

The Prophecy of the Destruction of Jerusalem

AN ATTEMPT TO ILLUSTRATE
Various Important Passages in the Epistles. &c.

OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, FROM

*Our Lord's Prophecies of the Destruction of Jerusalem,
And from some Prophecies of the*

OLD TESTAMENT TO WHICH IS ADDED,

AN APPENDIX CONTAINING REMARKS UPON DR. MACKNIGHT'S

Commentary and Notes on the two Epistles to the Thessalonians

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*The Lord is at hand. -- Phil. iv, 5.
He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Heb. x, 37.*

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PREFACE TO THE READER

There is nothing more delightful to an honest mind than truth; nor more important than religious truth. In the holy Scriptures, a complete system of the latter is revealed. But it has unfortunately happened, that through prejudice and indolence, from whence has arisen implicit faith in the opinions of others, and sometimes from a misguided piety, truth has been concealed from the view of mankind, and Christ and his Apostles have been made to speak a language derogatory both to reason and religion, and directly contrary to fact and experience.

But this is an age of enquiry, and Christianity is not of a nature to shrink from the severest scrutiny. It invites examination; and with the more freedom it is treated, the more conspicuously will it display its genuine beauties, and discover its sacred origin.

Whether the enquiry contained in the following pages, will contribute to so valuable a purpose, must be left to the judicious reader to determine. It was undertaken to satisfy the author's own mind, and was submitted, in another form, to the perusal of a worthy friend who condescended to ask his opinion upon the subject. As he proceeded, evidence increased, till at length he conceived it his duty to communicate the result to the public; hoping that at least it might excite others, better qualified, to do it justice.

With respect to the manner in which he has treated the subject-he has avoided every thing that appeared to him unintelligible, even to the lowest class of men; from a conviction that all are highly concerned in it, if they wish to understand the New Testament.

He has only to add, that when he has had occasion to think differently from the writers whom he has quoted, he hopes he has neither treated them with disrespect on the one hand, nor deserted the cause of truth on the other.

AN ATTEMPT, &c

It cannot escape the observation of any one, in the least conversant with the writings of the Evangelists, that the prophecies, relating to the destruction of Jerusalem, form a very considerable and important part of our blessed Lord's discourses. Many of his parables have an evident relation to that melancholy event, and were probably delivered at an early period of his ministry, when it would have been inconsistent with the great ends of it to have been more explicit.

In the following places, our Lord uses the parabolic method in speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem. Luke xiii. 6- 29. Matt. xxii. 1-7. Luke xiv. 17-24. Matt. xxi. 33-46. Mark xii. 1-12. Luke xx. 9-19. Luke xix. 11-27.

Towards the close of his life, he threw aside the parabolic method, and assumed a plainer language upon the subject, both to his own immediate followers, and to the multitude. Bishop Newcome, in his excellent observations on our Lord's conduct as a divine instructor, is of opinion, that the large discourse, which we have recorded in the 24th of Matthew, and the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke, was delivered but four days before his crucifixion, when Jesus took his final leave of the temple. And it seems to contain the substance of all that is to be met with upon this subject, in the Gospel History.

In the fulfilment of these predictions, as recorded by Josephus, an historian of undoubted credit, who was not only an eye-witness of the transactions of the Jewish war, but bore a considerable share in it, and was an enemy to the christian name; an argument of no small weight arises in favour of the divinity of our Lord's character and mission; for to allude to what Nicodemus said in the case of miracles, No man could foretel events of such magnitude and importance, and with the precision which he did, unless God was with him. A wise man, says the great writer above-mentioned, may foresee some events, relating to an individual or a nation, which depend on a formed character and a connected train of circumstances; but reason and experience shew, that there are likewise events of so contingent and improbable a nature, that the foresight of them exceeds the greatest human sagacity.

Of this nature were the predictions of our Saviour concerning the destruction of Jerusalem; upon the completion of which, the very credit and fate of Christianity depended; not in some distant and uncertain period, but in that very generation in which they were delivered. Verily, says Christ, this generation shall not pass away, before all these things be fulfilled. This is not the language of an impostor, but of one who knew that his predictions would be most exactly fulfilled.

Christ foretold, says Dr. Jortin, the total destruction of the city and temple; the coming of false Christs and false prophets; famines, pestilences, earthquakes, fearful sights and great signs from heaven; the persecution of the apostles, the apostacy of some Christians; the preservation of the faith; the spreading of the gospel through the Roman world; the Roman standards defiling the holy place; the city encompassed with armies, walls and trenches; the retiring of the Christians to the mountains; the greatest tribulation that ever was known; the time when these things should happen; the comparative happiness of the barren woman; wars and rumours of wars, nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom; the dispersion of the captive Jews through all nations; the continuation of the desolation; a shortening the days of vengeance for the sake of the elect: all which came to pass. Jortin's Remarks on E. Hist. vol. i.

If the reader is desirous to see in what manner these signs were fulfilled, he may consult Bishop Newton on the Prophecies and the present Bishop of Waterford's excellent observations on our Lord's conduct as a divine instructor.

The accomplishment of our Lord's prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem, may likewise be considered as a standing monument to all future ages, of the truth of the observation of the wise man; that righteousness exalteth a nation, but that sin is eventually, the ruin of any people.

The Jewish nation were favoured with many very extraordinary privileges, both of a civil and religious nature, which, if properly improved, would have distinguished them in an eminent degree above all their surrounding neighbours for national happiness. The whole history of that people, affords ample evidence that they enjoyed prosperity, or suffered affliction, proportioned to their virtuous or vicious conduct. But in our Saviour's time they were remarkable for their profligacy and wickedness, and their punishment was equally distinguished for its severity. It was such as had no example in former ages, and would never again be repeated.

To give a particular account, says Josephus, as quoted by Dr. Jortin, of all their iniquities, would be endless. Thus much in general, it may suffice to say, that there never was a city which suffered such miseries, nor a race of men, from the beginning of the world, who so abounded in wickedness. I verily believe that if the Romans had delayed to destroy these wicked wretches, the city would either have been swallowed up by the earth, or overwhelmed by the waters, or struck with fire from heaven as another Sodom; for it introduced a far more impious generation than those who suffered such punishments.

This account is confirmed in a variety of instances by what we meet with in the gospels, but no where more eminently, than in the 8th chapter of St. John, verse the 9th, and their crucifying the Lord of Life. In the former case, they brought a woman to Christ, who had been taken in the very act of adultery, and demanded judgment against her for so flagrant a crime, when it appeared that they themselves were as guilty of a like breach of the marriagecontract. In the latter, they put a person to death, whose innocent and inoffensive life was proof against their utmost malice, and whose benevolent and astonishing miracles testified that he was far superior to any one that ever appeared, and had a divine commission from the Father to rescue them, not from the Roman yoke, as they fondly imagined, but from the more intolerable yoke of sin, and to set them free from the burden of the ceremonial law. This last was the most capital sin of their nation, and is constantly assigned as a principal cause of the destruction, that was coming upon them! Many other instances might be brought from prophane history of the fatal effects of vice on public and national communities: but the same causes, will always product the same effects. Wickedness and punishment, are so closely connected, in the plan of the divine government of the world, that they never were and never can be separated. It is virtue; it is religion alone, that can render nations either happy or durable.

The calamities undergone by the Jews, says the Bishop of Waterford, were unparallel'd in their history, and will remain so. The many and great evils arising from their own distractions and intestine madness, were peculiar to this time. And Josephus asserts in general that no other city underwent such sufferings. In particular he says, that the number of captives, throughout the whole war was 97 thousand and that one million one hundred thousand perished in the course of the siege: To these must be added 237,490 of whom express mention is due by this historian, as being destroyed in other places; besides innumerable others, not subject to calculation, who were swept away by fatigue, famine, disease and every kind of wretchedness and violence. Thus did the awakened vengeance of heaven require of that generation, the blood of all the prophets, which had been shed from the foundation of the world. Newcome's Observations, p. 246.

There is another important use to be made of the prophecies of our Lord, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, which I have chiefly in view in what is to follow, viz. That they serve as a key to many parts of the writings of the Apostles, which otherwise we shall not be able to explain, in a satisfactory manner.

For want of having given sufficient attention to these predictions and to the language of the antient prophets, much obscurity still remains, particularly in the epistles, which have, I think not unfrequently, been totally mistaken by commentators of deserved eminence and repute.

The passages I allude to, are those which speak of the coming of the Lord being at hand, drawing nigh, being ready to be revealed, and coming as a thief in the night, with other expressions of the like nature; which have commonly been understood to relate to the great and final judgment of the last day, or the consummation of all things.

Such language as this, applied to an event, the time of which was altogether unknown, and certainly some thousands of years distant, must appear very extraordinary in any writer; much more in the Apostles of our Lord, whose character for veracity and accuracy is deservedly esteemed.

It is now full a century, since the learned Dr. Hammond, in his Paraphrase of the New Testament, was so extremely dissatisfied with the application of this language to the day of judgment, as to speak of it in the following very strong terms. "If," says he, in this coming of the Lord, this day of vengeance belonged to the day of judgment (now after so many years not yet come) what a forbearance were this? What a delay of his coming? and consequently what an objection against the truth of the christian religion. As Mahomet having promised, after his death, he would presently return to life again, and having not performed his promise in a thousand years, is by us justly condemned as an impostor."

This reasoning appears to me so just and forcible, that no other satisfactory reply can, I think, possibly be made to it, than what that great man has furnished us with, namely, that neither Christ nor his Apostles, had any view in them, to the great day of judgment at the end of the world, but to the destruction of Jerusalem, and to that only. And accordingly he has uniformly applied those expressions to that event.

His opinion has not, however, been adopted by succeeding commentaors, tho' they seem to have been much embarrassed to determine the meaning of the Apostles, in these passages; sometimes applyng them to the destruction of Jerusalem; sometimes to the final account which all men are to give of their actions, and very often to both those events.

Dr. Taylor, the author of the much-esteemed Paraphrase of the Romans, not being able to reconcile any or these Interpretations with his ideas of the scripture account of those passages, has adopted one of his own, which, I believe has been well received: It is, that the day of the Lord, the day approaching, &c. mean the time of a person's death; which he truly says, ends the Christian's course of preparation, duty, sufferings, watchings and patience. But this account is by no means satisfactory to me, and I am well persuaded, was not the Apostles meaning. Nor can I agree with him when he says, that our blessed Lord knew very well that he should not come, while that generation, to whom he preached, was alive, and that all his Apostles knew this, as well as he; for this is expressly contrary to our Lord's own assertion, in many parts of the gospels, that the Son of Man would come before that generation was wholly passed away. And that the Apostles themselves understood that he would come before that age was completed in a sense different from that of Dr. Taylor, is apparent from the declaration of the apostle Paul, that the Christians were not in darkness, that that day should

over-take them unawares, as were the unbelieving Jews; For I suppose no one will think that they had been favoured with a revelation of the time of their death. But this passage will be more fully considered hereafter. In short this hypothesis appears to have been the offspring of necessity, and not quite consistent with that knowledge and penetration, for which he has been distinguished. But we are all liable to mistakes.

I am fully sensible I shall be liable to the heavy charge of presumption, pretend to see farther than the many great and learned men who have gone before me; many of whom have spent their whole lives in the ardent pursuit of scripture knowledge. But the name of Hammond, whose great learning and sound judgment in general is acknowledged, must be my refuge from the imputation of such arrogance. If I have been able to add any thing to what he has advanced upon the subject, it should be remembered that I have his excellent labours, and those of the respectable commentators who differ from him, to assist my enquiries: and that it sometimes happens, that even the opposers of any opinion, may contribute, what may tend to establish the doctrine against which they are engaged.

