

## *THE PROPHECIES OF ST. PAUL.*

### I.—1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS.

THE whole teaching, whether oral or written, of the Apostles of the New Testament, was essentially prophetic. St. Paul, in entire harmony with the Old Testament conception, defines a prophet to be one who "knows mysteries and knowledge" (1 Cor. xiii. 2) and "speaks to men edification and exhortation and consolation" (1 Cor. xiv. 3). This is a fair description of his own work; his Epistles are full of mysteries and knowledge, and speak to men edification, strengthening, and comfort. Among the mysteries which they declare—the word, we must remember, does not denote something inherently inscrutable, but only something as yet unknown and needing to be revealed—there are not lacking some that have to do with the future. We may properly speak, therefore, of Paul's prophecies, even in that narrow sense in which the word is popularly used, and which makes it synonymous with predictions. It is in this sense, indeed, although under a mild protest, that we use it in these papers. Our purpose is to study the predictions of Paul.

We begin with his earliest writings, the Epistles to the Thessalonians, which were written at Corinth in A.D. 52 and 53. As is well known to every careful reader of the New Testament, these Epistles are also the richest in predictions of all Paul's writings. It is not too much to say that their main burden is the Coming of the Lord. To explanations concerning this, their only didactic portions are given; and, in the first Epistle at least, a constant allusion to it is woven like a golden thread throughout its whole texture, and each section, whatever its subject, is sure to reach its climax in a reference to it (i. 10; ii. 19;

iii. 13; v. 23). This seems strange to some. And it has been suggested, either that the Apostle in his early ministry made more of the Second Advent in his teaching than growing wisdom permitted him to do later; or else, that at this particular period, amid the special trials of his work—the persecutions in Macedonia, the chill indifference at Athens, the discouragements that met him at Corinth—he had his heart turned more than was usual with him to the blessed consolation of a Christian's expectation of the coming glory. Both of these explanations are entirely gratuitous. A sufficient reason for this marked peculiarity lies at the hand of all in that other fact that distinguishes these letters from all their fellows—they are the only letters that have come down to us, which were addressed to an infant community just emerged from heathenism.

For it is undeniable that the staple of Paul's preaching to the Gentiles was God and the Judgment. When addressing Jews he could appeal to prophecy, and he preached Jesus to them as Him whom all the prophets pointed unto, the Messiah whom God had graciously promised. But with Gentiles he could appeal only to conscience; and he preached Jesus to them as Him through whom God would judge the world in righteousness, whereof He hath given assurance to all men in that He hath raised Him from the dead. The address on the Areopagus, which was delivered only a few months before 1 Thessalonians was written, admirably illustrates how the Apostle tried to reach the consciences of his heathen hearers; and the totality of the message delivered in it was God (Acts xvii. 24–29) and the Judgment (Acts xvii. 30, 31). But if Christ coming for judgment was thus the very centre and substance of Paul's proclamation to the Gentiles, it would not be strange if he had dwelt upon it to the Thessalonians also. And that he had preached just in this strain to them, when, so shortly before writing this letter, he was with them, he tells us him-

self (1 Thess. i. 9, 10). For, what he chiefly thanks God for in their case is that they "turned unto God from idols" in order to do two things:—"serve the living and true God," and "await patiently His Son from the heavens, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, our deliverer from the coming wrath." The parallel with the speech on Mars' Hill is precise; it almost looks as if the Apostle had repeated at Athens the sermon that had been so effective at Thessalonica.

