

We need to be reminded that, however important and valuable that side of our life may be, there is another side, deeper, truer, and more enduring in its character, heavenly not earthly, and with results for eternity as well as time. We have had, and still have, the one life; we may have, and ought to have, the other. The heavenly Lord lives to communicate His Spirit to us, and He invites us to be one with Him. "As" therefore "we have borne the image of the earthy, let us also bear the image of the heavenly." Then we may travel onwards on our journey, and fight our battle, whatever it may be, in the sure hope of a blessed resurrection to a heavenly Lord in a heavenly life.

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*NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON THE FUTURE  
PUNISHMENT OF SIN.*

VI. THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

WE shall now complete our review of the teaching of the New Testament about the fate of those who reject the Gospel, by reproducing in outline the teaching of the Epistles of Peter and Jude, and that of the Book of Revelation.

The famous passages (1 Pet. iii. 19, iv. 6) which assert that at His death Christ went in spirit and made proclamation to the spirits in prison, and that to dead men good news was announced, in order that, though condemned in flesh, they may live in spirit, I must pass over. For I am unable to give any satisfactory explanation of them. And it is most unsafe to build up theological doctrine on passages of which the general drift is uncertain. Moreover I cannot detect in these passages any reliable addition to the teaching of the rest of the New Testament. Possibly they shed an

uncertain ray of light on some who have gone down to the grave without hope. But this by no means even suggests a probation beyond the grave. For it is quite possible that the good news announced beyond the grave was a reward for loyalty during life to such truth as those imprisoned ones possessed. Certainly this difficult passage gives no hope for those who have died rejecting the Gospel.

The Second Epistle of Peter and that of Jude are closely allied, and may well be studied together. A conspicuous feature of 2 Peter is the word *ἀπόλεια* or *destruction*, which occurs five times, and the cognate verb twice. The verb occurs twice in the Epistle of Jude. With these writers, as throughout the New Testament, these words are technical terms for the future punishment of sin. Evidently the chief thought of the early followers of Christ about the fate of those who reject the Gospel is that of ruin, the loss of all that gives worth to existence. For this, as we saw in my first paper, is the radical meaning of the word. This meaning is illustrated by 2 Peter iii. 6, which says that at the flood the then world was *destroyed*. This destruction was manifestly not annihilation, but, apart from the family of Noah, utter ruin. Nor was it final ruin. But it was a ruin from which only the power of the Creator could save the world. This confirms my earlier exposition of the meaning of the word.

This ruin is said to be inflicted at the great day, which is therefore called in 2 Peter iii. 7 a "day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly men." Meanwhile they are undergoing punishment. So chapter ii. 9: "The Lord knoweth how . . . to reserve unrighteous men in punishment for the day of judgment." The state of the lost is further described in chapter ii. 17: "For whom is reserved the gloom of darkness." In Jude 13 we have the same words, with the terrible addition that this awful doom is "for ever." This mention of the long duration of the

gloom suggests very strongly that the lost will be conscious of the cloud which will cover them. Certainly these words would be a strange way of describing even an ultimate extinction of consciousness.

We turn now to the Book of Revelation. In so doing we must not forget its picturesque and dramatic character. In it, as in the parables of Christ, we look not so much for exact definition of doctrine as for vivid presentation of familiar truth. It must be read in the light of the plain statements of the rest of the New Testament. Only so far as its figures are confirmed elsewhere, or at least as various figures confirm each other, can we safely build upon them doctrinal inferences.

A very conspicuous feature of the Book of Revelation is its use of the words *βασανίζω* and *βασανισμός*, which we may provisionally render *torment*, to describe the future punishment of sin. A cognate word we have already found in Matthew xviii. 34 in the same connexion of thought. In other connexions the same family of words occurs several times in the Gospels and in the Apocrypha. The total difference of environment will make these passages most useful guides in our search for the radical meaning of the word.

These words were the technical term in Greek for the examination of witnesses by torture. They then passed easily to denote any infliction of acute suffering. A good example is found in 2 Maccabees vii. 8, 13, 17, where both the substantive *βάσανος* and the verb *βασανίζω* are used to describe the acute and somewhat prolonged torments inflicted on the seven martyrs. Similarly, in Matthew viii. 6, a paralytic boy is said to be grievously *tormented*. In Luke xvi. 23 we read that Dives<sup>α</sup> lifted up his eyes, being in *torments*, and saw Abraham afar off. In verse 24 the sufferer describes his own condition: "I am in anguish in this flame." And in verse 28 he speaks of his abode

as "this place of *torment*." No words could more vividly describe acute suffering. In 2 Peter ii. 8 Lot is said to have *tormented* his righteous soul with the lawless works of the men of Sodom: a very strong way of describing the pain thus caused him. In all these passages the meaning of this family of words is beyond doubt. It denotes everywhere conscious and extreme suffering.

