

Articles by Charles W. Ross

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Spiritual Abominations

Spiritual Abominations

C. W. Ross

Mr. C. W. Ross, a noted and honoured teacher of the past generation on this continent, was the author of this article. It might well be said of him as of Abel, "He being dead yet speaketh." His words are weighty and are even more applicable now than in his own time.

On display in art galleries hang even in a limited way, knows that more than a century ago a flood of light was thrown on the truth of God which had been hidden for centuries under tradition and legality. The true Church composed of men and women in Christ Jesus, made joint heirs with Christ in His inheritance and glory, was practically unknown and certainly not visible. It was veiled from human sight by a vast body of mere religious professors. Religion was without any definite hope such as the return of Christ and the rapture of the Church to share with Christ the glory given to Him of the Father. But God began to work among His own in Christendom and there was a mighty revival of His truth. The coming again of the Lord Jesus to take away His people shone in hearts that loved Him, and the nature of the Church as distinct from Israel became clear and definite. This revival occurred after a long period of darkness even in Protestantism. Not only was the truth concerning the Church recovered, but so also were the simple truths of the gospel, the gospel that had been darkened by the legality that prevailed everywhere.

We feel that this period is illustrated for us in Numbers 21. First of all, we must recall that Israel for a long time had practically been lost in the wilderness. She started out well from Egypt, but soon progress to the land promised by God absolutely stopped. What consternation there must have been in Palestine when the inhabitants heard that a people was on the march with the intention of taking possession of their land. Yet, what surprise must have been theirs when these people did not appear.

This fact may have become a point for their witticisms, a joke with which they entertained their friends. In fact they may have said, "Where is the promise of His coming?" creating a laugh of incredulity.

In Numbers 21 the long dormant hopes begin to stir among the people of Israel, and they begin to move.

Confession

Confession, the first genuine confession in their history, marked them in connection with the episode of the brazen serpent. It was thus with the people of God somewhat more than a hundred years ago. In various parts of the world there was a stir, and the saints came together to read the Word of God and to confess their sad state. They did not use the language of their prayer books in their confessions, but in sincere distress before God they owned their sin and besought His mercy. Did He hear?

Recovery

Of course, He did. He answered by opening up truths from His Word in a manner that had not been done for centuries. In a special way the gospel was illuminated so

that saints were led into the liberty that is in Christ Jesus.

The seventh and eighth chapters of the Epistle to the Romans shone in divine light, and a new life in the energy of the Spirit of God marked the ways of the Christians. One has only to read some of the history of those early days to appreciate their character. The writer well remembers when it reached the part of the world in which his lot was cast. It was a stirring time in every way, and a distinct move among the people of God. Previously the law had been the rule of life, and under its distress many were trying to live. Now it was the sense of being in Christ, identified with Him in death and resurrection, that changed the entire character of their lives. This did not make them think that they were any better than they had been before, but it gave them the joy and emancipation from self-occupation that God means for His people.

Separation

Furthermore, it separated them from the mass of Christendom around and led them to gather together as members of Christ to carry out His Word and to confess His Name. Just as may be read in Numbers 21, they found a well of water which they digged for themselves. They realized the Spirit of God as the well of water and as the power for every form of Christian activity and life. We are struck with the movements in Israel recorded in Numbers 21, they seem so rapid and eager in comparison with the stagnation of the many years before.

Seduction

In Numbers 22 we find a stir in another camp than that of Israel. The king and people of Moab are aroused by the approach of Israel bent on conquest, so they set about to oppose and defeat them. This brings Balaam on the scene, and as we read his parables, we think of the word in Revelation 3:9: "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." Can a more exact illustration of this be found anywhere in the Bible? When the revival of the last century made itself felt, it aroused the hostility of the religious world, and led to most determined efforts to crush it. All the efforts did no more than those of Balaam, for they only scattered the more God's truth until it girded the world.

Shall we go on to Numbers 25? How one would like to avoid it, but, alas, we must not: "Israel abode in Shittim and began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab" is the painful story. It is almost unbelievable after their past experiences. Do we dare to draw comparisons with the people of God today? Rather, do we dare not? What is the condition of those who were revived and regathered in simplicity toward Christ only a little more than a century ago? Look around at the assemblies of the saints wherever they are to be found. What is their condition?

Strife

In the movement that trapped Israel we find three nations: Moab, Ammon, and Midian. One would refrain from mere fancy in interpreting God's Word, but surely

we must follow the guide marks. Moab and Ammon were the children of Lot and as such were related to Israel. Moreover, Israel, when about to enter into the land, was expressly forbidden to meddle with either Moab or Ammon. This command is found in Deuteronomy chapter two.

Does this restriction not remind one of Matthew 13 in which chapter the Lord forbids His servants to root up the tares; they were to grow together with the wheat. Tares speak of profession related to the people of God, the assumption of the Name of Christ when the heart is at enmity against Him. Moab and Ammon were related to Israel; they were the unholy fruit of an unholy union on the part of a believer sunk in worldliness. They had a god of their own, Baal-peor, and his worship was linked with gross immorality (Num. 25). The man who taught the Moabites how to lay a snare for Israel was Balaam, the very one whom God would not allow to curse Israel. Balaam was apparently a Midianite, and Midian means "strife." What a combination! He could not curse them, but he seduced them into fellowship with those from whom they were to keep separate.

Shall we particularize the condition of the saints who at one time were as one, recognizing only that bond that God had made and refusing all others? How shall we speak of it today? Has not strife succeeded in almost destroying the testimony in some places? Alas, in other cases, fellowship with that which at one time would have been eschewed is lightly entered into. We sometimes see those who have fellowship with things manifestly not of God, shudder at the thought of companying with other saints just as godly or even more godly than themselves but who differ with them ecclesiastically.

Division

Alas, we fear that Midian's destructive work is going on as well as the seduction of Moab and Ammon. We see in some places fellowship with those things that the Word of God led us out of as well as division among those who ought to be together. We wonder if what is needed in these days is not a javelin to strike with holy zeal at the abominations among us. We fear that sometimes what is wanted by the saints in ministry is not that which would avert the displeasure of the Lord, but that which would please them. When we read of ministry that is appreciated, we wonder if it would have been so valued had it been the kind that came from Phinehas. Saints sometimes leave conferences well-pleased with themselves rather than humbled before the Lord. Some actually glorying in their separation from other Christians, yet, hiding the sin of division under the pretense of separation from evil. When saints began to gather in simple dependence on the living Lord, there were two outstanding principles at work in their souls. One of them was the unity of all saints, and the other was the separation from evil; these were held in proper balance. Now, alas, in some cases it is division from saints and association with evil that is prevalent.

Hope

We cannot close without looking at the rest of the Book of Numbers. In chapter 31 we find God commanding Moses to avenge the children of Israel on the Midianites. This was one of the last acts of Moses; it was at the close of the wilderness journey. Dare we indulge the hope that ere the time of testimony ends, God will strike in His own way at the strife among us, and thus avenge

us on the unholy thing that has caused such grief to Him?

We think sometimes that we see evidences that He is moving to this end, and our hearts rejoice. Such a move would tell us that we are just at the last step of the long road to our eternal home.

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 1

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 1

C. W. Ross

We are indebted to the executors of the estate of our deceased brother C. W. Ross for these important papers on the TIMES OF THE GENTILES. Although published in 1933, their relevance to the present urged the family to have them reprinted. It is an honour to comply in this, and we trust that the careful perusal of each article will quicken in hearts the living hope of the imminent return of the Lord.

We are sorry that the chart which accompanies these articles will not be ready until next month. Watch for your copy.

This expression, "The times of the Gentiles", is found only once in the Bible, that is in Luke 21:24. It is the Lord's own term for the period when Israel is under the heel of foreign powers and her capital city in alien hands. When did this period commence? And when will it end? These are important questions and we propose to consider them with the aid of the Word of God.

Frequently one thinks by way of contrasts, and here this principle would lead us to ask, When were the times of the Jews? If the times of the Gentiles are distinguished by the prostration of Jerusalem under their heel, then naturally when Jerusalem was the metropolis of the kingdom of Israel, and the seat of royal power, we may think those were the times of the Jews. And rightly so, for God gave to Israel a king, David by name, and

promised to him and his dynasty the throne forever, and Jerusalem became the place where was set what is called in 1 Chronicles 29:23, “the throne of the Lord.” But David’s family behaved so badly in this place of responsibility that the time came when God could no longer suffer them to occupy the throne or wear the crown, although He bore with them for centuries and sought in patience and mercy to awaken in them a sense of their sin. Only now and again did one of the family turn to the Lord, but these occasional flares of faithfulness merely served to deepen the darkness of the general history, until there was no remedy and He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who swept them away, carrying some of the people to Babylon, making captive the king and burning the city and the temple of God which was its glory. So ended the times of the Jews.

The story of Israel’s kingdom is told out in detail in the books of Kings and Chronicles and the end of it is given in a most affecting way in the last chapter of the second book of Chronicles. It is affecting because of the manifest reluctance of God to give up His people to the destroyer and permit their complete overthrow. But “there was no remedy,” and so the blow must fall. Let us suppose ourselves reading continuously this history to the end, what question would naturally arise in our minds? Would it not be, what will God do now? Will He after a season of captivity allow the family of David to return to the throne and again bear rule for Him? Or is this the end of that dynasty? If so, what will He do? Is this catastrophe the prelude to a radical change in His ways among men? Now here is where the Book of Daniel fills a very important place in the canon of Scripture, for

in it these questions are all answered. God is going to make a change. The old order is not to be re-established but a new system is to be set up. The Jews are to remain under the power of strangers whatever favours may be granted to them by way of return to Jerusalem, and regal power will not be again in their hand, but in the hand of the Gentiles. This is the beginning of "the times of the Gentiles."

But how admirable are the ways of God in announcing this change. When one reflects on this crisis he feels that if a change is to be made, there are two parties to be apprised of it. First of all, the people who have been dismissed from this place of privilege should be informed of what has occurred, and then the people to whom is now to be committed the responsibility of taking this place should be told in no uncertain terms of this mighty change, which meant so much to the world. And this is what is done in such a way as to call forth the wonder of the reader to the story. How marvelously does God arrange circumstances so as to bring about both of these ends in one striking scene, told out in its details in the Book of Daniel, chapter II. The first chapter of this book is introductory in character and brings before us the shaping of conditions that were necessary for the scene to be enacted in the next chapter. Daniel and his fellow-Jews are, after a period of training, given a place among the wise men of Babylon attached to the person of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Then follows the remarkable series of events that brings to light the purposes of God. The first thing is that the king has a dream in the night which he forgot entirely in the morning. Apparently, however, it made a vivid impression on his mind and led to his summoning his

wise men and counsellors and making a demand on them that they repeat to him the forgotten dream and then interpret it for him. Naturally enough they expostulate with the king about the unreasonableness of his request, offering to interpret it if he would only tell them what he had dreamed, But he is an Oriental despot and in a flame of fury threatens them with death if they do not within a very little while comply with his demand. This edict of the king involves the four pious Jews who are reckoned among the wise men and they ask for a little time to pray to their God, who, they believe, will give them that which no wisdom of man can give. A little respite is granted and they turn to the living God, the God of Israel, and ask from Him mercies as to this matter. He hears their cry and to one of them, Daniel, He gives the dream with its interpretation. Immediately he is brought before the angry king and quietly and confidently unfolds his forgotten dream and its meaning. The dream itself is represented on the chart as the image with the head of gold, the arms and breasts of silver, the belly and thighs of brass and the legs of iron. This is the dream and the interpretation we give in the exact language of Daniel.

He says: "Thou, O king, art a king of kings; for the God of Heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power and strength and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven hath He given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. THOU ART THIS HEAD OF GOLD.

"And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee and another kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.

“And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces, and subdueth all things; and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

“And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes part of potters’ clay and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men; but they shall not cleave one to another even as iron is not mixed with clay.

“And in the days of these kingdoms shall the God of Heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever.

“Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.”

How much the king was impressed with this message, we have no means of knowing. Probably it flattered his pride to be saluted as the head of the wonderful image he had dreamed of and one would fear from subsequent events that that was all. But God had made known His purposes and caused this poor heathen ruler to know that He had committed to him an empire of vast extent,

and one would naturally expect that this would lead him to a sense of the responsibility now devolving upon him. But before following up this line, let us look again at the chart. It will be perceived that running up and down parallel with the image is a series of beasts. That is to say, on a level with the head of gold is a winged lion; next comes a bear; then follows a four-headed leopard, and last of all beside the legs of iron, a nondescript beast, dreadful and terrible to look upon. Now in order to understand why we have these in parallel lines we must explain a little about the Book of Daniel, or at least point out some things that are helpful in grasping the contents of the Book. The first thing, then, that we notice is this: The Book divides itself naturally into two parts of six chapters each. The first six chapters give us the story of the visions and experiences of the king; the last six give the visions of the prophet himself and his experiences. Now in keeping with this we find in the seventh chapter the first vision of the prophet and it is this vision that in the chart is paralleled with the vision of the king. And they are paralleled in the chart because they tell of the very same kingdoms and their inglorious end as the king sees in his vision of the night.

There is this very great difference, however, that what the king sees as a splendid image, the man of God sees as a succession of wild beasts. That is to say, the head of gold is a winged lion, the breast and arms of silver are a voracious bear, the belly and thighs of brass are a four-winged leopard and the iron legs are represented as a wild beast, dreadful and terrible and strong exceedingly. And the end of all these kingdoms is shown to be their complete overthrow, to be superseded by the power and dominion being given to the Son of Man. To make this

clear and definite in the mind of the reader, let us point out one or two things in which the links between this vision and that of Nebuchadnezzar are quite marked. The head of gold is seen by Daniel as a winged lion and as the prophet gazes the wings are plucked up and a human heart is given to the lion. Can it be doubted that the allusion here is to the experience of Nebuchadnezzar when he was humbled by God and made to know that God ruled in the heavens? Read the story as told in the fourth chapter of this Book. Then in the vision of Daniel the last beast is seen as strong and with ten horns, and this is what the king saw as legs of iron with ten toes on its feet. Other resemblances might be pointed out but there is only one more we notice, and that is the intervention of Divine power at the end to set up a kingdom which will displace all that have been before, and which will have no successor. In the dream of the king this is seen as a stone cut out of the mountain without hands and in the vision of the prophet it is a Son of Man who takes the kingdom, a man evidently in contrast with the beasts as God reckons the kings who have gone before. It is hardly necessary to say that both the stone cut out without hands and the Son of Man point to our Blessed Lord.

There is a third parallel line running up and down the chart but it is only partial and our object in placing it on the chart is to call attention to the fact that not only is the first Kingdom identified for us but at least the next two are clearly marked out in the Book of Daniel. The second empire, that is the breast and arms of silver or the bear, is on the scene even in Daniel's lifetime, and the third one is clearly indicated in the eighth chapter, which furnishes us with the two beasts on the third

parallel line running up and down, the ram with the two horns and the he-goat with the notable horn between its eyes. To sum up, then, the head of gold and the winged lion bring before us the Babylonian kingdom; the breast and arms of silver and the bear and the ram with two horns bring before us the Medo-Persian kingdom; and the belly and thighs of brass and the leopard and the one-horned goat all tell of the Grecian Empire which succeeded the Medo-Persian. So we are not under obligation to the histories of men to discover the meaning of these visions, the Book that gives the visions gives also their interpretation. When we turn to the New Testament, we find the fourth empire, the nondescript beast, on the scene, the Roman empire in all its characteristics as seen in the visions of Daniel, cruel and terrible exceedingly.

The question may be asked here, were there not other mighty empires in the world besides these four? Undoubtedly, but the significance of these four is that they were the empires, one after another, that ruled over the land of Canaan and held captive the people of God, the children of Israel. It was God who gave His people into their hand and this it is that gives them such a place in these Divine records. All Scripture bears witness to the fact that God's centre for the world is Jerusalem, and the nations that have held Jerusalem during the years included within the prophetic scope are of importance because of this fact.

(Part Two to follow next month)

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 10

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 10

C. W. Ross

The Things Which Are

Rev. 2 and 3 (Introduction to Philadelphia)

We have now reached the place where the church of God in its true character demands our attention. In order to have this fairly before us let us turn to Colossians 1. vv. 21-27, "And you that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in His sight; if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church, whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you to fulfil the Word of God, even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints." In this passage, let it be noted, the apostle Paul speaks of two phases of his ministry. In the one every creature is addressed, for it is the gospel that is the subject; in the other the saints are those for whom it is meant, and the church is the theme. Do not pass over this lightly, for it is very important to our

understanding of this portion of our subject. Paul was minister of the gospel; he says here, and minister of the church, he adds. The gospel is for sinners, for all — the truth of the wonderful mystery, the church is for the saints.

Now when the church in its career of departure from the Lord reached its limit, as exhibited in the letter to Thyatira, all saving truth was lost as well as everything else. One has only to think of the groping of the grown man, Martin Luther, after light for his dark soul, to realize how completely every vestige of the gospel was gone from public testimony. He sought at what was supposed to be the very fountain of divine truth in the world, for what his soul craved, but met with nothing but disappointment. He obeyed all the commands of the church with scrupulous exactness, he submitted himself to every form of privation and inflicted on himself all the rigours of the ascetic, but no peace came. At last he got hold of a Bible, and there he heard the voice, not of the church, but of the Lord Himself and in Him he found peace.

Listen to another of these men of that day, a Frenchman, William Farel by name. He too was struggling in the prevailing morass of superstition and fable and had reached a point where despair well-nigh overwhelmed him. He says, "Had it not been that I began to read the Bible, it would have been all over with me, for every thing on the face of the earth was so entirely perverted from the truth of God, that nothing was left whole and sound but the Bible. But when I began to read it I found myself utterly bewildered. I saw that everything around me, in doctrine and in practice, was just the contrary to the Holy Scriptures. Here then was the time when my

eyes ought to have been opened, and I ought to have come to my senses, and out of the accursed delusion in which I had been living. But it was not so. I remained as deluded and senseless as before; in fact I went from bad to worse, for the moment that the thought struck me how astounding it was that the Scriptures should be so different from all I had believed, Satan took alarm lest he should lose his victim, and dealt with me according to his custom — for up to that time he had kept me obeying and serving him with my whole heart, and without fear or doubt.”

In speaking of a later day, the same writer says, met some people in Paris, and they made mention of the gospel. And God knows how, by the most contemptible, He made me know the power and value of the death of Jesus. And when I first heard of these things, for three years and more I prayed to God that He would give me grace to understand the right way. I compared what I heard with the Greek and Latin Testaments, reading them often upon my knees. And I talked over these things with great and small, seeking only to be taught, despising not any.” Again he writes, “Now everything appeared to me as in a new creation. Scripture became clear to me. the light shone in upon my soul. A voice till now unknown, the voice of Christ, my Shepherd, my Master, my Teacher now spoke to me with power. God pitying our error, taught us that He only, by Christ, the propitiation for our sins, by Christ, the Mediator and the Advocate, blots out our transgressions for His own sake, insomuch as they are all cleansed by His blood.”

