

THE PROPHETIC WORD IN CRISIS DAYS

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by

Various Contributors

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CHAPTER ONE

THE CRISIS OF THIS PRESENT HOUR

JOHN F. WALVOORD

In order to appreciate the contribution of the Prophetic Word to our day, it is necessary to be aware of the context in which we find ourselves. The traveler today is cognizant of the fact that the masses are relatively blind to the trends of the times. Yet any intelligent reader of a daily newspaper must be impressed by the fact that we are living in unparalleled times in the history of the church. Certainly there are multiplied indications that the world is moving toward some sort of a climax. Even those who are outside the Christian faith are, in many instances gripped with an awareness that some unprecedented event is about to transpire upon the world scene. An atmosphere of crisis hangs ominously over the affairs of men and nations.

No man is sufficiently circumspect to evaluate all of the sinister forces which appear under development in our world today. Yet every alert individual may witness certain movements which bear foreboding significance to the prophetic disclosures of the Word of God.

In our own generation the rise of communism has been observed. In a remarkably brief span of years it has swept through Asia and Europe, and has recently advanced to the very doorstep of our own American hemisphere.

Nationalism is another force which has exerted great influence in recent years. Little nations, seeking their own welfare, are beginning to assert themselves. New tensions between old nations are in evidence, and countless world problems, unknown to past generations, are appearing to haunt the twentieth century mind.

Racial tensions have reached a new peak in our day. The Middle East is seething with racial conflict between the Israelites and the Arab World. Bitterness and unrest have gripped various nations of the world, and hatred of the more powerful nations is becoming a fad. Riots and unruly demonstrations have become daily occurrences in many parts of the world.

Tremendous economic pressures are in evidence today. Few Americans are aware of the gravity of the economic situation in which our own nation finds itself. America is an island of prosperity

and inflation, and powerful forces in the world are doing their best to whittle away our economic strength. The communist block is intent upon creating an economic crisis in our country. America is rich and envied by the world today, but she is in peril of being unable to retain many of her prized possessions. The economic outlook for the future does not appear to be bright.

Labor and capital have become conflicting forces in our modern world. The clash has been witnessed increasingly in our own country. Undoubtedly there is fault on both sides, and it is obvious that the problem has by no means been resolved. Capital has in some instances attempted to solve its problems by moving from one location to another, only to face the same old problems in the new location. Labor has sought solution to its problems by simply demanding more and more. Under these circumstances the pressures have become very great, and the time is rapidly approaching when capital may suffer embarrassment by being unable to support the demands of labor. The leaders of our country are increasingly burdened by the struggle between capital and labor, yet no immediate solution is to be found.

The field of religion presents some of the most incredible problems of all. The evangelical Christian today especially faces many formidable problems. We are told that the evangelical cause is at an ebbing tide. We see that the number of those who believe in the old-fashioned Book and the old-fashioned faith is steadily diminishing in proportion to the total population of the world.

Liberalism, with its unbelief and its denial of the faith embraces many of our schools of higher learning. Many churches which once stood for the faith and proclaimed the true gospel have been swept into its fold.

We are also faced today with a theological system known as neo-orthodoxy, which is one of the most deceitful forms of unbelief that the church has ever encountered. Sincere people who are unschooled in the technical aspects of theology find it very difficult to understand neo-orthodoxy, and those who do understand it find difficulty in expressing its contradictory and elusive precepts in terms intelligible to others. And yet, this relatively recent form of unbelief continues to gnaw at the vitals of everything that we count dear as evangelical Christians.

Everywhere we witness the advance of religious forces that are contrary to evangelical Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church has reached a zenith of power and wealth, and its inroads upon American evangelicalism are very obvious to anyone who acquaints himself with the statistics. Certainly the Romanist power is manifest throughout the world today on a scale that has never been known for many, many generations. In addition to these contrary forces within the ranks of Christendom, we see the advance of the Moslem faith as it sweeps human souls into its fold at a pace surpassing the rate of conversions to Christ through the combined evangelical missionary endeavors of the world.

