

A Man Clothed in Linen **Bro. Ric Cunningham**

Most of you will recognize “A Man Clothed in Linen” as a reference to the ninth chapter of Ezekiel. In chapter eight Ezekiel receives a vision of all the various abominations of idolatry being practiced by the Israelites in Jerusalem and even within the temple precincts. God was thoroughly disgusted with Israel’s idolatry so He declared that in His fury trouble would come upon Israel and He would not hear their cries. This literally occurred in 606 B. C. when the Babylonian armies conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. Antotypically we believe this vision applies to the period of the 1800s and represents Christendom. Four prophetic dates reached their fulfillment in that period:

- The 1290 years of Daniel 12:11 ended in 1829 with William Miller and a rekindled interest in the Lord’s second advent.

- The 2300 years of Daniel 8:14 ended in 1846 with the formation of the Evangelical Alliance and the cleansed sanctuary class which was found outside of it.

- The 1335 years of Daniel 12:12 ended in 1874 with the blessings associated with the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- The 1845 years of Israel’s disfavor ended in 1878 with the “Berlin Congress of Nations,” resulting in the Jewish people being granted much greater privileges in Israel than they had had for centuries. (See Volume 2, p. 218, and Volume 3, p. 260)

These dates are further corroborated by the time parallels of the Jewish and Gospel ages.

Bibles poured out in a flood in the 1800s. The Lord returned and knowledge increased. There had been no greater time since the first advent for spiritual growth. Yet how hardly would the Son of Man find faith in the earth when he returned. We can see by the small numbers gathered here, and by the spiritual loss in Christendom, that something has robbed the average Christian of his true faith in the Word of God. How did this happen?

That brings us to the ninth chapter of Ezekiel. That chapter tells us what was to transpire **before** the city received the Lord's fury. Let us read Ezekiel 9:1-7:

1He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand.

2And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brasen altar.

3And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side;

4And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

5And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity:

6Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.

7And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth, and slew in the city.

A great separating work was here described. A mark was placed on the foreheads of certain ones; others were slain or destroyed. Both works took place simultaneously.

Verse 2 says six men came from the way of the higher gate, "they that have charge over the city." The "charge over the city" denotes authority. Six had destroying weapons and one was clothed in linen. These seven men are those who had authority over Christendom in the sense that they came from the way of the higher gate, from the way of higher learning. They were teachers in Christendom. The Hebrew says they faced toward the north. Jehovah is pictured as residing in the north. They looked northward as they came into the court area and gathered around the brazen altar. We think this means that Jehovah, at the appointed time, allowed seven to be gathered together who would have authority over Christendom as teachers and who would come forth to spread their teachings. These teachings would either slay the one class, or would mark or spare the other.

They were gathered around the brazen altar in the court. That altar pictures the ransom sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. We suggest that the teachings of these seven surround, or concern the ransom sacrifice.

Verse 3 says that “the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house.” This suggests the Shekinah glory which dwelt between the cherubim and pictures the presence of the Lord leaving the inner sanctuary and coming to the threshold, to the door facing the court where the seven were circled about the altar. This glory might well represent the return of the Lord Jesus from the heavenly courts where he had been retained during the Gospel Age. From his return to earth’s atmosphere he began the harvest work. The harvest was indeed a time of separating. There is the gathering of the wheat and there is the gathering, bundling and burning of the tares. Our Lord supervises that work. Revelation 14:14, 15 picture him as a reaper returning with a crown upon his head and the sickle of truth in his hand.

We suggest that the man clothed with linen is Pastor Charles Taze Russell. He was the only one who was clothed in linen, which is the righteousness of the saints (Revelation 19:8). Being clothed with linen pictures being clothed with righteousness. Because he is standing in the court, he would still be in the flesh and would need the imputed righteousness of Christ as a linen robe. He is pictured as ready to serve. The writer’s inkhorn is at his side and the scribe’s pen is in his hand. His work was to place a mark that saves a certain group from destruction. This is the equivalent of Luke 12:42-44: “And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.”

We think Ezekiel 9:3 refers to his specific selection. The effect of present truth from his pen has “set a mark,” has separated a specific set of people from the masses of Christendom.