The subject, it will be allowed on all hands, is of importance; and an attempt to remove difficulties, and to ascertain the genuine meaning of the Apostles, on this subject, if conducted with becoming temper and moderation, will, it is hoped, be received with that candour which is due to an upright intention! I am persuaded that the records of the New Testament are an invaluable treasury of knowledge of the most important kind; that they only want to be rightly understood, to be more generally admired and more seriously attended to, and that the most humble attempt to throw light upon them, is an employment, not unworthy of any, who are persuaded of the truth of Christianity.

I have already observed that the predictions of our Lord concerning the destruction of Jerusalem appear to me, to be the only true key to the understanding the passages we propose to examine, and that the sum of those predictions is continued in the 24th of Matt. and in the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke. It will therefore be necessary to examine those chapters, and to enquire into their true meaning, so far at least, as they are the subject of controversy; for some very eminent commentators and divines have strenuously maintained, that some of these predictions relate, not to the destruction of Jerusalem, but to the solemnities of that more awful day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed; and it must be owned, that at first sight, some expressions there made use of, appear to favour their opinion.

But an impartial attention to the language of Scripture, and to the connection in which they stand, will, I am persuaded, remove all doubt upon the subject, and convince us that the Evangelists have their eye upon the destruction of Jerusalem, and upon that only.

To prevent trouble to the reader, let it be observed, that I shall make the 24th of Matthew the ground of my enquiry; taking notice occasionally, of any difference of importance in the other Evangelists.

All the three historians agree, that these remarkable prophecies, took their rise from a survey of the temple and its magnificent buildings, which Jesus then told his disciples, should ere long be thrown down, and not one stone left upon another; that is, should be utterly demolished.

Not leaving one stone upon another, says the Bishop of Waterford, is a proverbial and hyperbolic way of speaking to denote very exemplary destruction. The temple was so magnificent, says Dr. Jortin, that it was esteemed for art and beauty one of the wonders of the world; whence it was natural to expect that the Romans according to their usual custom, amidst their conquests, would endeavour to preserve it safe and entire. And

Josephus tells us that Titus laboured with all his power to save it, but that his soldiers, as if moved by a divine impulse, would not hearken to his positive and repeated orders, but set fire to every part of it till it was entirely consumed and the soil on which it stood was ploughed up and not one stone left on another. See Jortin's Remarks on E. Hist. vol. i, p. 30.

Upon this assertion, his disciples very naturally asked him, when these things should be, and what would be the sign of his coming? St. Matt. alone has this addition, and of the end of the world; which Bishop Pearce has, I think, more justly translated, the end of the age, during which the Jewish state was to last, and which age, the disciples imagined, would be at an end, when the Christ came, and visited the Jewish nation.

This makes the question stated by the three Evangelists, to relate to one and the same event, viz. to the destruction of Jerusalem, and well agrees with the declaration upon which it was founded; which certainly had no relation to the final judgment of the great day. On the contrary, if our translation is admitted to be right, the disciples not only introduce a question, which has no connection whatever, with the occasion which gave rise to it, but which was directly opposite to their well-known sentiments. (**Note:** This last sentence should probably read, ". . . if our translation is **not** admitted to be right, etc."). So far were they from conceiving, that the end of the world was at hand, that they became the followers of Jesus, from a belief that he was the Messiah, and they afterwards gave various evidences even till after his resurrection, that they expected, he would erect a temporal kingdom in the world. Lord, said they, wilt thou not at this time restore the kingdom to Israel. - Acts i.7.

To corroborate this translation, I shall produce a passage or two from the epistles, which even the mere English reader, who is at all conversant with the New Testament, will see, must necessarily be restrained to the times when they were written. The first is in the 10th chapter of the 1st epistle to the Corinthians, verse 11th: All these things (the things which he had before been speaking of) happened to them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the **ends of the world** are come. Bishop Pearce's note on this passage is remarkable. "St. Paul," says he, "did not imagine, that the end of the world was at hand (as some commentators have, much to his prejudice, supposed): He only alluded to the Jewish distinction of time." The other passage is in Hebrews ix, 26. Now once in the end of the world hath he (Christ) appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; "which phrase of **the 'end of the world';**" says the writer just mentioned, "relates, not to the end of the world, strictly speaking, but to the preceding ages, being ended."

In answer to the latter part of the disciple's question, What shall be the sign of thy coming? Or as it is in Luke, what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass? Our Lord proceeds to point out to them the various signs by which they might assuredly know, that the ruin of the Jewish nation was approaching, and to give them some useful directions, for the regulation of their conduct under that heavy calamity. This he doth down to the end of the 31st verse. But it is not universally agreed, that the 29th and following verses relate to the destruction of Jerusalem, though the preceding verses evidently have that event in view.

Let us then proceed to consider those passages which have been thought to be ambiguous and of a doubtful interpretation. The first is Matt. xxiv, 29. Immediately after, or during the tribulation of those days, shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. -The parallel expressions in Mark are nearly the same; but those of St. Luke are less figurative, and of course will more easily admit of an application to the temporal calamities that were to come upon that generation. Luke xxi, 25. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves

thereof roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

Distress of nations, refers to such nations as inhabited the several countries called by the name of Judea in its widest extent, including Jews, Galileans, Samaritans, &c. Bishop Pearce on the place.

The difficulty of applying these expressions, to temporal calamities, will, I apprehend, be removed, by observing with Sir Isaac Newton, that in sacred prophecy, the darkening, smiting, or setting of the sun, moon and stars, is put for the ceasing of a kingdom, or for the desolation thereof, proportional to that darkness.-And it is an observation of Dr. Warburton, which I am persuaded will give great pleasure to the reader, as it has done to myself, "that this language was borrowed from the antient hieroglyphics: for as in hieroglyphic writing, the sun, moon, and stars were used to represent states and empires, kings, queens, and nobility; their eclipse and extinction, temporary disasters, or entire overthrow, &c. so in like manner, the holy prophets call kings and empires by the names of the heavenly luminaries; their misfortunes and overthrow are represented by eclipses and extinction; stars falling from the firmament are employed to denote the destruction of the nobility, &c. In a word, the prophetic stile seems to be a speaking hieroglyphic. These observations will not only assist us in the study of the Old and New Testaments, but likewise vindicate their character from the illiterate cavils of modern libertines, who have foolishly mistaken that for the peculiar workmanship of the prophets' heated imagination, which was the sober, established language of their times, and which God and his Son condescended to employ as the roperest conveyance of the high, mysterious ways of Providence in the revelation of themselves to mankind." Warburton's Divine Legation, vol. ii, book sect. 4.

A few passages from the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, evidently, and beyond all dispute, descriptive of temporal calamities, will sufficiently illustrate the observations of these great men, and put it out of doubt, that ur blessed Lord had the ruin of the Jewish nation in view, in these highly gurative expressions.

I shall here transcribe them at full length, though I shall again have occasion to refer to them, when I come to examine into the Apostle's meaning, n those passages of the several epistles, which have been proposed for examination. The reader will then be able to see, and judge for himself, to what ent to refer our Lord's language in the passage now before us. I add, that may be well worth the reader's trouble to read over the whole of those hapters of the prophets, that he may be fully satisfied, they have temporal alamities only in view.

The first which I shall produce is from the prophet Isaiah, xiii, 10, relating o the destruction of Babylon, as appears from the beginning of the chapter. The stars of heaven, and the consolations thereof, shall not give their light: he sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause er light to shine." Still more remarkable is what the same prophet says of he destruction that was to come upon Idumea, xxxiv, 4. "All the host of eaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scrole; nd all their host shall fall down, as a leaf falleth off from the vine, and as falling fig from the fig- tree." Ezekiel speaking of the ruin of Egypt, thus presses it, xxxii, 7,8, "When I shall put thee out, I will cover the heavens, nd make the stars thereof dark: I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the oon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark ver thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God." I shall menon only one more passage to this purpose, from the prophet Joel, ii, 30, s it is thought to relate to this very calamity, of the destruction of Jerusalem. I will shew wonders in the heavens, and in the earth, blood and fire and illars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into lood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come."

After reading these remarkable prophecies of temporal calamities, it is hardly possible to entertain a doubt, that our Lord had a particular view to them in the passage under consideration, and that he applied it to the destruction that would soon overtake the Jewish nation. The preceding context requires that it should be restricted to that event, and it is afterwards declared our Saviour, to be among the things that would come to pass in that generation. To the Jews this language was perfectly familiar and intelligible, though their mistaken notions, concerning the Messiah's kingdom, would not suffer them to apply it to themselves.

The Evangelist goes on, verses 30 and 31, in the same figurative style. "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn; and they shall see the sign of the Son of man, coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory; and he shall send his angels" or rather messengers, (as the Greek word properly signifies, and is so translated in Mark 1, 2, and Luke vii,14) with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

The words in the Greek, should be translated, "tribes of the land:" which, with great propriety, apply to the people of the Jews, who, it is well known, were divided into 12 tribes.

I beg leave to propose it as a query, Whether the expression here used, "from one end of heaven to the other," has not its signification precisely determined, by the signification of the words, heaven and powers of the heavens, in the 29th verse, which I have endeavoured to shew, mean the Jewish state and constitution, and whether the gathering the elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other, will not bear to be thus translated: -From the four quarters of the land; from one end of the Jewish dominions to the other?

It is clear from what has been already said, that the 29th verse relates to the destruction of Jerusalem; this appearance of the Son of Man, in the particular circumstances here described, must necessarily relate to the same event; for it is not only limited to the same period of time by the particle then, but is likewise, one of those things that was to come to pass in that generation. It is also to be observed, that it was a direct answer to the question of the disciples, "What shall be the sign of thy coming?" "The plain meaning of it is " says Bishop Newton, "that the destruction of Jerusalem will be such a remarkable instance of divine vengeance, such a signal manifestation of Christ's power and glory, that all the Jewish tribes shall mourn, and many will be led from thence to acknowledge Christ and the Christian religion. In the ancient prophets, God is frequently described, as coming in the clouds, upon any remarkable interposition and manifestation of his power; and the same description is here applied to Christ. The destruction of Jerusalem will be as ample a manifestation of Christ's power and glory, as if he was himself to come visibly in the clouds of heaven." I shall only add, that the sign of the Son of Man is evidently that of which the prophet Daniel speaks, chapter vii, 13, 14. "I saw in the night visions, and behold one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him, and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people and nations should serve him."

This is the sign which the Jews so frequently required from our Saviour; the expectation of which, was founded upon this very prophecy of Daniel. By the manner in which he alludes to the prediction on this occasion, he expressly contradicts their interpretation of it, as being inconsistent with Daniel's real meaning. They expected that the Son of Man would descend visibly from heaven to take upon him the government of the Jews, and to lead them out to victory over all their enemies. But he informs them, that they ought to expect something almost totally the reverse of this; the Son of Man, not descending visibly, but interposing powerfully and irresistibly, not for raising the Jews to universal empire, but for executing dreadful judgments and destruction on them. They could scarce fail to perceive, that coming in the clouds of heaven implied executing judgment; for the expression is used several times in their own scriptures, and always mean no more than this; they notwithstanding strained it to a literal sense; to the meaning of a visible appearance in Daniel's prediction; and though they understood it

to imply, the execution of judgment, yet it was only upon their enemies, not upon themselves. But Jesus informed them, that they themselves were the objects of that judgment. See Gerard's Disertations, sect. 4.