But we not only learn thus how it happens that Paul dwells so much on the Second Advent when writing to the Thessalonians, but we learn also what is much more important,—how he himself thought of the Advent and in what aspect he proclaimed it. Plainly to him it was above all things else the Judgment. It was the Judgment Day that he announced in its proclamation; and this was the lever with which he prized at Gentile consciences. "The day in which God will judge the world in righteousness" was what he proclaimed to the Athenians, and that it was just this that was in mind in 1 Thess. i. 10 is evident from the office assigned to the expected Jesus,—“the Deliverer from the coming wrath.” In harmony with this, every passage in which the Second Advent is adverted to in these Epistles conceives of it pointedly as the Judgment Day. The Apostle's eager desire for the purity and sanctification of his readers is always referred to the Advent: he wishes to have them to boast of before the Lord Jesus at His coming (1 Thess ii. 19),—he prays that their hearts may be established unblameworthy in holiness before God at the coming of our Lord Jesus (1 Thess. iii. 13),—he beseeches the God of peace to preserve them in their whole being and all their faculties blameless, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. v. 23),—he declares that the Day of the Lord will bring sudden destruction upon the wicked (1 Thess. v. 3), and will draw a sharp line in justice between

the good and bad (2 Thess. i. 9). He speaks of the Advent freely as the "Day of the Lord" (1 Thess v. 2, 4; 2 Thess. i. 10), a term which from Joel down had stood in all prophecy as the synonym of the final judgment.

The most important passage in this point of view is 2 Thess. i. 6-10, where the matter is not only treated at large, but the statements are explicit. Here the declaration is distinctly made that "at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven (*ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει*) together with the angels of His power, in a fire of flame," God will justly recompense affliction to those who persecuted the Thessalonians, and rest or relief to them. Both the statement of what is to occur and the definition of the time when it is to occur are to be here observed; and as the one can refer to nothing else than the distribution of rewards and punishments for the deeds done in the body, so the other can have no other reference than to the act of the coming of Christ. Both matters are made even plainer by what follows. The Apostle proceeds to declare broadly that this revelation of Jesus of which he is speaking is as one giving vengeance to those ignorant of God and those disobedient to the gospel—a vengeance that comes in the way of justice, and consists in eternal destruction away from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might. And so closely and even carefully is the time defined, that to the exact statement that all this occurs at the revelation of Christ from heaven, it is added at the end, that this "eternal destruction" takes place whenever (*ὅταν*) the Lord gloriously comes,— "at that day." Unless the Apostle is here representing the persecutors of the Thessalonians as partakers in the horrors of the punitive side of the Second Advent because he expected and here asserts that the Advent was to come before that generation passed away—and this will not satisfy the general representation of verses 8 *seq.*—it is certain that he here thinks of the Advent, considered

as an act and not as a state, as the last judgment itself, when

“Nil inultum remanebit.”

In this case it would presuppose a general resurrection.

That Paul had a resurrection in mind as accompanying the Second Advent is certain from another important passage (1 Thess. iv. 13-18). The Thessalonians did not doubt that Jesus had risen from the dead (v. 14); but they had not realized even in thought all the consequents of this great fact. Like certain at a somewhat later date at Corinth, they did not understand that all men that die rise again by virtue of Christ's conquest of death. And thus, as they saw one and another of their own number “fall on sleep,” they sorrowed inordinately over them, like the rest that have no hope. It is not exactly clear what they thought of the state of the dead,—whether they conceived of them as with Christ indeed, in Paradise, but condemned to an eternity of shade existence, separated from the body for ever, which seems to have been the case with their Corinthian fellow-errorists,—or whether they fancied that with the cessation of bodily activity, the whole life went out, as may be hinted in the sad words that they sorrowed as the rest who have no hope (v. 13). In either case the Apostle brings them quick consolation in the glad announcement that the resurrection of Christ implies that of those who have fallen asleep; and that, raised through Jesus, God will bring them with Him at His coming (v. 14). With this assurance he makes Christ's coming doubly precious to them. Then proceeding to more minute details, he declares that those who are alive and are left unto the coming of the Lord shall in no wise be beforehand with those who have fallen asleep; for the Lord will come with a shout, and with an archangel's voice, and with a blast of the trumpet of God, which will pierce even into the grave. Thus the rising of Christ's