We think that the word “men” is used to show a mature Christian. It does not mean males as such for the body of Christ is made up of both males and females. The word shows that the strong, the mature element of Christianity would accept the meat in due season and be favorably marked and spared from the destroying weapons that follow. When the gross errors of the dark ages were shown to them, they would cry and sigh over

those abominable things. They would rejoice upon hearing the truth of the word of God, that our God is a God of love, justice and wisdom.

Consider the year 1846 when the cleansing of the sanctuary occurred. That was when the image of the beast of Revelation 13:14 came into existence with the formation of the Evangelical Alliance. Some 400 people representing different denominations gathered together in London and accepted a platform of ten doctrinal points upon which they agreed. Those who did not concur with those ten doctrinal points were to be considered outside orthodox Christianity. Three of the ten doctrines were the immortality of the soul, the Trinity, and the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. We know that those who disagreed with that doctrinal platform of error were really the ones whom the Lord considered a part of the cleansed sanctuary class. They had a favorable “mark” in their foreheads. They appreciated God’s beautiful plan and that Jesus Christ, as a ransom sacrifice, was the very foundation of that plan. They “sighed and cried” for the abominations.

Bro. Russell was born in 1852 and was taught to believe all the usual “dark age” doctrines of the nominal churches. As a teenager he had his faith in the Bible shaken by an infidel friend who raised good questions that stumbled him. He saw that those erroneous creeds could not be harmonized with the Bible. When he was 20 the Lord led him to a humble gathering of Adventists, described by him as “in a dusty, dingy basement hall.” The Adventists were able to harmonize, to a certain extent, the prophecies of the Old Testament with the testimony of Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament and this rekindled his faith in the Bible. So Bro. Russell set aside the creeds and studied the Bible, with a handful of other students, and with his mind unshackled. It was at this time that he saw the harmony of the Bible as never before. By 1872 he understood the ransom and restitution blessings for all as well as the concept of the two salvations—heavenly and earthly. He was immersed in 1874. From 1878 through 1881 Bro. Russell found himself caught up in a fierce maelstrom of doctrinal controversy regarding the ransom. This is the picture we have in Ezekiel 9:2 of the brazen altar around which seven men were gathered. Here was a seething cauldron of controversy involving some of the very ones with whom he had studied and cooperated. In 1879 Bro. Russell started ***Zion’s Watch Tower*** as a defense for the ransom and announcement of the Lord’s presence. He wrote ***Tabernacle Shadows*** in 1881 to defend the understanding of Jesus Christ as a ransom sacrifice. He defined Jesus’ sin offering experiences and also how the church could share in those experiences by following in the Master’s footsteps. These two great publications defended the ransom doctrine.

It was the **due time** for these things to be understood. Bro. Russell was the one who was called forth. If it hadn't been him, it would have been another. But it was him, and we're thankful it was. He placed a "mark" through these teachings. He said that if it didn't square with the ransom, it was error. How few in Christendom applied this simple, wonderful formula.

In the 1951 book entitled ***Where Else But Pittsburg***, a Mr. Swetnam records that Bro. Russell traveled over a million miles, delivered more than 30,000 sermons, and wrote over 50,000 book pages. At one time his newspaper sermons appeared twice weekly in 1200 newspapers and reached over 15 million readers. One of his opponents said that Bro. Russell's sermons had more readers than all the priests and preachers combined. What a wonderful work by the man with the writer's inkhorn.

We'd like to emphasize that it was the teachings, the message, that did this work, that set the mark. That is why we can still be marked even though the man himself is no longer with us. The instrument that did the marking was that message.

After instructions were given to the linen-clothed man with the writer's inkhorn, the Lord turned to the other six and said, "Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly all [who do not have that mark]." The young, the old, and the children picture those who are weaker. It depicts those in Christendom, such as the tares and the under-developed wheat class, who are weak in faith. They were not like those who cried and sighed for the abominations. These, when they heard the harvest message, the truth, remained weak. They could not rouse themselves out of their stupor; they were not spiritually minded at all. So they were slain.

What was destroyed? We do not consider it as literal death. Rather it shows the destruction of faith in the ransom of Christ. It was faith that was destroyed by the work of the six.

