



CHRIST IS COMING:

Bible Prophecy Confirmed By World Events

MAY we appeal to all readers that they will try to understand our point of view? It may seem a strange and unbelievable idea that a divine foreknowledge revealed in the Bible has lit the path of human history right to the days in which we are living, but the present writer is convinced that anyone who will take the trouble to read this little work through, will at least begin to understand why we so firmly believe in the reality of this light. Incredulity will then give place to a sympathetic understanding, and it is at least possible that faith will follow.

All men, whether they are Christians or atheists, at the threshold of life are met by certain fundamental mysteries, which indeed seem utter impossibilities, but which all are forced to accept. The ideas of time without any beginning and space without any end are surely at least as difficult to accept as the concept of divine foreknowledge. Even we have had experience of putting restraints on ourselves in order that we should not restrict the free choice of others. We have had no experience to suggest the slightest analogy to the unlimited time and space in which we are simply forced to believe; nor are we in any way helped by the scientific terms in which men sometimes attempt to disguise the mysteries.

The prophecies contained in Scripture are not viewed with favour by the intellectuals of the present day. Indeed, that is stating the matter very mildly. One is oppressed by the conviction that the negative prejudice of most readers is so strong that our first and hardest task is to open the closed minds of our friends, that they may be induced to pay proper attention to the argument.

A UNIQUE FEATURE

It must be admitted that the fact of prophecy has been recognized not only by simple minded Christians who are often dismissed with contempt, but by many thinkers whose names are well known in the world and whose abilities have been recognized in other walks of life. It has often been remarked by such thinkers that the specific, emphatic and often repeated declarations in the Bible as to the evils which would come on the nation of Israel, have been realized so fully and in such detail that it is unreasonable to dismiss them as mere matters of chance. Those who have made a study of the subject have noted a constantly recurring feature which distinguishes these predictions from all those human efforts which sceptics have sometimes cited as coming in the same category. The prophets of Israel did not merely make forecasts which might easily be proved true and which in the absence of a time limit could

never be proved false. They presented negatives as well as positives, sometimes in defiance of all probabilities.

The people of Israel were to be scattered and subjected to all manner of destructive experiences, yet never to come to a full end. This racial stability is guaranteed by repeated declarations in the strongest of language (see Leviticus 26, Jeremiah 30; 46, and many other passages). Egypt was to be defeated and to remain a “base kingdom”, ruled by strangers. It was never again to exalt itself above the nations. Tyre was to be made like the top of a rock and never to be built again. Babylon was to be the subject of perpetual desolations. So with all the forecasts regarding the world empires, there were extraordinary negatives as well as positives. When uninspired men have ventured to express a conviction that certain events will never occur, they have often been proved wrong in a few years. We are justified, then, in stressing the significance of these ancient challenges to eternity. The prophecies of Scripture are quite different from human prognostications not only in the range and extent of their forecasts, but in the nature of the predictions, the confident declarations that some apparently likely events would never happen and the importance of the object in view.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY

When men pretend to make an impartial investigation as to the origin of Christianity, they often most unreasonably ignore prophecy. Yet it is clear that it was largely as the result of prophecy that Jews and Gentiles were converted. Paul and Apollos appealed to the prophecies of the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is the Christ. The people were well aware that certain extraordinary events had occurred in their day. They knew that Jesus had been slain, that the elders of Israel had rejected him, and that now his disciples were claiming that he had risen from the dead. They knew in fact that these Christian witnesses were willing to endure imprisonment, scourging or death rather than abate any of their testimony regarding that which they claimed to have seen and heard. Guided by Paul and Apollos, many people became convinced that the prophecies of the Old Testament fitted so perfectly into the pattern of current events that they could not be resisted.

The same argument can carry conviction now. Taking only those broad facts which are admitted even by opponents, we claim that in the Old Testament, those Scriptures revered and guarded by the people who rejected Jesus, there is a mass of prophecy which comes to us with compelling logic. The time when the Christ would appear, the work he would perform, the fact that he would be cut off, and that after this the city and sanctuary would be made desolate; his death as a sacrifice, his resurrection, his waiting in heaven; the way the Jews would reject him, the call of salvation to the Gentiles, and finally the manifestation in glory when the Gentile kings will have the surprise of their lives (Isaiah 52:15), while Jews at one and the same time will be the subjects of their greatest deliverance and their greatest humiliation (Zechariah 12:10-14)—all these are contained in prophecy.