This kingdom was erected, and the foundation of that universal empire laid, which the prophet here says was to take place, when Christ told his disciples, "that all power was given to him in heaven and on earth, and a name given to him that was above every name." And it appears to me particularly worthy of observation, that the ruin of the Jewish nation is described, not only in the passage before us, but in many others, by the coming of the Son of Man, and by his coming in his kingdom. Remarkable to this purpose is Luke xvii, 20, and following verses. When he was asked when the kingdom of God should come, he entered upon the subject of the destruction of Jerusalem, and dwelt largely upon it; using many of the very same expressions to describe that event, which we find in the 24th of Matt. and the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke. On another occasion, Matt. x, 23, he told his disciples, when they should suffer persecution for their attachment to his cause, to flee from one city to another; "for verily," says he, "I say unto you; ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come," "i. e." says Bishop Pearce, "the gospel would not be particularly and fully preached to the cities of Israel, before the ruin of the Jewish state, and his taking vengeance on it" So again Matt. xvi, 28. "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here, who shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

While this work was in the press, a friend of mine put the sermons lately preached at Bapton's Lectures, by Ralph Churton, M. A. into my hands. I have been only able to run my eye over them in a very cursory manner; but he does not seem to interfere with my plan; except in applying Matt. xvi, 29, to his transfiguration; which I have referred to the time when the Jewish economy was to cease.

His argument, that the ancients are unanimously on his side, has as little weight with me, as with the best commentators in modern times; for as Mr. Dodwell long ago observed; they fell far short of the solidity of the moderns, who excel them, not only in philosophy and learning, but in the knowledge of antiquity, and even of their own languages. The principal argument used by Mr. Churton, is the close connection of Matthew xvi, 28, and the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke, with the account of the transfiguration. But, with due submission, I think the connection is evidently, not with the transfiguration, but with the preceding context. We need only go back to the 27th verse, to perceive this, "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, there will be some standing here, who shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." -The coming of the **Son of Man** in the former, and his coming in his kingdom, in the latter of these verses, clearly determines the connection between the two; for in the account of the transfiguration, which immediately follows, there is not a word said of his coming. Besides, to foretel that the disciples would not die till an event took place which was to happen but six days after, this, as Bishop Newcome observes, would be a prophecy unworthy of Christ.

I have only to add, that the same connection is observable in mark ix, 2, and in Luke ix, 28.

And to add no more, John xxi, 23, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"

It evidently appears, I think, from these passages, that Christ's coming, and this assuming kingly power and authority, mean one and the same thing. I cannot resist transcribing what Dr. Warburton has written upon this subject in his Julian, which, as Bishop Newton observes, will much illustrate and enforce the foregoing exposition." The prophecy of Jesus concerning the approaching destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, is conceived in such high and swelling terms, that not only the modern interpreters, but the antient likewise, have supposed, that our Lord interweaves into it a direct prediction of his second coming to judgment. Hence arose a current opinion in those times, that the consummation of all things was at hand; which hath afforded a handle to an infidel objection in these, insinuating that Jesus, in order to keep his followers attached to his service, and patient under sufferings, flattered them with the near approach of those rewards, which completed all their views and expectations. To which the defenders of religion have opposed this answer, that the distinction of short and

long, in the duration of time, is lost in eternity; and with the Almighty, a thousand years are but as yesterday, &c. But the principle both go upon is false, and if what hath been said be duly weighed, it will appear, that this prophecy doth not respect Christ's second coming to judgment, but his first; in the abolition of the Jewish policy, and the establishment of the Christian: that kingdom of Christ which commenced on the total casing of the theocracy. For as God's reign over the Jews, entirely ended with the abolition of the temple, so the reign of Christ, in spirit and in truth, had then its first beginning.

This was the true establishment of Christianity, not that effected by the donations or conversions of Constantine. Till the Jewish law was abolished, over which the Father presided as king, the reign of the Son could not take place; because the sovranity of Christ over Mankind, was that very sovranity of God, transferred, and more largely extended.

This therefore being one of the most important aeras in the economy of grace, and the most awful revolution in all God's religious dispensations; we see the elegance and propriety of the terms in question, to denote so great an event, together with the destruction of Jerusalem by which it was effected." Warburton's Julian, book i, chap. 1.

Our Lord having touched upon the most material circumstances and events, which were to take place, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, and having thus answered the latter part of the question, what the signs of his coming should be, proceeds to answer the other question concerning the time of his coming to destroy Jerusalem. Verse 32 and 33. "Now learn a parable of the fig-tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near," or **he is near**, "even at the doors." And farther to express his coming as very near, he declares verse 34, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." Upon which Bishop Newton thus expresses himself- "It is to me a wonder how any man can refer part of the foregoing discourse to the destruction of Jerusalem, and part to the end of the world, or any other distant event, when it is here said, so positively, in the conclusion; All these things shall be fulfilled in this generation. It seemeth as if our Saviour was aware of some misapplication of his words, by adding yet greater force and emphasis to his affirmation, verse 35, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away"

But though the time was hastening on for the completion of our Lord's prophecy of the ruin of the Jews; yet the exact time of this judgment, laid hid in the bosom of the Father. Verse 36. "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." St. Mark has it: "Neither the Son, but the Father;" but the sense is the same. Some men of great learning and eminence have thought that our Lord is here speaking, not of the destruction of Jerusalem, but of that more solemn and awful one of the day of judgment. But I can by no means think that the Evangelists are such loose, inaccurate writers, as to make so sudden and abrupt a transition, as they are here supposed to do; much less to break through the fundamental rules of good writing, by apparently referring to something which they had said before; when in reality they were beginning a new subject, and the absurdity of the supposition will appear more strongly, if it is recollected that the question of the disciples was, "When shall these things be?" "Why," says our Saviour, "of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only."

The improbability of the Evangelists having the day of judgment in view in this passage, will be still more evident, if we attend to what immediately follows in the 37th verse. "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be;" which the reader will observe, is the very expression just before used, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, and is the common language of the gospels relative to that event. This sudden appearance of

Christ, the Evangelist farther illustrates in the 40th and 41st verses. --!"Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left."

The providence of God over my disciples, and the effect of their attention to my forewarnings, will then be remarkable: a distinction will take place between those whose external circumstances are alike. My disciples will be preserved, and others will perish. See Bishop Newcome's Observations on our Lord's conduct as a Divine Instructor.

Should there be any doubt to what event these expressions belong, it will be removed by comparing them with the xviiith of Luke, from the 20th verse to the end of the chapter, where Christ evidently describes the destruction of Jerusalem, and uses the very words of St. Matthew just quoted. Thus it appears that the preceding and subsequent context relate to one and the same event; and the only reason that could have induced commentators to interpret the passage before us, of the final judgment, must have been the difficulty of conceiving, that Christ should not know, when the destruction of Jerusalem was to take place, though he had so minutely foretold the signs and fore-runners of that calamity: but it is equally difficult to imagine that he who is said to have, all power in heaven and in earth, and is appointed to be the judge of quick and dead, should not know when the day of judgment was to happen.

Bishop Peace questions the authenticity of the last clause of this and the parallel verse in St. Mark, and quotes Ambrose, as saying they were not found in ancient Greek manuscripts of his day; and it is remarkable that St. Luke omits the whole of this verse; I but I do not know that any thing can be gathered from that, as each of the Evangelists have taken notice of some particular which has not been recorded by others. It may however be questioned, whether the sense of this passage is not to be found elsewhere? Acts 1, 7. "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power."

But whatever is the true sense or reading of this text, the justness of the argument now laid before the reader, is not at all affected by it; for the connection of the whole chapter requires, the day and hour there spoken of, to be restricted to the destruction of Jerusalem, and to that alone. And every one, I believe, will acknowledge, that the connection of a writer is the only true criterion by which to determine his meaning: at least I know of no other.

It is unnecessary to be very particular in our enquiries into the meaning of the remaining part of the chapter, as it is so clear and so evidently, an improvement of the whole, and especially of the 36th verse. The greatest calamity that ever befel a nation was not far distant- That generation would not wholly pass away, till all the things that had been foretold, would be fulfilled- The signs of its approach had been accurately pointed out to them; but of the exact time, they were not apprized. As therefore they regarded their own safety, it behoved them to watch, to be always ready, and to behave like faithful servants, whom their Lord had entrusted with an honourable and important charge. Such conduct would, when their Lord came, receive its reward. But the servant that was careless and negligent, unfaithful and oppressive, would be surprized by the unexpected coming of their Master, who would not fail to punish them with the severity they deserved.

I cannot conclude this examination of the meaning of the xxivth of St. Matthew, without animadverting upon what I conceive to be a great inconsistency in Bishop Newton's conclusion of this subject. He does not hesitate to interpret every part of this chapter, of the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the signs of its approach; and he deserves the highest credit for the masterly manner in which he has handled it. But the reader will be surprized to find him afterwards saying, that some of these passages, particularly Matt. xiv, 29, 30, and 31, in a figurative sense, may be understood of the destruction of Jerusalem, but in their literal sense can be meant only of the end of the world. In like manner; that text, 'Of the day and season,

knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only;' "the consistence and connection," he says, "of the discourse oblige us to understand it, as spoken of the time of the destruction of Jerusalem; but in a higher sense, it may be true also of the time of the end of the world, and the general judgment. All the subsequent discourse too, we may observe, doth not relate so properly," he farther says, "to the destruction of Jerusalem, as to the end of the world, and the general judgment. Our Saviour loseth sight, as it were, of his former subject, and adapts his discourse more to the latter."

These are the Bishop's own words, which, I confess, I am utterly unable to reconcile with the whole tenor of his former reasoning upon the xxivth of Matthew, nor do I understand the propriety of his distinction between the figurative and literal sense, as he has applied it. When these prophecies were first delivered, concerning the ruin of Babylon, of Idumea, and of other nations, which were devoted to destruction by the Almighty for their iniquities; the prophets speak of these calamities, in the high wrought language, familiar to the Eastern nations, and they could only be understood figuratively of what was to happen to them. In their literal sense, the Sun and moon and stars continued to shine as before, without any essential alteration in them; nor can it be made to appear, that the prophets had any allusion to a literal completion of the dissolution of these powers; it being their frequent practice to speak in a metaphorical, without regarding the literal sense of their expressions.

With regard to the application of this language by our Saviour, Bishop Newton has himself expressed his wonder, (as we have already seen) how many can refer part of the foregoing discourse to the destruction of Jerusalem, and part to the end of the world, when it is said so positively here in the conclusion, "All these things shall be fulfilled in this generation:" and yet contrary to his own assertion, that "the consistence and connection of the discourse oblige us to understand it, as spoken of the destruction of Jerusalem," he says, "in a higher sense, it may be true also of the time of the end of the world, and the general judgment." But so far was our Saviour from understanding the words in a literal sense, that he declared the prophecy, in common with the others he had before mentioned, would be accomplished in that very generation. How unworthy of his character would it have been, to have a reserved meaning, in which that assertion would not be true, and which was not to be discovered, either by the consistence or the connection of the discourse. Upon the whole, I cannot see the smallest ground for supposing that the passages under consideration do at all relate to the great and final judgment; or that our Saviour had any farther view and meaning than what I have endeavoured to lay before the reader. -I have been necessarily obliged to take this notice of an opinion, which is supported by a person of Bishop Newton's distinguished reputation; for while there remained the least doubt of the true meaning of the prophecies we have been considering, our reasonings from them would of course be vague and inconclusive.

Before I enter upon the consideration of those passages in the epistles, which are the principal object of this enquiry, I shall request the reader's attention to a few observations, which appear to me of no small importance in determining the sense of them.

One observation is this, that if the 24th of Matt. with the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke, relate wholly to the destruction of Jerusalem; it follows, that whatever events are there pointed out, as significative of that grand catastrophe, may very naturally be expected to be taken particular notice of by the Apostles, in address to those who were any way concerned in them; and that in describing those events, or the signs of their approach; they would adopt a language similar to that of their great Master.

Thus our Lord exhorts his disciples, to "take heed that no man deceived hem; for that many would come in his name, saying, I am Christ, and would deceive many" Matt. xxiv, 4, 5.

Mark xiii, 6. Luke xxi, 8. In St. Matt. xxiv, 24, he assures them that there would "arise false Christs and false prophets, who would shew,' or promise to perform, "great signs and wonders, insomuch hat, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect" See also Mark xiii, 22.

