

THE PRESENT JUDGMENT

„Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out.”—JOHN 12:31

The meaning of this text and a class of parallel texts, has been, like much other Scripture, comparatively obscure until of late. As the seals one after another have been opened, each has cast light upon the others.

We think it is fair to infer that the prophets understood less about what they were writing than the apostles did, because they were inspired more to write than to understand, and had to study their own prophecies after they had written them, in order to understand them, and they were inspired to write them more specially for the benefit of those who live *now*, than for their own benefit. (1 Peter 1:10,11,12.) [This the regular readers of the WATCH TOWER *know*, but we repeat it for the possible benefit of those who are not regular readers.] We use the word „*now*” in the preceding sentence to cover a period of time embracing the entire Gospel age.

The Apostle Peter uses the word *us*, in the passages referred to, in a similar sense to embrace the Christian *body* living not only at that time, but at any time during the *Gospel age*.

We conclude, also, that as the prophets understood less of their own writings than the apostles did of those same writings, so the apostles understood less of what they heard Christ say *prophetically* than the *members* of Christ who read them now at the close of the age. This we say of the present living phase of the body and *not of any individual*.

Not that the members living now are more inspired, nor more consecrated, nor anything of that kind, but they have passed more mile-posts along the way, have seen the fulfillment of much that was foretold by Christ and the apostles, as one after another of their sayings have been *verified* from that day to this. We (all consecrated Christians, members of the body of Christ) have had the benefit of most of the things which the revelator saw in vision.

We have seen most of the things spoken of by our Lord in Matt. 24 th chapter fulfilled. We have seen those magnificent buildings thrown down, and „not one stone left upon another.”

We have seen the „falling away” and the man of sin revealed, the son of perdition spoken of by

Paul (2 Thes. 2:3) in his waxing and waning power. We have seen Israel scattered among all nations without favor, under the withering, blighting curse of God, a distinct *people* but not a *nation*. We have seen „Jerusalem trodden down of the Gentiles,” and remember that the condition was to continue „until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). We have seen the beginning of their gathering „out of all countries” to their own land. We have seen the gospel „preached in all the world for a *witness* unto all nations.” We have seen the parallels of the ages, and looked with wondering gratitude into the plan of God, and now recognize the dawning of the day of the Lord, the *presence* of the Master.

Having been permitted to see these things (some of which probably Paul saw but was not permitted to utter *plainly* then, as it was not then due to the world, neither is yet, our principal work being to „*build* each other up”) we are enabled by the light thrown upon them, to see other things, among which is the statement of our Lord quoted at the beginning of this article.

It will be noticed by the thoughtful reader, that this statement is not in harmony with the popular theology, which places the judgment of all men in the future. For that reason it is a troublesome text to all those who would have all God’s purposes regarding the probation of mankind accomplished in this world, age or dispensation.

What can such say to a statement like this, „*Now* is the judgment of this world,” or, as most authorities have it, „*Now* is a judgment of this world”? But what could our Lord mean by saying that? What kind of judgment is it, who are judged now, and what is meant by the term „*now*”? How strange and yet how comforting it is, to find many of these passages which have so long been so troublesome, now as the temple approaches completion, are the very stones needed to complete the work.

To appreciate the sentence, let us take a look back and see what had been done for the world, in the way of redemption, at the time these words were spoken. We find upon examination that absolutely nothing had been *done* except to *promise*. That was enough, to be sure, to base a hope upon, for *God’s* promises are „*yea* and *amen*,” but *actually* there had not been anything done to *redeem* the *race* from death, and those who were the chosen people of God, chosen *for a purpose*, supposed

::R0518 : page 6::

that they were the only people that the Lord cared anything about. The Lord had said so much to them about being his chosen people that they got the idea that he could never choose any other people.

