

Bible Student's Notebook

The Herald of His Grace

Volume XIV Issue 328

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

"This Generation"

by — James R. Coram

... Under no circumstances should you be finishing the cities of Israel till the Son of Mankind may be coming (Matthew 10:23).

Verily I am saying to you that there are some of those standing here who under no circumstances should be tasting death till they should be perceiving the Son of Mankind coming in His kingdom (Matthew 16:28; cf. Luke 9:27).

Verily I am saying to you that by no means may this generation be passing by till all these things should be occurring (Matthew 24:34; cf. Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32).

For still how very little, He Who is coming will be arriving and not delaying (Hebrews 10:37).

Little children, it is the last hour, and, according as you hear that the antichrist is coming, now also there have come to be many antichrists, whence we know that it is the last hour (I John 2:18).

hese and similar passages are often appealed to by unbelievers to show the exceedingly unreliable nature – indeed the sheer falsehood - of Jesus' words and teaching, since the event which they predict, the "Second Coming" of Christ, did not occur within the specified time and has not yet occurred over 1,900 years later. Much is made of the supposed absurdity of "Christianity" at its very core, its claims being founded on the word of such a manifest delusionist as Jesus of Nazareth.

After all, they reasoned, the sun was not darkened, the moon did not fail to give her beams, and the stars did not fall from heaven, nor were the powers of the heavens shaken; the sign of the Son of Mankind in heaven did not appear, all of the tribes of the land did not grieve, nor did they see the Son of Mankind coming on the clouds of heaven with

power and much glory (Matthew 24:29-30). Every eye did not see Him (Revelation 1:7), much less did the kingdoms of this world become those of the Lord God and His Christ (Revelation 11:15). Decidedly, the nations did not beat their swords into plowshares, nor their spears into pruninghooks, so as not to learn war any more (Isaiah 2:4).

Remarkably, however, certain believers, termed "Preterists" since they claim a fulfilled or past Second Coming of Christ, have appealed to these very same passages in order to show the exceedingly reliable nature - indeed the utter truthfulness - of Jesus' words. According to their claims, the "Second Coming" of Christ did occur within the specified time, all related prophecies being fulfilled accordingly.

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25):
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12):
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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PO Box 265, Windber, PA 15963 Office: (800) 784-6010 Local: (814) 701-0063 Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr. – Editor (clyde@studyshelf.com) André Sneidar – Managing Editor Rick Lemons – Associate Editor

Department Managers and Assistant Editors

Windber, PA: Clyde L. Pilkington, III, Nathan H. Pilkington, Janet

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GENERATION (continued from front page)

Preterists, however, must explain all prophecy concerning Christ's advent and kingdom in highly allegorical or even mystical terms, contrary to the plain sense of the passages themselves. Nonetheless, these believers have convinced themselves of the legitimacy of their interpretations, since, according to them, either Christ's Second Coming did occur within a generation of the time in which He made these prophecies, or He is a deceiver and a false prophet. Since no believer will affirm that Christ is either of these, and since, according to Preterists, the only alternative is to accept their claims as to a first-century Second Coming, they imagine that they have proved the correctness of their position.

God's Hidden Intention

A recognition of the hidden intention of God, as distinct from His revealed will, is vital to our subject at hand. The revealed will of God is well illustrated by our Lord's *reproach* on the cities of Israel in which most of His powerful deeds occurred, "for they do not repent" (Matthew 11:20). Since the people had failed to repent, Jesus reproached them for their failure to heed God's revealed will which had called for their repentance (*cf.* Matthew 3:2; 4:17).

Yet the hidden intention of God is equally well illustrated in Jesus' words in reference and as a complement to His preceding words of reproach on the people:

At that season, answering, Jesus said, "I am acclaiming Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for Thou hidest these things from the wise and intelligent and Thou dost reveal them to minors. Yea, Father, seeing that thus it became a delight in front of Thee" (Matthew 11:25-26).

If a recognition of the significance of Christ's powerful deeds is vital to repentance, and yet if God should *hide* this significance from some, those

from whom it is hidden will be unable to repent. Yet even so, if this is what God has done, we, too, may well acclaim the Father, Lord of heaven and earth, seeing that thus it became a delight in front of Him.

It is important to understand that the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined in relation to its purpose, according to the motive which sponsors it. Whatever God does is *right*; and it is also *good* with respect to His purpose. That which men devise for evil is that which God designs for good (*cf.* Genesis 50:20). If it should be that God's revealed will is not fulfilled, it is only that His hidden intention might be realized. Similarly, if God's present intention should entail a measure of evil, it is only that His consummate intention should be comprised of a superfluity of good (*cf.* Romans 8:18-21). This should ever be kept in mind whenever we should be considering Israel's failure, or our own.

