

LAST DAY DELUSIONS

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Traveling by train a number of years ago in Australia, I was seated opposite a very kind and cultured Presbyterian minister, and soon we were discussing subjects close to our hearts. He began to inquire concerning the differences between Seventh-day Adventists and the Protestant churches in general. He recognized that on the fundamentals of Christian faith, such as the inspiration of the Scripture, the virgin birth, the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, His resurrection, His heavenly ministry, and the blessed hope of His bodily, visible return to earth, Adventists were truly sound. "But," he said, "you are different, and I would like to know the reason."

After mentioning the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, we turned to Revelation 14 and read verses 6 to 10. "When did the hour of God's judgment begin?" I asked him.

"I do not know," was his reply. Then followed an extensive study of prophecy. His keen mind and wide reading made study a pleasure.

"Yes, Adventists do have a message, and it must go to every people in every country," I said. I then proceeded to unfold that message from the Scriptures.

One of our foremost writers declares that "in the very time in which we live, the Lord has called His people and has given them a message to bear. He has called them to expose the wickedness of the man of sin ... who has thought to change times and laws." - "Testimonies to Ministers," page 118. It is this conception of truth that makes it different. We believe that the hour of God's judgment is come, that the coming of the Lord draws near. However, Bible prophecy declares that before Jesus should come, the antichrist would make his appearance; that he would oppose the loyal people of God, at the same time posing as the divine representative in fact, declaring himself to be God. This we learn particularly from Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-5.)

The early Christians lived in anticipation of the rise of the antichrist, but knew there were certain things hindering his appearance. While Paul speaks of the "man of sin" and the "mystery of iniquity," it is from the prophecies of Daniel and John that we learn much of the work of this power. Daniel declares that the antichrist would "speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out, the saints of the Most High," and that he would "think to change times and laws." Daniel 7:25. John declares that all the world will worship him. (Revelation 13:3.) We are familiar with the power that attempted to change God's law.

The published catechisms of the Roman Catholic Church declares plainly that she is responsible for the change in the day of worship from the seventh to the first day of the week. The Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century clearly understood this. Philipp Melancthon, professor of Greek and theology at Wittenberg, and one of the great scholars of his age, makes this comment on Daniel 7:25:

"He changes the times and laws that any of the six work days commanded of God will make them unholy and idle days when he will, or of their own holy days abolished make work days again, or when they changed the Saturday into Sunday. They have changed God's laws and turned them into their own traditions to be kept above God's precepts." - "Exposition of Daniel the Prophet," gathered out of Philipp Melancthon, Johan. Ecolampadius, etc., by George Joys, 1545, page 119.

Antichrist's Attempt to Change "Law" and "Times"

But prophecy declares the antichrist was to attempt to change not only the "law," but also the "times." This expression "times" is deeply significant, and has a much wider application than at first appears. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments this term is associated with chronological prophecy. In Galatians 4:4 we read: "When the fullness of the *time* was come, God sent forth His Son." Jesus came in fulfillment of chronological prophecy. This was the significance of John the Baptist's message, "Repent you: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 3:2. Through the study of Isaiah he learned that Jerusalem's "appointed time" was come. (Isaiah 40:1-2, margin.) Daniel gave the measurement of that appointed time. The prophecy of the seventy weeks definitely located the time when the Messiah would come to redeem the world. It was in fulfillment of this prophecy that "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled." Mark 1:14, 15.

Chronological prophecy marked the time for the first advent. And chronological prophecy also marks the time for the Second Advent. Concerning the coming of the Lord, Paul says: "Of the times and the seasons brethren, ye have no need that I write you. For yourselves know perfectly." 1 Thessalonians 5:1, 2.

Peter, in his appeal to the Jews, speaks of the times of refreshing and the times of restitution. (Acts 3:19-21.) Both of these expressions are associated with the second coming of Jesus. One precedes and the other follows the Second Advent. The "times of refreshing" refers to the latter rain which prepares the church for the coming of Jesus. The "times of restitution" refers to the recreation of this earth after its cleansing by fire at the close of the millennium.