We are quite well aware of the way in which this matter has been treated by atheists and Christian compromisers alike. They usually assume that they can answer, or at least stop the argument, by calling attention to an ugly context in the Messianic prophecies. It is amazing how childish men—even learned men—can be when they are dealing with religious problems and their personal hopes. We do not think there is

anything in the Messianic prophecies more shocking to modern sentimentality than some of the recorded sayings of Jesus: “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). “The Son of Man shall send forth his angels and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend ... and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:41-42).

The most merciful of judges will seem harsh when dealing with incorrigible offenders. Certainly it would be impossible for any ruler to put the world right without the use of stern measures. If a reader can begin to understand the scriptural conception of divine righteousness and of human sin; if he can escape from that utterly childish tendency to be guided by human sentimentality and feeling, he may be able to see the picture of divine purpose in the light of prophecy—revealed through a nation so far removed from essential truths that they persecuted and repudiated most of the prophets—and culminating in the rejected man of sorrows who reveals to us the meaning of the Covenant Name. Once see that complete picture, and the objections of the critics seem pitifully feeble.

Even readers who are as yet far from seeing the complete picture may in measure understand the argument. At least they are bound to acknowledge the fact that many have been convinced by these prophecies that Jesus was the promised Christ. On this basis and with a mind at least partly opened it may be possible for a reader to follow our reasoning, and eventually to understand why we believe that Jesus Christ, the centre of a thousand years of prophecy, was himself in turn a prophet, revealing the purpose of God, anticipating human reactions, and casting a light through history to the days in which we now live.

PROPHECIES BY JESUS

It is admitted even by the most bitter of opponents that the four Gospels were in existence early in the second century and therefore the recorded sayings of Jesus have been before the world for at least seventeen hundred years. It is usual and natural for a reformer to be convinced that however much he has been slighted by contemporaries, future generations will do him justice. Jesus declared that this would not be so with his teaching of peace. He taught the doctrine of non-resistance, of gentleness and returning good for evil, but he recognized the fact that instead of the world accepting such principles there would be an increase of war and division, of family feuds and bitterness. Reformers who have admired the teaching of Jesus have repeatedly expected that their efforts to implement Christian principles would soon bear fruit, bringing an era of peace. Even the world struggle of 1914-18 was to be “the war that will end war”. Real followers of Christ never expected such a development, for they knew that it was contrary to his plain predictions. Read from the tenth chapter of Matthew verses 34, 35, 36. Consider the details of this statement and its implications, and you may see more evidence of superhuman knowledge than we have space to explain.

Another startling prediction is recorded in John 16. Here there is not only a repetition of the prophecy that disciples would be persecuted, but it is affirmed that a time would come when men would think that they did God service by killing them (John 16:2). Not many people are sufficiently acquainted with the facts to perceive the full significance of this prediction. There are a few, however, even among atheists, who

have some knowledge of the Scriptures and who are aware of the tremendous gap between the Bible and the organized theology which claimed to be based on it. Such students know that persecuted minorities, Waldenses, Huguenots and other feeble communities, were far nearer to Christ in both doctrine and practice than the powerful rulers who tormented them. But how was it that such tyranny was foreseen by Christ, unless he possessed superhuman knowledge?

All readers of history are aware that the persecutions were often on a terribly large scale with many massacres. What a strange development in view of the teaching attributed to Jesus. To the disciples who desired to avenge a deliberate affront to him, he said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:56). To those who wanted to forbid the work of one who did not follow with them: "Forbid him not ... he that is not against us is on our part".

THINKING THEY DID GOD SERVICE

One of the most remarkable features of the prophecy recorded in John 16 is the statement that a time would come when men would think that they did God service by slaying the true disciples of Jesus. This was a generous recognition of a possible sincerity even in the most bitter of opponents. Some of us, on looking back on the darkest pages of ecclesiastical history, may feel unwilling to admit that there was anything genuine in the pious fiends who took the lead in religious persecutions. We may be disposed to regard such abominations as the expression of utterly evil minds completely devoid of all desire to serve God. A closer investigation compels the recognition that even in the worst of outrages there was sometimes an element of belief in God. Zealous reformers were feared as a source of political danger, and so in the attitude of the authorities toward nonconformists self-interest helped to kindle and sustain the fires of religious persecution. Yet with all the mixed motives, there was a conviction that God was served by the destruction of heretics. It was surely an extraordinary development in the religion of love. Would ordinary, uninspired men have foreseen it? We take note of the fact that such things were foreseen and foretold in those Christian records written at least seventeen centuries ago.

With this background we do well to examine the Mount Olivet prophecy of the events leading to the Second Coming of Christ, taking into the survey all three records, Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. We read there that the temple would be destroyed, the Jews scattered, and the city Jerusalem trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled. Persecution of disciples would continue, there would be wars and rumours of wars, nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom to the last days of Gentile times. Before considering the special signs of the Second Advent it may be well to trace some of the events which have convinced us that we are now living in those last days.