Considering these grave circumstances, it is quite obvious that the world today is in a crisis. It is obvious that we face a future which, humanly speaking, permits little latitude for optimism. Most of us can do very little to alleviate the many conflicts and pressures which exist in the world. Certainly it is neither within our province nor our powers to provide sudden panaceas and cures. Perhaps most of us can do little more than sense the situation.

It is comforting to know that God has given us, in the Bible, an analysis of the causes behind all this trouble. Undoubtedly the basic difficulty is that the world as a whole has rejected the Bible as the word of God. The world has rejected Christ as the Son of God; it has rejected the morality and the ethics that is taught in the Bible. This is the sad state of affairs not only among heathen nations, but also here in our beloved America. Multitudes attend church no more than once or twice a year and, when they do, they hear nothing even approximating the true Gospel of Christ.

In view of the world's utter rejection of that light of Revelation which God has provided for our guidance along the path of righteousness, it is not strange that so many serious difficulties have imposed themselves upon human society.

The Bible discloses that this present world order is, to some extent at least, under the rule of Satan. We recognize the sinister hand of the Evil One behind many of the movements that are contrary to the Christian faith. The God who has ever judged blatant unrighteousness will not always tolerate the indifference and enmity of man. We are living in a world that is ripe for judgment.

As we see the rampant wickedness that characterizes our day, we cry out with Habakkuk, “**How long, O Lord?**”

Why does the Lord tolerate the tide of evil? The reason is that He is still waiting for precious human souls to come to Him. He is not willing that any should perish. There are yet others whom God desires to win to a perfect and eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Placing all of this context in the background of our prophetic study, we discover that the prophetic Word discloses God's solution to the present world crisis.

That solution has many facets, and incorporated in it are:

- (1) The coming of the Lord for His church,
- (2) A time of unprecedented judgment upon this world,
- (3) The second coming of Christ to establish His millennial kingdom of righteousness and peace.

As we face the hopeless world situation of this hour, it is encouraging to know that God has a plan which He will, in His power and wisdom, bring to bear in due time.

The Scriptures predict certain world developments which will occur in the end time, and current events present sufficient correspondence to these predictions to lead us to the conclusion that we may be very near to the end of the present age.

In the first place, the Bible clearly predicts the rise of a great world government. Today there is much chaos in the United Nations, partly due to the right to veto and the independency of thought which frequently defeats the objectives of the nations and of the world as a whole. But the Scriptures foresee the coming of a mighty universal government which will rule over “**all kindreds, and tongues, and nations**” (Revelation 13:7).

The Scriptures describe a process which will precede the coming of this world rule.

First, Christ will come for His church. Shortly thereafter a confederacy of nations that once existed as a governmental unit in the old Roman Empire will be formed. The nations of southern Europe, northern Africa, and western Asia will combine to form a great confederacy under a single authority. A movement which will begin with the revival of the Roman Empire will eventually gain such might and prestige as to dominate the entire world.

Of great significance to all of us is the fact that the ruler of this revived Roman Empire will make a covenant with the people of Israel. Under the terms of this covenant, he will guarantee their borders and promise them religious freedom. Undoubtedly an attempt will be made to solve the present strife between the nation Israel and the Arab nations which surround it. It is interesting to observe that some outstanding Israeli analysts of world events today have expressed their conviction that the solution of Israel's tensions with surrounding nations will only be found in the rise of some powerful Gentile leader who will enter into a covenant of peace with Israel and gain ascendancy over the entire Middle East. This is precisely the course of events predicted in the prophetic Word.