During the early centuries of the Christian Era, prophetic study was pursued with eagerness and expectation. But true to prophecy, there came the "falling away," and the man of sin appeared in the church. The tragic departure from "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" has filled volumes.

The prophetic light was soon dimmed by false philosophy. The theology of Augustine, for example [sometimes called St. Augustine], began to place the emphasis on the church as the kingdom of God, declaring that Christ was already reigning with His saints, and that the resurrection was of dead souls to spiritual life. The church was encouraged to assume the ruler-ship of the nations, and instead of carrying the gospel to the world, church leaders began to seek prestige and power by political intrigue. The Dark Ages were the result. Augustine's book, "The City of God," may be a classic in the field of literature, but it is a travesty in the field of prophetic truth.

But God did not leave Himself without witness, even amid the darkness of those centuries. In Britain, Southern France, Northern Africa, even in faraway Persia, men were raised up to call the church to a deeper study of God's word. By the time we reach the twelfth century we find the Waldenses, giving a clear witness against the antichrist, whom they declared was already reigning in the church. They were followed by others like Joachim, who, unfolding the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation, actually measured the prophetic period of "a time and times and the dividing of time" of Daniel 7 as 1260 years. Two centuries later came Wycliffe, "the Morning Star of the Reformation." He, like Huss and Jerome of Bohemia, was greatly influenced by such men as Joachim. The sword of the prophetic word was unsheathed, and men of God began to hew a way through the mass of muddled thinking of their age.

The sixteenth century dawned in a blaze of glory, radiant with the prophetic vision. Luther, Knox, Calvin, Baxter, Cranmer, and hundreds of others led the church farther out of the darkness and into the light of God's truth. Doctrine, precept, and prophecy were all part of God's message for that hour.

While these leaders did not agree on every particular point of faith, they were all united on the identity of the antichrist. Their study was largely based on Daniel and Revelation. On this point H. Grattan Guinness says:

"Luther never felt strong and free to war against the papal apostasy till he recognized the pope as antichrist. It was then he burned the papal bull. Knox's first sermon, the sermon which launched him on his mission as a reformer, was on the prophecies concerning the Papacy. All the reformers were unanimous in the matter; and their interpretation of these prophecies determined their reforming action. It led them to protest against Rome with extraordinary strength and undaunted courage. It nerved them to resist the claims of that apostate church to the uttermost. It made them martyrs; it sustained them at the stake. And the views of the Reformers were shared by thousands, by hundreds of thousands. They were adopted by princes and peoples. Under their influence nations abjured their allegiance to the false priest of Rome. In the reaction which followed, all the powers of hell seemed to be let loose. Yet the Reformation stood undefeated and unconquerable. God's word upheld it, and that prophetic book with which the Scripture closes [Revelation] was one of the mightiest instruments in its accomplishment."—"Romanism and the Reformation," pages 153, 154.

The Catholic Counter Reformation

It was to meet the challenge of these dynamic preachers of truth that the Council of Trent, perhaps the greatest of all the Catholic Church councils, was called. The very foundations of the Catholic Church were being undermined by the messages of these men of God. But when the council convened, "there was a bitter and obstinate war declared against the authority, the institutions, the sacraments, the dogmas, the moral teaching, the discipline of the church, in the name of Scripture," according to the Reverend A. Nampon, a Roman Catholic writer. He further says, "The innovators found in our sacred books [the Scriptures] that the pope was antichrist, and the Church of Rome the harlot of Babylon, and her traditions old wives' fables, and the priesthood the common property of all Christians, and faith alone sufficient for salvation, etc."—"Catholic Doctrine as Defined by the Council of Trent," page 103, 104.