dead is secured before He reaches the earth; and only after they have joined the throng, are the living along with them to be caught up in (or on) clouds unto His meeting, —into the air, to “swell the triumph of His train.” “So,” adds the Apostle, “we shall be always with the Lord” (v. 17). Dire, then, as the coming will be to those who know not God and who obey not the gospel, it will be bliss unspeakable to those in Christ; and as the results, on the one side, are “eternal destruction away from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might” (2 Thess. i. 9); so on the other they will be eternal dwelling with the Lord (1 Thess. iv. 17). It goes without saying that the Apostle has the believing dead only in his mind in our present passage (v. 16). How could he in such a passage speak of any other? But is not the parallel too close for us not to suspect that, as in the one case both the living and dead in Christ shall partake in the bliss and the living shall not precede the dead, so in the other the living who are left unto the Coming shall not precede those who have passed away, in receiving the terrible doom, and that the blare of the trumpet of God veritably

“Coget omnes ante thronum”?

Or is it more probable that Paul believed and taught that the Lord would certainly come before that generation passed away? There is no room to doubt that the Thessalonians expected the Advent in their own time. Their feelings towards death (1 Thess. iv. 13 *seq.*) would be otherwise inexplicable. And it is worthy of note that the Apostle does not correct them in this belief. He points out to them that to fall asleep was not to miss the glory of the Advent, but that whether they waked or slept they should live together with their Lord (1 Thess. v. 10). But he says no word that would declare them mistaken in expecting to live until “that day.” On the contrary, he

expresses himself in terms that left the possibility open that the Lord might come while they were still alive and left on the earth (1 Thess. iv. 15, 17). This was far from asserting that the Lord would come in that generation; but, in the connexion in which the words stand, they would have been impossible had the Apostle felt justified in asserting that He would not come. And this appears to be the exact difference between the attitude of the Thessalonians and that of Paul; they confidently expected the Lord in their own day—he was in complete uncertainty when He would come. That He would assuredly come, to bring sudden destruction (1 Thess. v. 3) upon all appointed unto wrath (v. 9) and rest and salvation to those in Christ, he was sure; but the times and seasons he knew perfectly were hidden in the Father's power (1 Thess. v. 1). He might come soon—when He did come, it would be, he knew, with the unexpectedness of a thief in the night (1 Thess. v. 2). But meanwhile, whether it found him waking or sleeping was of no moment; and though it became him to watch (1 Thess. v. 6), yet the watch was to be not a nervous expectancy, but a quiet and patient waiting (1 Thess. i. 10, *ἀναμένειν*, cf. Judith viii. 17). But if, just because the “when” was unknown, the Apostle could not confidently expect the Lord in his own time, the categorical assertion that the Advent would bring “eternal destruction away from the face of the Lord” (2 Thess. i. 9) to the special persecutors of the Thessalonians, rests on his view of the Advent as synchronous with the final judgment and presupposes a general resurrection.

The very moderation of the Apostle's attitude made it difficult for the excited Thessalonians to yield themselves to his leading. Certainly his first letter did not allay their fanaticism. Things went rather from bad to worse, and so certain were they that the Lord was coming at once, that they fell an easy prey to every one who should

cry "Lo, here!" or "Lo, there!" and even, apparently from this cause, began to neglect their daily business and became mere busybodies, refusing to work, and eating the bread of others. The Apostle sternly rebukes their disorder, and commands that they work with quietness; and with a view to preserving them from sudden agitation whenever any one chose to declare "The day of the Lord is upon us!" he points out certain events that must come before the Lord. That this practical, ethical purpose was the occasion of the important revelation in 2 Thess. ii. 1-12, the Apostle tells us himself (v. 2). And a simple glance at his words is enough to expose the almost ludicrous inappropriateness of the contention of some that the error of the Thessalonians was not feverish expectancy of the Lord's coming, but the belief that the day of the Lord had already come and had brought none of the blessings they had expected from it,—not the Lord Himself, nor their resurrected friends,—nothing of all that the Apostle had taught and they had hoped.<sup>1</sup> What the Apostle says is that he wishes to save them from being suddenly shaken from their senses or troubled by any statement from any quarter, as that the day of the Lord was upon them. The passage is parallel to and probably founded upon the words of our Lord in His warning to His disciples not to be led astray or deceived by any "who should say, 'Lo, here is the Christ!' or 'Here!'" (Matt.

