

THE OUTER DARKNESS

by A Edwin Wilson

From all over the county have come requests that we give some word of teaching relative to the outer darkness. This present issue is therefore made up completely of excerpts taken from the teachings of some of the great Bible expositors of all time; namely, G. H. Lang, G. Campbell Morgan, I. M. Haldeman, A. B. Bruce and John J. Morey. This doctrine is strong meat —not milk — and we beg of you to read prayerfully and carefully. First, we quote from G. H. Lang's new book, PICTURES AND PARABLES (...This is the *same* book but the British title.) Wilbur M. Smith, teacher of English Bible in Fuller Theological Seminary, says that G. H. Lang has the greatest grasp of the whole Scripture of any man living today. Here is what Mr. Lang says on the outer darkness:

"Few expressions have been treated with more laxity and liberty than this, though, seeing its solemnity, it should have received very exact study.

"It cannot point to the world of the dead, Hades, for there Dives and Abraham could see one another. Nor can a lake burning with fire be a place of darkness, and moreover that most dreadful of all regions is visible to the eye, for its torment is 'in the presence of (under the eye of, enopion) holy angels and the Lamb (Rev. 14:10; 19:20; 20:10).

"With its too common inexactness the A.V. gives simply 'outer darkness,' ignoring the two definite articles of the Greek. The R.V. gives 'the outer darkness.' English does not readily allow 'the darkness the outer' of the original language, which is a pity, because the repetition of the article throws emphasis upon the second noun: it is not just any darkness but darkness outside some region of light.

"Only our Lord used the term; and only Matthew records it (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). Christ repeated the statement of Matthew 8:12, as reported by Luke (13:24-30), when 'outer darkness' became simply 'without.' This somewhat reduces the severity of the thought. Nor is the change without significance. The region is simply outside some other region, contiguous to it.

"On each occasion those cast into outer darkness weep and gnash their teeth. The only other place where this sign of grief and rage is mentioned is Matt. 13:42, 50, when the angel reapers cast the wicked into 'the furnace of fire.' This is not set by the Lord as at the final judgment, the great white throne, but at the 'consummation of the age,' that is, in connection with the clearing of the wicked from off this earth when His

millennial kingdom is about to be established. But, as remarked above, darkness and flaming fire are incompatibles. Such impotent chagrin and rage can mark both spheres and therefore do not identify them. Moreover such distress is possible in this life, and does not require death to induce it: 'I am faint and sore bruised: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart ... My groaning is not hid from Thee' (Ps. 38:8, 9).

"A too little considered feature of the three references to 'outer darkness' is that each pictures a house of feasting. In Matt. 8 and Luke 13 Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are represented as reclining at table and others from all quarters joining them, while the 'sons of the kingdom,' those to whom the house and its pleasures more naturally belonged, see this feasting but are driven away from it into outer darkness.

"In our present passage it is the same. The King comes in to see the guests, that is, into the banqueting hall. It is thence that the man is cast out. "In Matt. 25 the lord of the house has returned thither from his journey, which is to be celebrated as a time of joy, implying a feast; it is to share this joy of their lord that the faithful servants are welcomed, whereas the unfaithful man is cast into outer darkness. In the second instance the man is bound hand and foot.

"This element of the one picture really gives the clue to the interpretation, when it is remembered that in the East such a festivity usually took place at night. Staying in a native quarter in Alexandria I was on the other side of the road from a large Oriental mansion. One night the whole house was brilliantly lit, a blaze of light from every room, evidently for some special affair. By contrast the street outside and the garden around were in black darkness, and nothing further was required to correspond to the term 'the darkness the outer,' which term equals the darkness which is without, outside the house.

"It were but an event to be expected that an Oriental despot, of royal or lesser rank, if offended with one of the slaves, should order that he be bound and thrown into the garden. There the unfortunate man, with the common Eastern emotionalism, would bewail the dark and the cold, and the danger from hungry dogs and jackals, and would gnash his teeth at being deprived of the pleasures forfeited.

"This is the picture; and, whatever may be the reality, it is not the same as the enemies of the king being slain in public, as in the parable of the

pounds (Luke 19:27), nor as the tares, the very 'sons of the Evil One' being cast into the furnace of fire, as in Matt. 13. Such obviously distinct pictures must be viewed as distinct, and distinct meanings be sought. To blur the picture and confound the lessons can be only confusing and misleading, as had commonly been the case in the treatment of this parable.

"In relation to things future and unseen, wisdom would lead each to say with the village idiot, when asked if he knew anything, 'some things I know, some things I don't know' — a much wiser state of mind than when a preacher speaks dogmatically on such a theme, as if he knows everything.

"Of Hades, the Abyss, the 'Lake of fire' — of these some definite knowledge is imparted, though much is left unrevealed. Of 'the darkness which is outside' much less is revealed; and it is not for us to speculate, least of all to be positive.

"It is outside the kingdom of heaven when pictured as the temporary festivity at the return of the lord of the house or as the wedding feast of the son of the house. It is marked by loss of liberty (bound hand and foot), by forfeiture of privilege (the 'joy of the lord'), by decrease of knowledge (the pound withdrawn), by deprivation of service and reward ('have thou authority'). It will be healthful that these solemn elements weigh upon our minds and warn and stimulate, though where and how the realities they picture will be experienced may not be known.

"In the interests of sound interpretation as well as of moral effect, it is vital to recognize that it is 'sons of the kingdom', those to whom by calling it naturally belonged; it is the 'friend' who had accepted the invitation and taken his place; it is the personal slaves of the house, of the lord of the house, who are bidden to value their rich privileges lest they lose them and fall under his displeasure. The apostles regularly describe themselves as slaves.

"It was 'his own bondservants' to whom the lord of the house entrusted the talents. What relationship this term indicates is not questioned when it is used of the shepherd calling 'his own' sheep and going before them (John 10:3, 4). To avoid this meaning in the former case is to deal deceitfully with Scripture as well as with one's own soul and that of the hearer. The blessed Lord who loved and redeemed them, made it abundantly plain

that one of His own servants may render himself obnoxious to this intensely solemn penalty of being bound and cast forth from the grand reality of the marriage supper, of the joy of the Lord. Nor is the spiritual reality at all unknown now. There are children of God, servants of Christ, who through misconduct have forfeited the once-enjoyed liberty of sons, no more share the joy of their Lord, and are in distressing darkness of soul. Experimentally they are outside the kingdom of God, which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

"But the very fact that this is possible to one of 'His own' itself proves that the penalty cannot be eternal, for all such have eternal life and can never perish. No one grasping the illustration used would suppose that the unhappy slave would be left in the garden to starve to death, or that the dark night would last forever. Day would dawn, his bands would be loosed, life would be resumed, but he would have missed the Joyous festival forever, for the wedding feast would never be repeated. That is to say, the special pleasures, honours, splendors which are to accompany the return of the Lord from heaven and the setting up of His kingdom at the consummation of this age, are to be a reward for fidelity, for righteous and dutiful conduct in His absence, and without this manner of life they may be forfeited."

This article appears in the *Appendix of Selected Writings of A. Edwin Wilson* (Schoettle Publishing Company, Inc., Third Printing 1996, pp. 377-380). No copyright.