Many things grew out of this council. The Catholic Church discovered that she could no longer depend upon ritual to hold her members. She must have preachers who could match the Protestant Reformers in scholarship and eloquence. The Jesuits, who had begun as a military order within the church only a few years before, were summoned to the help of priests and prelates. This was a new method of at-tack, and within a few decades the Jesuitical order became famous for its contribution to the scholarship of the Roman Catholic Church.

Two then in particular stand out in this century—Alcasar and Ribera. These were noted as the founders of two different systems of prophetic interpretation. Alcasar founded the preterist system, and Ribera developed the futurist system. Both, however, aimed at

lifting the stigma from the Papacy by endeavoring to locate the antichrist at some period in history when it could not apply to the Roman church.

By the preterist interpretation, all the prophecies relating to antichrist were pushed back in an endeavor to find their fulfillment before the collapse of the Roman Empire. Such characters as Nero and Diocletian were selected as fulfilling the prophecies concerning antichrist. But there were several weaknesses with this interpretation. One was that, monstrous and brutal as were some of these Roman emperors, they never made any pretense of belonging to the church, whereas Paul declared that antichrist would arise from within the church. Another weakness was that it lacked the historic evidence necessary to substantiate its claims. Because of the loopholes in this system, preterism never became very popular.

Futurism, a Clever Counterfeit

Ribera, on the other hand, took those same prophecies and hurled them off into the future, declaring that the antichrist would make his appearance after the coming of Christ. This diagram will show at a glance the result of these interpretations. You will see that Ribera divided the Second Advent into two separate comings.

First there would be the "secret rapture," when the church would be caught away silently; and seven years later there would be the manifestation, or the visible return, of our Lord in glory, when "every eye shall see Him." He suggested that the Lord would come first for His saints and seven years later with His saints. Between these two events, separated by a brief seven years, all the great prophecies, like Matthew 24, much of the book of Daniel, and the whole of the book of Revelation from chapter four to twenty, were to be fulfilled.

Instead of studying such wonderful prophecies as the seven seals, and the seven trumpets, and finding their fulfillment during the centuries of the Christian Era, as did the Reformers, futurists declare that such passages apply after the so-called secret rapture, and are therefore all future. John, however, was expressly told to "seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand." Revelation 22:10.

Ribera published a commentary in 1585 containing these ideas. Cardinal Bellarmine, perhaps the greatest scholar of the Catholic Church, built upon Ribera's work, emphasizing, as some earlier writers did, that antichrist would be a Jew from the tribe of Dan, that he would be a supernatural personage of great power, and would persecute the Jews whom, he said, would return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple and re-inaugurate their ancient sacrificial system.

Futurism was no clumsy counterfeit; it was a clever counterfeit of truth, which endeavored to recast the whole structure of prophecy. To do this, the seventy-weeks prophecy of Daniel, which so definitely locates and proves the identity of the Messiah, was taken piece by piece and made to fit an entirely new pattern. Instead of beginning this prophecy with the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 BC, the Jesuit interpretation of the Counter Reformation sought another date for its commencement. Instead of the seventh year of Artaxerxes in 457 BC, the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (445 BC) twelve years later, was chosen in an endeavor to associate the royal decree with Nehemiah, and not Ezra. Then instead of carrying this prophecy twelve years beyond the coming of the Messiah, this artful interpreter proceeds to cut off part of the period, throwing one week, or seven years, into the future to be fulfilled after Christ's return. To do this, however, is to do violence to both the Scripture and history, for there is not a thing in the prophecy that suggests a break. Also, 38 AD is given as the date for the crucifixion, whereas it can be substantiated that Christ was crucified in 31 AD.