We now return to the Book of Revelation. In chapter xii. 2 the same word describes the agony of childbearing: in chapter xi. 10 we read that "the two prophets *tormented* those dwelling upon the earth." In chapter ix. 5 we are told that to the locusts who went forth from the smoke "it was given that they should not kill" those that had not the seal of God on their foreheads, "but that they may be *tormented* five months." A description is added of the pain thus caused: "And their *torment* is as of a scorpion's *torment* when it strikes a man." We have here actual suffering inflicted and felt.

With these associations of thought connected with the word before us, we now turn to three tremendous passages in which it is used. In chapter xiv. 9-11 we read: "If any one worships the beast and his image: . . . also he shall drink of the wine of the fury of God." These last words describe the stupefying effect of this punishment. The strange collocation of words following, "which is mixed unmixed in the cup of His anger," suggests a combination of different elements together with undiluted intensity. This terrible description of suffering is then strengthened by a change of metaphor: "they shall be *tormented* with fire." To this is added a new element: "and brimstone." A visible memento of suffering is seen in "the smoke of their *torment*." So to Abraham looking towards Sodom, as recorded in Genesis xix. 28, "the smoke of the land went up as the smoke of a furnace." But in this last passage the word *torment* is not used. Probably

when in the morning Abraham looked towards Sodom the agonies of its inhabitants were over. In Revelation xiv. 11 the word *torment* suggests very strongly conscious suffering still continuing. And we are told that "for ages of ages" that smoke goes up. (The Revisers have accepted a reading which gives to this prolonged duration special prominence.) Even this does not close the terrible description. A few more words take us almost into that sulphurous flame, and reveal the ceaseless unrest of the sufferers there: "And they have no rest day and night." An announcement of suffering so terrible requires careful specification of the sufferers: "Who worship the beast and his image, and if any one receives the mark of his name."

This passage recalls another from the Book of Isaiah. Touching Edom, the prophet says, in chapter xxxiv. 8-10: "It is the day of Jehovah's vengeance, the year of recompense in the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste: none shall pass through it for ever and ever." The best commentary on this passage is the utter desolation which for some two thousand years has rested on the land of Edom. But this remarkable fulfilment at once proves that the prophet's language was not literal, but rhetorical, and warns us not to build doctrine upon the pictorial details of prophecy.

This ancient prophecy suggested probably the smoke ascending for ever in the passage before us. The chief point common to the two prophecies is the utter and irreversible ruin foretold in the one case as the doom of an ancient enemy of Israel, in the other as the doom of those who worship the present evil world.

Comparison suggests, however, points of conspicuous

contrast. In the doom of Edom the word *torment* and the other conspicuous marks of actual personal suffering found in Revelation xiv. 10, 11 are altogether wanting. The earlier prophecy speaks only of the desolate country, without any express reference to the punishment and suffering of individuals; whereas in the later prophecy we have individual sinners, a twofold statement of their sin, and words teaching clearly the painfulness of their punishment. This marked difference forbids us to bring down the meaning of the later prophecy to that of the earlier.

Another terrible vision in the Book of Revelation is the judgment upon Babylon, another reminiscence of the Book of Isaiah. In chapter xviii. 7, 8 a voice cries, "Give to her *torment* and mourning. . . . In one day shall come her plagues, death and mourning and famine: and in fire she shall be burnt up." Kings and merchants (verses 9 and 15, a conspicuous repetition) will wail "when they see the smoke of her burning, standing far off because of the fear of her *torment*." This last word, used twice, implies, as we have seen, actual suffering; and indeed makes this the chief feature of the whole picture. But in this passage nothing is said about the duration of the torment.

It is not easy to expound this judgment against Babylon as other than a doom pronounced against individual sinners. For the word *torment* is applicable only to persons. Moreover this exposition of chapter xviii. is confirmed by the similar language in chapter xiv., which indisputably refers to individuals. And the whole book is full of personal retribution.

Somewhat more difficult to understand than the doom pronounced on Babylon is that pronounced in Revelation xix. 20 on the beast and the false prophet. For these last are figures much more difficult to interpret than is the simpler figure of a city. But it seems to me evident that the beast and false prophet are aggregates of individuals.

Otherwise their doom is practically meaningless. Their punishment is described by the metaphor of *fire*, already so familiar in this book of terrible judgments; and the metaphor is intensified by the addition of *sulphur*. Conspicuous attention is called to the fact that into this place of torment *living* victims were thrown. "Alive they two were cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone." Into the same, as we read in chapter xx. 10, the devil was afterwards cast. And we are told that the devil and the beast and the false prophet will be tormented day and night for the ages of the ages.