Our object in making these quotations is to show, first, that every phase of the faith once committed to the saints was lost, and second, that the part recovered at

the Reformation was that first part of Paul's ministry, the gospel. It is quite true of course, that the whole Bible was restored to the people, but it is one thing to have the Bible in one's possession and another thing to have made the truth of it one's own. When the people of Israel were given the land of Canaan for a possession, only that part of it on which they set foot really became theirs. So with the Bible, only that part of it which we have learned in an experimental way do we dare to call our own, and it was the shame of Protestants, that having been led, so to speak, into the land by these mighty leaders, they did not go forward, but on the contrary lost much that was won in the first few years of the Reformation.

But this brings us to the next letter and the next parable, the sixth. For there came a time when some of the saints of God, stirred up by the Spirit of God, began to reach out into some of the unexplored regions of the Word of God, especially into the second phase of the ministry of the Apostle Paul, the truth of the church of God. It is a very little over a century ago that a number of God's people began searching the Bible, especially along prophetic lines. In doing so, the first thing that seems to have attracted their attention was the place Israel had in the purposes of God. Up to that time there was nothing but confusion as to the word of Prophecy. The distinct place of the church of God and the return to God in mercy to Israel were utterly unknown. One has only to read the religious writings of those days to see all this, and indeed, one need only to look at the Bibles printed previous to that time. Not that the text of the Bibles was different of course, but in the human statements at the top of the pages in the prophetic

books. In Isaiah for instance, you will find such headings as “Prosperity of the Church,” “Enlargement of the Church,” when if you read what is actually given by the Spirit of God under these headings, you will find in the most precise terms, a description of blessings that are to come to Israel in a future day. It was searching into some of these things that eventually led to the emerging out of the confusion into the clear light of Divine revelation, of that wonderful thing called the church of God. This brings us to the letter to Philadelphia.

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 11

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 11

C. W. Ross

We are now come to what we cannot but regard as a very important period in the history of the church. Let us note, to begin with, that in only two of these seven letters is the call to repentance omitted. The one is Smyrna and the other is this one now before us. The reason for the omission in the case of Smyrna is right on the surface, — under the mighty hand of God stretched forth in severe discipline they were repenting and returning to the Lord. The reason for its being omitted in this letter we believe is just as plain, they too are repenting under the moving of the mighty Spirit of God and returning in whole-heartedness to His ways and to Himself. This comes out very plainly in the letter itself.

Perhaps it is just as well to call attention again to the parallel parable in Matthew 8. It is the sixth one, the parable of the merchantman seeking goodly pearls and finding one, for which he sold all that he had that he might have the wherewithal to purchase it. In this story the leading character is the man whose desire for the priceless gem led him to give up all to obtain it. We are aware that there is a hymn that says, "I've found the pearl of greatest price," but that is not the form of sound words, for it puts the sinner in the place of the purchaser and surely if we think of any one giving all that he had we have to think only of one, the Lord Himself, Who, we are told, 'Loved the church and gave

Himself for it." We cannot for a moment doubt that what is brought before us here is the revival in power of the real character of the church of God as given to us in the Word. In the previous letter we have the time of the Reformation depicted for us when there was the recovery of the gospel and alas! a settling down with that as if it were the full measure of the mind of God for His people. Here there is a going on to ascertain all His thoughts and by grace an entering into them that calls forth His approval in no uncertain terms.

In the Old Testament we have, we believe, a time in the history of the people of Israel that answers to this and it will be for edification to look at it. The real history of Israel closes with the book of Chronicles. There we read of their complete overthrow. Never is the Kingdom restored as we have seen earlier in our studies. But God in His mercy to His people moved on the heart of their over-lord, the King of Persia, to issue a proclamation allowing them to return to Jerusalem to build again the house of God there. He not only allows them, He encourages them to do so. This is found in the first chapter of the Book of Ezra. Quite a large number take advantage of the king's clemency to return to Palestine and settle again in the land of their fathers.

The first thing that they did when they got back to Jerusalem was to build the altar of the God of Israel. Now every altar raised by direction of God in the Old Testament brings before us the cross of our Blessed Lord where He offered Himself to God. So what is here taught us is that the first thing that was settled in this time of revival was the way of access to God. We cannot but feel that this tells us in picture of the time of what is called the Reformation. Then this much was seen and re-

established, namely, the ground on which a sinner can find acceptance before God. It is added in the chapter where this is told out (Ezra 3:6), "But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid."

This is a remarkably accurate picture of what took place at the Reformation. The gospel establishes the soul in peace before God, but the gospel says nothing about the house of God. Let us very patiently look at this. The Epistle to the Romans gives a good foundation for a human soul to rest on for Eternity, but the Epistle to the Romans says nothing about conduct in the house of God or indeed the house of God at all. It is purely individual in character, and all truth as to the house of God is collective in character necessarily. In the passage we have been looking at the people of Israel simply put things on a solid foundation for their safety, for it is added in connection with their building the altar, "for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries." Their own safety then is secured but that is all.

In the Reformation the truth that secures the safety of the soul was brought out in remarkable plainness and simplicity, but "the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid." As we have already pointed out, there was no attempt to put anything else on a Scriptural basis, at least not generally. Everything outside of this was simply make-shift. Nor for centuries afterwards was there any real effort made to put the whole Christian position in all its phases on a Biblical basis. In the days of Wesley there was nothing more than a revival of what is called "Vital religion" and when there was no room for this in the Established systems of religion, he went off and set up a body of his own without in the least degree

attempting to act on the ground of the church of God. And indeed this characterized many of the revivals of those days. They were forced out of the great National systems but they did not get back to the foundation of the church of God. So it was everywhere — the great body established by law and a great number of sects and parties of all kinds and various degrees of orthodoxy. But the church of God, where was it in all this confusion?

About a hundred years ago or more God began to move among His people again in a very definite way as we have already noticed. The form of the movement at first was intensive study of the Word. Saints from the many parties of Christendom would gather in an informal way to read the Word and minister to each other any light that any one might have that the others did not possess and it was all welcomed. None had any thought of anything further than feeding their own souls and ministering to the sheep of Christ what they themselves were learning. Separation from the systems of men was not dreamed of in the beginning of those meetings.

But one of the first things that this, study of the Word led to was the ascertainment of the special place of Israel in the counsels of God. Some who were most hearty in these efforts rested content with this increase of knowledge and went no further.

Others, however, not satisfied with this, sought to learn what this meant for them in the way of obedience to the Lord. Because in learning the place of Israel in the Word, necessarily the special calling and privileges and functions of the church of God stood out and the tender and exercised consciences of many would not permit them to merely know these things. One of those whose

hearts were stirred at this time was a curate in the Episcopal system in Ireland. A most devoted clergyman he was, laboring among the poorer classes in the neglected parts of the country, and seeking to bring them into the knowledge of the truth as he knew it. He attended some of those Bible Readings and his whole being was enlisted in the cause of acquiring the mind of God, not only that he might teach it but that first of all he might do it. An event occurred at this time that seemed so utterly out of keeping with what he had been learning from the Word of God that he was deeply moved and courageously spoke out in protest against what was being done by those whom he regarded as his superiors in the church. What was being done was this. Roman Catholics were being converted from that awful system in large numbers and the Episcopal church was receiving them into its fold. But one high in the hierarchy of that system, the Archbishop of Dublin insisted on these converts taking an oath when they were received which bound them to acknowledge the King of England as head of the church. There was also at the same time a petition signed by most of the clergy of the Episcopal church addressed to the Parliament of Great Britain asking protection from the attacks that were being made on them by the Catholics because of this work of God that was going on. These things stopped the further spread of the work and the young curate was stirred by the circumstances in such a way as to write a paper and send it to the Archbishop and clergymen, remonstrating with them for their turning to the world for help of any kind. Many years afterwards the paper was published and the writer of it says concerning its contents, "It was the first germinating of the truth" which has since developed in the church of God."

Watch next number for this important paper.

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 12

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 12

C. W. Ross

Here is part of what he says: "What is the Church of Christ in its purpose and perfection? It is a congregation of souls redeemed out of this evil world by God manifest in the flesh, a people purified to Himself by Christ, purified in the heart by faith, knit together by the bond of this common faith in Him, and united to Him their Head, sitting at the right hand of the Father, having consequently their conversation in heaven, from whence they look for the Saviour the Lord of glory. As a body therefore they belong to heaven; there is their portion in the restitution of all things, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. On earth they are as a people, necessarily subordinate; they are nothing and nobody; their king is in heaven, their interests and constitution heavenly." He then goes on to protest against the ministers of this heavenly thing having recourse to the world for protection in the exercise of their duties as servants of the Lord and begs them to take what comes in the way of persecution as what is to be expected in this scene from a hostile world.

We quote again from this same paper to show how the truth of the Church of God was exercising him and others at that time. It may be well in order to emphasize the importance of this to remind ourselves of what was going on at the same time in religious circles but moving in a very different direction. It was what is called by

some the Oxford Movement, by others Puseyism. Its nature was an urge to return to the Church of Rome as being the original church founded by the Lord and His apostles. The Reformation was regretted as an unwise step and utterly wrong and many were returning to the fold of St. Peter as it was termed, some of them being prominent men in the Episcopal church in England. All Christendom indeed was astir at the outcome of these conflicting currents of thought and it is with this in mind that the following was written in the same paper from which we have quoted. The writer goes on to say, "What is the Papacy? Satan's fiction to answer all this. While men are kept down in the lowest desires of a depraved world, in the bondage of the corrupt affections of a nature alienated from the life of God, it presents a head on earth, earthly in its interests and objects, knitting together in a body, not a people separated out of the world to spiritual objects, but one tied by the closest interests to maintain his earthly supremacy, and with it their own importance on earth, and in an earthly way; and by this astonishing and universal scheme of anti-christianity, which is antitheism, precluding the application of the Divine Word to the souls of men. In short, the system of Popery I look upon as an entire counterpart of the Christian scheme, set up by Satan on the decay of faith to hold its place, uniting men to an earthly head and to each other by those interests from which Christianity delivers, and keeping the world in bondage, instead of leading men to heavenly things out of those interests, to be humbled in the presence of the world's dominion. The members of the Papal system will accordingly be found, in their interests, objects and activities, such as would result from such a system. We know, blessed be God, that in result the kingdom of His

Son will be glorified in the splendor of its great Head, and the destruction assured of that anti-Christian counterpart, by which Satan has deceived the world under the pretense of Christianity.”

The only result of this appeal to the clergy of the Episcopal system was to make the writer of it feel how hopeless it was to attempt to heal the system and as the truth of the Church of God became clearer to his mind it led to his separating himself wholly from this mixed communion, not to start something else but to recognize in a practical way what had been started long ago by the Spirit of God, but which had been buried out of sight by the plot of Satan and the folly of man. As we have already stated more than once it was the apprehension of what the Church of God was that led to this movement. And it is of interest to mention that when some of the saints of those days discovered its true character and compared it with what was all around them they wept copiously at the complete ruin that had been wrought. Not only so but they took a place before the Lord in confession of the sin that had led to this ruin. This is a principle of the utmost importance in such conditions.

When Daniel sought the blessing of God on the scattered nation of Israel, what did he say in his prayer? “We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Thy precepts and from Thy judgments: neither have we hearkened unto Thy servants the prophets, which spake in Thy Name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongeth to Thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day, to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of

Jerusalem, and unto all Israel that are near and that are far off, through all the countries whither Thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against Thee. O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against Thee."

Daniel was an Israelite, a member of the guilty nation and although personally free from the wickedness that had brought upon them the heavy hand of God in judgment, he took his place before God in confession representing the nation. So it was in those early days of Philadelphia, they saw first of all what the Church was as God made it and then they saw its ruined condition, scattered and divided and linked with the world and its ambitions, and they wept and confessed their sin to the Lord.

What then is the Church of God in the sight of God as originally constituted by Him? In order to understand this we must think of our Blessed Lord and His work for the glory of God and the blessings of men. If we break it up, so to speak, into its parts we think of all of His death and resurrection as meeting the question of sin and condemnation under which men lay. This is unfolded in all its glorious details in the Epistle to the Romans. But this phase of His work carries us no farther than what is our individual blessing. That is to say the blessings of Romans do not bring us consciously further than the realization of our place in Christ. Do not imagine for a moment that we are speaking or thinking lightly of this, but again we repeat it is individual blessing. When however, we turn to the Epistle to the Ephesians, what do we find? It is the ascension of the Lord and union with Him in that glorious place as the Body to the Head

that is there spread before us in its amazing display of the riches of the grace and wisdom and power of God. The Church is the Body of Christ, each member livingly linked with the Head and with each other, indwelt and animated by the Holy Spirit of God. It is the house of God on earth, in which He dwells by His Spirit, and it is the Bride of Christ waiting here for the absent Bridegroom. It is the manifestation of the very height of the wisdom and love and grace and power and mercy and every other attribute of God, in a word of the “fulness of God” as Ephesians puts it.

Not only so but it is cared for by the Head and from Him comes all the nourishment needed for its blessing and continuance. He sends the gifts from Himself and commits them to the Holy Spirit, His vice-regent here, to distribute as He will. Furthermore, the Spirit is here, not only in the individual believer but also in the Church as a corporate whole, to guide and control all its activities. In the Epistle to the Ephesians we have the Church in its organic being and Divine character, and in the First Epistle to the Corinthians we have the Church in its functioning on the earth. The form it took in manifestation was that of local assemblies in various places but all linked together as members of the Body of Christ and functioning by means of those different companies scattered throughout the world. This touched the question of ministry. In view of what the Word disclosed as to gifts given by the Lord, what was the true character of the system of clerisy that obtained all over Christendom? These questions were faced at that time by a group of men in the fear of God and in the spirit of “trembling at His word.” It seemed a gigantic undertaking to move in the face of all the well-

established principles of Christendom, but again the Lord had men who were dauntless in courage and full of zeal for the glory of the Lord, and counting not their lives or their reputations dear to themselves. Bravely they stepped out on the Word of God and acted on what they had learned.

The first account in a historical way of the beginning of this movement in actual deed tells us of four men meeting in a home in the city of Dublin, to remember the Lord as members of nothing but the Body of Christ. Some of them were still connected with the various bodies in Christendom but they were feeling their way out. They did not dream of such a development as came afterwards but their own souls craved real and genuine Christian fellowship based on the Word and they found it in this way. One of the four was J. N. Darby, the young curate whose protest we have copied from. By this time the truth had so developed in his mind that he found it incumbent on him to leave the system of which he was a member. He could not regard it as the Body of Christ even in principle, but a sinful mixture of saint and sinner without any real title to the name of the Church of God. When he left the system he printed and published a paper entitled. "The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ," and in it he set forth what he had learned from the Word of God on those points.

How could he do otherwise than leave that which was a combination of saint and sinner when the Church of God is a Body made up only of saints? And when he perceived that the Word calls on saints to refuse all yokes with the unbelievers, he, realizing his membership in the Body of Christ sought a fellowship based on this alone. But where could this be found? In the paper he

published when he left the system he says among other things, "In the first place, it is not a union of the outward professing bodies that is desirable; indeed it is surprising that reflecting Protestants should desire it; far from doing good, I conceive it would be impossible that such a body could be at all recognized as the Church of God. It would be a counterpart to Romish unity, we should have the life of the Church and the power of the Word lost, and the unity the life of spiritual life utterly excluded, Whatever plans may be in the order of Providence, we can only act on the principles of grace, and true unity is the unity of the Spirit and it must be wrought by the operation of the Spirit." Again in the same paper he says, "No meeting which is not framed to embrace all the children of God in the full basis of the Kingdom of the Son, can find the fulness of blessing, because it does not contemplate it — because its faith does not embrace it. Where two or three are gathered together in His Name, His Name is recorded there for blessing; because they are met in the fulness of the power of the unchangeable interests of that everlasting kingdom in which it has pleased the glorious Jehovah to glorify Himself, and to make His saving health known in the Person of His Son, by the power of the Spirit."

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 13

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 13

C. W. Ross

There is an outward symbol and instrument of unity in the partaking of the Lord's supper, "for we being many are one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread." And what does St. Paul declare to be the true intent and testimony of that rite? That whensoever 'we eat of that bread and drink of that cup, we do show the Lord's death till He come'. " Near the close of this paper from which we are quoting he shows how deeply he was exercised as to the becoming path in view of these things he has just been saying, things which could not be gainsaid. He says, "But if any one will say, if you see these things, what are you doing yourself? I can only deeply acknowledge the strange and infinite shortcomings and sorrow and mourn over them; I acknowledge the weakness of my faith, but I earnestly seek for direction. And let me add, when so many who ought to guide go their own way, those who would have gladly followed are made slow and feeble lest they should in any wise err from the straight path, and hinder their service though their souls might be safe." We quote this last sentence just to show the deep exercise that prevailed lest there should be any move not directly of the Spirit of God, and the natural shrinking from a path that seemed so radical in character and so daring in result.

But God was leading on and the more implicitly the saints obeyed the Word as it was opened up, the more light was vouchsafed to them. They were cast wholly on God and His Word. One cannot help turning back again to that wonderful time in Israel when they returned from Babylon. When was there at any time in their history such Bible readings as prevailed then? Never! Read through the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah and see how everything was regulated by the one standard. Again and again we have the expression, "They found it written" or its equivalent. For many years before the days of the captivity in Babylon the Word of God was little known and less read, now they resort to it for guidance in every move they make. So was it with those dauntless souls who ventured forth on this path. Step after step was taken as light was given and the movement spread among saints everywhere.

Naturally enough, one of the matters that demanded attention was the question of ministry. In the Reformation this was left practically untouched and clerisy as an institution remained unjudged in Christendom. But now that the Word of God was getting its place as the one court of appeal this must be settled by its decision. And when the Word of the Lord was brought to bear on this class known as "the clergy" the result was certainly astounding. The same writer from whom we have quoted more than once was so affected by the light the Word of God threw on the whole question that he wrote another paper and had it printed entitled, "The notion of a clergyman, dispensationally the sin against the Holy Ghost." It was not published at the time because the writer was entreated not to send forth such a radical declaration and yielded to their

entreaties. It was published later on, however, and shows plainly how thoroughly the system was exposed to the light of the Word of God and seen to be a gigantic fraud, hoary with age but nevertheless without one shred of the Word of the Lord to support it. He says, "The statement which I make is this, that I believe the "Notion of a clergyman" to be the sin against the Holy Ghost in this dispensation. I am not talking of individuals wilfully committing it, but that the thing itself is such as regards this dispensation and must result in its destruction. It is the substitution of something for the power and presence of the holy blessed, and blessing Spirit, by which this dispensation is characterized, and by which the unrenownedness of man and the authority of man, holds the place which alone that blessed Spirit has power and title to fill, as that other Comforter which should abide forever.