Futurism also misinterprets the prophecy regarding Christ. Those who teach this system declare that the one described in Daniel 9:27 as confirming "the covenant with many for one week," who "in the midst of the week" causes "the sacrifice and the oblation to cease," is not Christ, but antichrist. This "covenant," they say, will be confirmed with the Jews after the secret rapture and "during the seventieth week." Now when we remember that John the Baptist, Christ Himself, and the apostles all applied that seventieth week to their own day, showing the fulfillment of this prophecy in the baptism, ministry, and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus, then the tragedy of such an interpretation can be realized. Christ and antichrist are thus made to change places, and the heart is torn from the Christian message. Instead of building up faith by a closer study of that prophecy, and applying the last events to Christ, as did the apostles, futurism takes that part of the prophecy and thrusts it into the future in a meaningless way, and all for one purpose—to lift the stigma from the Papacy, the antichrist of the ages. It is no wonder that the Reformers rejected it. They recognized it as a fantasy, a master stroke of the enemy. Discerning its true purpose, they rejected it. The Reformation was built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, and the clear light of the prophetic word guided the Reformers in their conclusions.

Protestantism Transformed From Formality to Reality

Those who followed the early Reformers were not always clear in their understanding of truth. As men began to lose their keen perception, controversies arose among certain of the Reformed groups. Whole books have been written on the "arrested Reformation." The infiltration of Roman interpretations began to dim the prophetic light and blunt the sword of truth, so that by the end of the seventeenth century it could truly be said of Protestantism, "Thou has a name that thou livest, and art dead." Revelation 3:1.

A certain species of tree in New Zealand perfectly illustrates the Protestant church at that time. The rata is really a parasite. It begins its growth as a harmless little vine beside the roots of some giant of the forest. As it climbs, it feeds upon the life sap of the tree that supports it. As it grows, it entwines its parasitic arms around the original tree, which is gradually lost sight of completely. The rata has absorbed it. What was once a mighty giant of the forest becomes a mere support for the thing which has taken its life.

Such was the Protestant church at the close of the seventeenth century. It had a form, but no power. It was more concerned with mere buildings than with congregations. How strange that after so glorious a beginning the light of the Reformation should so soon be dimmed! The state church of Scotland at that time is a pertinent illustration of lifeless orthodoxy. Its apathy to real spirituality led many to protest against the cold formality of the state religion. They organized the Free Church of Scotland. The "Wee Frees," as they were called then, naturally met much opposition. In ridicule the state church said:

"The wee kirk, the free kirk, the kirk we 'oot a steeple." To which the "Wee Frees" ironically replied: "The auld kirk, the calld kirk, the kirk we 'oot a people."

And that was true not only of the Scottish Church; it was even more evident in the evangelical movement of the English Church, led by the Wesleys. For the most part, the people were not to be found in the ornate buildings of state religion, but rather in barns, foundries, or the open fields, listening to the word of God. A new era had dawned. Political crises, which have often worked for the purging of the church, had brought great changes in Europe, not the least of which was the overthrow of the Catholic court of England.

In this atmosphere of political and religious controversy, John and Charles Wesley were born. As young men they were sent by their father, himself an Anglican minister, to Oxford University. While there they began to envision the possibilities of a revived church of Jesus Christ. The prayer meetings conducted by these youthful leaders really laid the foundation for their future work, the building of the Methodist Church. This was the fruitage of their mother's sowing, who, in the days of their childhood, gathered her large family together, as well as many of the neighbors, and taught them the word of God. Her kitchen became a church, where the light of evangelical truth burned brightly. The light was rekindled and began to pierce the gloom of formalism. The eighteenth century can be rightly called the evangelical century.

Not only was Europe stirred, but the flame of truth leaped the Atlantic, and swept like a prairie fire through the colonies of America. Men like George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, with the Wesleys, were in the vanguard of a movement which revolutionized Protestantism and led the conquering hosts into the clear light of evangelical and prophetic truth.

Advent Awakening and Disappointment of 1844

With the dawn of the nineteenth century came the great advent awakening, when thousands of voices joined in the call, "Prepare to meet thy God." Not only in Europe and North America, but down in South America, and over in India, as well as in the Near East, men were proclaiming the near advent of Christ. The conclusions reached resulted from the study of prophecy, particularly of the seventy weeks and the twenty-three hundred days. They linked these prophecies together, and arrived at 1844 as the time for the judgment to begin. Many were expecting the Lord to come at that time. When He did not come, their disappointment was overwhelming. Anticipating this disappointment, the enemy of souls had laid a snare for the unwary, and that snare was futurism.