The Greek word, which is here translated, to shew, signifies to give; that is, says Dr. Farner, they will appeal to, promise, or undertake to produce, such signs, using the very language of the Jewish legislator, who represents a prophet as giving, that is proposing and appealing to a sign or wonder, whether it did or did not come to pass. Farmer on Miracles, p. 304.

In another place he tells his disciples to beware of false prophets, who would come to them in sheeps clothing, but who were inwardly ravening wolves.

This is in fact the very language of the Apostles. St. Paul speaks of false prophets, as being among the Corinthians; calling them deceitful workers, who transformed themselves into Apostles of Christ. In the 2d epistle to the Thessalonians, he mentions one whom he characterizes as the Man of Sin, whose coming would be after the working of Satan, with all power and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish. St. John assured those to whom he wrote, that many antichrists and many false prophets, were already gone out into the world; whereby they knew it was the last time, or the time when the Jewish polity was arrived to its utmost period, and Jerusalem would be destroyed. St. Peter also mentions some false teachers, who would bring in damnable or destructive heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

It is farther to be observed, that our Saviour mentions the exceeding greatness of the calamity that was coming upon the Jewish nation. He particularizes many very extraordinary instances of distress and misery which they would undergo, and asserts that the tribulation would be such as was not from the beginning of the world to that time, no nor ever would be again. The destruction would be complete, and not one stone left upon another. And we have seen that he makes use of the strong language of the antient prophets, to express the magnitude and extent of it.

Nor are the Apostles a whit less energetic in their discriptions of a terrible calamity that would certainly overtake a particular class of men. 2 Thess. 1, 7. "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Heb. x, 26. "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth; there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins; but a certain looking-for of judgment, that shall devour the adversaries." And verse 28. "He that despised Moses's law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?" 2 Peter iii, 7. "The heavens and the earth, which are now, are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." And verse 10. "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up."

I do not intend to enter upon the question at present, to what events these expressions were actually applied by the Apostles: that will be considered when we come to examine them in their connection, which can alone determine their meaning, and the event to which the

Apostles refer them. It is enough to my present purpose to observe, that the awful description our Lord gave of the destruction of Jerusalem, together with the account of it transmitted to Josephus, the great historian of that calamity, will justify these very strong modes of speech; especially if the language of the prophets, concerning like, or the same calamities, is also taken into consideration. And they are, on all these accounts what might have been expected, when they were upon that subject.

Again, the Evangelists, in relating the predictions of our Lord, concerning the downfall of the Jewish nation, constantly represent it, as taking the unbelieving part of that people by surprize; coming upon them as a snare, and as a thief in the night, while they were unapprehensive of danger. Matt. xxiv, 37. "As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be: for as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, and knew not, till the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." See the like representations in Luke xii, 35 to 41. xvii, 20 to the end. xxi, 35. Mark xiii, 35. St. Matt. speaking of some professors of Christianity, represents them as saying; "My Lord delayeth his coming," and from their subsequent conduct declaring, they did not believe he would come at all. St. Luke does the same, xii, 45, 46.

To this language of the Evangelists, that of the Apostles is exactly conformable. St. Paul says, that the Thessalonians knew perfectly that the day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night; for when they should say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction would come, as sorrow upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. St. Peter says, 2d epistle, iii, 10, that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night:" and he speaks of scoffers or mockers as saying, "Where is the promise of his coming?"

Another observation that I shall make relates to the design of the epistles. The great and leading view of St. Paul's letters to different churches, was to assert the liberty of the Gentile Christians, against the imposing spirit of the Jews, who wished to constrain them to be circumcised, and to observe the law of Moses. It was on this account that they suffered such violent persecutions, as sometimes to endanger their fortitude and perseverance in that pure and unadulterated profession of Christianity. The same may be said of the design of some of the other epistles, written by the other Apostles. Hence they were obliged to exert all their influence and credit with them, to engage them to stedfastness; to watch every motion of their adversaries; to combat their false reasonings and malicious insinuations, and afford that consolation to their brethren in affliction, which the nature of their situation required.

Among other arguments which they made use of, they had frequent recourse to this, that their sufferings would be but of short continuance; that they who were the chief sources of their present troubles, would ere long be deprived of the power of injuring them, as they had hitherto done, and in a word, that the promised coming of their Lord was at hand, to take vengeance on them for their obstinate infidelity and unreasonable and violent opposition to the gospel; and that then their sufferings from that quarter would cease, and be succeeded by a glorious and signal deliverance from the impending calamities! A greater design than this, or one more suitable to the known situation of the Christians, to whom the epistles were addressed, can hardly be conceived!

The last observation I shall make is, that the Apostles, in describing the calamities that were coming upon that generation, never mention the particular objects of the divine vengeance by name, nor say any thing of the nature of their punishment, but in general and indefinite terms. This was unnecessary in writing to Christians, with whom they had frequent personal intercourse, and who could not be unacquainted with our Lord's predictions, at least by

tradition: for according to Dr. Lardner, it does not appear that the four gospels were published so early as most of the epistles, being probably delayed till the power of the Jews to hurt them, was rendered ineffectual, by the calamities with which they themselves were surrounded. If they had been published long before the calamities of war came upon them; the caution the Apostles observed, would have been useless; because the prophecies of our Lord would have been perfectly intelligible, and could not have failed to have exasperated the Jews against the Christians to a degree of madness, and have rendered their situation still more deplorable.

For the same reason therefore, that the first records of Christianity were delayed by the wise providence of God; the Apostles forebore to expose themselves and their Christian brethren to the resentment of the civil magistrate, by too open and explicit a declaration of what was to happen to that devoted people. In this respect they imitated the example and conformed to the precept of their great Lord and Master, being "wise," or cautious, "as serpents, and harmless as doves." They adopted a language that was highly figurative; giving such hints of the destruction of the Jews, as were easily enough understood by those to whom they wrote; but which the enemies of Christianity could not lay hold of to their disadvantage.

Hence we read of a falling away, apostacy or rebellion; of a man of sin, and son of perdition; of one who let, and would let, till he was taken out of the way; and of times and seasons, and of last times, last days, and the like. Such a cautious method of writing, every one must see, was perfectly justifiable, in the circumstances they and their friends were in; though it is now, I believe a principal cause of the obscurity that prevails upon this subject, particularly in the passages just mentioned.

There are other causes of the obscurity of this part of the sacred writings, which I shall present to the judicious reader in the words of the great Mr. Locke. ---!"The nature of epistolary writings," says he, "in general disposes the writer to pass by the mention of many things, well known to him to whom this letter is addressed, which are necessary to be laid open to a stranger, to make him comprehend what is said. And it not seldom falls out, that a well-penned letter, which is very easy and intelligible to the receiver, is very obscure to a stranger, who hardly knows what to make of it. The matters that St. Paul write about, were certainly things well known to those he writ to, and which they had some peculiar concern in; which made them easily apprehend his meaning and see the tendency and force of his discourse. But we, having now at this distance, no information of the occasion of his writing, little or no knowledge of the temper and circumstances of those he writ to, were in, but what is to be gathered from the epistles themselves; it is not strange, that many things in them lie concealed to us, which, no doubt, they who were concerned in the letter, understood at first sight. Add to this that in many places, 'tis manifest, he answers letters sent, and questions proposed to him, which if we had would much better clear those passages that relate to them than all the learned notes of critics and commentators, who in after-times, fill us with their conjectures, for very often, as to the matter in hand, they are nothing else" See Mr. Locke's preface to his Paraphrase on the Epistles.

These observations, if they are not a presumptive evidence of the real meaning of the Apostles in the passages we have proposed to examine, will, it is hoped, at least ensure a patient and candid attention to their connection and design, and perhaps throw light upon some of them, which have hitherto baffled the skill of the most able interpreters.

The two epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians challenge our first attention, not only on account of their being the first written of all the epistles; but because, I apprehend, the meaning of the Apostle in them is more generally misunderstood and misapplied by than in most other passages, that are the subject of our present enquiry.

The learned Mr. Pyle, having applied some of the passages which we shall presently consider, indiscriminately to the day of final judgment, and that of the destruction of the Jewish nation; his account of the design of these epistles cannot well be suspected. I rather

choose therefore to lay it before the reader, than to give it in my own words, which cannot more fully express my sentiments of it. "It is," says he, "the opinion of the most exact chronologers, that there could not pass above a year between the writing of these two epistles. What the chief aim of them was, will be learned, partly from the history of the acts, relating to St. Paul's preaching to this church, and partly from passages in the epistles themselves. Acts xvii, we find St. Paul preaching in a Jewish synagogue at Thessalonica. The converts he then made, according to the account there given, consisted of some Jews, but mostly of Greeks, proselyted to their religion. But some Gentiles also came in, before either of these epistles were sent, and made this, like most others, a church consisting of both kinds of believers, seem clear from several expressions, and from advices directed to Gentile converts, as in I Thessalonians i, 9. iv, 3, 5, 6. Of the violent opposition to the Apostles doctrine, and implacable malice where-with the generality of the Jews persecuted him, we read in the forementioned chapter of the Acts. And the whole strain of these epistles, together with the time of their inditement, shew his design to have been, to support his new Christians under the furious attacks and to guard them against the false and malicious suggestions of those Jewish zealots." With this account agrees, that of the most celebrated commentators and divines, and it is indeed too evident to be denied.

I shall begin with the 5th chapter of the 1st epistle, which from its close connection with the conclusion of the former chapter, has generally been supposed to be a continuation of the subject of the general resurrection at the last day, of which the Apostle is there speaking. "Of the times and the seasons brethren, ye have no need that I write to you." In answer to this representation, it might be observed, that the Apostle apparently concludes his former argument by adding, in the last verse, "wherefore comfort one another with these words" and this certainly deserves some attention, independent of any other consideration.

Besides; if the times and the seasons relate to the time of the resurrection at the last day, the Apostle could not have said, that the Christians were not in darkness, that that day should overtake them as a thief; for I presume it will be allowed by all, that they were as much in darkness, as to the time when it should take place, as the unbelieving Jews themselves; not to mention that it was a matter of mere curiosity, which the Apostle would hardly have indulged.

It is an observation of Bishop Newton, that if we consult reason, if we consult revelation, about the time when the general judgment shall come, neither of them afford us any light: both of them leave us in darkness. See his dissertation on the general Judgment.

I think this must appear to every attentive reader, to be an argument of some considerable weight against the common interpretation. But other evidence is not wanting, that the Apostle in this chapter has begun a new subject; or rather, that the conclusion of the former chapter was only an occasional digression from the main design of the epistle.

The only way to ascertain the Apostle's meaning, and of course to determine the sense of the ensuing context, is to examine in what sense the phrase, "times and seasons," is used by the sacred writers; for upon that the whole evidently depends. The instances where this expression occurs, are indeed but few, yet enough, I believe, to determine the Apostle's idea of it.

In the 2d chapter of Daniel, that prophet, having been favoured with the revelation of the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had forgot, expresses his adoration of the divine perfections, displayed in the government of the world, in these remarkable words, verses 20, 21. "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever; for wisdom and might are his: and he changeth the times and the seasons; he removeth kings and setteth up kings." Here the prophet evidently

uses the very expression of the Apostle for a change of government, or an alteration of the political state of a nation, as he afterwards more fully illustrates it, in the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, verses 39, 40. "After thee shall arise another kingdom, inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth; and the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron." In the 7th chapter of the same prophet, the expression is a little varied, but the sense is manifestly the same. Speaking of a king that should arise in future times, he says of him, verse 25, that "he shall think to change times and laws."

