubiquitous one master mind may become by the aid of steam and the telegraph. Yet further, such advances having been made within the present generation, how much more may be made during the long onward march of invention, progress, and affiliation of remotest and most alien populations throughout a thousand years' millennium? Aside from this, mark the tendencies, not altogether undiscernible in our times, to laud and almost deify the great men who combine genius, talent, and magnetic power — the men of daring, dashing spirit, of brilliant parts and unblushing assumptions. It should be assumed that this "man of sin" will be great after the type of Milton's Satan — great in every commanding mental quality; great in his power and tact of deception; great in the uprising of a soul that disdains all restraint, that dares (in one word) to strike for the throne of the Almighty! Of course, it is also to be assumed that the times are those of a great apostasy, and that there are other wicked men only too ready to worship this incarnation of iniquity. But further, Who has yet been able to set limits to the power which Satan may

exert in this fallen world? Who can tell how perfectly he may project himself into the human soul, laid open and freely surrendered to his presence and power? Who knows how terribly he may command for his own use, and energize with his own spirit, the soul thus yielded up to his sway? Who can say but God may have wise reasons for permitting, just at the close of this probationary state, a case that shall exhibit Satan's utmost, maximum power of "entering into" one individual man; his reasons therefor bearing vitally upon the moral danger of leaving Satan "loosed" anywhere in the universe? The record sets forth that Satan is at this point upon his last and most desperate endeavor. Who shall measure the amount of aid he may or can give to this "man of sin," this human embodiment of his spirit and power? The coming of this man of sin being "after" [according to] "the working of Satan," who can say what magazines of lies he will uncap, what miracles he may appear to work, what marvels of "spiritism" may be brought into the field in this last battle with truth and righteousness on this great day of Armageddon?

Having thus replied to this objection, rather by starting questions and by suggesting hints than otherwise, I pass to consider briefly certain other passages in the Epistles, supposed by some to be parallel to this. We may group into one class 1 Tim. iv. 1-3; 2 Tim. iii. 1-5; Jude 17, 18; 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4. In another class we put 1 John ii. 18, 19, 22, and iv. 3; 2 John 7. The latter are properly treated separately, because in these and these only do we find the definite term, "the Antichrist." In the first group, the important words are these: "Now, the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils." "This know, also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." "Remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of

our Lord Jesus Christ, how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts." "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?"

As bearing upon any question respecting "the man of sin," we have no occasion to spend time upon these words. For (1) they are entirely too indefinite as to time to admit of being compared with our passage. (2) They are very indefinite and general in regard to the type of sin of which they speak. (3) They differ entirely from the passage we have in hand, inasmuch as they make no allusion whatever to any one individual man. On the positive side, they indicate a current opinion, we may say, a traditionary prophecy, respecting some apostasy in future, though not apparently remote, times—a fact manifestly brought forward as a moral warning against its incipient approaches. But that this is "the apostasy" of which Paul speaks in connection with "the man of sin" is by no means apparent. Any assumption to this effect is obviously without proof.

The second group, viz. from John's Epistles gives us these words: "It is the last time; and, as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now there are many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us." "Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is Antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son." "Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even already is it in the world." "Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an Antichrist."

At first view, it may seem that we have here something quite definite as to personal individuality; we certainly have the words, *ὁ ἀντίχριστος*. But here are many Antichrists; and the definition of the term is made so broad as to include

any one, yea, every one, who denies that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, or that Jesus is the Christ. Consequently, these passages from the Epistles of John really make no advance beyond the first group. All alike fail to exhibit those definite points of *time* and *character* which would be requisite to justify us in applying them to the specific case of "the man of sin." Any attempt to make out a parallelism fails in vital points, and must be abandoned.

Yet let the question still return: Have we any other prophecy really parallel with this of Paul respecting "the man of sin," treating of persons and events which are to precede closely in time the final coming of Christ? If we have, it will be entirely legitimate to make free use of whatever it actually reveals. When we have drawn from Paul all he has taught, i.e. have extracted from his inspired words all the meaning they legitimately bear, we must shut down upon fanciful speculation on his words. But it still remains for us to inquire if any other prophet has spoken of those times. There is one other prophecy of those very times, viz. in the Revelation of John (xx. 7-12), thus: "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. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."