He has said, „Ye are the children of the Lord your God;” „Thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself above all the nations that are upon the earth” (Deut. 14:1,2), and very many times he expressed himself in a similar manner; but if they had known that they were not chosen so much for their own sakes as for God’s „holy name sake” (Ezek. 36:22), which means for the sake of *love to all men*, they would not have arrogated so much to themselves. But with all their perverseness they were a very fit instrument for the purpose for which they were chosen, else they would not have been chosen by infinite wisdom, of course.

„Unto them was committed the oracles of God,” and they kept them very well, the same as a son would keep the „last will and testament” of his father written in a language which he did not understand, but which he supposed conveyed the *whole* estate to *himself*.

At the time the words were spoken, to which our attention is now directed, they had accomplished about all that was required of them at *that time*, and the further purposes of God were of such a nature that they were unfit instruments to be used for the accomplishment of them, and as God would not use instruments unadapted to his purpose, of course they had to be set aside. But why were they unfit? Because they had purposes of their own to accomplish which were not in harmony with the *further* purposes of him who had chosen them to be his people. They had agreed to be his obedient people, and that he should be their God (Josh. 24:22), but they had broken their agreement, they had made another choice, they had elected in their hearts that they would not follow the lead of any except he be a mighty one *of earth*, a chief among men, one who would lift them up to a condition of grandeur upon the *earthly* plane; it was earthly glory and honor that they wanted, and as the „*prince of life*” considered all such things of secondary importance, and made humility and self-denial requirements of the *first* importance, they chose to be under the leadership of the „*prince of this world*,” who had offered to bestow the kingdoms of this world upon Christ if he would fall down and worship him.

True, the prince of this world was a *usurper*, but he was nevertheless *ruling* this world, and *for the time being* had control. He had usurped the rulership of the world for four thousand years, a long reign, and it would seem claimed it by *possession*, but the lawful „*heir*” had come, and was *preparing* to take it, but until he actually *did* take it, he would not be its ruler or prince, and he never so styled himself, nor is he so called by the Apostles, but on the contrary he expressly says to Pilate, „My kingdom *is not* of this world” (*Kosmo*, arrangement); it was to be quite a different *arrangement*. So, if his kingdom was not of this world, he could not be the „*prince of this world*,” then his language could have no reference to himself as some suppose, thinking perhaps that there is ground for that opinion in Matt. 21:33-45; but though that parable had regard to his lawful *heirship*, there is no intimation that he was *the* prince or *ruler*, and, as we have said, his words to

Pilate are in direct contradiction to any such thought.

Then we must seek for the meaning of these words somewhere else. We said there had nothing been done, *actually* toward redeeming the race. There had been sin-offerings, so-called, and various kinds of sacrifices, but none of them could redeem the race from death, none could make atonement for sin; they were all „shadows of good things to come.“ All that the house of Israel had and did was typical, and was to be superseded by others. Their sacrifices pointed to „*better* sacrifices,“ their promises to „*better* promises,“ their covenant to a „*better* covenant,“ their hope to a „*better* hope,“ and their testament to a *better* testament.“ (Heb. 7:19-22; 8:6; 9:23.) But when would these *better* things be? When the prince of this world should be cast out. But Jesus said „*now* shall the prince of this world be cast out,“ and we do not see things very much better yet.

Then we had better examine that little word „*now*,“ and perhaps now is as good a time for it as any. Let us first look at some passages of Scripture where the word is used in a similar sense, which will perhaps give us a clue to it, making the sense more readily recognizable.