If the "Notion of a Clergyman" has had the effect of the substitution of anything which is of man, and therefore subject to Satan, in the place and prerogative of that blessed Spirit exercising the vicarship of Christ in the world, it is clear that however the providence of God may have overruled it, in the ignorance which He could wink at, it does, when stood upon and rested in against the presence and work of the Spirit, become direct sin against Him — pure dreadful and destructive evil — the very cause of destruction to the church. I must be observed here to say nothing against offices in the Church of Christ, and the exercise of authority in them. It were a vain and unnecessary work here to prove the recognition of that on which Scripture is so plain. But they are spoken of in Scripture as gifts derived from on high: "He gave some apostles" (Eph. iv. 5); so in 1

Corinthians 12, they are known only as gifts. My objection to the "Notion of a Clergyman" is that it substitutes something in the place of all these, which cannot be said to be of God at all, and is not found in Scripture." One more quotation and we are through; "What is the remedy? The recognition of God's Spirit where He is —personally seeking for that holiness and subjection of spirit which will discern, own and bow to His guidance and direction, and hail His blessing as the hand of God, wherever He operates in the measure and way He does so — that other Comforter sent to abide with us, whatever else did, forever."

Here then is the feeling engendered by a study of the Word as to ministry, a complete repudiation of the system of clerisy and a recognition of the presence of the Holy Ghost as the dispenser of the gifts needed for the maintenance of the Church and its blessing in testimony. A class of men who had some special place because they had been by an ordinance of man set apart for preaching was not found in the Word at all. Ministry was, as it means, service and one who could serve was one endowed with a gift from the Lord wherewith he served.

Now let us turn to the Lord's own judgment of this period as found in the letter to Philadelphia. The word Philadelphia means "Brotherly love", and this of itself is significant, because this was a return to the primitive condition when it was seen to be a reality, that "One is your Master and all ye are brethren." Not only so but a stronger bond even than that between brethren was discovered, even the same kind of bond that exists between the various parts of the human body, every part at the service of every other part. It was in no sense an

attempt to set up the Church again, but a recognition of its 'existence, though in a ruined and scattered state, and the finding of a path that meets the Lord's approval in that state. In the Word, division is condemned and saints are called on to walk in unity. Names, save those that He gives us are forbidden and condemned in Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, the Apostle Paul speaks plainly and strongly as to this. Let us listen to his solemn words, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ that ye all, speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the Name of Paul?"

Hear then the word of commendation from the Lord "Thou hast kept My word and not denied My Name." This sums up in divinely chosen terms the characteristics of this period. It was a return to His word, not merely in the matter of salvation but in all things. Creeds and confessions and rules and regulations and books of discipline and traditions of all kinds were thrown to one side that He as Head of the Body and Son over the House of God might have His place among His own. Not only so but all names that through time had obtained a place among saints were discarded and the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone was allowed to be named on His people. It may seem a small matter to be called by any other name and people

do so regard it but it is much to Him. If Paul indignantly refuses to permit his name to be named as head of a party, what about lesser names? What about Luther or Calvin or even names that are not personal but characteristic such as Presbyterian or Episcopal? Surely they must all be refused.

But there is more here that we should notice. He speaks of Himself as having the key of David with all power to open and shut in spite of men. The allusion here is mainly to the fact, that all power in Heaven and Earth is committed to Him alone. The Church had been for years accustomed to lean on the power of the world to maintain its place and an unseen Lord and Protector was hardly thought of. But in this period He is again in His place as Lord over all circumstances. One cannot help going back to the early days of the Church as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles. They were not dependent on the secular power for anything, indeed, all they met with from that source was opposition and hatred. In the twelfth chapter of the Acts Herod with the hearty co-operation of the Jews shuts up in prison two of the leading men among the saints, Peter and James. One of them is permitted to earn the crown of the martyr and the other is kept for a later day to gratify the relentless enmity of the Jews. But the saints gathered together in prayer and He who has the key of David the master key of all locks, opened every door that held Peter and sent him forth a free man. So those saints that in the Philadelphia period ventured forth into this path of separation learned the meaning of an unseen Master in Whose hand was all power. What prevailed around was leaning on an established system that the world acknowledged because it was palpable to the senses, but

a living Christ, still “watching o’er His ransomed people,” and still supplying all that was needed was practically unknown. Faith in His place at the right hand of power was merely a theory, now it had become by grace a great reality to a few.

And this thought put every servant into a place of direct dependence on Him. No longer was it the archbishop or bishop or even the presiding elder or conference assigning to each man his sphere of labor, but each servant to whom had been given a gift, was cast upon the Lord Himself for direction as to where and how he might exercise that gift. This ‘abolished all idea of grades of Service, each One’ was a servant Of the same Lord and it was Simply the gift given by the Lord, not official place, that made one differ from another.

Furthermore as to the temporal support of such as were called to give their whole time to the work, there was the same earnest desire to find what was written and act on it. Such a thing as a man hired to preach was utterly refused because it was not found in the Word. What was discovered was that each man to whom the Lord had given a gift was responsible to Him to exercise that gift, counting on Him Who had called him to support him in it, and on the other side what was plainly seen was the habit of the Church in early days to minister to such as had gone forth in His service, for His Name sake. See as to this the Epistle to the Philippians, 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter ix., and for individual action in this way read 2 Timothy, 1:18, and also the Third Epistle of John. In one word it was a return to faith in an unseen but real Head of the Church and He was found to be all that He ever was in the palmiest days of the past.

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 14

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 14

C. W. Ross

The Things Which Are

Rev. 2 And 3

Philadelphia (Concluded)

But there is another word He says as to Himself, and that is, "the holy and the true." This suggests another phase of responsibility that was apprehended at that time as belonging to the Church of God. That is the truth as to Him that was committed to the Saints to maintain. It has ever been Satan's aim to drag Him down from His excellency by introducing into the Church questionings as to who He is and what He is. The Church of God was the house of God and if we turn back to the Old Testament and read about the house of God we find that it was not only built according to the specific directions of God, as to size and form, but its furnishings were ordered by Him with the same careful attention to every detail. Now what was the house of God in the Old Testament, whether the tabernacle or the temple, is but a picture of the Church of God, His house in this dispensation, (1 Tim. 3:15). And every part of the furnishing of that house in olden times was a picture of the furnishing of the house of today. And moreover it all speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ. So the Church of God today was furnished with the truth as to Him that it might maintain it and proclaim it. Within its sacred

precincts no word save that which declared Him as He was, the Holy One of God, would dare to be uttered. But early in the dispensation or comparatively so, Satan sought to introduce that which dishonored Him. Arius, a man who was a leading figure in the Church, began to teach that which robbed Him of His true Deity. Thank God, this inroad of Satan was resisted to the uttermost and although many were carried away with the sophistries of Arius, the Church as a whole remained true to the faith as to the Lord's Deity. But Satan is ever on the alert to blaspheme that Blessed One and even in the day in which this movement was stirring all Christendom, there were covert attacks being made on the Lord. Edward Irving, a clergyman of London, a man of great eloquence and apparently deep piety, became deeply exercised about the state of the Church of God and especially about the absence of the gifts that marked the early days. He did not see any reason why we should not have the gift of tongues and every other manifestation of the presence of the Spirit of God. At last there broke out among his followers what he termed the gift of tongues and many were carried away with it. But it developed soon that Mr. Irving was teaching very grave error as to the Lord Himself, holding that he had in Him the law of sin and death as we all did by nature. Of course when this came out it was opposed with intense earnestness, especially by those who had taken the position of gathering to the Lord's Name alone. To them mere displays of power meant nothing if the Lord were dishonored, to them He was the Holy One of God and the true One and nothing must be allowed to touch the ark of God. Other trials too of the same kind arose but as a whole, thank God, anything that in any wise lowered Him from the place God has given Him and

revealed Him to be in His word was sternly opposed and driven out. To them He was "He that is holy, He that is true." Perhaps some of the measures taken to keep out everything of this kind were extreme but one cannot but thank God today that there are some places where one can go in the certainty that not a word of dishonor to Him will be permitted. In the assemblies of saints gathering in His Name alone, wherever they are found, He is still the Holy and the True. Alas! one hardly knows where else he would be safe as to this.

The work of God at the time of what is called the Reformation led, in so far as forms are concerned, to the establishment of the great bodies of Protestant churches owning no allegiance to Rome, but claiming a measure of independence of each other, as if there were many churches. True enough it is that we find the word churches in the Bible, but it is not at all in the sense in which it is so often used. There is no such thing as churches in a city anywhere but the church. We read of the church in Jerusalem (not of the first church and second church and such like), and we know it numbered thousands, nor do we read of the churches in Corinth although it too was very large. But the language of Scripture is as to Corinth "if the whole church be come together into one place," and in Jerusalem we are told of an occasion when the apostles called the multitude together, (Acts vi. 2). But in the Reformation as we have said more than once, there was little attempt to bring things in every way into conformity to the Word. A minister of the church in England was not a minister of the church in Germany.

He might be permitted to minister of course, but he belonged to a different thing, another communion,

another church. Because Zwingli and other Swiss believers rejected the theory of transubstantiation as held and taught by the German Reformers, Luther would not acknowledge them as brethren in Christ, so there came into being the Swiss Reformed church and the German and so on. But when the Church of God was perceived, then national distinctions were forgotten, distance meant nothing, it was the Body of Christ wherever it was found, and "there is one Body," Ephesians iv. declares. An apostle in the church in Jerusalem was nothing less when he went to Antioch, and a prophet the same. The language of the Word is, "God hath set some in the Church, first, apostles secondarily, prophets, thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." So the saints at this time met in little groups on the Scriptural principle, given for guidance in all conditions, "Where two or three are gathered together unto My name, there am I in the midst of them." His presence was all that was sought and all that was needed, for that secured all the blessing of this dispensation. As servants of the Lord went from place to place, they were received as members of the Body of Christ in this circle of twos and threes or whatever the number might be, and they ministered to them according to the gift of Christ in the unity of the Spirit.

There was no pretence to re-establish the church as it was of old and there were not any claims to anything save to be members of Christ meeting as such in His Name. There was felt very strongly the bond that bound them, not only to those with whom they met but, to every member of Christ wherever he was or in whatever

ecclesiastical circle he might move. Every gift the Lord might give was thankfully accepted and they did not look for what people ignorantly claim to have today, a Pentecostal church, with all the glory of those days, in the way of display of power. The language of the letter to Philadelphia is "Thou hast a little strength," and it was this sense of weakness that was their strength. He opened doors for them and helped them in their testimony and that was enough.

It is a curious thing that in the two churches where there is not the call to repent, there is the mention of opposition from those who claim to be Jews, that is to say, in Smyrna and here in the letter to Philadelphia. Why is this? We cannot doubt that in the letter to Smyrna there were really Jews in the racial meaning of term who formed this synagogue of Satan. But here it seems to us it is the principle of legality and hatred of the grace of God that calls for this name to be applied to them. In the letter to Smyrna there was the recognition of the hostility of the religious element as well as the persecution from the power of the secular authorities, but here, it is the opposition from the religious element only that is noticed. As a matter of fact in the period treated of in Smyrna the government of the world was enlisted in the service of Satan in his attack on the Church of God, but in the time of Philadelphia the governments of earth did not meddle with religious affairs in the way of opposition, but the religious authorities launched their energies and whatever weapons they could use in antagonism to this new movement. It was derided, scoffed at, assailed by calumny and every other device that could be resorted to in order to bring it into contempt and disrepute. But

the Lord here assures them that from out of that army of opposition He will give them who will do homage to them and acknowledge the hand of the Lord as having been with them. Who can doubt the meaning of this? Look if you will in the library of any man in Christendom who seeks to know the meaning of the Word of God and you will find books written by those whose names were vilified while living for walking in a path of separation from the religious systems of men, and those expository works are regarded as the clearest and fullest of all commentaries. Not only so but there are those who have had a great name as Bible Teachers who are simply passing on what they learned at the feet of such men without acknowledging' their indebtedness to them. All this the Lord sees and in His own time will adjust.

There is one thing more we must notice ere we leave this lovely picture and that is the way the Lord speaks of His coming. The language is the language of the early days of the history of the Church and what would be begotten in the heart by such a statement is the ardent expectation that characterized those early days. He says, "Behold, I come quickly." When did this note, so long forgotten in the Church's history, begin to be sounded out again? All one has to do to settle this is to read the religious literature of the last century on the prophetic Word. Prior to that time there is hardly one distinct statement as to the Lord coming for His own and coming quickly. The whole thought before that was that the Church was here to convert the world and when that should be accomplished He would return to judge the world. But now the truth is again blazing out, the midnight cry is sounding forth, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh." The effect of this on the lives of the saints who

came under its influence was, naturally, turning away from everything of earth to look up to Heaven and wait for Him.

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 15

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 15

C. W. Ross

Laodicea (Rev. 2 and 3)

If we are correct in our interpretation of these seven letters as being a panoramic history of the Church from the beginning of its failure in testimony until its final rejection by the Lord as His witness on earth, then we might say that had it ended in the state described in the letter to Philadelphia, it would have some credit for ending well in a little remnant. But this would be contrary to all lessons of human history as written by the Spirit of God. His unvarying testimony as to man is that he cannot and does not abide in the place God puts him but without exception departs from it and proves himself to be thoroughly untrustworthy. We should not expect anything better in the history of the Church. Nor do we find anything better.

Let us review some of the things we have gone over already. In the first place the history of the Church in its original condition is portrayed in the first four letters of this series, and shows its path as a gradual departure from God until it ends in subjection to a system described under the symbol of a notorious woman of the Old Testament. Jezebel by name. Then a remnant is marked off and the next three letters bring before us the history of this remnant. Now comes the question, will this remnant, profiting by all the lessons of the past,

prove more faithful to the testimony committed to it, than the past generation? What should one look for?

It will be remembered that we have more than once turned back to the Old Testament for help in these studies, and we think that at this point, we may again with real profit turn to its pages. There was a remnant brought back from Babylon to Jerusalem and the history of this remnant is given to us in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, at least the beginning of their history is given to us in these books. What an opportunity they had through the kindness of the kings of Persia to profit by all the lessons of the past, and one cannot doubt for a moment that they did profit somewhat by them and by the discipline in their exile from the land of their fathers. But to what extent did they learn the intended lesson? Only in one particular do we find any real change in their conduct, although it was undoubtedly a very important one, that is to say, they never returned to idolatry after their exile, but outwardly at least maintained their allegiance to Jehovah, the God of Israel. But this is referred to by the Lord when He came here in such a way as to show it to be of little worth on the whole, although He fully acknowledged it.

We would not unnecessarily tax our readers' patience, but above all things would we endeavor to communicate the truth in such a way as to be understood, even if we may seem tedious at times, so we must ask them to turn to the history of the Old Testament remnant and reflect a little on its lessons. First of all let us recall the three letters written to them or rather the three prophetic books that belong to this period, for these books disclose the conditions of the people as time went on. The prophetic books are Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi and

they are well worth the careful study of anyone who would learn the ways of God with man, and the ways of man when entrusted by Him with any testimony. The first two of these books are full of encouragement to this remnant in their endeavor to maintain a testimony for the living God, but the last one written quite a number of years later is an expression of God's disappointment in them and displeasure with their condition, and severe censure of their ungodly ways.

Now let us remember again. He does not reproach them for their idolatry as He does in the prophecies of old, Isaiah and Jeremiah and others of that time, called "the former prophets" in Zecharia 1-4. This ought to be carefully noticed, because of the words of the Lord Jesus when later on He came among this very remnant. As already noticed, they never returned to idolatry — that is plain —but the way the Lord puts it indicates very clearly they were no more pleasing to God than before. The passage we have in mind is found in Matthew 12:43-45. We quote it in full. He says, "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return unto my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept and garnished. Then goeth he and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation."

Now let us remember that this generation so forcefully described by the Lord was the same generation that came out of Babylon, only this is a little later in their history than when addressed by the prophet Malachi.

We are using the word generation in the sense of nation, as it is used so often in the Word. They were not of course the same individuals but their posterity, having the same moral characteristics as their fathers in the days of Malachi, only more fully developed. The unclean spirit of idolatry has gone out, but, alas! the true God has not filled the gap, all is mere formality and the time is coming, the Lord says, when the unclean spirit will return worse than ever. This time has not come yet, it points to a day yet to be when the great mass of Israel will bow before the worst form of idolatry that has ever been in the world. But for the time then present the statement is clear, there was no real heart for God, although the house was swept and garnished. So the remnant that came out of Babylon made no better record than their fathers, it all ended in complete failure.

But there is another point we would call attention to as throwing light on the letter to Laodicea and also confirming the interpretation we have offered of this whole series of letters, and that is that the Lord speaks in this letter of Himself and His path while in this world. He says, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father on His throne." Notice the reference to His having overcome. When then did He overcome? And what were the conditions under which He overcame? Of course it was when He was here on earth among men, and the conditions must have been similar to the conditions in Laodicea, if this word is to have any meaning. So that the scene in which He as man figured is repeated in Laodicea. In other words, it was the last period of the remnant history in the Old

Testament when He was here and it is the last period of the remnant history of the Church that is here likened to it. Laodicea is a picture of the last stage of the history of the remnant of those who were delivered from Rome and in similar circumstances our Blessed Lord ran His earthly course and bore His testimony while in this scene.

In corroboration of this it might be of service to compare the book of Malachi with this brief letter to Laodicea. One outstanding feature of Malachi's prophecy is the repetition of the expression, "YE SAY." Indeed the whole book seems to be a reply to arguments and complaints offered by the people to God when He seeks to call their attention to their delinquencies. Now observe how this is repeated in the letter to Laodicea. "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing," is the language of this church. How painfully like to the book of Malachi! It is in fact its very counterpart.

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 16

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 16

C. W. Ross

We have purposely dwelt on the similarity of these two epochs in history because they help us to understand more fully the meaning of this series of letters. We have pointed out that they run parallel with the whole history of man as unfolded in the Old Testament. Ephesus begins with the Paradise of God and the Tree of Life and Laodicea ends with the condition of things into which the Lord Himself came, to begin something wholly new. But man, whether in the Old or the New Testament, is a failure, whether under law or grace indeed whatever his privileges or responsibilities, he is ever the same, a complete failure. Of course this in no way touches the question of salvation by grace. God will triumph in the accomplishment of His purposes in spite of all that may oppose, but the question raised in these letters is, will man maintain a testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ in its pristine power and glory when he is called on to do it? The answer to this is an emphatic No. It is well to keep these two principles distinct in our minds, that is, the purposes of God which must succeed, whatever man may do, and the responsibility of man when God has called him to a certain place of testimony, which has always ended in failure.

