

THE PROPHETIC WORD IN CRISIS DAYS

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by

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE PROPHETIC WORD AND APOSTASY

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“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (I Timothy 4:1).

“The Prophetic Word and Apostasy” could be a very unpleasant theme, but I am an optimist, not a pessimist; a realist, but an optimist. If you have the Word of God in your hands, and the Word of God in your heart, and you are trusting the Son of God as your Saviour, and the Holy Spirit of God is your teacher, and you have an unction from the Holy One, you should be an optimist, praising the Lord regardless of what happens.

There are five questions I should like to ask, and give the answers.

I. What is meant specifically by apostasy?

There are two Greek words which mean “*a falling away.*” **“The spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith.”**

What is an apostate? An apostate is one who has made a profession of faith, but departs from this in his heart. Apostasy is a departure from professed faith in the things of God.

II. What does the prophetic Word say concerning apostasy?

It teaches with explicit clarity that in the latter days there shall be a departure from, “*a falling away*” from the faith. This is one of the signs of the latter days.

Every informed Christian should know that signs are multiplying rapidly these days, — that we have the right to believe that the Lord's return may be very near indeed. Things have been happening so rapidly in the past few decades, and there has been such a focusing of prophetic fulfillment, — such a convergence of history that one may readily be persuaded that Christ's return may be at hand.

Here are seven important occurrences of the last few years that surely suggest that things are shaping up for our Lord's return. We do not set dates but we do read the signs of the times.

1. A consolidation of power in western Europe, the area of the ancient Roman Empire, in precise fulfillment of Daniel chapters 2 and 7.

NATO, with its closer ties economically, financially, politically between the western countries of Europe. People are even talking now about the united states of Europe. This sort of confederation is predicted in the Word of God in connection with the latter times.

2. A consolidation of power north of Palestine. In Ezekiel 38 we read about the invasion of Palestine by this group in the latter days.

3. The awakening of the nations in the Far East. China, a magnificent nation, has been slumbering for thousands of years. Now it is awake. It has the same political ideology to all intents and purposes as the ideology of Russia and her satellites. For what is this preparing? For the marching of the kings of the east (Revelation 16:12), toward the dread battle of Armageddon.

4. Israel is back in her land, celebrating her barmitzvah, or thirteenth national birthday, May 14, 1961. In 1918 she was recognized as a republic in the family of nations in fulfillment of Isaiah 11:11 and other passages. In our own lifetime we have seen this happen. Since the sixth century B. C, the time of Nebuchadnezzar, Israel has been a wanderer and now she is back in the land. Things certainly are shaping up rapidly.

5. In II Peter 3:10 it is written, “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat . . . all these things shall be dissolved.” Twenty-five years ago few people could understand these words, “**the elements shall melt with fervent heat.**” And then in 1945, Hiroshima and the atomic age was upon us. Now we can begin to understand Peter's alarming words.

6. The beginnings of a world church, in preparation for what is known in the book of the Revelation as the whore, in imitation of the Bride of Christ. There is a getting together, a wider ecumenicity, a closer nexus or liaison developing, not only between the larger denominations, often at the expense of doctrine, but now also between Protestants and Rome. Yes, closer ties with Rome. Be on the alert!

7. The shadows of apostasy.

This is our theme. Skepticism is developing so rapidly that sometimes it seems Bible believers are getting into a smaller and smaller minority. I, for one, never dreamed that in the last days this apostasy would take shape as it is taking shape now. I thought it would be a frontal attack against our faith by obvious enemies of Christ. This is one reason I went to Germany as an exchange student years ago, to sit at the feet of liberal German professors, in order to understand their point of view and to be prepared to meet it.

But now it appears that in addition to a stubborn frontal attack against the Word we have also an oblique attack, an attack from an angle, even on the part of some who used to be right with us in the defense of the faith. Men of good will are beginning to capitulate and to throw their weight on the side of apostasy, — a very interesting phenomenon, a striking sign that we are in the latter days. The prophetic Word says that this apostasy is one of the basic signs of the latter days.

The very next major event in the plan of God will be the translation of the Church. Is it any wonder that men who teach the Word of God night after night, smile as they teach? They are talking about the Lord, singing about the Lord, preaching about the Lord, and praying to God the Father, in the name of the Lord, — and all of a sudden, — perhaps before the message is ended, — **“Behold I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. . . .”** At any moment, they may see their blessed Saviour, face to face!

III. What are some of the areas in which this apostasy is discernable?

Let's be specific. Let's not harangue, but rather, analyze. Out of a great number of possible areas, let us consider just five.

1. The great area of theological debate in the twentieth century relates to the Word of God, — the infallible, definitive, authoritative, inspired, inerrant Word of God

In the fourth century the area of debate was the Trinitarian formula, when the Council of Nicea discussed the relationship of Jesus Christ to, and in the Trinity. In the sixteenth century the area of debate was justification by faith alone, apart from the deeds of the law. But, here in the twentieth century, the debate concerns the inspiration of the Word of God. In this area, the shadows of apostasy are rapidly lengthening. Men contend and teach now that the Scriptures are partially inspired, or that they are spiritually inspired, or that they are inspired in the realm of faith, but not in the realm of history, or of science.

2. The second area has to do with the Person of Jesus Christ, — who He is.

Believers of the Word of God know who Christ is! If someone were to tell you that Jesus Christ were merely the highest form of all created beings, chances are that this someone would call himself a Jehovah's Witness. But this error was refuted centuries ago when the Council of Nicea gave out a ringing verdict concerning Christ, — that He is very God of very God. And they anathematized anyone who did not believe this.