<sup>1</sup> This curious misinterpretation is founded on a pressure of the verb *ἐπέστηκεν*, v. 2, in forgetfulness of three things. (1) That this verb is a compound of *ἵστημι*, not of *εἶμι*, and means, not "is in progress," but "is upon us," in the two senses of "to threaten," and "to be actual" (especially in the participle). While it *may* mean "to be present," therefore, it *need not* mean it, and is not likely to in such a case. (2) That the clause "either by spirit or by word, or by letter as if from us," is an essential part of the context, the omission of which falsifies the text. What the Apostle says is *not* "be not troubled—as that the day of the Lord," etc., *but* "be not troubled *by any statement* as that the day of the Lord is upon us!"—something essentially different, which excludes the above interpretation. (3) That the broad context renders this explanation impossible and meaningless.



xxiv. 23), and is already a valuable indication that throughout this whole section Paul has the great apocalyptic discourse of Jesus in mind and is to be interpreted from it.

The impression has become very widespread that, owing to the lack on our part of the previous information to which Paul alludes as given by him on a former occasion to the Thessalonians (verses 5 and 6), the interpretation of this prophecy must remain for all time a sealed riddle to us. That two important events, called by Paul "the apostasy," and "the revelation of the man of sin," the latter of which was at the time deterred by something else mysteriously designated "the restraint," or "the restrainer," were to take place before the coming of the Lord—this, we are told, is all that we can know, and any effort to obtain any defined outlines for the misty shapes thus barely named to us only succeeds in bringing the dense darkness in which they are steeped into tangibility and visibility. We find it difficult to believe the matter so hopeless. On the contrary, the broad outlines, at least, of the prophecy appear to us sufficiently clear; and we believe that a sound method of study will give the humble student who is willing to put a stern check on his imagination and follow the leading of the exegetical hints alone, an adequately exact understanding of its chief details.

First of all, we must try to keep fresh in our minds the great principle that all prophecy is ethical in its purpose, and that this ethical end controls not only what shall be revealed in general, but also the details of it and the very form which it takes. Next, we must not fail to observe that our present prophecy is not independent of previous ones,—that its roots are in Daniel, and from beginning to end it is full of allusions to our Lord's great apocalyptic discourse. Still again, we must bear in mind that it comes from a hand which throughout these Epistles preserves an

attitude of uncertainty of the "times and seasons," and so expresses himself as to imply that he believed that the Lord might come, in despite of all these preliminary events, in his own day.

If, holding fast to these principles, we approach the prophecy itself, we observe first of all, that although the three things—the Apostasy, the Revelation of the Man of Sin, and the Coming of the Lord—are brought together, they are not declared to be closely connected, or immediately consecutive to one another. The mere "and" of verse 3 reveals nothing beyond the simple fact that both of those events must come to pass before the Lord comes. So too for all that the prophecy tells us, both of these evil developments might come and pass away, and be succeeded by ages on ages which in turn might pass away, and yet men be able to say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" To point to the declaration in verse 8, that "the Lord Jesus shall destroy" the lawless one—almost, "blow him away"—"with the breath of His mouth and abolish him with the manifestation of His presence," as proving that he will still be lording it on earth when the Lord comes to his destruction, is to neglect the apparent indications of the context. For this assertion does not go, in either vividness or literality of expression, beyond what is stated just before of the generation then living (2 Thess. i. 7, 9); and it is inserted here not as a chronological detail—and is out of place (cf. verses 9, *seq.*) if considered a chronological detail—but as part of the description of the lawless one, and for the ethical purpose of keeping in the mind of the reader his judgment by God and his final fate. In a word, this statement only declares of the Man of Sin what was just before declared of the lesser enemies of the Gospel, and what was in 1 Thess. v. 3 *seq.* declared of all to whom wrath is appointed—that he shall meet with destruction at the Second Coming of the Lord. The revelation of the Man of Sin is not, then,

necessarily to be sought at the end of time : we know of it, only that it will succeed the removal of the "restraint," and precede, by how much we are not told, the coming of the Lord.