There is one passage more, where this phrase is used, and that is in the New Testament, by our Saviour himself, and he evidently adopts the sense, as well as the expression of the prophet; for when his disciples asked him, when he would restore the kingdom to Israel, without giving them a direct answer to their question, he replied: "it is not for you to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." As if he had said ---!"You have no business to pry too curiously into the dispensations of Heaven, in producing those great revolutions which his wisdom may see fit to bring about; but to rest satisfied that they will take place in their proper time.

It should be particularly attended to, that the disciples, by restoring the kingdom to Israel, undoubtedly meant the Messiah's exercising kingly power and authority, and rescuing the Jewish nation from that servitude to the Romans which they had long submitted to with great reluctance. At the time the Apostle wrote his epistles, the nature of kingdom was better understood, and the carnal notions of the Jewish believers corrected.

When, therefore, the Apostle uses the like phrase, probably, as in the case of our Lord, in answer to some query put to him, it is not likely that he should vary the established meaning of it, by referring it to the general resurrection, but applied it to that period, when the Jewish constitution was to be abolished, and Jerusalem laid in ruins; especially if it is considered that this period was then very near at hand.

If it is admitted to be the true sense of the 1st verse of this chapter, there will be no difficulty in applying what follows to the same event. All is clear and pertinent, and is so very much like the language of our Lord in his prophecies upon this subject, that it cannot well be mistaken. "Yourselves," says the Apostle, verse 2, "know perfectly, that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night; for when they (the unbelieving Jews) shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh, as travail upon a woman with child." The calamities that were coming upon them would be sudden and unexpected on their part, while the Christians were apprized of their approach. The former would be so involved in them, that they would not be able to escape, being in darkness, as to the final issue of the war, and fondly imagining, that as they had been hitherto distinguished as the peculiar people of God, they should not now be forsaken, nor their enemies be suffered to triumph over them. The latter relying on the truth of our Lord's predictions, and being attentive to the presages of their approach, were not in darkness as to the event of it, and of course would watch their opportunity, and thereby avoid the miseries that were coming upon their adversaries. "They shall not escape -but "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation (security) through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Such seems to me, to be the purport of the Apostle's argument, in this chapter, and it is impossible to conceive any thing better calculated to support the resolution, and animate the courage of his Christian friends, than this representation of the Apostle, under the severe persecutions to which they were exposed. They had not only an hope of an ample recompence of reward for all that they suffered, when Jesus should come to judge all mankind at the last day; but they had a near prospect of deliverance from their present troubles, when they would

enjoy all the comfort and all the advantage of their unshaken fidelity and perseverance. The Apostle adds, as he had done before in the last verse of the preceding chapter, concerning the resurrection of the dead at the last day, v. 11, "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do;" which, I think, is an additional testimony, that as he here concludes this subject, and proceeds to other matter, so he had done there. [Forgive my intrusion, but it is obvious that this is a forced interpretation, and is the **only** remaining hinderance to the position that **all prophecy - great judgment included**, found their fulfillment in the first century; after all, Matthew 24 makes the exact same statements, finding fulfillment within the then living generation! - cf. Matt. 16:27-28; Matt. 25:31 - TDD] And as the Apostle declares they did comfort themselves with such considerations; it is a plain proof that they could not mistake his real meaning, by supposing him to speak of the near approach of the great day of judgment.

In the succeeding epistle, which, as has been observed, was written in the same year, and with the same design as the former, the Apostle, as I apprehend, resumes the subject, probably in answer to some farther objections, which were started by their adversaries, to shake the faith of the Christian church at Thessalonica; intermixing therewith, such arguments for their comfort, as their embarrassed situation required. He begins the 1st chapter, after his usual manner, wishing them grace or favour, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; thanking God for their growing faith and charity, and for their patience and fidelity under the violent persecutions which they endured. In the 5th verse he tells them, that this excellent and praiseworthy behaviour of theirs, was a manifest token or evidence, that God had permitted these afflictions to befall them, that they might be rendered worthy of his kingdom, of which they were the professed subjects, and for the sake of which they suffered. This he assigns as the general reason of the apparently severe dispensations of heaven towards them.

With regard to their adversaries, from whom they suffered so much ill treatment, the case was widely different. It was just and equitable that they should in their turn, feel the full effects of their violent and unjust opposition, when those who continued faithful, under the severest trials, would obtain rest and deliverance from their troubles. "It is," says the Apostle, "a righteous thing with God, to recompence tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

Nothing could hinder an attentive reader from applying all this to the destruction of the persecuting Jews, and the deliverance of the Christians from their cruel and oppressive treatment, but the very strong expressions last mentioned; for the whole connection seems evidently to require, that the Apostle be understood as speaking of the approach of that calamity.

It must, however, be remembered, that our Lord's prophecy of his coming to destroy Jerusalem, is expressed by his coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, and sending his angels with a great sound of a trumpet; which the reader will see, have a striking resemblance to the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, with his mighty angels, here mentioned by the Apostle. And therefore there can, I think, be no sufficient reason for not applying the words of the Apostle to the same event.

The taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, is strictly applicable to the destruction of the Jews; for our blessed Lord, not

only calls the days that were coming, the days of vengeance, but constantly attributes their unbelief and their rejecting him, as the principal cause of their sin. And the epistles abound with passages of like nature, as every one knows, who is at all conversant with their writings.

Flaming fire, and everlasting destruction, are very strong epithets to be applied to temporal calamities; but not stronger than those of the prophet Isaiah, xxxiii, 14, descriptive of like, if not the same distresses, that would come upon the Jewish nation. "The sinners in Zion are afraid: fearfulness hath surprized the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" To justify this language of the Apostle, it should farther be observed, that the tribulation of that day is represented by our Saviour as exceeding all example in past and future ages, and that Josephus tells us, fire was a principal agent in effecting the destruction of that people, multitudes having perished in the flames. In a word, it was a complete destruction; scarce a trace remaining that there ever had been a city. It scarce needs to be added, that the word which is **translated everlasting**, frequently derives its force from the subject with which it is connected, and must be understood in a more strict or limited sense, according to the nature of it.

Destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power," appear to me to have a singular propriety in them, when applied to the ruin of the Jewish nation; for God's presence was the peculiar privilege of that people; which they could only forfeit by their wickedness, and their forsaking the covenant of their God. The Almighty said to Moses, the representative of the Jewish nation, Exod. xxxiii, 14, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest," which in interpreted in the 16th verse, of their being separated from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. When afterwards they were devoted to ruin for their iniquities, the language of the prophet Jeremiah is, xxiii, 39, 40, "I will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of my presence; and I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame which shall not be forgotten!" Their destruction from the glory of his power, in this connection, appears therefore to signify, the withdrawing those displays of power, which had been so often manifested in their behalf. When the Apostle says, in the 20th verse, that "Christ shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in" or by "all them that believe:" I conceive his meaning is, that the completion of his prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem and their deliverance, will increase their reverence and respect for their Divine Master, and raise the warmest gratitude of their souls, for so signal a deliverance.

It is, I think, of very great consequence in confirming the meaning I have been endeavouring to establish, through the whole of this chapter, to observe, that wherever the word, which is here translated **rest**, in the 7th verse, is used in the New Testament, it constantly signifies **rest** from temporal distress and present trouble. See Acts xxiv, 24. 2 Cor. ii, 12. vii, 5. viii, 13.

Upon the whole, I do not see any thing to hinder the application of these figurative expressions, to the calamities that were shortly to come upon the Jews, and put an entire end to their existence as a nation. On the contrary; a perfect consistency of argument is preserved, which suits with the evident design of both the epistles, and with the known circumstances of those to whom they were addressed.

The following chapter, which we are now to consider, has exercised the ingenuity of some of the most learned men; who have generally supposed, that it was intended to correct a mistake the Thessalonians had fallen into, from a misapprehension of St. Paul's former letter to them; as if the great and final day of account would come in that generation. And if they had understood that epistle-, as it appears most commentators now do, the mistake was

natural, and the Apostle afforded them too just a cause to apprehend, that its approach was very near at hand. But if what has been already said upon the 5th chapter of that epistle, upon which that mistake is supposed to be founded, be just and conclusive; this was not the design of the chapter before us. Nor is it easy to imagine that they could entertain such an idea. St. Paul, we know, spoke of his departure being at hand; and St. Peter expected shortly to put off his bodily tabernacle, as our Lord Jesus Christ had foretold he should; and that the Thessalonians should have fallen into such a mistake, appears to me a conjecture, which has no foundation whatever to support it. If any evidence can be adduced to corroborate the supposition, besides that taken from the meaning which has been put upon the latter part of the 4th, and the beginning of the 5th chapter of the 1st epistle to the Thessalonians, it ought not to be hastily abandoned or given up; but, I confess, I know of none.

The truth, I believe, is, that there were among the Thessalonians, some persons who were ill affected to the Christian cause; some mockers, such as those St. Peter speaks of, who said, "Where is the promise of his coming," and who by some insinuations, and perhaps by forged letters, which they ascribed to St. Paul, endeavored to shake their faith in Christ, and particularly their belief of his coming to punish the Jews, agreeable to his promise. This seems to be probable from the Apostle's manner of expression in the 2d verse; by letter as from us -by his caution that they be not soon shaken in mind, or by any means deceived; and by his salutation at the end of the epistle, written with his own hand, to prevent their being imposed upon. This, I own, is all conjecture, as well as the other; but it must be acknowledged, that St. Peter's information, that there were such persons in his time; and the known character of the enemies of the Christians, are some grounds for the supposition. I may add likewise, that it was extremely natural for the unbelieving Jews, from the situation of things at that time, to ridicule the notion of his coming; for they not only did not believe it themselves, but no remarkable signs of the approaching calamities, had yet appeared to lead the Christians to suppose they were very near.

To fortify the minds of the Thessalonians against these misrepresentations, and furnish them with an answer to their adversaries; the Apostle tells them, not to be troubled or by any means deceived by them; for that that day would not come, without some particular signs of its approach. -- "That day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin, the son of perdition, be revealed, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped." This Bishop Newton takes to be an assertion of the Apostle, that the destruction of Jerusalem was not at hand, upon the supposition that he is speaking of that event: but surely this is a great mistake. He only declares, if I understand him right, that the signs and presages of the ruin of Jerusalem were so closely connected with it, that the latter could not happen without the former, And this is no more than what our Lord had taught them to expect. After a long detail of the signs of his coming, he adds, "When ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." Matt. xxiv, 33. So far therefore is the Apostle from denying that the day of the Lord is at hand, that he appears to me, strongly to affirm its near approach.

Against this interpretation, the very distinguished writer just mentioned, opposes a variety of objections in the form of questions, which it will be necessary to consider. He asks, "What occasion there was to admonish the Thessalonians particularly of the destruction of Jerusalem? Or why they should be under such agitations and terrors upon that account. What connection had Macedonia with Judea, or Thessalonica with Jerusalem? What share were the Christian converts to have in the calamities of the rebellious and unbelieving Jews; and why should they not rather have been comforted than troubled at the punishment of their inveterate enemies?" And a little below, he asks again, "What a ridiculous comfort must it be to tell them, that it would not happen immediately, but would be accomplished within less

than twenty years?" To the three first of these questions it may be replied, that the Thessalonians had a great connection, and were more deeply concerned in the destruction of Jerusalem, than the worthy Bishop seems to have imagined. In the Acts of the Apostles, xvii, 1, we read, that they had a synagogue of the Jews, some of whom believed, and of the devout Greeks, or proselytes to Judaism, a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few; but that the unbelieving Jews, moved with envy, raised a persecution against them, and opposed them with all their might: and the Bishop allows, they were their most inveterate enemies. Macedonia had therefore, a connection with Judea, and Thessalonica with Jerusalem. As to the share that the Christian converts were to have in the calamities of the rebellious and unbelieving Jews, it is not necessary to assert that they had any: out it was necessary to their future comfort and happiness, that the unbelieving and persecuting Jews should be destroyed. And though they lived far from Jerusalem; yet their zeal would carry them thither at their great festival, where they would, from the sudden approach of the Roman army, be enclosed as in a net, and involved in all the ensuing calamities!