That the devil, who is evidently one person, is here associated with the beast and false prophet, who are metaphorical and apparently impersonal or rather aggregates of persons, need not greatly surprise us. The great deceiver and those whom he has deceived will suffer the same penalty.

In verse 15 the vision of judgment closes with the assertion, "And if any one was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire." We have here again the same metaphor of punishment by fire referring expressly to individuals.

With chapter xxi. opens a new scene, an absolute and glorious contrast to the verses preceding. Beyond the great white throne and the wreck of the present world, and the fearful doom of sinners, appears, in conspicuous contrast to the city which has passed away in the consuming flame, another city, the New Jerusalem, as a bride adorned for her husband. And in the splendour of that vision, as portrayed in verses 1-7, we seem to forget both sin and its punishment. "He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death shall be no longer: neither shall there be any longer mourning, nor cry, nor toil. For the former things have gone away." These words taken alone might suggest a complete extinction of all evil. But that this

is not so, we soon learn. Even across this landscape of undimmed glory creeps a dark shadow. From amid that brightness we catch a glimpse of sinners and their awful doom, depicted in the colours already so familiar: "But the cowardly, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all the liars shall have their part in the lake burning with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." The dark shadow is but for a moment, and the bright vision returns. From a lofty mountain we see again the holy city descending out of heaven from God. And as it approaches we mark its lofty walls, its vast proportions, its gates of pearl, its streets of gold, its foundations of precious stones, and its splendour, making needless the light of the sun. But again a dark shadow is flung across the scene, a shadow the deeper because of the brightness of the light intercepted. "There shall not enter into it anything common, and he that maketh an abomination and a lie; but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life." Again the shadow vanishes. We see (chapter xxii. 1-5) the river with its trees of life bearing many fruits and leaves of healing. "And there shall be no curse any longer. And the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it. And His servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall be night no longer. And they need no light of lamp or light of sun: for the Lord God will give them light. And they shall reign for the ages of the ages."

The vision is over. The angel assures John that "these words are trustworthy and true." And he adds, in verse 11, other words of solemn import. "The unrighteous man, let him be unrighteous yet more; and the filthy man, let him be defiled yet more: and the righteous man, let him do righteousness yet more; and the holy man, let him be sanctified yet more." Surely these words are not addressed



to men now living. And, if not, they must describe men contemporaneous with the foregoing visions of glory. This is confirmed by verse 14. Blessing hastes to follow curse: "Blessed are they who wash their robes in order that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may go in through the gates into the city." But side by side of this blessing we have another vision of punishment: "Outside are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one who loveth and maketh a lie."

These deep shadows falling four times across the bright vision with which closes this wonderful Book of Revelation are most significant. Touching some bad men living in his own day, St. Paul wrote in Philippians iii. 19, "whose end is destruction." This judgment we now see fulfilled. On the utmost verge of the prophet's farthest vision, and outside the eternal and glorious home of the righteous, we see men who are still characterized by the sins they committed on earth. In former visions we have seen them in actual sufferings. And the duration of this suffering is described in words thought worthy to describe the duration of the blessedness of the saved. Surely this is *destruction*: for it is the loss of everything that makes existence worth having. And the absence, from these visions, of any glimmer of hope is in terrible agreement with the assertion of the Apostle that of these men destruction is *the end*. Thus, amid many differences, beneath the cool argument of the pupil of Gamaliel and the vivid colouring of this great prophecy there is real and deep harmony. Midway between these two, in close agreement with each and in conspicuous agreement with the Book of Revelation, is the teaching of the Synoptist Gospels. Thus practically agree three very diverse types of New Testament teaching.

Such, as it seems to me, is the picture set before us in the Book of Revelation. If in any measure I have strained

the meaning of the words I have endeavoured to expound, the reader will correct me. My aim has been to reproduce, in dry light, the ideas which the words expounded would themselves suggest to those who first read them. In estimating their significance, we must not forget that they are prophetic pictures, and must therefore be expounded with utmost caution. But these figures were designed to convey truth, and must be appropriate to the truth they were designed to convey. Moreover, the figures coincide. And to a large extent they agree with the plain teaching of other parts of the New Testament. If we hesitate or refuse to build doctrine on metaphor, we need not hesitate to accept metaphor as a confirmation of doctrine taught elsewhere in plain language.

To sum up. Amid much we cannot understand, the Book of Revelation asserts in forms we cannot misunderstand that, beyond the grave and beyond judgment, actual suffering awaits sinners, and exclusion from the city of God. This exclusion and suffering are represented as continuing to the utmost limit of the prophet's vision.

In my next paper I hope to discuss the opinions of certain representative writers about the future punishment of sin.

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