PAST EXPECTATIONS

It has often been affirmed that those students who expect the return of Christ to the earth have always thought that the great event was near at hand. What such critics really mean is "always" within their recollection. Individual memory, however, does not go back far in history. There were many Protestants at the time of the Reformation

who certainly believed in a real Second Advent, but they did not expect it in their day, as scores of seventeenth and eighteenth century books bear witness. It was just over a hundred years ago, in the first half of the nineteenth century, that there arose a general expectancy among believers that the coming of the Lord was near at hand. If we could make all readers understand just why there were so many who began at that time to watch for the signs of the last days, we should have made a real advance in the presentation of these matters. There were some reasons in connection with time periods which, while they seemed to present weighty evidence to students, cannot be explained in a little work of this nature. There is, however, one line of evidence which greatly influenced the expectations of a hundred years ago and which all should readily be able to understand.

Everyone knows that the last book of the Bible claims to be “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass ... Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy”. It may be that some readers of these lines will impatiently dismiss the book of Revelation as a meaningless mystery. They may claim that any attempt to find a meaning for the symbols only expresses the opinion of the expositor. This is true, but it must be remembered that when an exposition is printed in a book it becomes a fact that the opinions have been expressed whatever we may think of them. We may be quite unable to understand the calculations of astronomers when they declare that at a certain time there will be an eclipse of the sun or the moon. We might call their expectation only an opinion, but if the result of their calculations has been written and printed we are forced to admit that the expression of their opinion was a fact. If when the time comes the anticipated phenomenon occurs, we may begin to see reasons for paying some attention to astronomers.

FACTS TO BE RECKONED WITH

Here, then, are a few facts which may explain why it was that a hundred years ago some students were convinced that “the latter days” of Scripture prophecy had begun. It is a fact that three hundred years ago nearly every educated Christian recognized that the book of Revelation was just what it claimed to be, “the revelation of Jesus Christ, to show his servants things which would shortly come to pass”. It is a fact that many Protestant scholars thought it was possible to get at the meaning, and that among expositors none had a greater reputation than Joseph Mede, Fellow of Christ’s Church College, Cambridge. It is a fact that his book, *The Key to the Revelation*, was translated from the original Latin and published in English in the year 1643, and an original copy of this first English edition is on the table as these lines are written. It is a fact that in this time-stained volume, printed more than three hundred years ago, Mede attempted to trace the meaning and fulfilment of the symbols of seals, trumpets and vials through history. It is a fact that the seven vials, or last plagues, are stated to lead to the great day of judgment. It is a fact that Mede regarded the sixth vial—the last but one— as meaning the drying up of Turkish power to prepare the way in the land of Palestine, that at that time the Jews would be restored to their old land, and there would be “a horrible and unheard of preparation for war”. The symbol of this sixth vial is the drying up of the river Euphrates to prepare the way of the kings of the east, and the reference to war is in a symbol of unclean demoniac influences going forth to the kings of the earth to prepare for the war of the great day of God Almighty and to gather them to Armageddon (Revelation 16:12-16). We cannot say it is a fact

that every reader of these lines will be able to understand the reason for this old interpretation but it would be surprising if any intelligent reader failed.

In Revelation 17, water is stated to be used as a symbol for people and nations. This same symbol of the river Euphrates, used to mean the people dwelling in the Euphratean valley, is employed by Isaiah, an explanation in plain language immediately following. In Isaiah 8 we read: "The Lord shall bring upon you the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria and all his glory". Mede quoted this, and asked, "Why should not the Euphrates of the vials in the same manner be understood of the Turks, being inhabitants of the same land?" This surely seems a convincing argument, but whether you agree or not it remains a fact that this exposition of the matter was written and printed more than three hundred years ago. It is a fact that although Turkey was one of the greatest powers in the world and showing no sign of decline, there were many earnest students who accepted Mede's interpretation and looked for this great sign of the latter days. It is a fact that a hundred years after Mede's day, Sir Isaac Newton wrote, "Master Mede's interpretation of the vials is not much amiss". It is a fact that a hundred years later still the Turkish empire met with such a series of disasters that many followers of prophecy began to think that the drying up had begun.