With regard to the other questions which assert, that it would be ridiculous comfort to tell them, that the destruction of Jerusalem would not happen immediately, but would be accomplished within less than twenty years; and that so far from being troubled and terrified upon that account, they should rather have been comforted at the punishment of their inveterate enemies: all this proceeds upon a mistake. They were troubled; not at the idea of the destruction of the Jews being at hand; but at the insinuations of the unbelievers that it would not come at all. This was a reasonable ground of trouble; for the very truth of Christianity depended upon its completion, as well as their deliverance from persecution. The Apostle therefore sets himself to banish their anxiety on these accounts, and to satisfy their minds that there was no reason for apprehending that the promise would not at length be fulfilled.

If any one is desirous reading what Bishop Newton has further said upon this subject, I refer him to his *Dissertations on the Prophecies*, vol. ii, p. 359.

I have already taken notice of an obvious reason for the use of the figurative expressions of the Apostle, when he speaks of the signs which were to precede the destruction of Jerusalem, viz that he might not expose himself, or his fellow Christians to the resentment of the evil magistrate; and this is a principal cause of the obscurity in which some of these expressions are now involved. It must however be remarked, with respect to the son of perdition, that Judas, who betrayed our Lord, is characterized under the very same figure, previous to his betraying him: John xvii, 12. "None of them is lost, but the son of perdition." And it is well known that the apostle Paul was fond of making use of the personalizing figure. But amidst all the obscurity, which this has occasioned in this place, the signs which our Lord had foretold are easily discerned. The man of sin and son of perdition, mean, I apprehend, an high degree of prevailing wickedness in some person, or persons, whose coming would be after the working of Satan, with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. If we compare this with the language of our Saviour, when he foretold the signs of the approaching ruin of the Jews; it will be highly probable that the Apostle speaks of the very same event. Matt. xxiv, 12. "Iniquity shall abound." Verse 24. "They shall shew great signs and wonders, insomuch, that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

Various are the interpretations of the learned, concerning the man of sin and the son of perdition, &c. some referring them to Simon Magus, some to Mahomet, and some to the Popes of Rome and their clergy. But if it be allowed, that the Apostle is speaking of the

destruction of Jerusalem; the supposition of the two last, cannot be admitted, as being wholly foreign to the purpose, and in many other respects highly improbable.

The application of the character of the Man of sin, the Son of Perdition, to the Popes of Rome, is an ingenious conjecture, and they have but too justly merited it by their monstrous iniquity. But this, I think, could not be the Apostle's meaning; for the wickedness of the church of Rome has been fully revealed: her power is much upon the decline, and yet the day of judgment in all probability is not very near at hand. There are many events to be fulfilled; such as the conversion of the Jews, and the universal prevalence of Christianity; events that do not at present appear to be very near at hand. I might add, that it was not at all to the Apostle's purpose, that I can see, to tell them of what was to happen in some distant ages, which, instead of comforting them, would only increase their distress.

The true meaning of these expressions must, I think, be sought for in the history of those times, to which the learned Hammond and Whitby have, with great judgment, confined their enquiries upon this subject. But whether either of them has succeeded in the attempt, or whether we have sufficient knowledge of that early period, I shall not pretend to determine.

Indeed I do not consider it as a matter of very great consequence (though certainly desirable) to know precisely to what, or to whom the Apostle alludes. It is enough for us to know, that the description here given was the subject of the Apostle's conversation with the Thessalonians when he was among them; that they well knew the hinderances of the complete revelation and consequent destruction of this man of sin, and that what the Apostle here advanced, was in answer to the insinuations that had been industriously propagated among them by their restless and implacable adversaries, that Christ would not come according to his promise.

If the time fixed by Dr. Lardner for the publication of the Gospels be well founded; it appears to me not improbable, that when the Apostle exhorts the Thessalonians, towards the conclusion of the chapter, to stand fast and hold the traditions which they had been taught, whether by word or his epistle; he means the traditions relating to the destruction of Jerusalem and the signs of its approach. The Dr. supposes, the first three gospels were not written till the years 63 or 64, and St. John not till 68.

Before I conclude this chapter, I cannot help remarking the close connection between the Apostle's argument in this and the 5th chapter of his 1st epistle to the Thessalonians. There he tells them, that though they were not in darkness as unbelievers were, as to the sudden and near approach of the day of the Lord; yet that it behoved them to watch and be sober, i.e. as I imagine, to consider attentively the circumstances and events which were to usher it in, since they knew neither the exact time nor season of its coming. Their knowledge that it would come as a thief in the night, would require this circumspection. Here the Apostle enables them to direct their watchfulness to their proper objects, assuring them, that that day would not come without the intervention of certain signs and presages of its approach, and that no insinuations of their adversaries, arising from its apparent delay, ought to give them any trouble, especially as they know the hinderances of their complete manifestation, and saw that the mystery of iniquity had already began to shew itself. Such a train of reasoning is greatly confirmed by what our Lord says of the destruction of Jerusalem; that they knew neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh, and on that account directed his followers to watch and to be ready, and not to suffer themselves to be deceived by his apparent delay. Matt. xxiv, 42 and following verses.

Upon the whole, I consider the unity of design manifested in these two chapters, and their evident agreement with our Lord's discourse upon the subject, as the strongest arguments in

favor of the interpretation I have adopted, and when taken together with others that I have laid before the reader, they amount almost to a decisive evidence in its favour.

The next passage that I shall consider is, the 10th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, from the 23rd verse to the end of the chapter; not that I think it particularly difficult, but as some commentators have referred what the Apostle says, in the 37th verse, to the spiritual salvation of the soul; it may not be amiss to give the reader a summary view of the Apostle's argument, that he may judge for himself of his real meaning.

I shall, as before, give a general account of the design of this epistle in the words of Mr. Pyle. "St. Paul," says he, "in his 2d epistle to the Thessalonians, had foretold a great apostacy, which, so far as it related to the Jewish people, may be interpreted, either of the general revolt of their nation from the Roman government, or of their Christian converts from the religion of Christ, agreeably to our Saviour's prediction, Matt. xxiv, 12. In the latter of these senses, it began now to be fulfilled by a too general desertion of the Jewish Christians; frighted from their profession, by the furious persecution of the infidel Jews. To arm some against, and to recover others from this apostacy, was the purpose of this epistle"

Having at great length, and by a variety of arguments, shewn the superior excellence of the Christian, compared with the Mosaic dispensation; the Apostle earnestly entreats them to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering, and as an evidence of it, to provoke one another to love and to good works, and particularly not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, as was the manner of some among them. This stedfastness in their faith and practice, he urges upon them by an argument peculiarly suited to their situation. They were now grievously persecuted by their unbelieving countrymen, and profess Christianity, at the utmost hazard of every thing that was dear to them, not excepting life itself; but the day was at hand, -things were so ripe for the completion of our Lord's prophecies, that they saw by the signs of the times, that it was near approaching, which would put an end to their troubles. Two or three years at most would find other employment for their adversaries, and leave them at liberty to serve God, according to their conscience: without that risque to which they were now exposed.

To engage them to perseverance in their professions, the Apostle represents to them, in very forcible terms, the very terrible consequences of apostacy from a religion of such superior excellence. "If," says he, verse 26, "we sin wilfully," that is, if we deliberately and wilfully apostatize, after we have been convinced of the truth and excellence of Christianity, no other sacrifice to atone for our sins is left us; but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour those who oppose it. If they died without mercy at the hand of two or three witnesses, who despised Moses's law; of how much sorer punishment would they be thought worthy, who trod under foot the Son of God, and treated the grace of the Gospel with neglect and contempt? Such abuse merited the severest punishment, and would certainly involve them in the effects of the Divine vengeance, which they could not too carefully avoid; for it was "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." As if he had said -- You are now in a state of persecution from men, which by apostacy, you may escape; but by so doing you will expose yourselves to greater calamities; to those dreadful sufferings which are ready to overtake the Jewish nation.

In the 32nd verse, the Apostle introduces another argument, to persuade them to be firm to the Christian cause, drawn from their manly behaviour, under sufferings (it should seem, from the terms used in the Greek, still more dreadful) than those to which they were now exposed. But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, (after ye had embraced Christianity,) ye endured a great fight, or combat of afflictions; taking

joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing that you have in heaven a better and enduring substance.

Such being their noble and truly praiseworthy conduct in times of past difficulty and trouble, the Apostle exhorts them not now, when nearly at an end, to cast away their courage or confidence, or suffer their faith to fail; for, saith he, it hath (even now) great recompence of reward; for ye have (yet) need of patience, that having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise; for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. It is, I own, out of my power to conceive, that the Apostle is here speaking of any other coming, than that which our Lord foretold should happen in that generation, and in language so perfectly similar. The day approaching in the 25th verse; the chain of reasoning subsequent to it; the situation and circumstances these Hebrew Christians were then in, and the time when this epistle was written; all conspire to confirm me in the opinion, that the Apostle meant the destruction of Jerusalem. The manner in which the Apostle concludes the argument too, very much favours this interpretation. Verse 38. "Now the just by "faith shall live," ie. shall preserve his life: "but if any man draw back," or apostatizes, "my soul shall have no pleasure in him:" he shall not receive the promised deliverance and protection, which belongs only to those who continue faithful.

In the last verse, he expresses his confidence, that the arguments he had laid before them, would have their due weight and influence upon them; that they would not apostatize to their destruction, but continue faithful, and thereby obtain the promised reward. We are not of them who draw back to perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

The reader will observe that this is perfectly agreeable to our Lord's prophecies, that he that endured to the end should be saved; but that those who were not prepared by habitual watchfulness and fidelity should have their portion with hypocrites, Matt. xxiv, 13, and 42 to the end.

But I do not see how the Apostle's language; that they saw the day approaching, and that yet a little while, and he that should come would come, and would not tarry, upon any other principles can be justified. If he meant, the day of final judgment, he said what was not true: it was not a little while, but many ages before that event would take place; nor could he say with any propriety that they saw it approaching. If on the other hand, under these ideas he speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem; his language is that of accuracy and precision; for it is the opinion of the most able judges, that this epistle was written in the year 63, and that the Jewish war broke out in 66. In a word, this supposition appears to me to make everything clear and pertinent, and his reasoning just and conclusive, and well calculated to produce the happiest effects, upon those who suffered for the sake of Christ.

I should now proceed to consider that very difficult and obscure passage in the 4th chapter of the 1st epistle of St. Peter, verses 5,6 and 7, but; I confess, I am unable to offer any interpretation of it than that which the most esteemed commentators have adopted; who have, I believe, generally applied it to the destruction of Jerusalem. The whole preceding and subsequent context much favours this interpretation, as well as the leading design of the epistle itself; which, says Mr. Pyle, was to support the Gentile Christians under the heavy persecutions to which they were exposed: but with respect to the real meaning of the Apostle in these verses, I cannot satisfy myself, and, of course, am but ill qualified to afford satisfaction to others. The judicious reader will not, however, form his judgment of the general meaning of the passages, we have been considering, from a single instance, which has been allowed on all hands to be the most obscure of any that is to be met with throughout the New Testament; but from that collection of evidence which has been attempted to be laid

before him, and which will receive still farther additions, from this very Apostle in the 3rd chapter of his 2d epistle, which we are now to consider.

This chapter commences with an account of the occasion of his letter, which was to stir up the minds of believers to a remembrance of what had been foretold by the holy prophets, and had been repeated to them by the Apostles, during their personal ministry among them; viz. that in the last days, scoffers or mockers; who walked after their own lusts, would come, 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.

