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The Testimony of Prophecy to the Apostasy

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CHAPTER VII.

THE TESTIMONY OF PROPHECY TO THE APOSTASY.

“What is prophecy but history reversed?” Nothing. Prophecy is a record of things before they transpire. History is a record of them after they have occurred; and of the two prophecy is often more to be trusted for its accuracy than history: for the reason that it has for its source the unerring inspiration of God; while history—except in the case of inspired historians—is colored by the favor or prejudice of the writer, depends for its exactness upon the point of view from which he looks upon the events; and is likely to be marred in a thousand ways by the influences surrounding him—party considerations, national interest or prejudice; supposed influence upon present conditions and future prospects—all these things may interfere with history; but prophecy is free from such influences. Historians are self-constituted, or appointed by men; but prophets are chosen of God. Selected by divine wisdom, and illuminated by that spirit which shows things that are to come,^a prophets have revealed to them so much of the future as God would have men to know, and the inspired writers record it for the enlightenment or warning of mankind, without the coloring or distortion so liable to mar the work of the historian. Thus Moses recorded what the history of Israel would be on condition of their obedience to God; and what it would be if they were disobedient. Israel was disobedient, and historians have exhausted their art in attempts to tell of their disobedience and suffering; but neither in vividness nor accuracy do the his-

^aSt. John xvi: 13.

tories compare with the prophecy.^b So with the prophecy of Daniel in respect to the rise and succession of the great political powers that should dominate the earth, and the final triumph of the Kingdom of God.^c So with well nigh all of the prophecies.

With these observations upon the trustworthiness of prophecy it is my purpose to show that prophecy no less than the facts of history, sustains the conclusion arrived at in the foregoing chapters on the apostasy from the Christian religion, and the destruction of the Christian Church.

Paul warned the church at Ephesus that after his departing grievous wolves would enter in among them, not sparing the flock; and "also of your own selves," said he, "shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them."^d "Preach the word," said the same apostle in writing to Timothy, "be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, with all long suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap teachers to themselves having itching ears; and they shall turn their ears from the truth and be turned to fables."^e The prophet Peter also warned the church of the rise of false teachers, who privily would bring in damnable heresies; deny the Lord who bought them; bring upon themselves swift destruction, speak evil of the way of truth and through covetousness, with feigned words would make merchandise of the saints.^f

Referring again to Paul's prophecies we have him foretelling the rise of anti-Christ before the glorious coming of the Messiah to judgment. He plainly foresaw the "falling

^bDeut. xxviii.

^cDaniel ii.

^dActs xx: 27-30.

^eII Tim. iv: 1-4.

^fII Peter ii: 1-3

away"—the long night of spiritual darkness and apostasy that would brood over the world before the coming of the Son of God, in the glory of his Father, to reward the righteous, to condemn the wicked. He said of this apostasy:

"We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him; that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit nor by word, nor letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand & Let no man deceive you by any means, for that day shall not come except there be a falling away first and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not that when I was yet with you I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way, 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 coming; even him whose coming is after 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 saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."^g

The reader with the facts of history before him, cannot see more clearly the "falling away," the rise of that corrupt ecclesiastical power which opposed and exalted itself above all that was called God; lorded it over God's heritage; shrouded itself in mystery; placed its foot on the neck of kings; forbade marriage; transgressed the laws; changed

^gThat is, he would not have them believe that the day of Messiah's glorious coming was at hand

^hII Thess. 1-12.

the ordinances, and broke the everlasting covenant—I say the reader with the facts of history before him cannot see these things more clearly than Paul foresaw and predicted them in this remarkable prophecy.

But not to the prophets of the New Testament alone was the great apostasy revealed. Isaiah as well as Paul and with equal clearness foresaw and predicted it. In a prophecy, which beyond all question relates to conditions that can only exist in the last days, he writes :

“Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him. The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the Lord has spoken this word. The earth mourneth, and fadeth away; the world languisheth, and fadeth away; the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth is also defiled under the inhabitants thereof.” Why? *“Because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath a curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left.”*ⁱ

Of this prophecy it is to be observed that the defilement of the earth, and the wretched condition of the inhabitants thereof described in the opening sentences, and in the remaining verses of the chapter, not quoted, are the result of transgressing the law, changing the ordinance and breaking the “everlasting covenant.” The prophet cannot have reference to transgressing the law, and changing the ordinance of the Mosaic covenant, for the Mosaic Law was not an everlasting covenant, but merely a temporary law “added to the

ⁱIsaiah xxiv.

Gospel because of transgression.” It was a law of carnal commandments to act as a school master to bring the people to Christ; and when Christ came was laid aside, having fulfilled its purpose.^j It was not, therefore, an everlasting covenant, and hence was not the thing the prophet Isaiah had in mind in his great prophecy. On the other hand, Paul refers to the blood of Christ as “the blood of the everlasting covenant,”^k hence it is the covenant sealed by that blood to which Isaiah must have had reference—the Gospel; and the transgression of its laws, the changing of its ordinances, the breaking of that covenant was to result in making desolate the earth and the inhabitants thereof.

As additional evidence that it was not the transgression of the Mosaic Law, nor transgression against any former dispensation of the Gospel, that the prophecy refers to, the reader’s attention is called to the fact that the disasters of the great apostasy find their culmination in the burning of the inhabitants of the earth, from which but few men shall be left. That is a calamity that has not yet overtaken men. It is a judgment that will fall upon them in the future. Yet a few shall escape. As the prophet in another place in this remarkable chapter says—referring to the general desolation of the earth and its inhabitants—“When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning of grapes when the vintage is done. They shall lift up their voices, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord, they shall cry aloud from the sea.”^l From which it is to be understood that there will be a few even in those disastrous times, whose righteousness will call down the favor of God. And though the earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and the transgressions there-

^jGal. iii.

^kHeb. xiii: 20.

^lIsa. xxiv: 13, 14.

of shall be heavy upon it; though the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth; though as prisoners they shall be gathered into the pit, and will not be visited for many days; though the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, yet shall the Lord of Hosts reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously."^m

My direct argument for the apostasy is completed. The facts of history have testified to the destruction of the church, to the apostasy from the Christian religion; and prophecy with a voice no less certain has testified to the same things.

^mIsaiah xxiv: 20-23.