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Reading the time on the face of God's clock

Part 5: The utter rejection of God!

"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time," Revelation 12:9-12.

As we come to the fifth and final study in this series, I will remind you of the introduction we have been using at the beginning of each of our studies.

As we may look abroad and see the evidences of the passage of the weeks and months of the year in the realm of nature, in the evidence of the physical decline of the human body, not to mention the movement of the hands on our clocks and watches, even so may we look around and note the indications of the passage of time in the lifespan of this world as it is revealed to us in the Bible.

Christian, the Bible is a map by which we find our way to heaven but more than that, it also marks the present position of mankind on the way to the end of the purpose God has for this earth!

Satellite Navigation is not new! Just as I can insert a destination into my Sat Nav and then watch my progress upon its screen as I journey toward my destination, even so I can observe exactly the present position of humanity on its journey toward eternity!

In keeping with my title, the Bible will tell us of the passage of time and the approach of the final hour for this world.

There are given to us in the Bible certain features that will mark the end of this age. These features may be seen in times past, but never to the degree of union and fusion as they will be seen in the last days!

I want to look at some of these features and observe their pre-eminence in the affairs of today, from the nations afar off to our own doorsteps. I think that as we look at these increasingly predominant elements of life today we will see that one is linked to another. There is a successive springing forth and developing out of each other. One wickedness gives birth to another of great depravity!

Man has ever been pressing toward the utter rejection of God but he has been restricted in his efforts at denial.

Genesis 11:1-9, is an illustration of this fact. Here man is recorded as defying God's purpose, and that but a short time after the destruction of defiant and rebellious humanity in the days of Noah. Then, as here in this account, God hindered the attempt of ungodly men to initiate their own regime in preference to God and His order.

At the 'Tower of Babel' mankind was resolved on rejecting God's command to repopulate the earth. "Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee. Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth," Genesis 8:16-17.

Men decided to act in defiance of this command. "And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east,



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that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth," Genesis 11:2-4.

God's response to this spirit of rebellion was to confound their language so that it was impossible for the various language groups to communicate with each other and so carry out their scheme of rebellion! "And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city," Genesis 11:6-8.

I have always thought it interesting that it says: ". . . and they left off to build the city." That is a phrase similar to one that is used worldwide still today of what it is men on a building site do at the end of the working week. They leave off building until the Monday of the next working week! They leave on Friday evening but intend returning on Monday.

I think that there is that suggestion in the actions of the men of Babel. They left but intended to return to their scheme whenever they found it possible!

And return they did as the world's subsequent and final history shows.

Thus God restrained and restricted mankind back in those distant days, some 2000 years after Creation. This He did chiefly because God has His purpose in grace and mercy to accomplish amongst the nations and therefore has held back wickedness until that purpose is finished. Paul the apostle states in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8. "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming."

Please note carefully the words: "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed." The phrase 'mystery of iniquity' may be translated 'the secretive workings of lawlessness'. It refers to the scheming of the devil amongst the nations to advance and promote his kingdom and dominion and the attempted overthrow of God's purpose.

However, Paul says that 'And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed.' Again, that statement may be understood as saying, 'ye know that what restrains the workings of iniquity will continue to hold and restrain it (letteth) until that restraint is removed and then the Antichrist will be revealed in his time.'

So then, there is a time in the purpose of God when He will release the restraints upon the workings of iniquity amongst the nations and the full flood of rebellion will break forth.

This will happen, not because God has lost control but rather because His time to bring the whole matter of man and devil's rebellion to a head has arrived!

Just as God was aware of man's rebellion in the days of Noah and exercised sovereign control over it, bringing in the flood of judgment and just as the Lord stymied the devil's schemings at the cross and turned them to the advancement of His purpose and His glory, so it will be again.



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Peter said on the Day of Pentecost, when he rehearsed this truth: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it," Acts 2:22-24.

What appeared to men, including the band of disciples, saw as a defeat and an overthrowing of the One they believed was the Messiah, turned out to be the very reverse of their perceptions and was in truth God defeating His enemies and gloriously advancing His purpose in love and mercy!