PROVISIONAL DECLARATIONS OF TRUTH

It is indeed important to believe what the Scriptures say. Yet the deeper question still remains: In what sense is what the Scriptures say to be understood? As we approach this question of the time of Christ's appearing, whether it is past or future, it should first of all be noted that each of these statements of Jesus concerning His appearing (e.g. Matthew 10:23; 16:28; 24:34) is expressed in the subjunctive mood, sometimes with the conditional particle an (EVER) included. These grammatical features are reflected in the Concordant Version by the auxiliaries "should" and "may."

The subjunctive mood calls attention to the contingent (*i.e.*, dependent) nature of what is being affirmed. It speaks of the connection which obtains between what is affirmed and that on which the affirmation *depends* for its fulfillment.

In the nature of things, if that on which a declaration expressed in the subjunctive mood depends is unrevisably certain, the declaration itself is unrevisable and is certain to occur. Yet, if that on which a declaration expressed in the subjunctive mood ▶

A detailed contrast between God's intention and will is dealt with in the classic work, The Problem of Evil and the Judgments of God by A.E. Knoch (available at StudyShelf.com).

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depends is *not* unrevisably certain, the declaration itself is revisable and is not certain to occur.

Of course, that on which the first-century fulfillment of these texts in question immediately depended was the will of God, then revealed. If the will of God, then revealed, was peremptory (final, barring any possible recension for whatever reason), then these prophecies were certain to occur in that generation. Yet, if the will of God, then revealed, was not peremptory, then these prophecies were not certain to occur in that generation. It will not do simply to claim that, since these prophecies were made, they were therefore made peremptorily. This is what is at issue, and must not be decided by circular reasoning, special pleading or emotional claims.

It should be noted that the prophecies of the establishment of the kingdom, within that present generation of Israelites to whom Christ came, were necessarily provisional. They were contingent upon Israel's national repentance and acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah and Savior.

It is true that it was the revealed will of God that the kingdom *should* then come. This is reflected in the various passages such as Matthew 24:4-34 which predicted the occurrence of certain events preceding the Kingdom's establishment within that present generation. Yet it is just as true that the

kingdom did not then come.

"In His Own Jurisdiction"

It is certainly correct that Matthew 24:34 and similar prophetic declarations must be understood *provisionally*. This is because certain provisional considerations were entailed in their fulfillment (*cf.* Acts 3:19-20). Ultimately, however, it is not their provisional nature that raises the question as to whether they were unrevisably certain to occur. If, in the counsels of God, they were unrevisably certain to occur, doubtlessly their provisional element would be entirely fulfilled. The only ultimate question is whether such a prophecy is an expression of the actual intention of God and is therefore a peremptory declaration.

This can be decided only by a consideration of all relevant issues; but to claim that, because the future tense is used, such declarations are therefore peremptory and may not be understood provisionally either in relation to Israel's obedience or even in relation to God's hidden intention, is wholly unwarranted. This is especially true when it is noted that these texts are expressed in the *subjunctive* mood, which calls attention to their *dependent* nature. Their ultimate dependency is on the actual intention of the Father, Who has placed the decisive times and eras for restoring the kingdom to Israel in His Own jurisdiction (Acts 1:7).



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Very simply, until the Word of God was completed (Colossians 1:25), one could not say to a certainty that a particular declaration of God's revealed will concerning things to come was also a declaration of His actual intention concerning things to come.

That this provisional, yet prophetic declaration in Matthew 24:34 of the revealed will of God was not a peremptory expression of the actual intention of God concerning that very generation, is made evident not only from history but from further revelation. The millennial kingdom did not commence in the first century and run its course until some time after 1000 A.D. Satan was not bound during this period, being cast into the submerged chaos, locked and sealed therein. Surely, during the Middle Ages, the rest of the dead of all past generations were not resurrected for judging and then cast into the lake of fire. Nor, during that same period, was the earth destroyed by fire, nor was a new earth created, one in which there was no more death, nor mourning, nor clamor, nor misery.

Therefore, the words of Christ in Matthew 24:34 and similar passages are to be understood within the compass of the will of God then revealed. It is foolish to insist on taking such passages in a peremptory sense, as if no other sense but the peremptory existed, or as if this was the only possible sense in which these passages could be understood.

NOT UNREVISABLY CERTAIN

It is incorrect to claim that, if the Kingdom was not then established, Jesus was "wrong." His words cannot be taken beyond the bounds of an implicit "God willing – and He is – Israel's contingent obedience being understood." The words of Christ then, in these texts in question, are altogether true in relation to the subject with which they are concerned.