This, we believe, is emphasized in this letter by the manner in which the Lord introduces Himself. He says, "These things saith the Amen, the Faithful and true

Witness, the beginning of the creation of God.” Every word here is significant. Let us notice them in detail. The first one is “the Amen.” This is a word frequently used in the Word and its meaning seems to be that the Lord Jesus is the real guarantor of the accomplishment of all God’s promises. Whatever has been entrusted to man has been basely given up by him and so He turns back to Himself, so to speak, and finds relief in the thought that nothing will fail of being carried out, for He has underwritten them all and will see to their complete fulfillment. Then in close connection with this is the expression, “the True and Faithful Witness.” How full of meaning this is in this place!

Israel was a witness for God in the midst of a heathen world but instead of testifying to the living God against the abominations of the heathen, they were themselves perverted to idolatry and “the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles through them” (Horn. 2:24). The Church of God was called to be a witness, not only to a living God but to a Saviour God, but, alas! its testimony was no better than the testimony of Israel. This is disclosed in this portion of the Word. So the Lord thinks of Himself and finds relief for His own heart and surely gives relief to ours when He speaks of Himself as the “true and faithful Witness.” Never did He fail in one particular but shone more brightly, the more the trial called for faithfulness. And last of all, “the beginning of the creation of God.” Surely this, too, is in contrast with what is before Him in this, the last phase of the Church as His lampstand. Everything up to this time had, so to speak, a measure of responsibility resting on the first man. It is true that the Church is a new creation, but this does not touch the question of its responsibility to

be a witness to the Lord. And its witness was to a new creation and the hopelessness of the first man. But, alas! it soon departed from that testimony and began to glorify the old creation, thinking of grace only as an aid to man, not the complete setting of him aside and the substitution of Christ, and a new creation. Christ became largely an aid to the rehabilitation of the old creation and so of course men would and do value what will help things in the world. But the testimony committed to the Church is one that sets the first man aside wholly and brings forward a new Man in the glory. This does not suit man, however, and, alas! the Church to placate the world and obtain its favor would tone down the truth as to this and instead of a new creation, would speak of what might be done to help the old one. And it has to be admitted, too, that much has been done for the world by the Church in this way. It has introduced new ideals into the world in presenting the Lord Jesus Christ and these ideals demand the homage of men and indeed receive their approbation at least. Hospitals for the sick, homes for the aged and indigent, and indeed every form of practical benevolence found in the world today are found only where the Name of the Lord has been preached. But to make this the chief object of its testimony is to falsify it, for these things are merely secondary and the paramount purpose may be easily forgotten or neglected in the pursuit of these secondary aims. The church of Rome may point to its institutions for the relief of suffering humanity and hide under these things its betrayal of the Lord Himself, and there is ever this danger in any period of testimony, but here the Lord reminds the church of the Laodiceans that He is the beginning of the creation of God. Nothing will take the place of testimony to Him first of all and we feel

that this title He gives Himself is a very suggestive one at this time.

It may be that in the letters of chapter three of Revelation there is not the same development of evil as is to be found in the letters of chapter two. This is what the Old Testament would teach us to look for. We have already called attention to it. In order to be clear as to this, let us remind ourselves again that Israel had a remnant history, and the evils that were rampant in the people in their history before the captivity are not found in those who were restored from Babylon. But the underlying principles of sin are the same and so we find in the remnant no heart for God, in spite of the fact that idolatry seems to have completely disappeared from their midst. So in the Church. While in Rome which we regard as the height of departure from God's path there is a deliberate substitution of the Virgin Mary and the saints for the Lord Himself, we would not look for this gross condition in the remnant that came out from this system. What we might look for would be the same want of heart for the Lord but not the outward turning away from Him found in Rome. And this is exactly what we do find. The Laodiceans are self-satisfied and the Lord is vainly knocking for admittance among them. Apparently they do not miss Him at all and seem quite content without Him.

Shall we try to identify this state of affairs, or shall we say that it has not yet arrived in such finished form as to be perceived? Gladly would we take the latter course if we could, but alas! we feel that we must not rest in the pleasing illusion that we are Philadelphians if perchance that illusion may be the very mark that shows us to be really Laodicea. Let us reflect a little at this point, and

ask ourselves a few questions that may help to clear the matter up in our minds. The first question then we would put to ourselves is this, if the condition of things depicted in Philadelphia should fall into decay, what features would it display? Another question is, how many generations does it take to bring about decay in a testimony? Let us try to answer the last question first. For an answer to this we must turn to two passages that we think will throw light on the subject. The first one is the story of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God took up Abraham and committed to him a testimony, which he maintained with more or less faithfulness to the end. In the course of nature that testimony fell to Isaac, who maintained it too with a measure of faithfulness but with far less vigor than his father, Abraham. Then followed Jacob, and we may safely say that had it not been for a direct intervention on the part of God, the testimony would have been utterly lost. But that it might be continued in power God took up Jacob and put him through various experiences that fitted him to be the vessel of testimony when his father, Isaac, had finished his course. Again we are told that when the people of Israel went into the land of Canaan they "served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua who had seen all the great works of the Lord that He did for Israel." Then it is added, "And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served Baalim: and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other

gods" (Judges 2:7-12). So it took but three generations to develop apostasy. And this is the history of man.

Our object in noticing this in such detail is to use it in a suggestive way in considering the change from Philadelphia to Laodicea. How many generations would it take to develop Laodicea from Philadelphia? Let us take it for granted that Philadelphia is the Lord's own picture of a movement which took form about one hundred years ago and then ask, in the light of all we have read from the Word as to man's failure, what should we expect to find its condition to be with the lapse of this period? Are we going farther than we are warranted when we say that Laodicea is exactly what Philadelphia would become if departure should go on to its end? For ourselves we are persuaded that this is the exact meaning of Laodicea. It is idle to think because we maintain the form that the truth in Philadelphia gave to activities among saints, that we are entitled to claim the Lord's approval of our state. Not for a moment would we write or speak slightingly of the Lord's ordinances such as baptism or the breaking of the bread, but if these become mere forms without any exercise of heart that the Lord should have His place in our affections, then it is of little value to Him. If the knowledge of the truth that has been recovered in the last century leads only to self-satisfaction with a supercilious attitude towards those who do not know as much as we think we know, then Laodicea in principle has come. In fact we do not know how Laodicea could originate save in the decadence of Philadelphia.

Let us turn to the Old Testament again for help. When the people of Israel were in Babylon, Daniel bowed before God in prayer for restoration. In his prayer there

was a complete confession of the sin that had led to their captivity. He did not exempt himself from the general guilt but in the fullest way identified himself with his people as one of them. Read the prayer in the ninth of Daniel. He says, "We have sinned," not "they have sinned," And it was this prayer that was answered when God moved on the heart of the King of Persia to let them go back to Palestine to build the house of God. And this spirit of confession and humiliation before God marked every one who was a leader in this movement. For instance, when Ezra reached Jerusalem and found that things were going badly, he immediately cast himself down before God in confession and self-judgment of the deepest kind. Not only so but his example was infectious and we are told that the people gathered around him and joined in the exercise of self-judgment and confession. Read for all this the ninth and tenth chapters of Ezra.

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 17

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 17

C. W. Ross

In our previous studies we were told about Nehemiah who became after Ezra an outstanding figure at this time. In the first chapter of the book that bears his name we are told that when he heard of the sad state of this remnant he fell down before God in this same spirit of self-judgment and confession, saying, "We have sinned against Thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against Thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which Thou commandest Thy servant Moses." This was the spirit that God could approve of, so He took Nehemiah up and sent him to Jerusalem to help the feeble few who were there. Not only so but we find that when he had built the wall and gotten things into some order he gathered the people together and had the book of the law read in their hearing. Then he led them into the presence of God in sackcloth and with fasting that they might confess their sins and the sins of their fathers. In other words he sought to imbue them with the same spirit that had actuated him and filled their mouths with words of confession and self-judgment before the Lord. Read this in its details in the ninth of Nehemiah. As long as this spirit prevailed among the people God could find some measure of delight in them. Long before God had said to the people through His prophet, Isaiah, "To this man will I look, even to him that

is poor and of a contrite spirit and that trembleth at My word" (Isa. 66:2).

But alas! this spirit soon departed from them and was succeeded by pride and independence and even insolence toward God. This is fully developed in Malachi and one has simply to read the book to see the terrible lack of confession and self-judgment. Take for instance one passage. "Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from Mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto Me and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?" One can hardly measure the distance in a moral way that has been travelled since the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, when he reads these words. Again in the same chapter He complains, "Your words have been stout against Me." What a contrast to the time of Nehemiah when they wept as they listened to the Word of the Lord? And when later on the Lord Jesus came to this remnant He found this spirit of pride and self-sufficiency at its height. Their past history they seemed to have forgotten entirely and unblushingly said to Him, "We were never in bondage to any man," although at that very time they were the subjects of the Roman empire, ground under its iron heel. The spirit that led Daniel and Ezra and Nehemiah to bow in lowly confession before Jehovah had departed and in its place was a spirit of pride and hyprocrisy.

Shall we carry the analogy between Israel and the Church to its end? Why not? When the saints of God at the beginning of last century began to meet in the Name of the Lord alone there was with them the deepest consciousness of the failure of the Church in its testimony. One has only to read the writings of those

days to see this. There was no cutting of themselves off from its past history as if it were no concern of theirs. They believed the Church of God was one in the truest sense of the word and therefore the sins of past generations they felt to be truly their own and so confession accompanied their separation from what they found themselves linked with that was contrary to the mind of the Lord. Indeed it is recorded by one that on one occasion so strong was the sense of the condition of the Church of God that when they met their tears flowed so freely as to wet the very floor of the room where they were assembled. And it was this condition that the Lord met in His grace and responded to with such abundance of grace as to overwhelm them with the treasures of His Word as He opened their understanding. But alas! when this spirit of confession and self-judgment left and was replaced with pride over the possession of so much truth, then surely the beginning of Laodicea had come. Intellectual knowledge of truth took the place of communion with the Lord and learning the truth from Him. We have said, "possession of truth," but in reality was it possessed? It might be in the writings of the men to whom God gave so much in those days and it might be in the libraries of the saints to whom it was ministered, but if it did not lead to more humility and more confession and more trembling at the Word of the Lord, then it was not really possessed at all. To fancy one's self in possession of more truth than others and boast of it is a delusion. The truth of God really apprehended would ever lead to more humility, more real confession, in fact more manifestation of every grace in those who held the truth thus. It is the truth apart from communion with Himself that seems to us to be the character of Laodicea.

From such a state there seems to be no recovery. The threat to spew this church out of His mouth is unconditional, although there is a call to repentance. So we may say that the end of all efforts to bring back the Church to its original state is disappointing and means at last complete repudiation of the whole thing as a testimony for Him. This does not mean that there will be any failure of the promises of the Lord to His own. It does not mean an abrogation of those sweet promises that have cheered the hearts of His people so long. "The Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and 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." The repudiation of the Church as a witness for Him on the earth has no bearing on such assurances. They abide in all their fulness and force even if the Church as a body has failed to maintain its place. In fact the two thoughts are quite distinct. What is before the Lord all through this series of letters is the Church in public testimony and in this it has been a complete failure. It is simply one more witness to man and his untrustworthiness wherever he is placed.

One more word should be said. We have all through tried to link in a sort of parallelism the series of parables in Matthew 13 with the seven letters before us and we must not forget to do so in this case. The parable that would be put alongside of the letter to Laodicea is the one that speaks of the net cast into the nations of the world bringing ashore in its meshes a great harvest of fish, good and bad. How can this in any way be shown to be related to the letter to Laodicea? Let us think for a

moment on the extraordinary efforts in the gospel that have been made in the last few years, and we think the connection will be apparent. Never in the history of the world were so many gospel tracts printed, never were there so many missionaries, never was the Bible translated into so many different languages and dialects as in the last few years. Men may rest in this as a proof of the progress of the gospel and the triumph of the Church, but it is only the mark of the end of this dispensation. And it in no wise conflicts with what the letter to Laodicea presents. for one may have little heart for the Lord and ease his conscience at the same time by giving large sums of money to missionary enterprises and other efforts to spread the gospel. Indeed there may be an apparent interest of the deepest kind in the work of missions with worldliness of a marked character. This has often been seen. And surely we all have witnessed what seemed like enthusiasm in what is called the work of the Lord without any heart for His word or conscience about walking in His ways. Some have even gone as far as to slight all He has said as to His Church and subordinate everything to the reaching of souls with the gospel. God forbid that we should speak or write a word that would lessen the zeal of any one in the gospel, but when zeal for souls takes the place of love for Him, then it is not meeting with His approval.

He would be the guest of the heart and so He calls for individual response to His appeal for an open door into which He may enter. When He is in reality the object of the affections all is well and in place. Without this all is out of joint and no delight to Him. How like to the remnant of Israel, the house swept and garnished, but alas! empty, for He is outside and knocking for

admittance. What is the Church if Christ be not the very centre of all its activities? The man to whom the Lord entrusted the administration of the truth as to the Church was the apostle Paul. What was his language as to the Lord? His epistles breathe nothing but love of the deepest character for His Saviour and Lord. Listen to his language in the letter to the Philippians. "For to me to live is Christ," not even to preach the gospel but Christ Himself was his object in life. And he sought to imbue the Church with this spirit wherever he went. But here we have it in its final stage, the Lord outside and little if any heart to let Him in. It is a sad story and humiliating to us but surely it enhances His glory Whose love never fails but shines out all the more brightly against the dark background of man's ingratitude and unfaithfulness.

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 18

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 18

C. W. Ross

The Things Which Are

Part 3

We have now reached the last part of the chart. In order to get the thought embodied in this before us in a simple and clear way, we would look again at a passage in Matthew 13:51-52. The Lord has just been giving a sketch in the form of seven parables of the various phases of the kingdom of Heaven. These we have been looking at in some detail. He has termed them the "mysteries or secrets of the kingdom," things never revealed before. The kingdom itself as a purpose of God has been revealed in plain terms in the Old Testament but not in the form the Lord declares it will now assume. The question naturally would arise in the mind, Does this new form set aside for all time the old prophecies of a kingdom in power and glory, set up on this earth?

Now, it is for an answer to this thought that we turn to the passage we quote. It says, "Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto Him, Yea Lord. Then said He unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure, things new and old." Do not pass these words lightly by as if they stated a mere generality as is so often done. They have a specific

meaning and direct application to the kingdom of heaven. There are new things about the kingdom and these the Lord has just been declaring, and there are old things about the kingdom and these are found in the Old Testament prophecies. One who is instructed in the things of the kingdom will know the difference between the two and will not mix them or allow the one to set aside the other. He will know there are the two phases and he will give each one its proper place.

Now, as a matter of fact there is nothing in which the lack of "rightly dividing the Word of truth" is so disastrous as in this circle of the truth of God, and there is nothing but gain in the apprehension of the force of the Lord's words here, gain indeed that bears on the whole body of the revelation God has given to us. There are those who think that God has abandoned all His thoughts as to the recovery of Israel and who turn into spiritual blessing all the promises of future blessing for the earthly people of God. Not only do they change the whole character of the blessings described in the Old Testament but they set aside the Jews wholly as the objects of those blessings. Every curse in the Old Testament belongs to Israel but every blessing belongs to the church. So it is said. Then again there are those who claim all earthly blessings as being the future for the church. A restored earth is to be the home of all the saints and Heaven means nothing but a condition of bliss on the earth. This latter theory is hardly worth noticing, for it does not obtain very largely among intelligent students of the Word.

Now the Word of the Lord we have quoted from Matthew 13, would make us expect that the things He spoke of although new were not meant to set aside those

things He would term old. There are many other passages of course that confirm this in the fullest way and some of them we must look at. One of the most specific as to the future of Israel we have in Romans 2. We turn to this because it is sometimes said that the Old Testament promises to Israel have all been forfeited by their rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now here is a passage written after they had rejected Him in the fullest way. That is to say, not only had they rejected Him when He presented Himself in person but after the Holy Spirit had appealed to them through Peter and the other apostles definitively and in the most positive terms said as they stoned Stephen, "We will not have this Man to reign over us."

After all this we find the Apostle Paul saying, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sakes, but as touching the election they are beloved for the father's sake. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." Could language be plainer? Here is the apostle quoting from the very passage that is appropriated to the Church of God by some, and he uses it to demonstrate the unchangeableness of the promises of God to Israel.

But there is more. The apostle who thus writes was called at a very critical time and in a very remarkable way. He was in his whole being committed to the path of

rejection of Jesus of Nazareth. Read what another has written as to this. "The high priests had resisted the Holy Ghost to the uttermost. Paul had joined them in it; but he was not satisfied with that. He desired to be the active enemy of the faith wherever it existed, and to destroy the Name of Jesus. He had done much at Jerusalem, but he wished to satiate his hatred even in foreign cities. We know his history in the Acts. The living expression of Jewish resistance to grace, he was also among men the expression of the most active human enmity to Him Whom God would glorify. Grace was greater than the sin, the patience of God more perfect than the perseverance of man's hostility. He was pleased to show forth in Paul a pattern of the sovereignty of that grace and perfect goodness—to the Jew hereafter, who as a nation will be in Saul's condition; to all men as the enemies of God and children of wrath by nature. Peter, guilty of denying a living Saviour, could speak to the Jews of grace that met their case, which was his own; Paul formerly the enemy of a glorified Saviour and the resister of the Holy Ghost, could proclaim grace that rose above even that state of sinfulness, above all that could flow from human nature — grace that opened the door to the Gentiles according to God's own counsels, when the Jews had rejected everything, substituting the heavenly assembly for them — grace that sufficed for the future admission of that guilty nation to better privileges than they had forfeited."

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 19

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 19

C. W. Ross

The quotation at the close of the article in the October number entitled The Times of The Gentiles states briefly and completely the case of Paul as illustrating the grace that will be shown to the Jews hereafter. To say, in face of this history, that the Jews have forfeited all the promises made to them in the past is to miss all the lessons of grace that his story so brilliantly exemplifies. So when we read from his pen that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance," we understand how thoroughly his own experience enabled him to write such words. The guilt of the nation is no greater than that shown to him. God in the execution of His purposes of grace as they have been declared, will not be balked by the sinfulness of man or indeed by anything of man or any other creature. His gifts and calling are without repentance, that is to say, without change on God's part. In the language of Balaam, "God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent; hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" (Numbers 32:19). The people of Israel in a by-gone day might delay their entrance into the land of Canaan by their own folly and unbelief, but God had promised to lead them in and into Canaan they came. So now, they might, as indeed they did, for the time turn away from themselves in their obstinate folly, the promises of being the people of God in the place of pre-eminence in the earth, but when

God's time comes He will carry out His purposes concerning them for the glory of His grace and the display of His power and wisdom.

