



The King's Highway

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An Advocate of Scriptural Holiness

"And an highway shall be there and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness."

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THIS QUESTION OF PROPHECY

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It is not surprising that in some quarters devout Christians are perplexed at the point of the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. Some have yielded to the understandable tendency to view the chaotic interpretations of professional lecturers upon the subject, and to conclude from the very lack of agreement among them, that the question is hopeless. It is our purpose in this discussion to lift into prominence those features in prophetic study which are foundational, and which remain valid through the confusion of speculation which has gathered about the entire subject.

Jesus Christ the Primary Source

Without discounting in any sense the authority of the entire Bible, the writer wishes to observe, first, that the words of our Lord are of primary importance in such a discussion, inasmuch as the prophetic ministry of our age centers in the question of the re-appearing of Jesus Christ on earth, we are led first to analyze His statements. Foremost among the pronouncements which He made was the promise that He would come to earth again. "The Son of Man cometh."

Again, He indicated that there would be an element of contingency in His coming — that even those who are in readiness will be surprised when the supreme hour strikes. If the parable of the Ten Virgins bears upon this point at all, it teaches that the five who were wise were by no means certain concerning the precise hour in which the bridegroom would come. This very fact ought to rule out over-certainty concerning the reading of the signs of the times. Let it be said, parenthetically, that the cause of Bible prophecy has suffered immeasurably at the hands of its unwise friends.

Yet further, our Lord indicated that the primary objective of the doctrine of the second coming is a moral and spiritual one. It is to afford an incentive of the strongest sort toward constant spiritual vigilance and toward the earnest quest for the highest and best in Christian life and experience. During the bombings of Germany, one word was heard over government wirelasses in that unhappy country with great frequency: broadcasts were constantly interrupted with the cry of "Achtung! Achtung!" (Warning! Warning!) So also our Lord would keep His church on perpetual alert, by means of the constant and warning assurance that He would appear "in such an hour as ye think not." Never divorced

from this alerting call was the injunction, "Be ready!"

Possible Abuses of the Doctrine

Few good things are at the same time fool-proof. It is part of the inner logic of the message of the second coming of Christ that it should be misunderstood—and abused. The very element of uncertainty, coupled with the fact that some signs are indicated in Scripture, opens the way for speculation, and has encouraged many well-meaning persons to go much too far in the matter of finding the details, point by point, of the contemporary scene 'clearly described' in Scripture. Let it be said that it is very normal for humans to wish to know, so far as possible, the future; this very desire, however, frequently impels a forced interpretation upon Scripture, in which the fallibility of human judgment is quite overlooked.

The events which are foretold to precede the return of Christ are of two kinds: some are relative signs which admit of degrees, and others (relatively few in number) are more nearly absolute. Among the former may be mentioned the disintegration of society, the breakdown of the ties of the home, undue emphasis upon things temporal, etc. Among the latter, at least two ought to be mentioned: the final falling away (apostacy) and the appearance of enigmatic figure, the man of sin.

Some will urge that the first of these, the apostacy, is one admitting of degrees: that there have always been defections from the Faith. This argument has weight, it seems, however, that the apostacy of the end time will be one of no mere local and partial character such as has frequently occurred. Rather, it will be a systematic and widespread denial of the essentials of the faith from within the Church in its major branches. There are many thoughtful persons who feel that the systematic system of denials which calls itself 'liberalism' or 'modernism' may be the precursor of a landslide away from the Truth which will bear along with it the major portion and strength of the church.

That which is said concerning the 'man of sin' leads us to believe that he will appear as a figure of magnificent proportions, in governmental power as well as in his pretensions to religious authority. In this lies the subtle possibility of much misunderstanding. Biblical descriptions of him are such as to lead the unthinking to identify any dictatorial system, or any boastful despot, with the Anti-christ. Many well-meaning persons were certain beyond doubt that Benito Mussolini was he; the

same error was made a generation ago with respect to Emperor Wilhelm II.

The net result of such snap judgments is the weakening of confidence in prophetic teaching in general. Some of us have had difficulty in understanding how some teachers of national fame can so easily and without apology pass from one dogmatic guess to another, when one after another of them are flatly contradicted by the course of history. Even in the eyes of a long-suffering public, the cause of Biblical prophecy has been compromised by these zealous but superficial theorists.

A Note of Caution

Not many among the readers of this JOURNAL are themselves in danger of going out on a limb at such points as the identification of the Anti-christ or the precise naming of the ten-toe nations. Our tendency is more likely to be that of abandoning in discouragement, the whole of predictive prophecy. To do so would be to commit the error of throwing out the baby with the bath water—an unwise procedure as any mother will understand. But how else fortify ourselves against being misled?

Permit two or three constructive hints: first, let us keep our eyes upon the main lines of prophetic teaching, those upon which the Bible seems clear, such as the following: that the coming of Christ will be certain, but relatively unexpected; that He will come to find, not a millenium upon earth, but a large-scale moral, religious and social decay; that world-dictatorship in government will be near at hand; that religious functions will be usurped by evil men; that unprecedented missionary activity will be part of the details of the end-period; and that Israel will be providentially agitated in the direction of nationalism prior to His coming.

The second caution is against too great desire for a detailed pattern of events. The Bible is not like the libretto of an opera which tells precisely when each performer will appear on the stage. Such information is not lying on the surface for the casual reader to pick up and follow as a traveller would follow Baedeker's guide-books. It is rather to be found through diligent study. Finally, it is one of the effects of profound study to render the student cautious at the point of dogmatizing upon details. Much of the cure for wild speculation in prophecy can be found in diligence in Bible study, which will serve to lift the student above speculative superficiality.

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