Since we interpret one as being a man and the teachings he used to set a mark, the other six also represent the teachings of men. But these teachings had a slaying affect. Although undoubtedly directed by Satan, these are man's teachings. Here is one suggestion about who might be represented by these six.

1. **Charles Darwin** wrote the ***Origin of the Species*** and proposed the evolution theory. The evolution theory teaches that we can determine the

origins of life. It contradicts the scriptural teachings of creation and the entire Word of God.

2. **Robert Ingersoll** came to be known as the great agnostic. He was a popular orator who attempted to expose “problems” with the Bible, in the light of the dark-age creeds. He personally produced much skepticism in the Word of God.

3. **Sigmund Freud** popularized a therapeutic practice called “Psychoanalysis.” His 1913 book entitled ***The Future of an Illusion*** said “religion is a universal, obsessional neurosis of mankind. God, in short, is a creation of man.” Because he believed science can take the place of religion and faith, he taught that mankind does not need a Redeemer.

4. **Karl Marx** was an atheist who was the chief theorist of socialism and communism. He work ***Das Kapital*** was published in a series of volumes beginning in 1867 and laid the foundation for radical socialism. He taught that religion must be annihilated in theory and in practice because the ultimate salvation for man would be the communist revolution!

Through these four “higher critics,” Satan was furiously attacking the Word of God, and he used perverted science and false education to do it. The masses of Christendom, in their spiritual lethargy, didn’t understand that they were being overwhelmed and their faith destroyed.

5. **Mary Baker Eddy** founded Christian Science. In 1875 she published ***Science and Health, with a Key to the Scriptures***. She taught that sin, death, pain and sickness were simply imagined. “All is life; there is no death.” This was the claim of the serpent in the Garden of Eden suggesting the false idea of the immortality of man. Bro. Russell has well said, “Christian Scientists are neither Christians nor Scientists.”

6. **Madam Blavatsky** was a Russian occultist who in 1875 started the Theosophical Society. She taught that all of us are immortal and we don’t really die. The Theosophical Society is the forerunner of the New Age Movement that is so popular today. Their spirit mediums are called “channelers” because they channel the communication from the fallen angels to their fellow man.

The handout we have prepared is a rare example of a secular source who acknowledges Bro. Russell’s role as a defender of the word of God. There are further references from Bro. Russell’s writings on this sheet for your consideration.

The first four of these six represent “Higher Criticism” in the form of so-called “education and science.” The last two represent Spiritism which attracts by a claimed secret inner power. These attracted the weak Christians and destroyed their faith by these teachings. It was the Lord who permitted these tests just as he allowed Satan to use the serpent in the Garden of Eden to manifest disobedience in Adam and Eve. This is the thought in 2 Thess. 2:8-12 (quoted with some corrections from the original Greek):

“And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his presence: whose presence is accompanied by the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be preserved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they might and should believe a lie; that they all might be judged unworthy who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

The Lord sifts and tests his professed children at the time of harvest, at the time when the Lord returns, at his *parousia*, presence. That presence would reveal the wicked Satan, the Papacy, and all his false systems, to those who have an ear to hear. But of course Satan would be doubly active with lying signs and wonders which would accompany the Lord’s presence. God allows Satan to offset the proper influence of the truth by distorting it with false teachings. In fact, this text says God sends these. He allows Satan to perform these lying wonders and miracles to sift and test those who do not have the proper faith in the Word of God and who will not receive the harvest message. The ones who are sifted do not love righteousness nor the truth. This is why the Lord said to the six, “Go out and smite.” They used false teachings. The Lord wants to sift those who were not faithful, those who did not have the mark of a mature Christian in their forehead. There was a separation between those who had faith in the ransom and those whose faith could be shaken by the false teachings of these six.

After talking about the slaying of the young and the old, the women and the children, the end of verse six says, “begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.” These are those who are weak in faith—past their prime of life. They were supposed to be the teachers of the Word of God, yet remarkably it was the clergy class who were the first ones to advocate these various errors. In the late 1800s

as the people were being enlightened from the doctrines of the dark ages, the clergy tried to adopt new teachings to keep their flock in their various denominational “sheep folds.” Thus their true faith in the ransom was slain, destroyed.