The last days-the last times-and the latter times, are phrases that are, I believe, generally, if not always, used in the epistles to denote the concluding period of the Jewish economy: and it is a remark of Dr. Benson, upon the 1st of John, verse 18, that if the Apostle had said, that the last day or hour of the world was at hand, he had said that was not true. He there admits, that the last days mean, the days prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the Jewish state; and yet he interprets what follows in this chapter, of the final coming of Christ to judgment.

In answer to these suggestions, the Apostle asserts the contrary -All things did not continue as they were. They were willingly ignorant of; they would not attend to what had already happened. God had promised, by the mouth of Noah, to destroy the old world by a flood of water, and they had long warning of it; so long, that it is likely, scoffers arose as in the present case, and said, Where is the promise of his coming? Yet, notwithstanding their unbelief, the promise was at length fulfilled. The flood came and swept them all away in a moment of security, when they were engaged in all the occupations of life. The world that then was, (that is, the inhabitants of it) being overflowed with water, perished, agreeably to the Divine assurance. But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word of promise, are kept in store; reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

To understand the Apostle's meaning in these verses, we must carefully attend to what has already been observed, that in the prophetic language, the perishing of the heavens and the earth, signifies the dissolution of any great state or empire, or any remarkable calamity, that was to take place among men. The phraseology was perfectly familiar to the eastern nations, and particularly to the Jews and first Christians, who had the Old Testament prophecies in their hands. And the apostle Peter adopted it, not only upon this account, but for other prudential reasons, before taken notice of.

In this sense he certainly uses the phrase in the 5th verse. The heavens that were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water, perished. Now says the Apostle, in answer to the scoffs of unbelievers; this having been the case with the old world, according to God's express promise; there is the same reason for believing that he will be as faithful to his word as heretofore. The heavens and the earth which are now (in opposition to those of old) by the same word (of promise) are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

If it be allowed, as I think it must, that the expression of the heavens and the earth, which were of old, relates to a temporal calamity, in the 5th verse; it will be difficult to conceive, that the Apostle uses the same terms, in the 7th verse, in a different sense; unless it should be thought, that the farther description of this calamity, given in the 10th, 11th, and 12th verses, is too strong to be applied to any thing temporal. But it ought particularly to be remembered, that our Lord spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem, as far exceeding all other calamities, that ever had, or would happen; and he spoke of it too, in language almost as strong as that which the Apostle uses in the chapter before us. Matt. xxiv, 29. "The sun shall be darkened, and the

moon shall not give her light; and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."

But to show the reader, in the strongest light possible, that the Apostle has the great calamity, that was coming upon the Jews in view in these expressions, I shall put the language of the prophets, before taken notice of, in a column opposite to that of the Apostle; and that, I think, will preclude the necessity of using any other arguments. He will then be able to determine for himself.

Isaiah xxxiv, 4

All the host of heaven shall be rolled together as a scrole.

Nahum i, 5.

The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burnt at his presence; yea the world and all that dwell therein.

Isaiah xxiv, 19, 20

The earth is utterly broken down: the earth is clean dissolved: the earth shall be removed as a cottage.

Malachi iv, 1.

Behold the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up.

2 Peter iii.

Verse 10. The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.

Verse 11. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved; what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?

V. 12. Looking for and hastening to the coming of the day of God; wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.

The Apostle's inference in the 11th verse, is, in my estimation, so far from being an objection against applying the whole of this chapter to the destruction of the Jewish nation, that it is an additional evidence in its favour. Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.

I think it is not improbable, that the Apostle might here insinuate, that the dissolution that was about to take place, was the consequence of the wickedness of the Jews; and that the way to avoid such calamities in future, was to live upright and godly lives. At least this is a view in which it may be considered to advantage.

It was natural and unavoidable for them to be in earnest expectation of an event, which had in the clearest terms been predicted and limited to that age; and they were under the strongest obligations to an unblameable conduct, as they were assured, that their perseverance in the Christian faith and practice, would alone entitle them to an exemption from those woes that were about to fall on that wicked generation. He that endureth to the

end shall be saved. Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Matt. xxiv, 13, 46.

If the sense that has now been given, of the heavens and the earth being dissolved, be the true one, there can, I think, be no difficulty in determining the Apostle's meaning in the 13th verse, Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth: for the destruction of the old heavens and earth; that is, of old polities and constitutions, necessarily implies new ones, that should be erected in their stead.

The meaning therefore of the new heavens and the new earth, is, that the Messiah's kingdom should be erected on the ruins of the Jewish economy. This will, I think, be evident by comparing the Apostle's expression, with the same language used by the prophet Isaiah, lxxv, 17, and with the introductory description of the approach of the Messiah's kingdom in some preceding verses. Verse 11. "Ye are they that forsake the Lord, that forget my holy mountain. Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall bow down to the slaughter. Behold my servants shall sing for joy of heart; but ye shall cry for sorrow, and howl for vexation of spirit: and ye shall leave your name for a curse to my chosen; for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name: for behold I create new heavens and a new earth."

It will, I think, be impossible to read this passage of the prophet Isaiah, without at least suspecting, that it relates to the very destruction of Jerusalem we have been speaking of. besides the wickedness which is there said to bring on their calamities; their leaving their name for a curse, and his servants being called by another name, are extremely remarkable, and can hardly be applied to any other event. The creating new heavens and new earth therefore, which immediately follows, appears to me a most happy illustration of the meaning of the Apostle Peter, in the 13th verse of this chapter.

In the conclusion of the last-mentioned verse, St. Peter points out a remarkable property of the new heavens and the new earth; of which the prophet, in the chapter just mentioned, and in many other places, given an high and beautiful description, in the strong, figurative language of the East. Isaiah lxxv, 19. "Be you glad and rejoice for ever, in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing and her people a joy. They shall build houses and inhabit them, and they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock, and dust shall be the serpents meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord."

In the 11th chapter of the same prophet, his description of the days of the Messiah's reign is still more remarkable. "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity, for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness, the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them; and the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox: and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den: they shall not hurt nor destroy in all

my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

If this beautiful description of the wonderful alteration that was to take place in the new heavens and the new earth, is allowed to relate to a future and more glorious state of the Christian church, than has ever yet been seen in this world; it may, I think, be query'd, whether St. John's animated view of the new heavens and the new earth in the 21st chapter of the Revelations, does not relate to the same happy and peaceful state of things in some more advanced and perfect state of Christianity.

Upon this passage, Dr. Jortin says, "It is reasonable to suppose, that the Holy Spirit of God, who inspired the prophets, gave them a view of the kingdom of Christ in general, from its establishment to the end of the world; and that they were led to represent it, in their prophecies, as it should be, in its full lustre, in its highest degree of beauty and perfection. But," adds he, "though these predictions have not yet received their entire completion, yet a great part of them has been remarkably and illustriously fulfilled." Many instances of which, highly worthy of the reader's attention, may be seen in his excellent discourses on the truth of the Christian religion, from whence the above quotations are transcribed.

It is, however, enough to justify the Apostle's declaration; that therein dwelleth righteousness, to observe that righteousness is the grand feature of the personal character of the head of this kingdom, as exhibited in the Gospels; and that his religion and laws are, in every view, holy, just and good. Nothing is enjoined to be believed, but what is worthy of God: nothing to be practiced but what is friendly and advantageous to man, and calculated to raise human nature to the highest nitch of perfection, of which it is capable. With respect to the time, when these events were to take place, the Apostle cautions his Christians friends against drawing improper inferences, from the delay of the execution of God's promise, assuring them, that tho' a few years was a long time in their estimation; yet that with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day; and that though some men counted it a slackness concerning his promise, because he did not come at the moment, when they were pleased to expect him; yet that his forbearance was of the most benevolent nature, to give men and opportunity and time for repentance; from an unwillingness that any should perish. "But," says the Apostle, in the 10th verse, "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." As if he had said -As surely as the inhabitants of the old world perished by water; so surely will the day of the Lord come, and come too, as a thief in the night, in a sudden and unexpected manner. This last expression, together with the scoffing insults, mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, are so exactly the language of the Apostles, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, in many passages, that we have been surveying, and so similar to that of our Lord in his prophecies of this event; that they are additional proofs of the truth of the interpretation that has now been given. The words of St. Matthew are these; Matt. xxiv, 42, &c. "Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known, in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up: therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh." In a word, I do not think, that the signs our Lord pointed out, as evidences of the near approach of the destruction of Jerusalem, would be worthy of that name, if they were meant to be applied to events, which were to be separated by a great number of ages, and those events totally different from each other.

The Apostle concludes the chapter with an exhortation to beware, seeing they knew these things, lest they also, being led away by the error of the wicked, should fall from their own stedfastness; but, on the contrary, endeavour to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

It may be expected, before this examination is closed, that I should take particular notice of the book of the Revelations of St. John, in which there are some passages of a similar nature with those which have hitherto employed our attention.

But before we take notice of these passages; candour obliges us to observe.; that an important controversy has arisen, concerning the time when the Revelations were written; in which the first characters in Christian literature have been very much divided: some referring it to a period prior to the destruction of Jerusalem; while others have contended, that it was written as late as the year 96, in the reign of Domitian. The celebrated Dr. Lardner, who is the great advocate for the latter of these opinions, has produced a cloud of witnesses to support it; and provided the first authority which he refers to, may be depended upon; it will be difficult to gainsay such evidence. But if the original testimony of Irenaeus should appear to be built upon a weak foundation, those of his successors, through a long series of ages, will not add to the strength of the argument in favour of this opinion.

"Irenaeus" says Dr. Lardner, "we have good reason to believe, was a disciple of St. Polycarp;" but that he was but very young, and not long under his instructions, appears from Irenaeus's own words, 'whom also I saw in my early;' and in a letter to Florinus, who had embraced certain errors, he says, -"Those opinions, the presbyters before us, who also conversed with the Apostles, have not delivered to you. For I saw you when I was very young, in the lower Asia with Polycarp -For I better remember the affairs of that time, than those which have lately happened: the things which we learn in our childhood growing up with the soul, and uniting themselves to is: insomuch, that I can tell the place in which the blessed Polycarp sat and taught, and his going out and coming in; and the manner of his life, and the form of his person; and the discourses he made to the people; and how he related his conversation with John and others, who had seen the Lord; and how he related their sayings, and what he had heard from them concerning the Lord, both concerning his miracles and his doctrine, as he had received them from the eyewitnesses of the Word of Life. All which Polycarp related agreeable to the scriptures. These things I then, through the mercy of God towards me, diligently heard and attended to, recording them, not on paper, but upon my heart. And through the grace of God, I continually renew the remembrance of them." Lardner's Credibility, vol. iii, p. 195, article, Polycarp.

From this account, which Irenaeus gives of his youth, and of his retaining what he heard from St. Polycarp, without any assistance but from memory; it cannot but be admitted that he might be mistaken as to the time when St. John was banished into the Isle of Patmos, and consequently, that the Revelations might be written at a period antecedent to that, which fixes it in the year 96 or 97. At least such kind of external evidence; cannot weigh very powerfully against any evidence of an internal nature, which may be produced from the Revelations themselves. The observation of Irenaeus is indeed certainly just, that the things which we have learned in our childhood stick the closest to us through life; but the most attentive will be sensible, that many impressions will in time wear away, and lose much of their force, and times and circumstances be forgotten; especially where there are no memorials to recur to, to assist the recollection.

With respect to the internal evidence, which we are furnished with from the book itself; the reader will be disappointed, if he expects to find it clear and full; for this would require a knowledge of the whole contents of the Revelations, which I am not ashamed to own, with Dr. Lardner, I have not attained. If there appears a probability, that St. John uses the same expressions and phrases so frequently occurring in the apostolical epistles, in the same sense in which they appear to me to have applied them; it is all that I undertake to show.