It is neither dishonest, mistaken, nor even inappropriate to make provisionally correct statements concerning future events. Indeed, nearly all of our own predictions concerning events of ordinary human affairs can be no more than provisionally correct. They are not unrevisably certain, since that on

which they depend has not been disclosed to us, certainly not in a peremptory sense ("if the Lord should be willing"; cf. James 4:13-17). The proviso "God willing" is always to be understood; for, indeed, it is always present, whether explicitly or implicitly.

In this respect the predictions of Christ the Son of God are quite like our own. Whatever He declares shall occur (and this is especially emphasized where He uses the subjunctive and speaks of that which "should be occurring"), is only that which shall occur, "God willing." In light, then, of Matthew 24:34 and related passages, surely it is correct to say that *the then-revealed will of God*, to which our Lord was privileged to testify, was that that generation of Israelites to whom Jesus spoke should repent and receive their Messiah. God willing, then, these things should be occurring. Then, the Kingdom *would* come.

God's Actual Intention

It is mistaken to take Christ's words as somehow transcending the implicit proviso, "God willing," or to assume that God's revealed will concerning that generation was also necessarily His actual intention concerning that generation. The case of the Pharaoh of the exodus is a good example. God's revealed will to Pharaoh was declared by Moses. Moses said, "Thus says Yahweh ... Dismiss My people that they may serve Me!" (Exodus 10:3). Pharaoh said, "Go!" (Exodus 10:8).

Yet Yahweh made the heart of Pharaoh steadfast so that he did not dismiss the sons of Israel (Exodus 10:20).

This was God's actual intention.

The principle is the same of our Lord's day with the nation of Israel. Then, God's revealed will was that Israel should repent and enter the kingdom; but that it was His hidden intention that they should not do so is evident, seeing that He has blinded their eyes and calloused their heart lest they may perceive with their eyes and apprehend with their heart (cf. John 12:40; Isaiah 6:10). God's inten-▶

tion concerning them, His revealed will notwithstanding, was that

[They] *must not* be understanding ... [and they] *must not* be knowing (Isaiah 6:9).

Certainly, that which God wills should come to pass, shall come to pass (*i.e.*, what He wants to occur will occur). Whatever is His actual intention shall occur.

In Christ's personal ministry to the nation of Israel, He came to His Own simply as

The Servant of the Circumcision, for the sake of the truth of God, to confirm the patriarchal promises (Romans15:8).

The truth of God for the sake of which He testified was the truth of God revealed by Israel's prophets concerning God's glorious kingdom under Messiah (or, "Christ"), to be established on the earth. Thus He confirmed the original promises, which God had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to bring blessing to their "seed."

Accordingly, then, *in relation to the revealed will of God* concerning the kingdom, Jesus could truly say,

Verily, verily, I am saying to you that by no means may this generation be passing by till all these things **should** be occurring (Matthew 24:34).

It is altogether a separate question – and indeed a question which Christ did not address during His ministry to Israel – whether this revealed will of God was also His actual intention. Apart from other considerations and without additional revelation, all that can be said as to Christ's testimony concerning "this generation" (which has now become "that generation") is that it was true and correct in relation to God's revealed will.

THE INTEGRITY OF CHRIST'S WORDS

It must ever be kept in mind that Matthew 24:34, and other similar "imminency" passages concern-

ing the Messianic kingdom, are made in relation to the will of God then revealed. That other considerations and further revelation have made evident that Christ's words, then spoken, were not a declaration of God's actual intention concerning that very generation, is no dishonor on Christ, nor does it follow that He was a false prophet.

If God's revealed will is not also His hidden intention, and if Christ's testimony here is only in relation to the former and not the latter, we should rather say that Christ's testimony as to "this generation" was altogether true and correct within the province with which it was concerned. If other considerations and further revelation should make evident that His testimony here was not true and correct concerning some *other* theme with which it did not deal, it is no opprobrium on the name of Christ with respect to any question of the veracity of His testimony.

Many true and correct statements are only true and correct concerning the subject with which they deal, and are incorrect with reference to other subjects. It is simply unintelligent, however, to characterize a statement as false if it is only true in connection with its own subject. To the contrary, such a statement is to be characterized only as true, it being a matter of the intelligent use of idiom that a "true statement" is one which is true insofar as its own subject is concerned, or insofar as it is contemplated within its own province.

How unreasonable it would be to require, in order to meet our approval, even as to gain our appraisal as a "true statement," that a statement must be true and correct not only concerning its own subject but concerning a different and incompatible subject as well. Similarly, it is absurd to ridicule or doubt the integrity of the words of Christ concerning "this generation" for being correct only in relation to that with which they are concerned. It is not Christ or His words that are mistaken, but we ourselves if we would expect His words within a certain sphere also to be true within a different and incompatible sphere, one which does not come under the purview of His words.