Verse seven says, “Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain.” The court shows those who should be believers in the ransom as represented by the brazen altar. Instead it is by this altar that a great slaughter takes place. Not only were the clergy the first to be slain, but those who professed to be Christians were also slain and it defiled Christendom. This continues to our day. The blind lead the blind, and both fall and are falling into the ditch. Verses 8-11 read:

“And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord God! Wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem? Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not. And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head. And, behold, the man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me.”

This is not a time for reformation. It is the time of harvest. The wheat are to be gathered, the separation takes place, and the systems are destroyed. Christendom will be utterly destroyed. The Lord will have no pity; He will not spare it. The “house of Israel” in this prophecy represents Catholicism. Judah represents federated Protestantism. These are the two religious parts mentioned in Revelation 16:13 as the beast and the false prophet which are aligned with state government, and which will be destroyed.

The land is full of blood, the blood guilt of Christendom. It is caused by the teaching of God-dishonoring doctrines such as evolution, spiritism, and in some instances even reincarnation. The clergy act as though they don't believe the Lord cares. They lack belief in the reality that the Lord is present and will soon pour out his judgments. In verse 11 the man clothed with linen says, “I have done as thou hast commanded me,” a phrase which shows that the message will assist in sealing the 144,000.

Then follows chapter 10, verses 2 and 7: “He spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub,

and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter them over the city. And he went in my sight...

“7And one cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubims unto the fire that was between the cherubims, and took thereof, and put it into the hands of him that was clothed with linen: who took it, and went out.”

We would liken the scattering of these coals of fire over the city as being the same as the seven last plagues that come upon Babylon, Christendom, to destroy her, after the separating work of wheat and tares has taken place. In Volume 3, *Thy Kingdom Come*, page 135, in the “Work of Harvest” chapter, two of the summaries read, “The Casting off, Gradual Fall and Final Destruction of Babylon—The Sealing of the Servants of God, **BEFORE** the Plagues Come Upon Babylon.” On page 166 Bro. Russell writes: “Thus the classes are to be marked and separated before the plagues come upon rejected, cast off Babylon.” These coals of fire bring to mind the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the fiery judgments of the Lord of those perverse cities. It also brings to mind Revelation 18:8 where it says that the harlot, the city (mystic Babylon, Christendom) shall be utterly burned with fire. This is the affect that the pouring out of the seven last plagues will have upon Christendom. But it doesn’t come until after the separation has taken place.

We think there is something about the man in linen who gets these coals of fire that is worthy of note. The seven last plagues are hard, revealing truths that are contained in the harvest message that will be poured out upon Babylon in such a way, and at just the right time, when the social, economic and religious environment is ripe so that people will recognize how iniquitous these systems have been, so that the discontented masses of people will rise up and pull these systems down. Revelation 18:20, 21: “Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her. And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.” We think that’s the relationship the man clothed with linen has with these coals of fire which shall eventually destroy the city.

It is important to appreciate the agents the Lord uses. He used human prophets to guide and direct Israel. He used human apostles to establish the church. He

used human agents as the seven messengers In Revelation 1 those messengers were in his right hand. If the Lord holds these seven in his right hand, he has confidence in them. They are his messengers; they carry his message.

In the message to Laodicea (Revelation 3:20), the Lord states that “he would stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” Since our Lord’s return in 1874, he has been using time prophecies and signs of the times to attract the attention of the faithful. Those who respond are greatly privileged to partake of the spiritual meat or bread now provided during this harvest time.

“Therefore, be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.” Matthew 24:44-46

The meat in due season is the truth needed to protect and strengthen the faith of the saints during the Lord’s *parousia* from the errors of infidelity, evolution, higher criticism, false doctrines, spiritism, occultism, materialism, and all lying wonders and deceptions. These truths are supplied to us by our returned Lord through his appointed servant, or human agent, the wise and faithful servant, Pastor Charles Taze Russell. Let us continue to appreciate how and where we can “sup” with our Lord in the most satisfying and nutritious way—in the Word of God, using the provided keys, the writings from the man clothed in linen with the writer’s inkhorn by his side.

May the Lord overrule anything said amiss.