In the 1st chapter, St. John begins with a kind of title, calling it the (or more exactly a) Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to shew his servants the things which must shortly come to pass, and having sent, he signified, it by his angel, ie by Jesus Christ, to his servant John; verse 11. who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Ver. 2. Blessed, or happy, is he who readeth, and they who hear the words of the prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is near, or at hand.

There does not, I think, appear to be any thing forced or strained in the supposition, that the things which must shortly come to pass, and which were at hand, here mentioned, might be applied to the destruction of Jerusalem. The happiness of those who read, heard, and kept the words of the prophecy, was foretold by our Lord in his unequivocal prophecy of that event, Matt. xxiv, 46. "Blessed, or happy is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing."

In the dedication to the seven churches in Asia, verse 4, St. John, according to the general practice of the Apostles, wishes them grace, and peace from him who is, who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the Prince or Ruler of the kings of the earth; who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood, and hath made us kings and priests to God and his Father; to him be glory and power to ages of ages, or forever and ever. Amen.

After this magnificent description of the power and authority of our Redeemer, and of the glorious advantages derived to his followers through him, he immediately proceeds, in the 7th verse, to describe the nearness and manner of his coming. Behold he cometh with clouds, or with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they who pierced him, and all the tribes of the land shall mourn because of him: even so, Amen.

If we look into the 24th of Matt. verse 30, we shall find this very description. -Then shall all the tribes of the land mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming with, or in, the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. The addition of the expression, "they who pierced him," by St. John, seems, with "the tribes of the land," necessarily to confine his views to the destruction of Jerusalem; and as if he would not be mistaken, he describes that very power and great glory that our Saviour said he should come in.

The Evangelist proceeds to give an account of his situation and circumstances, and of the manner in which he received his commission, respecting the seven churches of Asia; verses 9, 10, 11, and 12. - I John, whom also am your brother and companion in the affliction and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the Isle called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ: I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. And what thou seest write in a book, and send to the churches that are in Asia, &c. And I turned to see the voice, ie. to see from whence the voice proceeded which spake with me. Then follows, to the 19th verse, an animated and beautiful representation of his person, and of the power with which he was invested after his resurrection, and a repeated injunction to John, to write the things which he had seen; the things which then were, and the things which should be hereafter. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the meaning of the vision of the seven stars, and the seven golden candlesticks. Verse 20.

Among the things that then were; St. John, I apprehend, includes the state of the seven churches of Asia; for at the beginning of the 4th chapter, after the addresses to those churches

were finished, he is called to attend to what should be hereafter, which must be allowed to be a mark of great accuracy, if what he had said before be admitted to have happened prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. Mess. Beaufobre and Lenfant have indeed supposed, from the corruptions that had arisen in the seven churches of Asia, that Jerusalem must have been destroyed some time before St. John, in the name of Christ, reprov'd them for faults, that happen not but after a while. -- But to this it may be answered, that various faults are mentioned in the epistles to several churches which other apostles had planted; and that it had been foretold by our Saviour, in his prophecy of the ruin of the Jews, that before it was fulfilled, the love of many, on account of the abounding of iniquity, would wax cold. And it is observable, that in the address to the church of Ephesus, the members of it were commended for resisting and examining the pretensions of those, who pretended to be Apostles, but were found to be liars, Rev. ii, 2. Which is agreeable to the epistles; (of whose date there is no question,) asserting that false Christs and false prophets were then in the world; as our Lord had declared there would be, with this note of observation. behold I have told you before," Matt. xxiv, 24, 25. Upon the whole, I cannot help thinking, that there is some ground for supposing that St. John's language harmonizes with that of his fellow Apostles, and that the internal evidence of this book's being written before the destruction of Jerusalem ought not to be slighted. It would give me pleasure to attend the Apostle through the whole of his work; but I wish to avoid wading out of my depth; besides that, the generality of readers, for whom this work is principally intended, would not be competent to judge of the matter.

There are two reflections, that I think naturally arise from the enquiry in which we have been engaged, with which I shall beg leave to trouble the reader, and conclude.

Ist. The Old and New Testament have an evident and close connection, and mutually illustrate and confirm each other. Without the prophecies of the Old Testament, neither our Lord, nor his Apostles would, in some particular instances, be intelligible. The reader has seen what use has been made of them, in the course of this investigation, and particularly in illustrating the 3rd chapter of the 2d epistle of St. Peter; and I am firmly persuaded, that without their assistance St. Peter's reasoning cannot be understood. And whoever gives attention to the writings of the Apostles will see, that they very frequently adopt the language of the antient prophets, and often without giving any notice that they do so; taking it for granted, that those to whom they wrote were sufficiently acquainted with it. Those therefore, who wish to understand what they read, cannot have recourse to a better source of information, than to these sacred books; which, besides the prophecies they contain, afford the most excellent instructions of piety, and the soundest lessons of morality. The books of the Old Testament may justly be considered as the foundation, upon which the superstructure of Christianity is built; and it will be impossible to attain to a comprehensive and full understanding of the latter, without a considerable acquaintance with the former. The evidences of our religion, will shine with a brighter lustre, when it is observed, that the characters of the Messiah; the time of his coming; the nature of his office; the progress and success of his religion, and the ceasing of the Jewish dispensations, with the exemplary vengeance that would overtake the Jewish nation for their crimes, are distinctly marked out by antient prophecy: and the fulfilment of these events must stamp a credit and authority upon these valuable records of antiquity, that infidelity itself will never be able to overturn.

2d. I wish it to make the deepest impression upon myself and others, that God is faithful to his promises; that he cannot lie, but will execute that which he has determined. The old world, he declared, should be destroyed by water; but his forbearance to execute his promise, made the world believe that it would not take place: but they were woefully deceived -The flood came and swept them all away. In our Saviour's time, God declared by him, that in a few years Jerusalem should be destroyed; but many laughed at so improbable a prediction, and

said, Where is the promise of his coming? Yet we have the most undeniable evidence, that every thing which he said, was most exactly fulfilled. The Jews at this hour are a standing and unexampled monument of the Divine faithfulness, and as time wears away, will still afford brighter evidences of the truth of his promises.

There is one promise more, which the same veracity has engaged that shall be fulfilled; which the same principle of infidelity has engaged men to believe will never come to pass, and with the same folly which the Antideluvian and Jewish unbelievers discovered. But heaven and earth shall pass away, yet his words shall not pass away, till this promise also is fulfilled. God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained; and the time will certainly come, whether we will believe it or not, when all that are in the grave shall come forth: they that have done good, to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation. I hope no one will imagine, while such passages as these stand in the Bible, which no criticism can warp from their plain meaning, that I have at all weakened the evidence for the general judgment; because I have, in the foregoing enquiry, applied many passages, that have been usually thought to relate to the day of judgment, to the destruction of Jerusalem. The connection and the occasion of the discourse; the language of the prophets, and of our Saviour, appeared to me to require such an application, as the only consistent method of justifying the Apostles as accurate and good writers. If I have erred, I have no doubt that the friends to truth will set me right in this matter; and it will give me some pleasure to be the instrument, though it be by my errors of its discovery by abler hands.

APPENDIX.

When the foregoing sheets were nearly printed off, a new Translation of the two Epistles to the Thessalonians, with a Commentary and Notes, by Dr. Macknight, the Author of the Harmony of the Gospels, &c. was presented to the public. My concern with these epistles appeared to me too considerable, to overlook what a writer of his eminence has said upon those passages, which have fallen within my plan.

But though I cannot, upon a careful perusal of this part of his work, agree with him in every thing he says, concerning the different comings of Christ mentioned in the New Testament; yet it has given me great satisfaction to find him saying, "that the Apostles, by the coming of Christ, which they represented as at hand, when they wrote their epistles, meant his coming to establish his spiritual kingdom over all people, nations, and languages, and not his coming to put an end to the world; it is evident from what Christ himself told them, Matt. xvi, 28; There be some standing here, who shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." And agreeably to this account of the coming of Christ, and the end of all things, he observes, that every passage of their epistles, in which the Apostles have spoken of these things as at hand, may, with the greatest propriety, be interested of Christ's coming to establish his own everlasting kingdom over all people, nations, and languages, by destroying Jerusalem, putting an end to the law of Moses, and spreading the Gospel through the world.

These observations are supported by many passages from the New Testament, which the reader will find in Dr. Macknight's preface to the 2nd epistle to the Thessalonians, p, 68.

But notwithstanding we agree upon this part of the subject, yet we differ widely in our ideas of some passages in the two epistles, which he has applied to the day of final judgment, but which, I think, relate to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem; particularly upon I Thess. v, and 2 Thess. 2.

In the preface before mentioned, this respectable writer has, with great judgment and ability, exposed and confuted the opinion of some great men; that the Apostles entertained an idea that the day of final judgment was then near at hand; which he very justly stiles, a most pernicious error. But it appears to me, that it was farther necessary, effectually to vindicate the character of the Apostles, to show that they, none of them, by their writings, gave any reason to suppose, that they had such an opinion.

Almost all the commentators assert, that the Thessalonians actually did mistake the Apostle, and imagined that he spoke of its being at hand. And if St. Paul, in the 5th chapter of his 1st epistle, spoke of the day of judgment, he could not well have chosen a language better calculated to raise such an idea in their minds. Verse I --- 'Now concerning the times and the seasons:' (concerning the day of judgment,) he tells the Thessalonians, that they knew perfectly, that the day of the Lord so cometh "as a thief in the night;" that they were not in darkness as to that event, and that therefore it became them "to watch and be sober," that is, to wait with earnest expectation of its approach.

The fault therefore, according to this interpretation, was not in the Thessalonians, but in the Apostle who wrote so, that he could not be understood in any other sense; and as a proof of it, almost all the commentators have supposed him to speak of the day of final account, though they do not, for obvious reasons, allow that he spoke of it, as being near at hand.

But the truth, I believe, is, that both the character of the Apostle, and of the Thessalonians, are free from all imputation of blame in this matter. They neither of them ever entertained such an opinion as has been attributed to them; but the one wrote with a clearness and perspicuity, which was perfectly intelligible to the other. And Dr. Macknight himself acknowledges, that the messenger, who carried the Apostle's first letter to the Thessalonians, had informed him, that they were exceedingly strengthened by it, and bare the persecution, which still continued as violent as ever, with admirable constancy.

I have shown, in the foregoing enquiry, that the Apostle's argument rests entirely upon the meaning of the words "times and seasons:" in the 1st verse of this chapter, which I have endeavoured to ascertain from the clear, indubitable sense of the same expressions in other parts of Scripture. If I have failed in this, I confess, I have laboured to very little purpose, and can neither understand the Apostle here, nor in the 2nd chapter of the subsequent epistle, which is generally agreed is closely connected with it. The sense of the latter must be governed by that of the former.

Dr. Macknight has observed, in his commentary upon the 2d chapter of the 2d epistle; that the Apostle reprobates the opinion imputed to him, that he thought the day of Christ was at hand. But I can find no traces of such a reprobation in his assertion, that that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, "but only that it was not so near at hand, as some had insinuated to the Thessalonian Christians. But this matter will, I think, be put beyond all doubt, by placing before the reader, at one view, the language of our Lord, as recorded by St. Luke, and that of St. Paul, in the chapter before us.

Luke xxi, 8, 9.

And he (Christ) said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and the time draweth near: go ye not, therefore after

2 Thess. II

Verse 1. Now we beseech you brethren, by or concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him.

them.

But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions (seditions) be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not immediately.

Verse 2. That ye be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

Verse 3. 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.

I appeal to the judicious reader, whether a better commentary upon a passage can possibly be produced, than this of St. Luke; or whether there ever was a prophecy more completely fulfilled; than in the account the **Apostle Paul here gives** of these deceivers. As to the signs which the Apostle declares must first come to pass, I have already declined entering upon them; but if the meaning of the Apostle, in the beginning of the chapter, is clear, the subsequent context must be determined by it.

FINIS.