RICHES TO THE WORLD THROUGH ISRAEL'S OFFENSE

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The question remains: Since God could have turned the hearts of those first-century Israelites to repent and accept the Lord Jesus as their Messiah, why did He not do so? The answer is that it was in His purpose for them to be stubborn and disbelieving – not according to His revealed will, but according to His hidden intention:

Yet after His having done so many signs in front of them, they believed not in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet which he said, may be being fulfilled, "Lord, who believes our tidings? And the arm of the Lord, to whom was it revealed?" Therefore they could not believe, seeing that Isaiah says again that He has blinded their eyes and callouses their heart, lest they may be perceiving with their eyes, and should be apprehending with their heart and may be turning about and I shall be healing them. These things Isaiah said, seeing that he perceived His glory, and speaks concerning Him (John 12:37-41).

God does all to the end of salvation, and with a view toward mercy. God is the Savior of all mankind, especially of believers (I Timothy 4:10). God locks up all together in stubbornness, that He should be merciful to all. O the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How inscrutable are His judgments and untraceable His ways! (Romans 11: 32-33).

On behalf of the conciliation of the world, God has temporarily "cast away" Israel (Romans 11:15). Even so, He has not "thrust" them away (Romans 11:1); He has not "thrown them out," never to be recovered. Callousness, in part has come on Israel, only until the complement of that which God is achieving through the nations has been realized (Romans 11:25). Then, according as it is written,

Arriving out of Zion shall be the Rescuer. He will be turning away irreverence from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them whenever I should be eliminating their sins (Romans

11:26-27; *cf.* Isaiah 59:20-21; Psalms 14:7; Jeremiah 31:34).

It was needful that Israel should "trip" – not that they should "fall," but that in their offense "salvation to the nations" might become a reality. Yet the nations' own salvation itself, in turn, is to provoke Israel to "jealousy," that they too might be saved (Romans 11:11; cf. 11:25-27). Israel remains "beloved because of the fathers" (Romans 11:28).

"[Israel's] offense is the world's riches" (Romans 11:12). That men, through unbelief, should be ignorant of their riches does not remove these riches from their possession. A man who is ignorant of his wealth is a wealthy man, even if an ignorant wealthy man. One who is ignorant of his possessions, though he fails to enjoy them, does not forfeit their ownership. Accordingly, through the blood of Christ even now, the world possesses vast spiritual riches.

That which constitutes the world's riches is declared in the word of the conciliation,

How that God was in Christ conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them (II Corinthians 5:19).

Though men continue to offend, through the Lamb of God, God nonetheless has taken away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Through Christ, God has united the world to Himself and is no longer reckoning their offenses to them. Though God will judge all according to each one's need and according to His Own purpose, nevertheless the judgment, ultimately speaking, will be that of those whose sins have been taken away and whose offenses are not being reckoned.

THE POWER OF THE CONCILIATION

Whatever loss is incurred to man through *eonian* judging is needful on behalf of God's Own purpose. It will not continue beyond the eons. At the consummation death will be abolished and all will be subjected, that God may be All in all (I Corinthians 15:28). This is the ultimate fruit of the conciliation.

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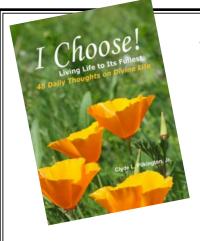
While Israel is not God's people at present, until the times of the restoration of all which God speaks through the mouth of His holy prophets concerning them (Acts 3:21), when they will then become sons of the living God (Romans 9:26), God has granted to the apostle Paul this grace:

To bring the evangel of the **untraceable** riches of Christ to the nations (Ephesians 3:8).

These "untraceable" riches of Christ, revealed only through Paul, are those revelations concerning the Christ which Israel's prophets did not seek out and could not search out, the scope of their ministry being confined to the grace which God had appointed for Israel (cf. I Peter 1:10). In contrast to this, it is the privilege of Paul and those who imitate him,

To enlighten all as to what is the administration of the secret which has been concealed from the eons in God, Who creates all, that now may be made known to the sovereignties and authorities among the celestials the multifarious wisdom of God, in accord with the purpose of the eons, which He makes in Christ *Jesus our Lord* (Ephesians 3:9-11).

These glorious Pauline revelations, even as God's purpose concerning that company of believers (cf. Ephesians 1:22-23) who would be blessed according to Paul's evangel, could not be revealed at the time of Christ's personal ministry to Israel. It was necessary, for the sake of the conciliation of the world, that Israel not encounter that for which she was seeking (cf. Romans 10:3; 11:7). Hence the revealed, yet provisional, will of God concerning first-century A.D. Israel was superseded by the actual divine intention concerning that same people, according to God's Own design and purpose. Let us rejoice in the marvelous wisdom and ways of our God. Seeing that out of Him and through Him and for Him is all, we would praise Him accordingly, saying, to Him be the glory for the eons! Amen! (Romans 11:36).



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