Let us note the salient features of this passage. (a) These events follow the millennium. (b) They immediately precede the final resurrection and judgment. Of course, they synchronize with the passage from Paul to the Thessalonians, under our special consideration. (c) In respect to costume, drapery, this passage differs widely from that of Paul, as we ought to expect. This is in the boldly poetic style of the whole book, and is specially suggested (as to costume) by Ezekiel's prophecy of Gog and Magog (chap. xxxviii. and xxxix.). But highly figurative though it be, the actual significance of the symbols may be reached with a fair degree of precision and certainty; that is to say, it predicts a vast, mighty, terrible onslaught of the powers of Satan and sin upon Christ's earthly kingdom and people. In this conflict Satan is the prime moving spirit, commander-in-chief; but some one man, appearing under the name "Magog," is his subordinate — the human incarnation of Satan, and the arch-leader under him of the hosts of sin. By a somewhat common mistake, the two names, "Gog" and "Magog" are taken to indicate two distinct men. A reference to Ezekiel will show that Magog only is the prince; Gog, the name of his country. (d) Of the destruction of this human captain and of his countless cohorts, the brief record is: "Fire came down from God out of heaven, and destroyed them"; essentially what Paul also said: "Whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." Satan's doom follows, and simultaneously come the final, closing scenes of earth's great drama — the dead rising, and the myriads, once of earth, before "the great white throne" for judgment. Remarkably all the great outlines of these two prophetic passages harmonize. Beyond all reasonable question, Paul's "man of sin" comes *after* the millennium, in proof of which I need adduce here only these two considerations; viz. (1) That there is a millennium in Paul's programme of prophecy; as witness what he wrote to the church at Rome (xi. 16-26), to the effect that the Jews were to be re-engrafted into

Christ, that this should be "life from the dead to the Gentiles," and that "the fulness of the Gentiles" should so come into the great gospel kingdom. (2) That there is no place for this conversion of the nations *after* the final coming of Christ in the terrible blaze of his glory to destroy "the man of sin" and his apostate hordes. Therefore, in Paul's programme, as in that of John, the millennium *precedes* this great apostasy and the development and destruction of "the man of sin." Therefore, in both these prophetic passages the points made belong to the "last things" of our world's history. In both we have the final conflict on earth between the great antagonist forces of Christ and of Satan. In both, Satan's hosts are specially mustered and headed by some one man, his embodiment and representative. In both, this human incarnation of Satan perishes, and with him his followers. And finally, in both, this destruction is by a fearful deluge of fire—the blast of the breath of the mighty Conqueror—the blaze of his fiery brightness in his last appearing. And this outburst of judgment on the marshalled hosts of sin heralds in the final consummation.

Concluding Suggestions.

1. The case of "the man of sin" and his destruction in nowise interferes (as some have supposed) with the millennium. The great gospel work of the ages finds all the time it needs *before* his development, and *before* his final doom.

2. The ultimate purpose of God in permitting sin to enter our world being to allow to Satan and sin a very large range for development in order to reveal to the moral universe their essential malignity and terrible mischiefs, we may see the wisdom of this remarkable variation in the general programme, introduced in the last two phases of the conflict between Christ and Satan, viz. in the millennial period, and in the period next ensuing and prior to the final judgment. In the former period, long and glorious, "*Satan is bound*"; his personal agencies are withdrawn from the field of battle; and then the truth of God pervades the nations; "The

knowledge of the Lord fills the earth as the waters cover the seas." This phase of the great conflict having transpired, another and contrasted arrangement ensues: "Satan is *loosed* for a little season"; the "withholding" power, as Paul terms it, "is taken out of the way," [becomes *ἐκ μέσου*, out of the midst; out of the fight; out of Satan's way]; the restraining force previously exerted upon Satan is taken off; and then "that great apostasy" comes on; "the man of sin" appears, and runs his short — but, alas, too successful — career; and then cometh the end. This contrast between a world with Satan "bound," and, again, a world with Satan "loosed," — Christ and his truth having unimpeded range in the former; Satan unrestrained and putting forth his utmost energies in the latter — this wonderful variation in the conditions of the great sin-problem of our world in its relation to outside agencies is startling, most impressive, and in its moral bearings immensely instructive. As said in my "Notes on the Revelation of John" (p. 227), "It is obvious that one part of God's design in permitting this last development of Satan in our world may have been to exhibit his agency before our race, and before the moral universe, with far more distinctness and prominence than ever before. After the long ages of Christ's peaceful and triumphant reign, the very name of Satan, and much more his pernicious agencies, may have been almost forgotten from the human mind, not to say from angelic minds as well. One more exhibition of satanic hate and revenge and power will not be amiss for the moral instruction of the universe. Coming at this stage, in the strongest possible contrast with the beneficent reign of the great Messiah, it will stand out most signally before the universe as the moral ground of his eternal doom. Who can then fail to see that he is indeed a *devil* and a *Satan*, infinitely deserving his destiny of torment in the lake of fire and brimstone forever and ever!"