A BOOK OF A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

In the year 1849 a book called *Elpis Israel* (Hope of Israel) was published in which the author expressed his conviction that the end of Gentile times was at hand, that "the latter days" of Bible prophecy had begun, and that the first stage of Israel's restoration might very soon be expected, for that was to be in the latter days (Ezekiel 37, Hosea 3, and other prophecies). It is a fact that the writer of *Elpis Israel* set on record his conviction that the restoration would be in two stages, the first stage to be before the return of Christ to the earth. The Jews, he said, would go back to the land in search of temporal advantage and "in unbelief of the messiahship of Jesus". This conviction was largely based on Ezekiel 37 in which the political resurrection of Israel in the latter days is presented under the figure of a valley full of dry bones. The first stage of all was to be a mere shaking among very dry bones (Ezekiel 37:7). Then a formation of skeletons and bodies, but still no breath or spirit in them until another divine proclamation should call them to life. Whether you can agree that this justifies the exposition in *Elpis Israel* or whether you reject the idea, it remains a fact that this exposition was written and printed a hundred years ago, and a copy of this book is also on the table as these lines are written.

It is a fact that the author of *Elpis Israel* agreed with Mede that the great sign of the sixth vial would be the clearing of the Turk out of Palestine, the beginning of Israel's restoration, and "a horrible and unheard of preparation for war". In fact he was so convinced that the war sign would soon come that in 1849 he attended a peace meeting and moved an amendment to a peace resolution. He pointed out that according to the Bible great wars would mark the end of the age, and so the optimistic hopes for peace were doomed to disappointment.

DEVELOPMENTS OF 60 YEARS

Here we must draw attention to another fact of outstanding importance. The signs

which in these days our friends can most readily understand did not exist a hundred years ago. The solid conviction that the latter days of Scripture prophecy had begun came before there was any sign of the restoration of Israel or of any exceptional preparation for war. There was a freedom from national conflicts such as had not been enjoyed for a very long while. "At the beginning of 1855 Europe was in a condition of profound peace." So we may read in a history of the war in the Crimea; that conflict with Russia which broke the spell of peace, and was perhaps the first of those demoniac emanations seen in vision by John. As for the restoration of Israel, read Macaulay's essay on *Civil disabilities of the Jews*, printed in 1831. The essayist recognized that God had promised that "in some way, at some time, perhaps ten thousand years hence the Jews would be restored to their own land". Assuredly the restoration was not a matter of practical politics in 1831!

When in days of boyhood 65 years ago the present writer began to take an interest in these matters, there was a little movement in the land of Palestine, but not more than a shaking of dry bones which hardly anyone noticed. There was some increase of armaments in Europe, but comparatively very little. Income tax was still at ninepence in the pound, the first £160 (equal to £350 now) being quite free.

These two great signs of the last days, the restoration of Israel and the preparation for war, were expected only because other signs clearly indicated that the latter days had begun. It seemed impossible that anyone with any knowledge of the subject could deny the significance of those unclean influences preparing the kings of the earth for war, or that anyone could fail to see the meaning of such a prophecy as in the third chapter of Joel, where the preparation of the Gentiles for war is so definitely connected with "that day and that time" when the restoration of Israel should be effected (Joel 3:9; 3:11-12).

Whatever view you take, however, it remains a fact that the present writer, among many students, accepted the truth of these matters 60 years ago, and has witnessed the gradual unfolding of events in harmony with those expectations. The Turk has been cleared out of Palestine and the Euphratean valley; there has been a building up of Israel's bones, going even beyond our expectations and establishing a State of Israel which even enemies are compelled to recognize. Concurrently with this there has been preparation for war even more terrible than the words of prophecy seemed to indicate. At the same time there has been a development of those other signs of the last days mentioned by the Lord Jesus in his mount Olivet prophecy.

THE PERPLEXITY OF OUR TIMES

In the Mount Olivet prophecy in answer to the question of the disciples as to what should be the sign of his coming and of the end of the age, the Lord Jesus mentioned matters which surely ought to be of interest to all Christians. After a general survey of the many wars and persecutions which should prevail all through Gentile times—matters we have already dealt with—he came to the time when "the sign of the Son of Man" will be seen in the heavens, and in this connection he used some plain language which every reader should be able to understand: "Distress of nations, with perplexity ... men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21:26-28). It may be objected that the first part of this prediction is not distinctive enough to be regarded as a sign of the times. Nations have

often been distressed and statesmen have often been perplexed in the history of mankind. This we freely admit, but we think it must also be conceded that there is something distinctive in the troubles of the present day. Often in the past the distress of one nation has been directly caused by the success of another. The French were in great distress after the war of 1870-1, but the Prussians were well satisfied. French statesmen were greatly perplexed, but Bismarck was triumphant. In the history of the world there have been many local wars in which nations directly affected have suffered acutely, while other nations have hardly been aware of the trouble. During the last hundred years there has been a change, and the pace of the change is continually increasing. Modern war troubles the whole world; the victors may be almost as much distressed as the vanquished, and the statesmen of victorious nations have perhaps been even more perplexed than those who have been so decisively defeated that they can be statesmen no more.