Paul says (1 Cor. 13:12), „*Now* we see through a glass darkly.“ „*Now* I know in part.“ That was true then and is still true, though, as it is a little lighter, this much farther along we can see *better*. Yet we still see through the *same glass* somewhat darkly; it is still „*Now*.“ In Matt. 3:10 we read: „*Now* also the axe is laid [applied] unto the root of the tree,“ etc. The *same* axe of Gospel requirement, reckoning the *intention* for the act (see Matt. 5:22-28), still lies at the root of the trees. This is the real circumcision, and cuts off the „old man,“ whose place is supplied by the new creature. The *old* requirement (or axe) lopped off some of the branches; but „*now*,“ throughout the Gospel age, it is applied at the *root*. There must be an utter destruction of the flesh; there must be a „*new lump*.“ The past experience with the old has shown to the world that there must be a „*new man*,“ a new *house*, and that house is now being built up „a spiritual house.“

That „*now*“ is not *yet* quite complete. In Rom. 3:20,21, we read: „By the law is the knowledge of sin; but „*now*“ the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.“ The same is still true with regard to the *same things*; it is still the same „*now*.“

Again, in Rom. 8:22, we read: „For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until *now*, and not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruit of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body“ (the church, which is his body), not *bodies*. We are still groaning, we are still waiting, the same „*now*“ is not expired.

We understand that our Lord uses the word *now* in the same sense that it is used in these

passages; that is, it applies to the whole time from Christ's first to his second coming *at least*, and covers the Gospel age up to the time that Christ with his saints takes the kingdom.

As though he had said, the time to *begin* the work of salvation *has come*. There is *now* no further use for „bleeding birds, and bleeding beasts,” the reality which these typified is *now* to take place, the „better sacrifices” now begin to be offered as the head laid next to the body is placed upon the altar. (Lev. 1:12,13.) „*Now*” the real work commences, and in it is included a judgment of this world, and the overthrow, casting out of its prince.

„The royal majesty of the *heavens* has approached,” „The kingdom of heaven is *at hand*,” „The hour is *at hand*,” „*My time is at hand*.”

The *result* of that which is *now* beginning, is that the ruler of this world shall be cast out, and it will be at the desire of *his own subjects*. And even though he may seem to triumph because I am „lifted up from the earth,” yet by that very means I will draw all unto me. „*Now* is the judgment (*krisis*—accusation, condemnation) of this world; and „judgment (*krima*, which includes *law*) must *begin* at the *house of God*.” What do we see? The old house of God, the house of Israel, was condemned and „left desolate”; and even *that* was a type, for that which has happened to the second house is the same, and it is from the *remnant* of *both* houses that the new house is formed. Compare Isa. 11:11; Rom. 9:27; 11:5; Eph. 2:15. See, also, Isa. 8:14. „The *remnant* [of both houses:: of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth.” (Zeph. 3:13.)

This remnant of „both houses of Israel” (how significant is the meaning of *Israel*: RULING WITH GOD; see Young's Con.) judge *themselves*; and „when we are [thus] judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” (1 Cor. 11:31,32.) He who is among this class „cometh not into [future] judgment, but has passed [legally] out of death into life.” (John 5:24, R.V.) „There is therefore *now* no condemnation [consequently no future judgment:: to them *that are in Christ Jesus*. For the *law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus* made me free from the law of sin and death.” (Rom. 8:1,2, R.V.)

While thus judging themselves they judge (condemn) the world the same as Noah did (Heb. 11:7), and their „judgment is just” because they seek not their own will, but the will of their Heavenly Father.

Another sense in which we should consider the words, „*Now* is the, or a judgment of this world,” though a secondary sense, is yet an important one, and though it is not a legal judgment, because rendered by those who are themselves legally dead (under sentence), yet it is a *fact* that such a

judgment is being passed—*i.e.*, this world *is now* passing judgment upon its rulership and *condemning* it, and the *result* will be in harmony with the judgment of the other class. The world (by acclamation) will cast out the *prince* of this world, and the universal desire will be for a different ruler. There are *yet* but a few comparatively who desire a righteous ruler, but the oppression of the present power will become so great that the universal desire will be for a king to rule in righteousness. *Then* the „*Desire of all nations* shall come,” and the glory of this latter house (rulership) shall be greater than the former.” (Hag. 2:7-9.) Who, especially among those who are watching, cannot see the discontent prevailing with regard to the rulership of this world? Communism, Nihilism, and all that element, is the result of this judgment of the world, who suppose that *they* can bring this prince to terms. But, ah! they can neither

::R0519 : page 7::

bring him to terms nor cast him out, because they operate upon the same principles that he does. They can express their judgment and dissatisfaction, but that is all they can do; they cannot even bind him. But the „Prince of *life*” is getting things ready, and when all is complete Satan will fall from his present position as ruler „like lightning.” This Jesus saw in vision (Luke 10:18). But oh, the terrible events connected with his overthrow! What tongue or pen can portray them?