3. We see why Paul should speak of this as "*the apostasy*" — the great, the signal, the ever memorable apostasy. Nothing else on such a scale stands on the pages of human

history. Nothing so great *could occur before the millennium*. It is only after the nations have been brought to Christ, and long ages have rolled away in the peace and fruition of Christ's reign, and when it might begin to seem that Satan must be dead, and that sin has mostly lost its power, then, all suddenly, Satan is loosed; and lo, the change astonishes the moral universe! Such an *apostasy*! Who could have believed it?

4. I cannot forbear to notice the incidental, and therefore the more remarkable, coincidence between John and Paul on the point of the *duration* of this apostasy. John says: "Satan is loosed a little season" [*μικρὸν χρόνον*, xx. 3]. In symbol, it is the time of one great military expedition, a single campaign; his hosts sweeping up from the ends of the earth, and besieging the saints in their camp, the beloved city; and then — the end. Entirely in harmony with this is Paul's view of the time — brought within the life-work and life-period of *one man*. One man heads it; it ends with his death. Let us praise God that this great apostasy is so short!

5. This wonderful variation in the divine scheme will serve to bring out the mutual relations between Satan and our sinning race in a way to show not only how great his power, unrestrained, may become, but how fearful are the exposures and liabilities of man left defenceless before his temptations. What a chapter of revelation on these points stands in the history of this one "man of sin." Oh, how should it warn the sinners of our world against his satanic "devices!" And how fearful the light it throws upon the malignity, the moral hardihood, the dire infatuation, the perfectly satanic nature of all sin! Sin in man and sin in Satan are in essence and nature only the same thing — mad rebellion against God. Let us not omit to notice, at this point, the thoughts which these same facts suggested and impressed upon the mind and heart of Paul, as we may read in the immediate context of our passage — words of appalling significance: "Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and

with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. ii. 9-12). Here we see compacted into one sentence the terrible energies of Satan in the line of lying, deception, delusion; these energies taking effect upon the souls of "them that perish"; taking effect upon them, because they *will not* admit to their heart so much as "the love of the truth, that they might be saved," but cherish the love of Satan's lies the rather, and so come under "strong delusion," and reap its natural and necessary fruit — damnation.

6. If there were any need to vindicate the justice and wisdom of the great Judge in consigning Satan at the last day to the prison-house "prepared for the devil and his angels," to go no more out forever, here it is. Close upon this last and direst development of his malign spirit and of his mighty hand, God hurls him down to his fiery doom; and all the holy will say, "Amen!" A sense of relief will come over them; they breathe freely, and pour out their grateful hearts in trustful adoration: "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!"

7. It is quite in this line of thought to say that Satan's being "loosed" from the pit is a case in point, bearing upon the safety, and therefore the wisdom, of a future *restoration* of the wicked. It is the fondly indulged hope of some, — perhaps, rather, of many, — that somewhere in the long future of the lost ones of our race [and, by parity of reasoning, of the lost angelic race as well], the prison doors will be thrown open and the prisoners be "loosed." As to this fond hope, let it suffice to say that the Lord will have made one experiment of the sort already — enough to satisfy all the truth-loving throughout the moral universe.

8. Finally, perhaps one object sought in this last scene may be to develop the Messiah's infinite control over the

material universe, to show that he can wield at will all the fearful enginery of fire and flame for the destruction of the wicked, in combinations unknown before. The conflict long waged with the spiritual weapons of truth and love takes on a new type; material forces of all-consuming power flash out before all worlds, and testify that Jesus is indeed King of the universe, with all power given him in heaven, earth, and hell. Before such forms of power, the great, gigantic, representative sinner of our race, "the man of sin," becomes most emphatically "the son of perdition." Before such power, the prince of darkness and his fellows, who "kept not their first estate," having had large range for developing the malignity of their souls, and having had their public trial in the judgment of the great day, are swept away to their final, everlasting doom.

ARTICLE IV.

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION.

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IN ANDOVER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

No. XI.

INSPIRATION CONSIDERED IN ITS SPHERE.

THE *sphere of inspiration* is that which the wisdom of the Infinite Spirit has prescribed to himself, taking counsel of no created intelligence. It was never his plan to give indiscriminately, in all the departments of human activity, that special illumination and guidance, called inspiration, which, as we have seen, raised its possessors above error, and invested their words with divine authority. This heavenly gift was ever rigidly restricted to the supernatural revelations connected with the plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. We acknowledge, indeed, with devout reverence, the providential guidance of God in all the affairs of human history. It was not without his appointment, for example, that our