The next words of Jesus, the second part of the paragraph we have quoted, are much more distinctive and more definitely indicative of the days in which we are living: "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth". We can hardly suppose that anyone will deny the absolute applicability of these words to the present time, or that anyone would claim an equally appropriate application to any other age. There have been fears when nations have been menaced by strong enemies or by plagues which threatened to destroy. Now the fears are general and intense. Another remarkable feature distinguishes this from all other ages. In former times the fears of utter destruction have been on the part of ill-educated people, influenced by superstition; it has been the part of educated men to still those fears and give assurance of stability in human affairs. Now it is the well educated men who are most conscious of the terrible dangers that menace mankind.

A RACIAL FEAR

Not long ago an economist sounded a warning against the tendency of civilized luxury leading to race suicide. He said that the population of Europe had only about doubled in the last hundred years. In the same period some other races had increased far more rapidly, suggesting a very real danger that with the progressive opening up of the world "the clash of colour" would lead to the white races being overwhelmed by superior numbers. A little calculation will show that the prospect is grim enough even at the slowest rate of increase mentioned. It would mean ten doublings in a thousand years. Many people fail to see the meaning of this unless they have figures plainly before them: 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, 1,024. Thus in a thousand years—not a very long period in history—there might be a thousand people in the world for every one living now. How hopelessly unreasonable are the sentimentalists who think they can conquer disease, lead natural, healthy lives, continue to increase in numbers, other races increasing most, and yet avoid war.

Intelligent statesmen see this menace clearly enough. They know that the clash of material interests has led to the clash of arms in the past with less than a hundredth part of the economic pressure of necessity that looms in the near future. So if with all their acumen they do not see quite far enough to accept the real Christian message, they view the future with dread. They recognize that war is sure to break out sooner or later, that when it comes "glorious allies" and "foul enemies" will be sorted out according to the interests of the moment and not on any enduring basis of friendship.

And they see quite clearly that just as it has been in the past, so in the greater struggle to come, it will only need the bitterness of impending defeat to bring into use every weapon that can be devised for the destruction of human life and property.

Often Christians are most reluctant to look at unpleasant truths even when plainly presented by Scripture. There are, however, many terrible facts in history and in modern life. It is childish for us to shut our eyes against them or to the prediction of them in the Bible. It was terrible that Jesus should be crucified; it was terrible that Jerusalem should suffer such an overthrow; terrible that there should be wars, nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom. It was terrible that disciples should be persecuted and sometimes killed by fanatical enemies who thought they were serving God. It is terrible that after eighteen centuries nations should still hate each other, and that the hearts of men should be overwhelmed by dread of the earth's future. These evils are realities, and grown-up people ought to face them. The fact that Jesus foresaw them eighteen centuries ago suggests that there may be equal truth in his claim to be able to give rest and peace and eternal life to those who in faith and obedience come to him. To disciples of this age Jesus said in that record which has been before the world for over seventeen centuries, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36).

NOT "SMOOTH THINGS"

Some readers may ask, "Why give so much attention to these repellent ideas? Why not devote your space to the presentation of scriptural matters which are accepted and not resented?" The answer is that we have not taken up the pen to produce a popular or acceptable essay. We have no desire to write smooth things which can be appreciated by sentimentalists and tolerated by the scornful. The only reason for writing is a burning conviction that we are living in the latter days; those days when "the lofty looks of men shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed low", when God will "shake terribly the earth" (Isaiah 2:11, 19); that day of judgment concerning which the apostle Peter says, "If it begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17).

The signs of the last days are of such importance because they lead the way to the tremendous changes yet to come. We know from experience that if once closed minds begin to open and defensive scepticism begins to give way, the picture soon becomes too clear for it to be resisted any longer. Not only will a student see the cumulative force of all the signs here urged, but much more than we have presented will become clear and compelling.

In trying to interest our friends in these matters we sometimes feel as if in a cloistered room. We know that there is life-giving air outside with the clear light of the sun rising in the East, but our friend refuses to look or to allow the tightly fastened blinds and shutters to be moved. Then at last a shaft of light catches his attention, and for the first time his stolid resistance begins to give way. We succeed in forcing the shutters a little way open until with a look of incredulous amazement he pulls up the blind, opens the tightly shuttered windows, and allows light and air to flood into the room. We have seen such changes, and so we write in hope. If one or two readers can be induced to open those closed windows of the mind and allow the light of truth to

enter, our effort will have been well worth while.

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