With these things before us the question arises, how and when will God bring to pass all these promises to Israel so abundantly given in the Old Testament and so plainly declared in the New to be still in force but now waiting for their fulfilment? Here is where the book of Revelation comes in to fill its place in the inspired Word. It gathers up, so to speak, all the loose threads of the prophetic scheme and weaves them into one harmonious whole in a most beautiful way. Let us reflect for a moment on the problem, as we may call it. Israel is temporarily set aside, the Gentiles are in the place of privilege and blessing, upon the Church of God has developed the responsibility of being the lightbearer for God, and the administrators of the Kingdom of Heaven, and yet it declared that the promises of God to Israel are in full force still. Observe how all these difficulties are solved in the book of the Revelation. And the third part of the chart is an attempt to bring this before the mind in a simple way. Let us look at it.

It will be noticed in the first place that the feet of Nebuchadnezzar's image are in this third part of the chart and the stone cut out of the mountain without hands is seen striking it. The beast of Daniel's image is here too, that is the fourth one, still having ten horns thus again paralleling the ten toes of the image. There is seated on the beast a woman which of course is not seen in the Book of Daniel because this woman is the woman of the second part of the chart and here the two are combined in a startling way. But before noticing these

things in detail it is well to look in a general way at the make-up of the book of Revelation.

It has often been noticed that in the Word of God numbers are used in a very precise way. We have no thought of going into this phase of the Divine Book because it would lead us too far afield, and it has been done very elaborately by others. Of course one may go too far with anything almost and it is possible that some have allowed imagination to work in their use of this idea of the symbolic character of numbers. But it is doubted by none that the number seven is almost invariably used as the symbol numerically of perfection or completeness. It began with the very beginning of the course of time. The first divinely ordered period in the way of the measurement of time is the week which is made up of seven days, and this number is repeated many times in this same sense of completeness throughout the inspired Word.

Now when we come to the book of Revelation we find it occurring so often that one cannot doubt its significance as being God's seal on the book as the end of His communications to His creature. Not to mention but a few there will readily spring up in the mind, the seven churches, the seven stars, the seven Spirits, the seven seals, seven trumpets and seven vials. This list by no means exhausts the occasions on which we have this number used in the Revelation but they are sufficient to call attention to its importance. God is announcing that He has said all He has to say or will say to man, for in this book He has manifestly brought to an end the whole history of man's rebellion and Satan's plots in the complete triumph of righteousness and final settlement

of every problem that the presence of sin in His universe raised.

It has often been noted that in Genesis we have man in the paradise of God to begin with but the rest of the Book of God is the sad story of his exclusion from that place of bliss and the frightful consequences of the entrance of sin. We have, too, in that book of Genesis the first appearance of that sinister figure who has been the tempter and destroyer of man and the inveterate enemy of God. But in Revelation, although at first the darkness of the scene seems to be denser than ever, it is but the prelude to the dawn that soon breaks through the heavy clouds, touching with its golden rays every part of the universe of God and bathing it in Divine glory. Satan is cast down and given his own place forever, and all who have linked themselves with him in his hatred of God and His Christ find their self-chosen doom with him. Christ, the Second Man, is Head over all things and men who have been His followers on earth are with Him. The awful gulf that sin dug between God and the creature is bridged so that God and man are together forever, all death and whatever else sin brought with it into this world have been banished eternally out of this universe of bliss and God is all in all. We say again, the book is manifestly the end, one feels as he completes the reading of it that there is nothing more to say, for every question is settled, every problem solved —"earth's sad story is closed in glory on yon shore."

We say all this to emphasize the character of the book as the summing up and gathering together of all past communications and binding them into perfect unity. As we have said, the calling out of the Church and the

setting aside of Israel demanded a further book from God.

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 2

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 2

C. W. Ross

We are indebted to the executors of the estate of our deceased brother C. W. Ross for these important papers on the TIMES OF THE GENTILES. Although published in 1933, their relevance to the present urged the family to have them reprinted. It is an honour to comply in this, and we trust that the careful perusal of each article will quicken in hearts the living hope of the imminent return of the Lord.

Be sure that in this number you have received your copy of the chart that is so necessary for the understanding of these articles. If there was none enclosed in your issue, please notify This office promptly.

But let us turn to our chart again. It will be observed that there is another parallel line running up and down the chart. This one has neither images nor pictures of any kind, however, but is made up mostly of Scripture references. This is based on the prophecy of the ninth chapter of Daniel. Already nearly seventy years had been passed by the people of Israel in exile, as was predicted by the prophet Jeremiah, and Daniel, realizing that this period had just about expired, seeks the face of God in prayer and supplication, asking for mercy and restoration. His prayer is a most touching one, and finds an immediate response. An angel is sent to convey to him the mind of God concerning his people for whom he had prayed so earnestly, and what was said by him is a

very wonderful revelation of the future of Israel. It would be outside our aim were we to attempt a detailed exposition of this portion of the Word, and besides, there are many books of real worth already written on it. One of the most helpful is Sir Robert Anderson's work, "The Coming Prince." It is a masterpiece in working out to the utmost detail the dates that are given in this chapter. Here we must content ourselves with the barest outlines of the prophecy. First of all the prophet is told that there is a definite period fixed by God to complete the Divine purposes concerning the people who have been prayed for. The basis of the figures is the period of seventy years of captivity now nearing an end.

Now it is announced that there are seventy sevens of years to run ere the consummation of the counsels of God. Then this period is divided into three separate periods, seven sevens, sixty-two sevens and one seven which is apparently cut off at the end and marked out in a very distinct way by its happenings. The beginning of the whole period is the issuing of a commandment to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, and the end is the completion of all Divine purposes concerning this people. Now without attempting to be precise, it may be said that we can define the two first periods without much difficulty. At least there are periods in their history that well answer to these divisions. There is the time from their resettlement in the land under the protection of the Persian monarchs until the close of the canon of Scripture, and that is just about forty-nine years. Then there is the long interval of silence between the Old and New Testaments that is from the close of the Old Testament until Christ presented Himself to them as the Messiah, and that period is approximately four hundred

and thirty-four years, making in all up to this point the whole period with the exception of the last week of years. Now it is said in the prophecy, "after the sixty and two years shall Messiah be cut off and shall have nothing." Naturally one would say, after the sixty and two weeks would come the last one, but the language is Divine and we must humbly learn not to arrogantly amend the Word of God. It does not say that the Messiah would be cut off in the last week which would be the natural statement, but simply after the sixty and two weeks. What then about the last week of years? It is reserved for its own series of events in which another prince than the Messiah of Israel figures. Read the last verse of our chapter for this and it will be readily seen that this whole period has its peculiar character and its divisions too have their character.

To sum up, then, we would say that the first period embraces the resettlement of the people in their own land and the full provision God made to shape their spiritual character during the time to follow. Then comes the long wait in which things are allowed to develop until the Messiah comes. Last of all a time not yet come when an alien Prince shall make a league with them which he will break and this period will end in complete desolation. This prophecy, it will be observed, does not go on to the details of the accomplishment of God's purpose to establish Israel forever in their own land, all it does is to cover the time of their course under responsibility. All else is left out in this passage and we must turn elsewhere to find that when their course has been finished, as it will, in complete desolation, then God will come in and work for His own glory, not according to their doings but according to His own

gracious counsels. This will come before us again when we reach the last part of the chart.

Before we open up the concealed portion of the chart it is necessary to call attention to what will prepare us for what is to come. When we open the New Testament, we are at the close of the long silence on God's part and it is broken by a voice in the wilderness announcing that the time had come for the Kingdom of Heaven. The fourth empire of Daniel's vision is on the scene and everything seems ripe for the establishment on earth of that which had been predicted by the prophets. Now let us turn to the hidden part of our chart for further details.

The Things Which Are

We admit that at first sight, this part of the chart seems a mass of confusion, which it will be our endeavor to clear up. The title is taken from Revelation 1:19, the subtitle, "The mystery of the seven golden candlesticks," from Revelation 1:20, and the other subtitle, "The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven," from Matthew 13:11. The word "mystery" in Scripture does not signify as it does with us, something dark and difficult to understand, but simply a secret hitherto unknown but now revealed. So the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are not the perplexing problems connected with the kingdom but simply the secrets the Lord discloses in Matthew 13; and so with the other occurrences of the word.

The object in making the chart in this form is to emphasize a fact of tremendous importance in the understanding of the Word of God as a whole, namely, that this period in which we live is not revealed in the

Old Testament at all. Neither Daniel nor any other prophet tells us of this dispensation and for this we have the definite statement in Matthew 13:34,35:

“All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake He not unto them; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.”

But we must approach this in an orderly way and so would look at the Gospel of Matthew with some attention. There are four separate accounts of the life and ministry of the Lord and each of them has a distinct character as is well known. The Gospel of Matthew presents the Lord as the King of Israel, the heir of the throne and crown of David; the Gospel of Mark brings Him before us as the Servant of Jehovah in the midst of His people; Luke tells of Him as the Son of Man, tracing His genealogy back to Adam; and the Gospel of John surely displays Him as the Son of God, a Divine Person on the earth. All this is well known truth and is repeated here only to suggest that we may expect to find in Matthew a development of the truth as to the kingdom which we would not look for in the other Gospels. Look, for instance, at the way Matthew opens, “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ the Son of David, the son of Abraham,” and observe how this is followed up in the next chapter with agitation in Jerusalem over the arrival of wise men from the East who inquire where they may find the new-born king, “the King of the Jews,” as they term Him. Then in Matthew 3, the forerunner of the Lord announces the near approach of the kingdom and demands repentance on the part of all who hear him. In

chapter 4, John's voice is hushed and the Lord Himself takes up the message and proclaims, "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Not only does He preach, He heals all according to the manner of the kingdom or rule of Heaven on earth, namely deliverance from all the oppression of sin and Satan.

In the end of chapter 4 He is the centre of a great multitude of people from all over the land, and to escape them He goes up the mountain-side and there addresses His own. But how does He speak? Just as we might expect, with supreme authority as a King to His subjects. The people recognized this and were wont to say that He taught them as One that had authority and not as the scribes. It is the King Himself who is among them, One greater even than Solomon, as He afterwards tells them. And this effort of the Lord to bring the people to repentance in view of the kingdom goes on until we reach the tenth chapter. In this chapter He makes a supreme effort, so to speak, to spread the news of the coming kingdom, sending forth His disciples all over to carry the good news, and giving to them credentials of their mission, even triumph over the enemy and emancipation from his power to all to whom they might go.

But in the eleventh chapter a change is plainly seen in His attitude. Verse 20 tells us, "Then began He to upbraid." Every word here is significant. For the first time He is severe and denunciatory. All His gracious overtures have been scorned and the time has come to recognize this. His words at this time are a scathing arraignment of their utter lack of response to every appeal that had been made to them whether by the lips of John the Baptist or His own. The result aimed at by

both of them, namely repentance, was wholly lacking and again the question is raised in the mind, what now will God do? Certainly, as is made plain in the next chapter, He will not go on in the same way as He has been doing, for when an appeal is made for a sign from Heaven the Lord curtly replies that no sign should be given to them save that of Jonas the prophet, referring to His own death and resurrection. Furthermore, He states His personal glory in no uncertain terms, "A greater than Jonas is here," and "A greater than Solomon is here." Then comes the thirteenth chapter where we have unfolded, "the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven."

Before taking them up in detail a few words are necessary to make the way plain before us. In the first place, let us notice that the chart here again is arranged in a series of parallels. There are seven parables in Matthew 13, and there are seven letters in Revelation 2 and 3, and these are put side by side in the chart. Naturally it will be asked why we put those two portions in such connection with each other; and of course we must answer this question, because the answer is in a large measure an explanation of the whole chart.

In the first place let us remember that up to this point (Matt. 13) the Church has not been mentioned. In so far as the establishment of something new is concerned, both John the Baptist and the Lord Himself have spoken of nothing but the kingdom of Heaven as about to be set up. Not a word has been said as to its form, but it is quite evident that even the disciples looked for a display of divine power that would free Israel from all their enemies, and make them again the favoured nation in the world. They regarded the Lord Jesus as the Messiah,

the promised Deliverer, and they had no basis for thinking of any other kind of deliverance than that which would mean complete emancipation for them and through them the blessing of the world. This is evident from the question of the twelve when the Lord was raised from the dead, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" And their thoughts were entirely justified by all they had learned from their Holy Scriptures. These writings teemed with declarations of a glorious future for Israel, when the kingdom would be theirs and all nations should bow before them, receiving the law from them and paying them tribute. Isaiah declares, "A king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment" (Isa. 32:1); "Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people, but the Lord shall arise upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isa. 60:2-3); "And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory, and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God" (Isa. 62:2-3); "But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create, for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying" (Isa. 65:18-19).

(To be continued)

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 20

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 20

C. W. Ross

The Lord appears to John while he is an exile in Patmos for his faithful testimony and reveals Himself in a new character of a judge and for a moment this brings John into the dust in dread. But as to himself John is soon reassured and then he is told the purpose of this visitation. One cannot but be reminded of similar experiences in the case of Daniel. There the whole book is divided into its three natural divisions, first, the things already seen, second the things which are, and lastly the things to follow. The things seen are surely the vision of the Lord in this new and solemnizing aspect as the judge of that which He has raised up to be a witness for Himself in the world. The things which are, are given to us in the next two chapters and we have been looking at them in some detail. The things to follow after these are clearly indicated for us when we reach the fourth chapter where the prophet is taken up to Heaven and told as he ascends thither, "I will show you things which must be hereafter, (or after these things)."

So what is found in the rest of the book from the beginning of the fourth chapter on to the end is what will take place when the Church is off this scene and her history is closed. This is evident if we notice that we do not read of the Church on earth at all after the end of the third chapter. We do read of Jews and Gentiles but

no more of the Church of God. This is really the key to the book of Revelation.

The first thing we encounter in this portion of the book is the throne of God in Heaven and the bringing forward of the book of God's counsels, for this earth. They are sealed and no man is found worthy to open the seals save One and that is the blessed Son of God, the Lamb slain. To Him then is given this book and as soon as it is put into His hand things on earth begin to be agitated. It is beyond our purpose to attempt to expound the book of the Revelation; we must confine ourselves to that which is immediately connected with the chart. It is evident, however, that the word spoken in Hebrews 12:26-27 is being fulfilled in measure, "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven."

In the next chapter of Revelation, that is the seventh, we find Israel to the fore and it is specifically said, "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed; and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel." No longer is it as in Christian days when the Apostle says that there is a remnant and as a matter of fact only out of two tribes, but already there is in sight the fulfilment of the Word, "All Israel shall be saved."

We shall not pursue into anything like detail what comes after this except to point out that it follows somewhat the channel marked out in Exodus when God was delivering His people out of Egypt. Blow followed blow, increasing in severity but hardening instead of melting the heart of the prince of the world and his allies. Then,

when we reach the eleventh chapter we find ourselves on somewhat familiar ground for there is mention in specific terms of the same period that we have in Daniel, there termed a time, times and the dividing of time, that is a year and two years and half a year. And in a little while we have before us Daniel's beast — the last one — ruling and persecuting the people of God. When an explanation is offered of this beast it is said to the seer, "The beast that thou sawest, was and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit." Here we have a plain announcement that an empire which did exist and ceased for a while is to be revived and flourish again for a season. Its revival is due to Satanic power, it ascends out of the bottomless pit, but its end will be perdition.

Of course we do not find in the Revelation anything like the image of Nebuchadnezzar because the visions here are all given to a man of God and none to a heathen king. But the thing that Nebuchadnezzar saw in a way suited to him is seen here in the way that it becomes a man of God to see it. However, we ought to notice the fact that riding on the beast is a woman, which is something that there is not a trace of in Daniel. Who is this woman? This is the woman Jezebel, that apostate system of professed Christianity, repudiated by the Lord when He called His own out of this scene. She is called a harlot because she professes to be the bride of Christ and is untrue to Him in every way, committing fornication with the kings of the earth. Here is the uniting of the two dispensations, so to speak, the comingling of things new and old in the kingdom, not confounding them but uniting them like two streams that have flowed on in separate beds for many miles, at last uniting and flowing after that in one channel. Here

is the political world represented in the beast and the religious world represented by the woman but they are united in the last stage of the world's history in bitter hostility to God and His people in the world. For just as it was in the time of the Acts of the Apostles, the unbelieving mass of Jews when God had taken out of them His own elect, became the unrelenting foes of God and His Christ, uniting with the political powers of the world in the warfare they waged against the Church of God, so it is now. God has taken away His own saints of the Christian dispensation and what is left bearing the name Christian is a corrupt mass which unites with the openly ungodly and Satan-led world in opposition to anything there may be left of God in the world.

And what is left of God in the world when the Church is gone? Certainly nothing Christian although there may be much that bears the Name. But when He calls away His saints He repudiates everything else in the world whatever profession they may make. Now here is where the twelfth chapter of Revelation is of service. When Satan is cast down out of Heaven he realizes that his time is but short and so it is said, "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." Immediately we are told he began to persecute the woman that brought forth the man-child as related in the beginning of the chapter. And again we have the period mentioned termed here a time, times and half a time, taking us back to Daniel the prophet (Rev. 12:12-14).

Furthermore, we are told in the next chapter of the rise of the fourth beast through Satanic power that he may use it as a weapon to crush the people against whom his

rage now burns. And it is said of this revived power that power was given to him to continue forty and two months, that is three and a half years. Now the recurrence of this period naturally makes us think of Daniel and that one week of the seventy mentioned in chapter nine of his book. So it will be noticed, to turn back to the chart, that on the right hand we have reference made to this time when Satan is working with his old-time hatred of God to destroy what there is of God among men. Who, then, is the woman who gave birth to the man-child caught up to the throne of God? Who but Israel? It certainly would be confounding things very markedly to think of the Church as the woman in this case. He was before the Church and the Church is the fruit of His toil and suffering. But we are told in Romans 9:5, that of Israel as concerning the flesh, Christ came. So in some way after the Church is gone the ancient people of God are in the place of testimony and when Satan is cast down of God, he aims all his shafts against them. The world-power links itself with the religious power and all combine against God.

It will be remembered that in studying the ninth of Daniel we pointed out that the time given God to complete the full measure of Israel's history is seventy weeks of years, divided into three parts, seven weeks, sixty-two weeks and one week. We have referred to this already and now take it up because we believe that the last week is before us in the book of Revelation. It is said in Daniel 9, that after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah should be cut off, so that there is no question about that part of the time having passed, and there remains but the last week, or period of seven years.