We cannot fail to observe, however, next, that in his description of the Man of Sin, the Apostle has a contemporary, or nearly contemporary phenomenon in mind. The withholding power is already present. Although the Man of Sin is not yet revealed, as a mystery his essential "lawlessness" is already working—"only until the present restrainer be removed from the midst." He expects him to sit in "the temple of God," which perhaps most naturally refers to the literal temple in Jerusalem, although the Apostle knew that the out-pouring of God's wrath on the Jews was close at hand (1 Thess. ii. 16). And if we compare the description which the Apostle gives of him with our Lord's address on the Mount of Olives (Matt. xxiv.), to which, as we have already hinted, Paul makes obvious allusion, it becomes at once in the highest degree probable that in the words, "he that exalteth himself against all that is called God, or is worshipped, so that he sitteth in the sanctuary of God showing himself that he is God," Paul can have nothing else in view than what our Lord described as "the abomination of desolation which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (Matt. xxiv. 15); and this our Lord connects immediately with the beleaguering of Jerusalem (cf. Luke xxi. 20). This obvious parallel, however, not only places the revelation of the Man of Sin in the near future, but goes far towards leading us to his exact identification. Our Lord's words not only connect him with the siege of Jerusalem, but place him distinctly among the besiegers; and, led by the implication of the original setting of the phrase (in Dan. xi. 36) which Paul uses, we cannot go far wrong in identifying him with the Roman emperor.

Whether a single emperor was thought of or the line of emperors, is a more difficult question. The latter hypothesis will best satisfy the conditions of the problem; and we believe that the line of emperors, considered as the embodiment of persecuting power, is the revelation of iniquity hidden under the name of the Man of Sin. With this is connected in the description certain other traits of Roman imperialism—more especially the rage for deification, which, in the person of Caligula, had already given a foretaste of what was to come. It was Nero, then, the first persecutor of the Church,—and Vespasian the miracle-worker,<sup>1</sup>—and Titus, who introduced his divine-self and his idolatrous insignia into the Holy of Holies, perhaps with a directly anti-Christian intent,<sup>2</sup>—and Domitian,—and the whole line of human monsters whom the world was worshipping as gods, on which, as a nerve-cord of evil, these hideous ganglia gathered,—these and such as these it was that Paul had in mind when he penned this hideous description of the son of perdition, every item of which was fulfilled in the terrible story of the emperors of Rome.

The restraining power, on this hypothesis, appears to be the Jewish state. For the continued existence of the Jewish state was both graciously and naturally a protection to Christianity, and hence a restraint on the revelation of the persecuting power. Graciously, it was God's plan to develop Christianity under the protection of Judaism for a short set time, with the double purpose of keeping the door of salvation open to the Jews until all of their elect of that generation should be gathered in and the apostasy of the nation should be rendered doubly and trebly without excuse, and of hiding the tender infancy of the Church within the canopy of a protecting sheath until it should grow strong enough to withstand all storms. Naturally,

<sup>1</sup> Tac., *Hist.*, iv. 82; Suet., *Vesp.*, 7; Dion. Cass., lxvi. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Sulp. Sev., *Sacr. Hist.*, ii. 30, § 6. 7.

the effect of the continuance of Judaism was to conceal Christianity from notice through a confusion of it with Judaism—to save it thus from being declared an illicit religion—and to enable it to grow strong under the protection accorded to Jewish worship. So soon as the Jewish apostasy was complete and Jerusalem given over to the Gentiles—God deserting the temple which was no longer His temple to the fury of the enemies, of those who were now His enemies—the separation of Christianity from Judaism, which had already begun, became evident to every eye; the conflict between the new faith and heathenism culminating in and now alive almost only in the Emperor-worship, became intense; and the persecuting power of the empire was inevitably let loose. Thus the continued existence of Judaism was in the truest sense a restraint on the persecution of Christians, and its destruction gave the signal for the lawless one to be revealed in his time.