Probably no more vivid description could be given than is given in the Book of Zephaniah. You should read it all carefully; and let those who are not familiar with these things, and yet desire to have truth and righteousness prevail in the earth, dwell upon the third verse of the second chapter; and let all those who have sacrificed with Christ rejoice in what is said in the ***third chapter, from the 16th to the 20th***verses, inclusive.

There are some (they are „a solemn assembly”) who see many of these things, but they follow afar off, for „the reproach is a burden” to them; but when the tribulation gets heavy enough they will be separated and gathered; this is reason for our comfort concerning them (18th verse).

Another argument which we would present against the thought that the words „prince of this world” might refer to Christ himself and „the judgment of this world” refer to his trial before the Sanhedrim and Pilate, is this: Paul says (1 Cor. 2:7,8): „The hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory, *none* of the princes of this world knew, for *had* they known it, *they* would not have crucified the *Lord* of glory.”

This would preclude his being either *the*, or a prince of *this* world. Jesus made the announcement, „The kingdom of *heaven* is at hand,” and authorized his disciples to proclaim the same, but soon after said to Pilate, „My kingdom is not of this world.”

This is a dark and disorderly arrangement; it has been a night of sin all through the reign, but „the night is far spent, the day *is at hand*,”—the kingdom of *heaven is at hand*.”

These terms are all of similar import and were true then; indeed, that work of Jesus and his disciples was the *beginning of the end*, it was the first part of the period embraced in the word „*now*,” and we are in the last part of the same period.

Some persons who are not Christians, and some who are, now think that because Christ said, and the disciples proclaimed, the kingdom of heaven *at hand*, the disciples thought it was to be set up during their life-time. There might be such a *seeming* to one not familiar with the Scriptures bearing upon this point, but to the careful Bible student, who compares scripture with scripture, there would be no trouble, for Paul says: (2 Thes. 2:1,2) „Now we *beseech* you, brethren, touching the *coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and our gathering together unto him, to the end ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, *nor yet be troubled*, either by *spirit* or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is *just at hand* („has set in”; Rotherham’s trans.) Let *no man* beguile you in anywise, for it *will not be*, except the falling away come *first*, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.” (R.V.)

Peter understood what our true guide about this was, when he said, „We would do well to take heed to the more sure word of prophecy, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, *until* the day *dawn*” (2 Peter 1:19). So we see the day had *not dawned* then, although it was at hand, but not „*just at hand*,” that is, not as near as the *dawning*. The night is far spent when we have past midnight, but the dawning is the beginning of day.

We understand that we are in the last part of the period embraced in the word „*now*,” in the text. The „more sure word of prophecy” assures us that this period is nearly filled up. We understand that the servants of God are being „sealed in their foreheads”; the last thing before the „four angels” „hurt the earth and the sea” (Rev. 7:2,3); that we are just about entering the time of trouble, of which the destruction of Jerusalem was *but a type*.

Many are being „purified and made white and tried.” A judgment *is in progress now*, and there is still another to come, and the associate judges for that tribunal are being prepared (1 Cor. 6:2,3); and when the prince of this world is cast out, they will enter upon their further work of judging the world. One thought more. *How much* this class need to *study* and become *familiar* with „the books,” according to which the judgment both *now* and then is to be given (Rev. 20:12). Yea, and how much we need to have the testimony of Jesus, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

J. C. SUNDERLIN.

=====

— August, 1883 —