3. The third area of apostasy today concerns the work of Jesus Christ here on the earth.

Why did He come into this world? Was it just to teach? Was it just to set an example? Was it simply to be the greatest enunciator of spiritual and moral formulae and axioms this world has ever known? It that all?

If that were all, we would be left in our sins. We need a Saviour!

Ever since the time of the Lord Jesus Christ there have been two parallel points of view concerning the purpose of Christ's ministry. One of these lines was early represented by Gnosticism, — a sort of metaphysical, speculative combination of theological concepts. It has descended from generation to generation down to the present. Its secret of deliverance, — if there be any personal deliverance, is the intuitive realization that each of us is, in reality, a part of the vast, all-absorbing unity; that each must be absorbed into the bosom of the Infinite, and lose the particularistic, individualistic identity. Present day descendents of this thought are the Christian Scientists, Religious Scientists and Unity movements.

Over against this view there is the other line of thought, the Biblical line, the line of the Word of God, that the way of deliverance is by blood atonement, that Jesus Christ is **“the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world”**; **“and without shedding of blood there is no remission”** (Hebrews 9:22). He himself **“ . . . bare our sins in his own body on the tree”** (I Peter 5:24). **“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures”** (I Corinthians 15:3).

Between these two views there is fixed a great gulf. Jesus said, **“I am the way, the truth and the life”** (John 14:6). Anyone who believes that entrance to Heaven can be gained by being absorbed into some mystical unity is lost and in need of the Saviour.

4. Area four pertains to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead.

This is being assailed as non-historical today by many of the draftsmen of current theological thought. One of Bultman's basic theses is that we must de-mythologize the Gospels, — remove their mythological elements, which would, of course, include the resurrection of our Lord.

5. The fifth and last area we will consider is the question of our Lord's return.

Will the Son of God actually return to receive believers to himself? Men scoff at this today. But remember, **“ . . . there shall come in the last days scoffers saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation”** (II Peter 3:3, 4).

The basic areas of apostasy, then, that we have considered are the Inspiration of the Scriptures, the Person of Christ, the Work of Christ, the Resurrection of Christ and the Second Coming of Christ.

The fourth question we consider is crucial.

What should be the effect of this apostasy upon earnest, simple-hearted Bible believers? The answer should be that when we detect this falling away, it should make us sad. We should regret that some outstanding men of God seem to be yielding to the enticement of error. Should this apostasy baffle, bewilder or confuse us? Certainly not, for if we have the Word of God in our hearts, we know that this is a sign of the times.

“Now the spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith.”

V. Do we really have reason for hope amidst all the present day apostasy?

Here is our apologetic, our defence.

Do we have proof of the divine inspiration of the Bible? What did the Lord Jesus say about the Old Testament?

“Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18).

Now a jot is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and the tittle is smaller still, just a part of an Hebrew letter. Why do we accept the Old Testament as genuine and inspired? Because we believe that Jesus Christ is very God of very God, and that he put His seal on it.

If I had to choose between a scholar who would de-mythologize, and Jesus, the Son of God, I choose the Son of God with no hesitation. But, how about the New Testament? This was not yet written when Jesus was here, but He called His disciples to Him and said; **“I am going away, but the spirit of God is going to come and he will guide you into all truth.”**

Matthew was present when these words were spoken. So, when reading from Matthew the next time, remember that it has the seal of God upon it. Who else was present when these words were spoken? John! John wrote five books of the New Testament, all the very truth of God with the seal of the Son of God upon them. Who else was present at the time? Simon Peter who wrote First and Second Peter thus have the seal of God upon them. We fully realize that fourteen of the twenty-seven New Testament books were written by Paul by direct revelation of the Spirit of God. Basically, however, we accept the Word of God because He put His seal upon It.

Can we defend the deity of Christ?

Here is an excellent passage to refer doubters or skeptics to. **“Before Abraham was, I am”** (John 8:58). If Jesus had intended to say that He, individually, personally existed before Abraham, He could easily have said, “Before Abraham was, I was.” But He did not say that! These two words, **“I AM,”** are a title of deity. In Exodus, chapter three, Moses asks of God, **“Who shall I say sent me?”** Again, **“I AM hath sent thee.”** Christ is, indeed, God.

Can we defend the validity of the substitutionary death of Christ?

There are many passages of Scripture that can be used to defend our belief. Matthew 20:28, Acts 16:31, Hebrews 9:22, I Peter 1:18, 19, and I Peter 2:24. There is but one way of salvation. We are sinners. We are redeemed by the blood of Christ, **“in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins”** (Ephesians 1:7).

Can we prove that Christ was literally resurrected?

We who believe the Bible accept the historicity of the resurrection.

Jesus Christ is “**declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead**” (Romans 1:4). The event literally happened! It is God's seal on the deity of His Son.

Finally, are we able to defend the Lord's promise of His second coming?

The second coming is mentioned over three-hundred times in the New Testament. Simon Peter told us that in the last days, scoffers would arise, denying the second coming of Christ.

As the shadows of apostasy deepen, many men of God who are not bowing the knee to error are becoming conspicuous. They are being criticized, but they are standing for the Word of God. Do you recall the story of Daniel, and the story about the orchestra? When the musicians sounded, everyone was to bow down to a great idol. The three Hebrew friends of Daniel did not become conspicuous until everyone bowed down.

May God give us grace to stand unflinchingly for His Word!

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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