Now at the end of the whole period it will be recalled there was to be the making an end of sins, bringing in of everlasting righteousness, sealing of the vision and prophecy and anointing the Most Holy. And these events were to be directly connected with Daniel's people so that the question arises, have such things come? The answer is No, emphatically. Moreover, the last week was to begin with the making of a covenant with a certain prince for this period of seven years, and in the midst of this time he breaks the covenant by stopping Jewish worship. Now this has not taken place and the book of Revelation, we believe, brings before us this very period of unexampled tribulation, ending of course in the deliverance of the saints and the ushering in of the cloudless day of blessing.

This time of trial is spoken of in Daniel as "a time of trouble such as never was, since there was a nation, even to this same time," (Daniel 12:1). Again the Lord speaks of it in almost identical terms, when he says, "Then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:21). In the book of Revelation it is spoken of as "the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world," (Rev. 3:10), and as "the great tribulations," (Rev. 7:14). It is a time when God is bringing everything to an issue in this world.

In the letter written to Thyatira, the Lord says that He will cast Jezebel into great tribulation along with her paramours, and in the later chapters she is seen as Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. Apparently all religions will combine under one great head and so will it be with all political powers. Babylon will receive her doom at the

hand of the kings with whom she was allied. They will cast her off and destroy her. When we think of Jezebel as one of her names we cannot help thinking of the fate she met. She was devoured by the dogs, and this Jezebel will meet a like judgment. The ten horns on the beast, which are interpreted as ten kings, will hate her and make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. So we are told in Revelation 17:16. Thus will end this unholy combination.

It began when Constantine the great, the head of the empire in early days, joined hands with the Church of God, now it ends in mutual hatred and eternal separation. When this claimant to the name of the Bride of Christ is out of the way all Heaven shouts for joy. Not only so but this is followed almost immediately by the announcement of the marriage of the Lamb. Not until the false and faithless woman is disposed of does the true one appear in a public way as the bride. This is natural. After the Lord has taken His own to Heaven there remains on the earth this shameless wanton claiming the name and place of the spouse of the Lord Jesus Christ. But this period displays her in her true character and manifests where her heart is. Openly she joins hands with Satan, and the Lord leaves her to her natural fate—she is utterly destroyed. Then when there can be no cloud on the title of the true bride because of this system on earth claiming the place, He openly espouses her and takes her to Himself.

But there still remains on earth the power of the world in a secular and political way and this must be disposed of. So in the nineteenth chapter of Revelation we are told of the confederation of the beast and the kings of the earth gathered to resist the claims of God and His

Christ. But all in vain, they are swept away and the conflict is over. Here is the fulfilment of the vision of the king Nebuchadnezzar, the stone cut out of the mountain without hands has smitten the image and it is demolished. The beast of Daniel's vision is overthrown and the kingdom is now in the hand of the Son of Man.

And this will be the time of the deliverance of Israel, for apparently the great battle will be fought near the city of Jerusalem.

The Times Of The Gentiles --Part 3

The Times Of The Gentiles

Part 3

C. W. Ross

Jeremiah says: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days and at that time will I cause the Branch of Righteousness to grow up unto David and He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness. For thus saith the Lord, David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of Israel... Moreover, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which the Lord hath chosen, He hath even cast them off? Thus they have despised My people, that they should be no more a nation before them. Thus saith the Lord, If My covenant be not with day and night, and if I have appointed the ordinances of Heaven and earth, then will I cast away the seed of Jacob and David My servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them" (Jeremiah 33:14-26). These are only a few of the many quotations we might make from the prophets, but they are a fair sample of the uniform witness of all the prophets to the glorious future of Israel, when the kingdom should again

be theirs and the Lord would be in their midst once more.

With such magnificent promises filling the minds of all the faithful in Israel, what a thrill must have passed through their hearts when they began to hear that the time had come for the accomplishment of all this — that the Messiah was already here and that the long-looked-for redemption was about to be consummated. No doubt the great mass of the people were totally unready for the kingdom, so both John the Baptist and the Lord Himself called them to repentance. But only a remnant responded and as time went on, the leaders of the people especially and with them the majority of the nation banded themselves together against the Lord and His Christ. Again we point out, the question arises in the mind, when this became apparent, what will God do? The answer is that God accepted the situation the people had created for themselves, and brought out of the treasury of His counsels a plan that had not been made known to men hitherto. He will not give up the kingdom, but for the present it must take a form new and strange to the disciples. It is this new form of the kingdom that is unfolded in Matthew 13.

In seven parables the Lord sets forth this new form, and the manner in which He does this is most significant. For the first time He speaks to the people in a parable and when His disciples ask the meaning of this new departure, He tells them He has done so deliberately and of purpose. His words are:

“Because unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have

more abundance, but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables; because they seeing, see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing and their eyes have they closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears for they hear. For verily I say unto you that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them and to hear those things which ye hear and have not heard them" (Matthew 13:11-17).

This surely indicates a turning point in our Lord's ministry to Israel. No longer will He continue His appeals to them as heretofore; on the contrary, He will confine His communications to a select circle, made up of those who have received what He has said up to this time. The rest are blinded and abandoned to the results of their unbelief. They have not understood nor cared to understand what He has said about the kingdom previous to this nor have they bowed in repentance before God, — now they cannot understand. But what about those who have understood and received Him and His message? Shall they be left as an integral part of an apostate nation, or will God separate this select circle into a community by itself, and if so, how? We have reached a solemn crisis in the ways of God, and it is of the utmost importance that we should understand it. In

order to do so we must leave for a moment Matthew 13 and go on to Matthew 16. Here He declares His purpose concerning this remnant who have believed in Him, as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. The way in which His purpose is announced is most interesting and should be noticed very carefully. In the first place the Lord puts a question, the answer to which divides the nation into two parts, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" Observe the reply, "Some say that Thou art John the Baptist; some Elias and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets." Then follows the question, "But whom say ye that I am?" and to this comes the wonderful testimony, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Here then are the two parties in Israel, those who believe in Him and those who do not, and in view of this the Lord says, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father, which is in Heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven."

Here is the first mention of the Church of Christ in the Bible. Let this be carefully noted, for it is important for our understanding of the Word of God. And let it be observed and weighed very carefully, that the Church and the kingdom of Heaven are not the same thing at all. The two ideas are distinct as this passage plainly shows. Peter is sometimes depicted in the religious world as carrying the keys of Heaven itself and sometimes as carrying the keys of the Church. But both

thoughts are baseless and all it needs to show this is a little attention to what the Word says. In Matthew 13 the Lord has been giving to His own the secrets of the kingdom, that is to say, the form the kingdom of Heaven would take in the absence of the King, and the question would naturally arise in the mind, but who will represent the King down here in His kingdom? One cannot conceive of a King absent from his kingdom without leaving some one or ones to administer its affairs for him. Now let us repeat, the Lord has announced that the kingdom of Heaven is to take a new character entirely, not spoken of by the prophets. In this new form the King will be absent because rejected, and the question is who or what will authoritatively represent Him? Of course it is generally held in the Roman Catholic system that the Pope is the successor of Peter and in his hand are the keys of the kingdom. But who can find one single word in the Word of God as to the successor of Peter? There is not one hint that what the Lord said to him here established a kind of spiritual dynasty of which Peter was the root and head. It is all an absurd fable. On the other hand, the Protestant will say, that the representative of Christ here is the Holy Ghost and in so saying he is much nearer the truth than the Papist. But we must face the fact that here the Lord commits the keys of the kingdom to Peter, with the assurance that his acts on earth will be validated in Heaven.

Now there is no question whatever that at the beginning of the Church's history as recorded in the Book of the Acts, the Apostle Peter acted in a very authoritative way, and moreover, that his course in this respect had the endorsement of Heaven. This is not merely a theory, it was a matter of fact plainly manifest to all. For example,

on the day of Pentecost it was he who opened the door of repentance to the guilty nation of Israel. Later on it was he who prayed for the Samaritans that they might receive the Holy Ghost and surely the Lord approved of his action, because the Holy Ghost came on them. Furthermore, when the door was to be opened to the Gentiles he was the man chosen of the Lord to do it, and his message at that time was sustained by Heaven, for the Holy Ghost came on them when they believed the message he brought. There can be no question then that in the early day when the kingdom of Heaven was being given its form, the Apostle Peter carried the keys of the kingdom. But, let us ask here, after the door is opened to the Gentiles in Acts 10, when do you find him again in this important place? The answer is, never. In the fifteenth chapter of the Acts, in the discussion as to the Gentiles being circumcised, he occupies a subordinate place, the leading place being taken by James, and from this time on he disappears from the sacred narrative. He is mentioned of course by Paul in his epistles, but never as a spiritual superior, and once at least as an erring brother whom he had to reprove (Gal. 2:11-14).

But who then represents the Lord in the kingdom if there be no successor of Peter? Again we say, we reject with all our hearts the suggestion that the Pope is in any wise his legitimate successor. In what Peter did there is no succession needed, the work was done, the kingdom was formed, its limits fixed, its boundaries established. But then who acts for the Lord in the kingdom when it is thus established? This brings us to the eighteenth chapter of Matthew where for the second time the Church is mentioned. And in this mention of the assembly, the words addressed to Peter as acting for the

Lord with His sanction, are now connected with two or three gathered in His Name, "Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be bound in Heaven." So that when the kingdom is established those who are here on earth representing His Church in any given place are authorized to act for Him with the assurance that He will stand by them in it. It is through the assembly of saints gathering in the Lord's Name that His authority is to be exercised and of course it is by the power and presence of the Holy Ghost that they are fitted for this solemn responsibility. We are not told of general assemblies or synods or any other form of government, far less of the Pope or college of cardinals; all authority to act for the Lord in His kingdom is vested in two or three gathered in His Name. We have dwelt on this at length so that we may have in our minds the close connection between the Church and the kingdom, because the condition of a kingdom surely depends to a large extent on the condition of those in authority in it. And for this reason we have on the chart put alongside of the various phases of the kingdom the successive stages of the Church's history, and we shall take them up together.

But we must look a little further at the truth of the Church in order to justify our use of the seven letters as a picture of seven successive stages in its history. We have already pointed out the declared purpose of the Lord in Matthew 16. There it is a purpose to be carried out in the future, but when we turn to the Acts of the Apostles we find it becoming a fact. The Lord has gone into Heaven having accomplished redemption, but He has left behind Him a company who feel themselves thoroughly apart from the unbelieving nation with which

they are linked. They are together in an upper room in Jerusalem, and day after day they meet for prayer until on the day of Pentecost the promised Comforter comes. This Divine Messenger from the glory brings to them the knowledge of Christ seated on the Father's throne and their place as linked with Him there and with each other here in a new and heavenly way. Thus is brought into being the wonderful thing called the Church of God.

For a time it seemed like a Jewish sect, for they still went to the temple at stated times, but when Israel persisted, in spite of the appeals to the nation, to reject the Lord in glory and the testimony of the Holy Ghost, then God raised up a man, Saul of Tarsus, afterwards the Apostle Paul, to whom He committed the full revelation of His purposes in connection with the Church. It is not that the Church did not exist until Paul was raised up, it existed ever since Pentecost, but to Paul was committed the mission of telling its destiny, its character, its responsibility, and its glory. As the Word puts it in Ephesians 3:8-9, "Unto me who am less than the least of all saints in this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the administration (R.V.) of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, Who created all things by Jesus Christ." In keeping with this he tells us that the Church is the Body of Christ, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, baptized by one Spirit into one body, thus being an entirely new thing in the earth.

* * *

According to the Bible, the Word of God, there is only one Church, the Body of Christ, of which all members are united to Him as Head in Heaven.

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 4

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 4

C. W. Ross

We are indebted to the executors of the estate of our deceased brother C. W. Ross for these important papers on the TIMES OF THE GENTILES. Although published in 1933, their relevance to the present urged the family to have them reprinted. It is an honour to comply in this, and we trust that the careful perusal of each article will quicken in hearts the living hope of the imminent return of the Lord.

But not only was the Church the body of Christ, it was the house of God, His dwelling place here, thus displacing Israel as God's witness on earth. To make this manifest to all beyond cavil, the time came when God scattered the remnant of Israel, closed their worship, allowed their temple to be destroyed and thus left nothing on earth as a collective witness for Him save the Church of God.

Now the question arises, how will the Church of God behave as His lampstand or candlestick on earth? The Papist quotes "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" as a proof that the Church would never fail, but would remain God's faithful witness in spite of all the devices of Satan and the weakness of men. But is that what this statement means? Surely not. Do the gates of hell signify Satanic power or even sinful men in their hatred to God? Does not the expression rather stand for the power of death? Those gates that hold men in the

unseen world will not keep the Church from being the display of God's grace and glory in the eternal ages. We humbly submit that the text simply assures us that the powers of the unseen world will not affect this thing, that in resurrection its real glory will be seen, and moreover, that it will not die out as movements have died out in the world, but will go on continuously until all the purposes of God are accomplished. In keeping with this the Apostle assures us "we shall not all sleep." It is not a question of its faithfulness or otherwise, it is simply a question of its continuity of being, death will not stamp it out on earth, nor will death keep it when the time comes from shining out in all the glory of God. But its faithfulness as a witness for God is not touched by this assurance of the Lord, — that is another question and is the one before us in the second and third chapters of Revelation.

In this book of the Revelation the Lord is presented in an entirely new character. He is not here the Head of the body, the Saviour and High Priest of His people. The whole book is one of judgment, and because all judgment has been committed to the Son, He is here presented in the character of the Judge. Naturally enough His judgment begins at the House of God, and so in the second and third chapters He is found going over the history of that which was established for God's glory here. In a later chapter we shall have occasion to go into more detail as to the whole book, because the last part of the chart takes us into its contents in some details. Enough has been said for the present to enable us to take up the two chapters that are immediately before us.

Ephesus

Now let us turn to our chart. On the left hand is the name Ephesus and beside it is the figure of a man with a seed-basket, scattering seed. A sower sowing seed is the Lord's own picture of the first of the mysteries or secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven. He is the Sower and the seed He sows is the Word of God. The natural thought awakened in the mind by the word kingdom is certainly not that of a farmer as is depicted here. We think of power and pomp; we think of a king receiving homage from his subjects and being acclaimed as their sovereign. But here is a marked contrast, a patient labourer in the field without any outward show or that which would appeal to the mind of man as imposing in any way. Alas! although our Lord was a King in very deed and entitled to the homage of all mankind, it was little of that He received while here. The wise men from the East acknowledged Him as King and paid Him royal honours, and when He entered Jerusalem riding on an ass in keeping with the prophecies that declared the King of Israel would so come, the multitude acclaimed Him as the King of Israel, the Son of David, and spread their garments before Him and cut down branches off trees and strewed them in the way, thus giving Him a royal welcome to His own metropolis. But alas! it was but a flash in the pan, and this soon gave way to bitter hatred and plotting against His life. Full well He knew what was in the heart of man and so that there might be something for God in this world He turned away from the throne and took up the seed-basket and called on His servants to do likewise. How completely true to the fact is the picture the Lord draws. What has characterized the activity of the servants of God since

the day of Pentecost? Has it not been preaching the Word of God throughout the world? Have those who can be called true messengers of His ever sought the place of rulers over their fellows like the ambitious men of earth? Have they not like their Master gone to the darkest places of this world enduring all kinds of suffering that they might carry the Word of God and sow it in human hearts? Who will question it? This, then, is the picture the Lord draws of the Kingdom of Heaven. Of course there is more in the picture than merely sowing seed; there is a detailed description of human hearts as the soil into which the seed falls, but to go into this would take more space than we feel we can give here. So we turn from the parable of the kingdom to the letter from Revelation 2, which we believe is to some extent parallel with it.

Very much is said to this church (Ephesus) by way of commendation. It was still young and full of spiritual vigor. The connection between it and the sowing of the seed is that in Ephesus we have the result of the seed-sowing, a bounteous harvest apparently. If we turn to Acts 19, we have the story of the sowing and the wonderful results in human hearts and human lives. For a space of three years that splendid servant of the Lord, the Apostle Paul, sowed the seed by day and night and publicly and from house to house. Opposition of course develops but every enemy is borne down and Christ is triumphant over all, "so mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed." Thirty-five years have now passed away and the Lord is visiting this assembly to see its condition. What does He find? Much to approve, thank God, and fully does He accord it the praise it earns from Him for its work and patience and labor and intolerance

of evil as well as its unsparing judgment of false apostles. But it is added, "Nevertheless I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first love." In the text of the Authorized Version this is put as if it were a little thing, but the Revision corrects this and gives it its true weight as a condition that spoiled everything — indeed even without the correction we might easily perceive that it was a grave condition, for He says, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen." Sometimes it is spoken of as a sort of accident, that we have lost our first love but that is a mistake, the language would suggest rather that there was a deliberate turning away from Him as the prime object of their affections. And without this as the spring of everything in their activities it was a fallen condition. One can understand this, and we think the address to the elders of Ephesus throws all the necessary light on it. In that address, given us in the twentieth chapter of the Acts, the Apostle tells them of some rising up from amongst themselves who would teach perverse things to make themselves the object and center of the saints, and evidently that had already begun. Christ was not the alone object of their spiritual activities but self, maybe in some subtle form, had displaced Him and therefore in principle all was lost. Perhaps His eye alone could detect this, but it does and He sees nothing but a total setting aside of the Church as the witness for God in the world if this is not repented of.

But this raises a question in the mind. What will the Lord do to recover His witness from this path of departure from Him? Will He let it go on to reap the fruit of folly, or will He do something in a direct way to arrest this downward trend? What would His past ways

teach us to look for? Without question we would expect Him to do something definite. When we read of the church in Corinth and one there who had given himself up in a gross way to the indulgence of his flesh, we are told of the Apostle's judgment to "Deliver such an one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (1 Cor. 5:5). Again the same Apostle tells us of two men, "Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Tim. 1:20). And even in Old Testament times when God would deliver His servant Job from pride and self-confidence He permits Satan to work his will on him for a time. Simon Peter, too, that noble confessor of the Lord, was given up for a season to Satan when the Lord saw the need for a severe lesson to wean him from himself. Undoubtedly Satan hates the people of God and it suits his heart of hostility to everything divine in the world, to rage and tear them to pieces, but his opportunities to do this are limited by the Lord, Who has been exalted far above all principalities and powers of every kind. So Satan can go with his fiendish plans against the saints, only as far as he is permitted. But all this would prepare us for just what we find in the next letter to the church of God, that is, Satan being allowed to do his work as of old.