I say again, it is God, not man, Who is determining the 'times and the seasons'!

The restriction we have seen that God is exercising upon rebellion will be lifted in judgment by God one day. Peter refers to this. "This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation," 2 Peter 3:1-4.

However, the text at the beginning of this article refers to that loosing of the powers of wickedness even more explicitly.

I want you to notice some things stated in those verses in Revelation 12.

1. THIS CASTING OUT OF SATAN INTO THE EARTH WILL TAKE PLACE VERY CLOSE TO THE RETURN OF CHRIST.

The event is spoken of as a herald of Christ's coming in power. "And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night." The devil is loosed upon the earth to work his evil for a short time. He will exercise great wrath "because he knoweth that he hath but a short time," verse 12.

The devil has never been able to exercise his 'wrath' with such freedom until this time, despite desiring to do so. You recall I am sure the words of the Lord to the devil regarding just what he would be permitted to do on Job. "And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD. . . . And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life," Job 1:12, 2:6.

But in that time referred to in Revelation 12, there will be a lifting of restraint, not completely I am sure, but to a degree never known before!

Please note also the utterly blind folly of the devil. ". . . he knoweth that he hath but a short time." Yet this knowledge does not cause him to stop and consider the utter futility of his rebellion. No! It drives him on to great fury.

Is it not sad that it appears the devil knows of the approach of the return of Christ while many believers are careless and deceived regarding that fact! Matthew 25 begins with the Saviour showing us the sleeping church and that on the eve of the Saviour's return. That is a sleep induced by the devil who, knowing the time is near, nevertheless seeks to somehow frustrate the purpose of God by prevailing upon Christians to be careless and indifferent to the 'times' which they are living through!

Paul sought to combat this spirit of sleepiness in his day and his words have been preserved by the Holy Spirit for 'our learning'!



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"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him," 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.

Christian, let us fight the spirit of sleep and be awake and alive to what is happening before our eyes. "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh," James 5:8.

II. THE KINSHIP BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE UNBELIEVER IS SEEN IN THIS IGNORING OF TRUTH!

Sinful man is no different from the devil! He also seeks to shut his ears to the gospel truth.

"The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely," Psalm 58:3-5.

"But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts," Zechariah 7:11-12.

"Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep," Acts 7:52-60.

The Saviour testified of man's unwillingness to heed His words.

"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 they have 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 13:13-17.

To what lengths men will go to block out the truth! Are they not as blinded and deceived as the devil, and little wonder since he is the author of their blindness?

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the



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minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them," 2 Corinthians 4:3-4.

How loudly we must seek to sound out God's message of mercy!

"The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" Isaiah 40:6-9

III. HOW GLORIOUS IT IS THAT NEITHER THE FOOLISH REJECTION OF GOD'S WORD BY MEN NOR THE UNRELENTING OPPOSITION OF THE DEVIL TO GOD'S TRUTH CAN HINDER OR HALT OR DELAY FOR ONE SECOND THE FULFILLING OF GOD'S PURPOSE FOR HIS CREATION.

"The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders. This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" Isaiah 14:24-27.

"Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?" Isaiah 43:13.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8:28-31.

There is nothing more sure than that the eternal purpose of God shall be accomplished and that as He planned it in eternity! This is the comfort and hope of the people of God. No matter how dark the night may become, "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah," Psalm 50:3-6.

Confidence in the immutability of our God and His purpose in grace has ever supported the saints throughout the ages and will continue to do so until the end of time!

The Shorter Catechism, in answer to Question 4, 'What is God?' gives the response: "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." What a glorious statement that is! The Lord is the "Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come," Revelation 4:8.

Because of this truth, Dear Christian, no matter how the tides of men's opinions may ebb and flow; no matter how the theories and sentiments of the world may proclaim the end of God and His gospel, He will prevail.

Men, the chief of men, shall be forced to cry out one day to "the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Revelation 6:16-17.



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None can subvert or resist the outworking of God's eternal decree. "It shall come to pass!"

O Christian rejoice! Your eternal destiny is secure "for this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto (or over and beyond) death," Psalm 48:14.

Ivan Foster.

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