If the masculine form of “the restrainer” in verse 7 demands interpretation as a person—which we more than doubt—it might possibly be referred without too great pressure to James of Jerusalem, God’s chosen instrument in keeping the door of Christianity open for the Jews and by so doing continuing and completing their probation. Thus he may be said to have been the upholder of the restraining power, the savour of the salt that preserved the Christians from persecution, and so in a high sense the restrainer.

Finally, in this interpretation, the apostasy is obviously the great apostasy of the Jews, gradually filling up all these years and hastening to its completion in their destruction. That the Apostle certainly had this rapidly completing apostasy in his mind in the severe arraignment that he makes of the Jews in 1 Thess. ii. 14-16, which reached its climax in the declaration that they were continually filling

up more and more full the measure of their sins, until already the measure of God's wrath was prematurely (*ἔφθασεν*) filled up against them and was hanging over them like some laden thunder-cloud ready to burst and overwhelm them,—adds an additional reason for supposing his reference to be to this apostasy—above all others, “the” apostasy—in this passage.

We venture to think that the core of this interpretation may be accounted very probable,—so much of it as this: that the Apostle had in view in this prophecy a development in the immediate future closely connected with the Jewish war and the destruction of Jerusalem, although not as if that were the coming of Christ for which he was patiently waiting, but rather in full recognition of its being only the culmination of the Jewish apostasy and the falling of God's wrath upon them to the uttermost. When he declares that these events must precede the coming of Christ, this no doubt was clear evidence that the Advent was not to be looked for immediately; but was in no wise inconsistent with uncertainty whether it would come during that generation or not. As a matter of mere fact the growing apostasy of the Jews was completed—the abomination of desolation had been set up in the sanctuary—Jerusalem and the temple, and the Jewish state were in ruins—Christianity stood naked before her enemies—and the persecuting sword of Divus Cæsar was unsheathed and Paul had himself felt its keenness: all the prophecy had been fulfilled before two decades had passed away.

Let us gather up for the close, in brief recapitulation, the events which Paul predicts in these two Epistles. First of all, and most persistently of all, he predicts the coming of the Lord from heaven unto judgment, with its glorious accompaniments of hosts of angels, the shout, the voice of the archangel and the blast of the trumpet of God that awake the dead. Thus, he predicts the resurrection of

Christ's dead to partake in the glory of His coming. Then, he foretells the results of the judgment—eternal destruction from the face of God for the wicked, and everlasting presence with the Lord for His own. Of the time of the Advent the Apostle professes ignorance; he only knows that it will come unexpectedly. But he does know that before it the apostasy of the Jews must be completed, and the persecuting power of the Roman state be revealed. This apostasy and its punishment he sees is immediately ready for completion (1 Thess. ii. 16). Finally, he mentions having previously foretold the persecutions under which the Thessalonians were already suffering (1 Thess. iii. 4).

*Allegheny.*

BENJ. B. WARFIELD.

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THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

XVIII.

SLAYING SELF THE FOUNDATION PRECEPT OF  
PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY.

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, the which is idolatry; for which things' sake cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience; in the which ye also walked aforetime, when ye lived in these things. But now put ye also away all these; anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth: lie not one to another”—COL. iii. 5-9 (Rev. Vers.).

“MORTIFY *therefore*”—wherefore? The previous words give the reason. Because “ye died” with Christ, and because ye “were raised together with Him.” In other words, the plainest, homeliest moral teaching of this Epistle, such as that which immediately follows, is built upon its “mystical” theology. Paul thinks that the deep things which he has been saying about union with Christ in his death and resurrection have the most intimate connexion