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 5

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 5

C. W. Ross

Smyrna

In the First Epistle of Peter which was written quite a few years after the Church had been brought into being, there is evidently a note of warning of a storm about to break over the Church of God. This is marked all through it. The first suggestion is found in the first chapter where we read, "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." Here a "needs be" for heaviness instead of joy, as the portion of the saints, is hinted at, and this is maintained all through the Epistle until we reach the fourth chapter, where at verse 12 we read, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." Further on in the chapter it is said, "The time is come, that judgment must begin at the house of God," and he does not leave any question in the mind as to what he means by the house of God, for he immediately adds, "And if it first begin at us." In the next chapter the theme is continued when he says, "Humble yourselves therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time. Casting all your care upon Him for He careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion, goeth about,

seeking whom he may devour; whom resist, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, Who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”

Now observe how this fits in with the condition exhibited in the letter to Smyrna. In Peter’s Epistle the words, “suffer” and “suffering” occur very frequently — fifteen or sixteen times — and in Smyrna the first message is “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer.”

Again in Peter’s Epistle Satan is represented as a roaring lion; here the word is, “Behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison.” Frequently people speak of Satan as a roaring lion as if that were his normal attitude, but that is a mistake. Peter is bringing him before us as the persecuting enemy when he so speaks of him. But further Peter speaks of praying that “after they have suffered a while” they may be delivered, which is in perfect accord with the letter to Smyrna which limits the time of trial to a period described as ten days, showing that the time of the trial is measured, not by Satan but by the Lord. It was always so, as we have seen.

The “needs be” for this trial we have already noticed. The first step of departure has already been taken and the Lord would keep the saints from going farther in this path. So He allows Satan to move against them with his old-time hatred of everything of God, permitting him to use every weapon he can command to crush this thing that God has planted in this world for the glory of His Son.

It will be noticed on our chart that alongside of Smyrna is found a sinister figure meant to represent Satan. It will be remembered that he is the principal character in the second of the parables of Matthew 13. But not as an open enemy but as one working underhandedly is he there presented, oversowing with bad seed the field which had already been planted with the good seed of the Word of God. The link between the letter to Smyrna and the parable is the prominence of Satan in both and the reference to "them which say they are Jews and are not but are of the synagogue of Satan." In the letter to Smyrna he is brought before us in both characters — in his subtle work of seeking to destroy the work of God by imitating it and also in his savage and cruel work of crushing it by violence.

Let us notice first of all the synagogue of Satan as the Jews are here called. It seems a terrible term to apply to a religious body, and falsely-named charity would not so speak. But let us reflect a little. When the Church was first formed the greater part of it was made up of Jews who were brought out of Judaism. What was left was simply made up of men who had hardened themselves against God in spite of every appeal that could be made to them. The line was clear-cut. "The Lord added to the Church such as were being saved," and the rest were left like a rotting carcass filled with hatred of God and His testimony. Their synagogues were the gatherings together of those who were simply the enemies of God and willing weapons for Satan to use for his purposes of destroying the work of God. And he used them, first for sowing his seed and then for the expression of his deadly hatred of the saints. The work of God in sowing the seed of the Word had hardly begun when he became

active in this work. We are only as far as the 15th of the Acts when we find him busy. Paul and Barnabas had been engaged for some time among the Gentiles when, we are told, "Certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Here is surely the enemy at work, but who are those whom he employs? Jews, unquestionably. And what was the seed they sowed? The law of Moses without doubt. How subtle this is. Those poor Gentiles who had received the gospel through men of Jewish birth were, naturally, an easy prey to Satan when he sent men of the same race with what purported to be more of that Word which they had already received. At this time his efforts were defeated, for when the matter in the providence of God was submitted to the apostles and others, they issued a declaration, repudiating the men who had disturbed the minds of the saints and freeing them in the fullest way from the burdens they would fain have fastened on them. This defeat however did not daunt Satan or his emissaries, for we find him returning to the work again and again, finding at last a foothold even in Jerusalem itself. In Acts 21 when Paul revisited the city, he was informed, "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe, and they are all zealous of the law."

In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians we find the Apostle Paul complaining bitterly of these men. He says, "Such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing, if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose

end shall be according to their works" (2 Cor. 11:13-15). They were the inveterate enemies of Paul especially, following him with bitter and relentless fury, withstanding him wherever he went, first by imitating and then by open opposition. And this was because his ministry was among the Gentiles whom they hated with utter and unreasoning violence. No wonder the Lord here describes them as the synagogue of Satan. From among them Satan recruited his ranks, whether to sow the deadly seed or to openly oppose, and they willingly yielded themselves to his work, doing his bidding with heart and voice. How they gloried in blaspheming that Name so dear to the Christian heart — they were the synagogue of Satan.

But the power of the world as represented in its government did not at first persecute the Church of God. This is plain from the Acts of the Apostles. All the violence came from the Jews. But a change is coming as predicted by Peter and Satan is allowed by the Lord to now enlist in his army the Roman government. This period of the history of the Church is well-known in the annals of the world. For many years the empire of Rome had left this new religion at peace, in keeping with its general policy towards all religion. But through circumstances, hardly worth noticing, because behind them were the unseen powers, whether divine or diabolical, alarm had been awakened throughout the empire and instead of indifference there was intense interest, which led to edict after edict being issued by the emperors of Rome, condemning the Christians to every form of cruel death and their property to confiscation. Many details as to this awful time can be found in Church histories dealing with this period but

we confine ourselves to the main features that are outstanding in these letters. Foxe's Book of Martyrs and Miller's Church History can be purchased and they are both helpful in this respect.

What was the effect upon the Church of this time of tribulation? What is the effect of the fanning mill on the wheat? The winds of persecution only drove away all who were only nominally attached to the truth of God and caused the real to shine out in a way that dumbfounded the adversaries. Apparently there was recovery from the down-grade that He marked in Ephesus. It is touching too to notice the manner in which the Lord presents Himself in addressing the church at Smyrna. He sees His loved ones in the furnace and although He knows the needs be for this and indeed has planned it for their blessing, yet He will not add to the heat of the flame by a word of reproach. Rather will He sustain them in the sorrow and reveal Himself to them as One Who has passed through death and is beyond it forever, and who abides in His love and care, the First and the Last.

This is so markedly in contrast with the way in which He presents Himself to the church which follows this one that we think it is a suitable time to call attention to this feature of these letters. Each one is different as may be easily seen and this ought to excite enquiry. But as we have not noticed the one already passed (in the letter to Ephesus), let us pause a moment and look at it. He speaks of Himself as "He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." This is His introduction, so to speak, to the whole series of letters which give His

judgment of the course of the Church as His witness on earth.

The Times Of The Gentiles --Part 6

The Times Of The Gentiles

Part 6

C. W. Ross

The Things Which Are—Permagos

The manner in which the Lord presents Himself to this church is startling, if we reflect ever so little on it.

Suppose one were to send you a message that he was about to visit you with a sharp sword with two edges, would not your first feeling be one of alarm? Would not the deadly weapon suggest anger? Undoubtedly it would and so here as one reads on he is soon made aware of the serious condition in this, the third-stage of the history of the Church, which very properly excites the Lord's grave displeasure.

It is in place here to call attention to another principle running through this series of letters, that is not only interesting in itself, but that confirms very strongly the thought that these letters are all symbolic. It is what we may call the historic sequence observable in them. Note that in the first letter we are carried back to the very beginning of the Bible. The language is, "To him that overcometh will. I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." Here we are taken back to the sinless creation of God, and that which was denied man because of his sin is here promised to the overcomer. Then in the second letter the promise is, "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." Here again we are carried back, but not quite so far as in the previous one. It is to the time when death has

come in and forms the common lot of man, outside of the Paradise of God, we are taken, and the overcomer is assured the second death will not hurt him. He may die under the violence of Satan, but not a second time — that which follows death, even the lake of fire, he will never know.

Now when we come to Pergamos we find the reference in a historical way is much later than Genesis, it takes us as far as the book of Numbers. It speaks of the manna of Exodus and the doctrine of Balaam which we find in Numbers, thus bringing before us the whole history of Israel in the wilderness. And it may be added here that in the next letter, that to Thyatira, we are carried still farther on in history, even to what is practically the end of the history of the people in the land, when their iniquity rose to its height in the horrible reign of Ahab and Jezebel.

But to return to Pergamos, which is immediately before us, we notice first that the Lord makes a singular statement about this church. He says "I know thy works and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is." Now what does this mean? In what way could an obscure town in Asia Minor be the seat of the authority of Satan? It seems utterly beyond explanation unless we view these letters as we are doing, as a panoramic view of the Church of God. Even then, what period of the Church does this describe? Let us remember that the epoch represented by Smyrna is the time of persecution, when the Roman Emperor as the tool of Satan, tore like a wild beast, the saints of God. The devil is represented as seeking to destroy the testimony of God in two way, first by means of his allies the Jews who sought to pervert the gospel and then by means of the Roman

power which was stirred up by him to persecute and destroy by physical violence. But in this letter there is a marked change. The Church is dwelling where Satan dwells and where he has his throne, that is to say, the saints are at home where Satan is at home, for that is the force of “dwelling” all through the book of Revelation. The normal condition of the Church of God is, “our citizenship is in Heaven” but here they have apparently forgotten this and are settled in the world on friendly terms with its prince and god. Was there ever in Church history a change of such a radical character that it can be identified as being here spoken of by the Lord in these terms? Indeed there was and it is a notorious fact in history, not an obscure incident. All historians mention it and make much of it. The individual who figured large in this stupendous change was Constantine the Great, as he is known in the world. He was Roman emperor and in his day the Church and the world came to terms that meant a complete change in every way for both the parties to the compact. The Roman emperor became a patron of the Church instead of a persecutor and indeed professed Christianity himself. Many of the saints wearied out perhaps by the long drawn out hatred of the world, were caught by the snare and hailed the change as a cause for thanksgiving to God.

How fitting the historical reference to the time when Israel, the earthly people of God, were passing through the wilderness. Balak, king of Moab, alarmed at the apparent prosperity and growth of the people of God, hired Balaam, a prophet, to curse them by means of his devilish incantations. Gladly would Balaam have complied with the request, for “he loved the wages of unrighteousness”. But his efforts were in vain; every

attempt to curse ended in a blessing, and baffled and despairing he abandons the enterprise. But alas! he is subtle and teaches Balak the king how he may accomplish his end by ensnaring the people so that they may curse themselves. The women of Moab seduce the men of Israel into idolatry and the gross wickedness that always accompanies it, and the anger of the Lord is awakened and He smites His people in dire judgment. The story of this is found in Numbers 22-25.

And this story is repeated in the Church of God. The devil had sought by craft and cruelty to crush the whole testimony but his effort had signally failed. Never had the saints shone so brightly as when they were being hunted like the beasts of the forest. The record of that time is an epic of supreme sacrifice in face of frightful suffering and unparalleled devotion to the Lord when it meant death and shame to confess Him at all. But now all is changed. The emperor of Rome whom Satan had employed to wreak his hate on the saints becomes now the flatterer and corrupter. Neither Satan nor his tool is converted, the same hatred burns in the heart of the enemy and he succeeds alas! in dragging the Church down to his own level and finds in its bosom an abiding place and home, and thus turns it into an instrument to deceive souls instead of a beacon-light to direct them to the Christ of God.

What a contrast! The emperor of Rome at one time issuing from his palace edict after edict giving up to death and spoliation the Church of God, now presiding over the councils of its ministers and controlling its policies. The Servants of Christ at one time hunted and proscribed, now received in the palace and welcomed and flattered and made great men in the earth. And

alas! many thought it was a mighty triumph for God and even dreamed that the millennium had come. Others, however, more in the mind of God, feared it was all a mistake and mourned over the fall of the Church as they deemed it and as it was in very deed. And in the letter to Pergamos we have the Lord's own judgment of it. Fully does He recognize that there are faithful souls standing apart from the general trend but just as fully does he express His displeasure with those who have been active in leading the Church into the net of Satan.

It will be recalled that in the fall of the people of Israel into Balak's snare (Numbers 25), one man distinguished himself in faithfulness after such a sort as to gain for himself an everlasting priesthood. His name was Phinehas and it is recorded of him that when the people were indulging themselves brazenly in gross sin, he took a javelin and smote a guilty pair down to death. Evidently the Lord has this in mind when He says of Himself, "These things saith He that hath the sharp sword with two edges."

But there is another evil of which He takes cognizance, besides that of guilty commerce with the world. His words are, "So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate." In the letter to Ephesus He speaks of the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, here it is their doctrine, but both deeds and doctrine are objects of His abhorrence. The church at Ephesus resisted their deeds and are commended for it; in Pergamos the deeds had developed into a doctrine held by some of them at least. What is this thing so strongly reprobated by the Lord? Many attempts have been made to construct a theory based on the existence of a man named Nicolas but it is surmise, confessedly.

Not a vestige of proof has ever been offered for this and so one is forced to turn away in another direction for a clue as to the meaning of this thing. Let us take the meaning of the word itself and see if it furnishes any help. Its meaning is conqueror or overcomer of the people. We are all familiar with the word laity which simply means the people generally as distinguished from the professional class. Now while this may be all right in the realm of human affairs, what does it tell us when transferred to the Church of God? If there is in the Church of God a class called the clergy and the great bulk are known as the laity, what does it mean? Does it mean that professionalism has come into sacred things? Alas! this is exactly what has taken place. A professional class has absorbed all the prerogatives of the people of God and indeed when fully developed this class is often called the Church. A young man in thinking of a profession whereby to sustain himself says he is going into the Church, meaning thereby that he is going to be a preacher. All the Divine thought is lost both as to the Church and as to ministry. Is there anything in the Word of God that supports the class distinction here so severely condemned? Absolutely nothing, it is wholly pernicious.

It may be asked here, but is there not in the Word such a thing as ministry, and are there not ministers of the Word? Unquestionably so, but the more one knows of scriptural ministry, the more will be abhor Nicolaitanism, both deeds and doctrine. If our interpretation is correct then we may expect to see it in its full bloom in the church of Rome. How did all this mass of clerics, from the Pope of Rome down to the lowest ecclesiastic come into being? Where do we read

in Scripture of the Pope, cardinals, archbishops and other dignitaries? Nowhere. It is all a gigantic imposture on Christian credulity. How then did it ever succeed in imposing itself on people? Assuredly it did not grow up in a night but rather beginning in the misty past it gradually assumed the immense proportions it has today. But how did it begin? Apparently it started with deeds at an early date by an assumption of authority because of gift on the part of some, yielded too likely by saints as a harmless thing until its encroachments on the rights and privileges of the saints of God became an established system. And practically the whole of Christendom has followed in the wake of Rome and so in almost every sect we have men set apart from their fellow saints and distinguished from them by vain and foolish titles, such as "Reverend," "Right Reverend" and other misnomers utterly out of place in the Church of God. But this subject will be before us again so we leave it for the present.

The parable of the kingdom of Heaven that is aligned with this letter is that of the mustard seed become a mighty tree. The connection is obvious. The Church of God was small and despised to begin with, having no standing in the world and apparently having nothing to ever give it standing. Just think of it a moment in human terms. Here was a Jewish peasant without money, without influence or anything else to appeal to the world, not even attempting to gather around him a following but rather at times discouraging them from taking up His cause. Furthermore He is condemned as a criminal and executed on a Roman cross. But eventually He becomes the centre of a system that fills a large part of the world. This is the third parable of Matthew 13,

and how well it fits in with the third letter of the series. The servants of the Lord have become potentates of earth and the Church is now a powerful political influence among men. No longer is it like its Founder, despised and rejected of men, but on the contrary, it is honored and accepted as a new force in the world, to be reckoned with henceforth in its power over the minds of men. Look for a moment at our chart. In its first parable we have the Lord before us in the lowly guise of a Sower of seed, but in the later parables He disappears from the scene. In the second parable the enemy is the prominent figure, and in the third it is a mighty tree. The fourth has a woman and a tower, but our blessed Lord is absent from the picture until we reach the fourth when He again appears for a reason which will be plain when we reach it in our studies. It is a sad but most instructive story. But how significant the change in this letter immediately before us, and how entirely in accord with the parable, the Church becomes a tree rooted in the earth and becoming a great earthly power. The enemy so marked in the previous parable is not any more an enemy, he is become a professed friend and finds his home among those whom he had sought to destroy from the earth.

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 7

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 7

C. W. Ross

The Things Which Are—Thyatira

“And unto the angel of the church of Thyatira write: these things saith the Son of God. Who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet like unto fine brass” (Rev. 2:18).

We have now reached the climax of the departure from the Lord, noted first in Ephesus, stopped temporarily in Smyrna, but developing again in Pergamos, until in Thyatira it reaches maturity. The introduction the Lord gives Himself in this letter should warn us of conditions existing of a reprehensible character. When His eyes are blazing like fire, it means anger, and when He speaks of His feet as being like fine brass, we can think of nothing but judgment according to the scriptural symbol.

But why does He introduce Himself as son of God here? If Thyatira be as we believe it is, a picture of full-blown Popery, the reason is obvious. One of the developments of the mystery of iniquity in the church was the gradual abandonment of the faith once delivered to the saints, and in nothing was this so marked as in the growth of what is termed mariolatry, that is the worship of the virgin Mary. When one turns to the Word of God, especially to that portion of it which gives the special truth for this dispensation, we find nothing to justify the homage paid to the mother of the Lord. Paul, the Apostle

of the Gentiles, our Apostle, never mentions her name, and neither Peter nor John nor any others of the New Testament writers make any allusion to her after the first chapter of the Acts. In all of the instructions for the Church of God, there is not a hint of any deference of any kind to be shown her. But in contrast with this, all these writers take the utmost pains to maintain the true Deity of the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let us turn to the teaching of the woman Jezebel. We shall quote from a book of devotion issued with the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and it would be well to set these quotations along side of the Word of God. Here is a prayer they are taught to use, "Blessed Virgin Mary, after God my only hope." Again in a form of confession, the language put into the lips of the penitent is, "I confess to Almighty God, to Blessed Mary, ever Virgin." Listen further:

"Mother of mercy, hail O gentle queen,

Our life, our sweetness, and our hope, all hail!

Children of Eve, to thee we cry from our sad banishment, To thee we send our sighs, weeping and mourning in this tearful vale: Come then, our Advocate, O turn on us those pitying eyes of thine, And our long exile past, Show us at last Jesus, of thy pure womb, the fruit Divine."

"Holy Mary, mother of mercy, and refuge of poor sinners," is another expression in this profane system. One more quotation we make, although we might make many more. This one, however, is a form of prayer to be addressed to the Virgin on visiting her altar in the church: "Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin, my mother Mary, to thee, the Mother of my God, the Queen of the

World, the Advocate, the Hope and the Refuge of sinners, I have recourse today, I who am the most miserable of all. I render thee my humble homage, O great Queen, and I thank thee for all the graces which Thou hast bestowed upon me until now, particularly for having delivered me from hell, which I have so often deserved.”