In addition to the coming of a great world government, the Scriptures foresee the rise of a world religion. In the so-called "ecumenical movement" of our day we have already sensed mankind's desire to have a world church. Certain church mergers have reflected intense interest in a universal church which might embrace not only the so-called Protestant churches, but also the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. Probably one of the first major developments to be witnessed will be the merging of the latter two systems, healing the schism that dates back for nine hundred years, to the division which occurred between the churches of East and West. Such a merger could well be the forerunner of the coming world church.

It is our belief that the world church will not reach a state of full development until after the true Church, the Body of Christ, is taken out of this world by the Saviour. Following the rapture of the true Church, which has ever protested against the unbelief which binds together the proponents of the world-church philosophy, this universal ecclesiastical octopus will spread its tentacles rapidly.

In fact, it will become an implement in the hands of the revived Roman Empire to assist it in gaining world domination. For a time, while the world religious machine is under construction, Israel and perhaps certain other groups will be permitted freedom of worship. But the Scriptures indicate that ultimately, when the super church acquires the advantage of power, it will abolish all forms of religion except those that are embraced within its fold, and impose one religion upon the entire world.

Concerning the ruler of this world religion, the Word of God declares that ". . . **all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world**" (Revelation 13:8). Later in the same chapter it is stated that this wicked, religious monopoly will impose on all men the worship of the image of the beast, and that none may resist except on pain of death (Revelation 13:14-15).

The final form of world religion will incorporate the worship of the world ruler, Satan's substitute for Christ. It is God's declared purpose that His Son shall rule the world, but Satan will propose to substitute this embodiment of evil for the Son. It is significant that the direction of religious trends in our generation is toward the establishment of one super-religion.

A third very obvious aspect of the present world situation presents itself in the form of severe military tensions. A conflict known as the "cold war" rages unabated, as occasional hot wars bring misery and ruin to various parts of the world. The world today is an armed camp in a sense surpassing anything previously witnessed in times of peace. Never before have such massive, impending armaments been at the disposal of military forces. Humanly speaking, the only factor preventing a world eruption is the near balance of power between America and Russia. At the present time Russia appears to be accomplishing her purposes in the world without resorting to total war. But it may be that Russian leadership will one day become convinced that her purpose of world domination cannot be accomplished except through war.

The Bible plainly forecasts the coming of yet another great world war. It will be a war that eclipses anything that the world has ever seen before. It will embrace all nations of the world. Its focal point will be the Holy Land, where the armies of the world will deploy themselves, centering in the valley of Esdraelon. The conflict which will ensue is referred to as the battle of Armageddon, and in the midst of the fray the Lord Jesus Christ will return to this earth in glorious power, to inaugurate his own millennial kingdom rule.

The Scriptures describe this great battle in the sixteenth chapter of the book of Revelation.

Late in the tribulation period the sixth angel will pour out his vial upon the great river Euphrates. We are told that the waters of the Euphrates river will be dried up, that the way of the kings of the East might be prepared. The dry river bed will permit unhindered passage of the great armies of the east to the scene of battle. Unclean spirits will go out into the world, to the kings of the earth, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. The armies of the world will focalize on a point known as "**Armageddon**," the mount of Megiddo, by the valley of Esdraelon, and there the final world conflict will take place.

The extent of this conflict is indicated in the ninth chapter of Revelation, where the army that is to cross the Euphrates river is described. The number of the army of the horsemen is said to be ". . . **two hundred thousand thousand** . . ." (Revelation 9:16). Thus it is clear that this army which comes from the Orient will number two hundred million men. Such will be the character and immensity of this final world war.

As we face the significant facts of our present generation, they seem to point to a climax of events yet to transpire.

A coming world government which is absolute, a coming world religion which brooks no other religion, and a coming world war that spares none, —these frightful prospects are not suggestive of a bright future.

They represent the sad destiny of a world that would not have Christ.

The crisis of this present hour is sufficiently portentous to shatter vain optimism for better days ahead. The only reliable hope for the future must be bound up in a living faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Those who possess this saving faith will be with Him in glory when these sad chapters of future world history unfold on a world that would not have the Son of God.

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