All these quotations are from a book of devotion published for the use of Catholics. We do not care to defile our pages with more for they are indeed shocking in the way they set aside the Lord and substitute for Him His human mother, a sinner like ourselves. And our object in quoting these we have reproduced here is to show the force and meaning of the Lord asserting His dignity as Son of God. True, to His humanity this woman had the high honour of conceiving Him in her womb and bringing Him into being in this world, and that is honor enough. All that is added to this is blasphemy and idolatry, and a mere effort of Satan to dishonour the Lord and obscure His Divine glory by exalting the mother to an equality with Deity. It is not merely unscriptural, it is a positive system of deadly poison, calculated to cast Him down from His excellency and destroy souls. The dogma of her being an Immaculate Women is on a par with this and one of the supports for the amazing system. Some may not understand this, at least we have found some who supposed that it meant that the Lord was born without sin, which of course all true believers in Him gladly acknowledge. The dogma is that Mary herself was without stain of sin. But listen to the statement from the Pope who first defined it as an article of faith. It isn't so long ago, only in 1854, and by Pope Pius IX. Here is what he says: “The doctrine which

holds that the Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first instant of her conception, was, by a most singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the human race, preserved from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God, and therefore to be firmly and steadfastly believed by the faithful." One might well demand in answer to this declaration, "Where is this revealed by God?" It is nothing but an impudent lie foisted on a gullible people by Satan himself through his willing instrument. Small wonder then that the Lord's eyes blaze and His feet burn as He views this shameful perversion of the truth of God.

But all is not condemned. He does not fail to see the love and service and faith and patience and these increasing, for the last are more than the first. For we must not forget that under the surface of utter departure from God in the hierarchy of the church there was a large element of devoted souls, men and women who knew the Lord and served Him with more or less faithfulness. Hospitals and all kinds of homes for the poor and aged were founded and multiplied even when apostasy was developing in doctrine and this is what the Lord sees and owns as being in this system, bad as it is in other ways. But this does not cover from Him the rise of a notorious woman in their midst, Jezebel by name. It is possible but not likely, that there was an individual in the town of Thyatira who was so named, but the introduction of this person as a representative of apostasy is only a further confirmation of the prophetic character of these letters. Jezebel is a well known and infamous character in Old Testament history and stands here as a symbol of matured Popery. If we turn back to

what is related of her in the Books of Kings, we find that she was the founder of a system of religion in Israel, which was pronounced apostasy from that which Jehovah their God set up. In her day iniquity rose to an unparalleled height, we are told, and her husband Ahab, stirred up by her, “did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him” (1 Kings 32:33).

She had a system of religion of her own and supported several hundred priests to maintain and practise it. A prophet of God, the God of Israel, she hated and threatened with death. Other true prophets shrank in dread of her and hid in caves, maintained on bread and water by a faithful but timid Obadiah. To all appearance the whole land was given up to idolatry under the spell of this terrible woman. Her religion prevailed seemingly over all opposition and everything else was banished from the realm.

Now for a moment let us turn to the corresponding parable. In it we find a woman mixing leaven with a meal until the whole is leavened. Meal is food and leaven is in the Word of God symbolic of evil. One has only to look up the references in Scripture to see this. “Beware,” said the Lord, “of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1). In another place He speaks of the leaven of Herod, and in 1 Corinthians 5, saints are commanded to purge out the old leaven — in fact, in every occurrence of the word it has but one meaning and that is a sinister one. So what is here suggested is that the kingdom of heaven in one phase of its history will be like false and corrupting doctrines mixed with the truth of God, and the one doing this is a

woman. Thus the parable of the kingdom and this letter to Thyatira dovetail perfectly.

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 8

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 8

C. W. Ross

This woman Jezebel calls herself a prophetess, that is, she claims Divine authority for what she teaches. It is not that she bases this on what the Word of God says, which she simply passes on, but she bases it on whatever she may say that has no basis in the Word of God, and is given with no authority save her own. Let us quote from some of the deliverances of this system and see if we cannot recognize in them the voice of Jezebel. "All the Catholic bishops, thus united with the Pope of Rome, form through this holy union only one holy society, which is called the "Apostolic Ministry," or the "Teaching Church," of which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke when He said, "If any man will not hear the church, let him be to thee as a heathen and a publican," "I am with you all the days, even to the consummation of the world," "He that heareth you heareth Me, he that despiseth you despiseth Me." It is this Teaching Church of which St. Paul wrote that "it is the pillar and ground of the truth," and that "it is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. This church is consequently the only one which men ought to hear; she is infallible in her decisions and cannot deceive us because the gates of hell can never prevail against her, and because Jesus Christ remains with her to the end of the world. Therefore, that man only can be called a true Christian who listens to the infallible truth, to the pure doctrine of

Jesus Christ Himself speaking through Peter and the apostles, who listens to the Pope of Rome and the Catholic bishops united with him. He who thinks otherwise, or who teaches the contrary, is a heretic, because he despises the only true apostolic ministry established by Jesus Christ Himself." As one reads this, one can only wonder how such stuff can ever be foisted on human beings, but alas, the greater part of the world drinks this in with avidity. This pretension reached its climax in 1870 when the doctrine of Papal Infallibility was publicly proclaimed, that is the doctrine that when the Pope spoke as Pope on a question of doctrine or morals his utterance must be regarded as infallible. It met with a good deal of opposition in the system itself and led to a secession of some from its pale, but it was and is generally accepted and defended by its leaders.

Upon all this the Lord looks with anger, for it is a perversion in every way of the Church of God and a corruption of His truth. "Until the whole was leavened" is the limit of the corruption, and we may well ask what single doctrine of Scripture is left untainted by this foul and festering system. Is it the Deity of our Lord Jesus? With fair words she may claim to be a confessor of Divine truth as to this, but she has so leavened it with Mariolatry, as to destroy all its value. Is it His atoning death? She will admit again in plausible words its value, but by the doctrine of purgatory and the sacrifice of the Mass she utterly denies its efficacy. We repeat in the language of the Word, "the whole is leavened."

But now we find a new idea entering into this series of letters. In verse 24 of Revelation 2 we read, "But unto you I say, unto the rest in Thyatira" (R.V.). Here is the new note, a remnant marked off from the main body,

refusing to receive the doctrine of Jezebel or follow the mass into the mazes of Satan. It is worthy of note that when we turn back to the time of the actual Jezebel we find a similar condition. Elijah in a moment of depression said, "I only am left, and they seek my life to destroy it," but the answer of God to him is, "Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." Elijah might complain of their lack of courage in not openly consorting with him, but God apparently put on them none other burden than that they already bore. So here the Lord finds a measure of relief in thinking of those who had refused to go with the crowd, but who found their joy in Himself, spite of the awful darkness of their surroundings.

Sometimes one wonders when he reads the confessions of individuals in this system, how they could remain connected with it at all with the knowledge they had of the Lord. Hymns have come down to us, written by men who were even priests and leaders in the Papal system, breathing out in plain language the faith of God's elect, and devotedness to Himself, of a very high order. Listen to one of these saints of old, one of the "rest in Thyatira." His name was Henry Suso, and he is even quoted in the book of devotion from which we have taken the previous ex-tracts, as an authority for some of the superstitious doctrines and practices of Rome. He was a monk and lived and died as such, but it is difficult indeed to reconcile this with the song we quote. Here it is:

"To Thee, Lord, my heart unfoldeth,

As the rose to the golden sun

To Thee, Lord, mine arms are clinging,
The eternal joy begun.
Forever through endless ages,
Thy cross and Thy sorrow shall be,
The glory, the song and the sweetness
That makes Heaven, Heaven to me.
Let one in his innocence glory,
Another in works he has done—
Thy blood is my claim and my title.
Beside it, O Lord, I have none.
The Scorned, the Despised, the Rejected,
Thou hast won Thee this heart of mine,
In Thy robes of eternal glory,
Thou welcomest me to Thine.”

And who does not know the beautiful hymn written by a monk in the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux? Let us quote one verse of it:

“Jesus, the very thought of Thee,
With sweetness fills my breast,
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest,”

Space forbids further quotations, but there are many such that might be given, and our only answer to the question. How could men with such knowledge of Christ lend their support to the veneration of the Virgin and other supersitious practices? is the word here, “I will

put upon you none other burden, but that which ye have already, hold fast until I come." The time had not yet come to enter into a contest with Rome and raise what these men held and taught into the place of public testimony, and so all He asked them to do was to hold fast the truth they knew until that time should come. There may be even yet, we trust there are, many in that powerful system, who in secret stand aloof from its apostasy, but who dare not openly break with Rome for fear of the consequences. We believe we have known such, God grant there may be many more.

At this point it is well to pause for a moment to point out another principle in the Word. We have already noticed that there are seven parables and seven letters. This number seven is of frequent occurrence in Scripture as expressive of completeness of a series and its usual division is into four and three. This is seen in the very beginning of the Bible. The world was formed in six days, but the whole period connected with it is seven, for the seventh was the day of rest or delight in the accomplished work. Now the first four days were taken up with inanimate things, and on the fifth day we find God bringing life upon the ordered scene. We only refer to this to show the general division of the number which prevails all through the Bible. In the seven parables of the kingdom of heaven and the seven letters to the churches, this principle is maintained and indeed this forms a further evidence of the close link between the two series. Let us look at the parables first and in this case the division into four and three is so obvious as to hardly need pointing out. The first four were spoken in the open air to the multitudes and the remaining three to the disciples in the house, after He had sent the

multitudes away (Matt 13:36). Furthermore, this action of the Lord is most significant if we reflect a moment, for it naturally suggests that the first four points to the public manifestation of the kingdom of heaven, while the other three just as naturally make us think of those phases of the kingdom of heaven known only to the initiated, that is to real believers in Christ in-dwelt by His Spirit. To illustrate, it is apparent to all that for centuries since Pentecost there has been preaching everywhere answering to the sowing of seed, it is plain to all that there have been divers kinds of seeds, producing a great variety of harvest. And who does not know that Christianity as a religious system began in a most obscure corner of the world and in most unpromising circumstances and that from this it has become a mighty force reaching to every part of the world? Moreover, none will deny the existence of the woman who pretends to feed the people answering in the fullest way to the picture the Lord gives us of a woman mixing leaven with the meal. True of course it is that the multitude does not know that the woman is corrupting the food by the admixture of leaven and so the Lord presents it as seen by the public.

Now in the letters of Revelation 2 and 3 the character of the first four differs from the other three in much the same way, although perhaps it calls for a little more attention than in the case of the parables. However, this much may be pointed out as being on the very surface, that the first four show us the first four stages of the history of the Church ending in full-blown Popery. But when this is reached, a remnant comes to the light who is out of touch with this apostate condition, and the three letters that follow, to Sardis and Philadelphia and

Laodicea are addressed to that remnant, when they have become the public testimony of the Lord. As long as this remnant was hidden in an apostate mass, it had no separate standing — the public testimony was Thyatira in which they were submerged. But the time came when God in His mercy moved for the deliverance of His own, and having delivered them from Rome, put them into a place of responsibility again, making them His witnesses and lightbearers in the world.

All this is in keeping with Old Testament history. There we find the story of the kingdom of Israel ending in the books of Kings and Chronicles, when the people became captives of Babylon, the sceptre of sovereignty gone and all their privileges stripped from them. Never again do they resume this place they lost. But a remnant returns and rebuilds the temple and the city of Jerusalem by permission of their overlord, the Persian monarch. The scion of their own sovereign line takes his place with this remnant, not as king, but as one of themselves, helping in the work, apparently without any more authority than the others. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of this remnant and it is a most interesting story. Then the prophetic books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are addressed exclusively to this remnant. All the other prophets appealed either to Israel or Judah as kingdoms while they still held their place as such, but the three last prophets in the Old Testament occupy themselves wholly with this despised and feeble few who returned from Babylonish captivity.

In keeping with this we find here that what we are now to enter on is the remnant history of the Church, that portion of the mass delivered from Rome, the spiritual Babylon, and which became for the time the object of

the appeals of the Lord to be faithful with what had been committed to them. So the first letter which we now take up is the one directed to this remnant in the beginning of its history.

The Times of the Gentiles --Part 9

The Times of the Gentiles

Part 9

C. W. Ross

The Things Which Are

Rev. 2 and 3

Sardis, A Picture Of Protestantism

When we reach this point we feel that we have gotten to modern times and to responsibilities for today. Because what is now before us is the judgment of the Lord on what we call the Reformation. The Lord presents Himself as having plenitude of spiritual power first of all. We know of course that there is only one personal Holy Spirit, but in this prophetic book full of symbols, we may expect things to be presented in a manner of its own. Seven Spirits simply means the one Spirit in the fullness of power and wisdom. Seven stars is probably an allusion to the fact that as the Spirit of God works and manifests Himself in and through human vessels, He produces certain results and these vessels in whom He has wrought are the seven stars, the angels or unseen representatives of the seven churches.

We must remember here that what the Lord judges is not His own work (for that would be judging Himself), but the result of His work when committed to men to maintain. He did not judge man in innocence, because there was nothing to judge, but when man became unfaithful and left the place of innocence in disobedience, then of course God must judge. So with

the Church. Our Lord did not begin to judge the Church until it had fallen, as He describes its condition in the first letter, that to Ephesus. So with the mighty revival generally called the Reformation. He does not judge what He wrought in that great movement, but He does judge the response that men made to that wonderful forth-putting of His power. This is, we conceive, the difference between the thought of the Seven Spirits and the seven stars (the seven Spirits speaking of the infinite energy of God and the seven stars of the result of that energy in the human vessels in whom He wrought).

With this principle before us, let us think first of the blessed work of the Spirit of God at that wonderful time. It is said that the word "Sardis" means "those escaping," and if this be its meaning it is most suitable, for the snare of Satan in Thyatira had held them captive in a dreadful way. And indeed only God would open up a way of escape. How did He do it? In other words, what was that great work we speak of as the Reformation? We know that its net result was to put into the hands of the people again the blessed Word of God, the Bible. We must not dwell on all of the many combinations of circumstances that, in the providence of God, were used to bring about this notable result, but it is almost necessary to refer to some of them.

For centuries before, the Bible was to all intents and purposes an unknown Book among those who called themselves Christians. Neither the clergy nor the laity knew its contents, although it was claimed to be the foundation of all their doctrines and practices. This period is generally referred to as the Dark Ages, and well it is so named. Few people could be easily imposed on. The circle of those who were educated was a very

limited one and reading matter was of the meagrest for every bit of literature had to be laboriously copied out by hand and there were few who could afford those precious manuscripts. But the time came when movable type was invented and the art of printing came to the fore, and naturally this led to the multiplication of books and with it arose a passionate desire to read them on the part of nearly all classes. God had said again, "Let there be light," and there was light. No longer could people be imposed on in the wholesale manner in which it had been done for centuries, for knowledge was now increased and this constituted at once a menace to the power of the Papacy.

But all these things were merely the outward circumstances that in the Providence of God contributed to the emancipation of many from Rome and its tyranny. There was going on in souls at the same time a work that stirred the whole being of those affected by it. Men were agitated over the most profound and moving question that can stir a human soul, and that was, "What must I do to be saved?" And just as in the early days of the history of the Church as recounted in the Book of the Acts, the Lord, when He needed a man for a special work, picked out a strong character like Saul of Tarsus, so now He laid hold of men of great natural ability and dauntless courage. Among those whom He called to Himself at this time was a brave and honest man who lived in Germany, a devoted son of the Church. His name was Martin Luther, and with him the Spirit of God dealt in a very real way, arousing him to a keen sense of his responsibility to God and his own sin and weakness. With the most brilliant prospects before him he turned away from everything of worldly honour and immured

himself in a monastery that he might secure the salvation of his soul. We need not follow him through all the mazes of darkness and superstition from which he at last emerged into the sunlight of Divine grace, as he learned the value and meaning of the cross of Christ. It was a terrible struggle, and yet every phase of it was just so much training for the place God meant him to occupy as His most prominent witness in this new movement back to the Word of God — back from tradition, superstition, the councils of the Church, the writings of the early fathers, back to the blessed and incorruptible Word of the living God, the Bible.

But he was only one of many, although probably the foremost figure in the eyes of men in this great work. Not only in Germany, but all over Christendom, men — Farel in France, Zwingli in Switzerland, Knox in Scotland — were raised up and these and other men blazed the way out of Rome. To us today who have never known anything but this freedom of conscience from the yoke of Rome, it seems a little thing to challenge the authority or supremacy of the Pope, but at that time it demanded men of unwavering bravery and deep convictions to do so. But let us thank God, such men were found by the Lord and called by Him to the work and fitted for that work which they did. To sum up what they did in a few words, these men found in the Bible the answers to all questions of conscience and what they found for themselves they determined with rare courage and faithfulness to share with the whole of Christendom. Who that knows the history of that glorious time but will easily understand why the Lord should introduce Himself as having the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars? He moved on the hearts of men in a marvelously

powerful way and the men He moved were mighty men, defying the power of Satan with sublime courage and wisdom. Fire and sword and every device calculated to cow men into submission were resorted to by the ecclesiastical authorities but in vain, for they went on with their glorious mission until it was accomplished.

Now what they accomplished as we have already pointed out was the restoration to the masses in their own tongue of that priceless heritage, the Bible — this was the outstanding feature of the Reformation. Not only was it printed and circulated but men were raised up who went through the length and breadth of Christendom, proclaiming with the living voice what they had found in that Book of Books, the Bible. And this it was that broke the hold of Rome, and liberated men from the seduction of the siren voice of that foul female, who by her sorceries deceived the world.

But all this that we have spoken of is the Divine side of this great movement, this letter is the judgment of the Lord upon the result of this work when left to the responsibility of men to maintain. What will this mass of people who have been set free from superstition and tradition do with that Book which at such a cost has been restored to them? This letter tells us in no uncertain terms exactly what they did. There is a word in this one which occurs in only one other of this series, that is the word “remember.” In the letter to Ephesus He says, “Remember therefore, from whence thou art fallen,” to Sardis, it is “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard.” This is striking and when weighed seen to be most suitable. In the case of Ephesus, it is the first stage of the departure of the Church from its original standing in which this word is

found and in the case of Sardis it is the new start so to speak, given to the Church in the Reformation that He has in mind. The word "Remember" would be quite out of place in any of the other letters, for there was no fresh start except at those two points, Pentecost and Reformation times. But let us ask, What was it that Sardis had received and heard? Was it not, as we have been pointing out, the Blessed Word of God and the voice of the Lord Himself in it, that adorable Saviour and Shepherd of the sheep, Whose voice had been drowned out for centuries by the blatant boastings of the woman Jezebel who called herself a prophetess? Unquestionably so.