In the hour of bitter defeat, when the foundations of their faith were being challenged, some turned to Ribera's fantastic theory to find an explanation for their dilemma. One group in the south of England became particularly interested in what seemed to be new light. In this way certain groups within the Protestant church began to be seriously affected by the futuristic interpretation. From that meager beginning, this unhistoric and fantastic interpretation has been spreading until today almost every Protestant movement or individual interpreter within Protestant circles is giving it credence. But futurism undermines the very foundations upon which the Reformation was built four hundred years ago. It teaches that instead of coming in the clouds with power and great glory, our Savior will come secretly and silently to take away His church; that the world will go on just the same; that the newspapers will come out the next day with flaming headlines announcing the disappearance of various groups and individuals, and then it will begin to dawn on people that the Lord has come.

How utterly different is this conception from the clear teachings of the apostles and of Christ Himself! Peter, Paul, and John, yes, and Jesus, all emphasize "His glorious appearing."

The Scripture declares that our Lord will descend with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God, to raise the dead and to translate the righteous. It surely will be a rapture, but not a secret rapture. The very book which contains God's last message for today makes Ribera's interpretation of no consequence.

A by-product of futurism is dispensationalism, by which an endeavor is made to divide history into seven dispensations, as taught by such men as Scofield, and outlined in the following diagram:

Innocence	Garden Of Eden
Conscience	Adam To Noah
Human Government	Noah To Abraham
Promise	Abraham To Exodus
Law	Moses To Jesus
Grace	Christian Church
Kingdom	Eternity

The advocates of this system say that the dispensation of the kingdom follows the dispensation of grace, at which time the Jews will preach the gospel of the kingdom to all the world after the church has been taken away. During this time the antichrist is supposed to come. After entering into covenant relationship with the Jews, he will turn and persecute them, but will later be destroyed by the visible appearing of Christ at the end of the seven years.

When we reached this point in our study the minister who had been my traveling companion in the train, exclaimed, "I see it! Now it is clear to me why you Adventists feel you must reach Christians as well as heathen with your message." And that is just it, dear friends. Ours is a world-wide message. We have been called into existence to preach to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. And it is the "everlasting gospel" that we are to proclaim, not a gospel of a mere dispensation. Futurists look upon the gospel of grace as something different from the gospel of the kingdom. They say that the church is concerned with grace, while the Jews are concerned with the kingdom. Thus the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come," has no meaning for them.

Now, if these things were a thing of the past, we would not stop to mention them, but the tragic fact is that the vast majority of present-day Protestantism is accepting futurism, adopting it as its child, although ignorant of its Jesuit parent-age. For example, the notes in the Scofield Bible are shaped entirely on the futuristic interpretation.

Every chronological prophecy is changed by futurism, thus "making" the word of God of none effect." The mystery of iniquity, in which futurism was conceived, is the power that changed both "the law" of God and "the times." This power is described in Revelation 13 as a beast rising out of the sea, to whom the devil gives authority. After ruling for 1260 years, he was to receive a deadly wound. This happened in 1798 A. D. But the deadly wound would be healed, the prophet declared, and then all the world would wonder after the beast. How rapidly the wound is being healed, both politically and ecclesiastically! When this is accomplished, apostate Protestantism will reach out with one hand to grasp Roman Catholicism, and with the other to grasp Spiritualism. So keen will be the deception that only those who are diligent students of Scripture will be shielded from the powerful delusion that will take the world captive.

Protestants today are divided between Modernists and Fundamentalists. Modernists give little or no place to the study of prophecy, and Fundamentalists are, in the main, futurists. A certain Euclid Phillips, D. D., of Baltimore, comments on the prophecy of Daniel in a recent religious journal. Like all futurists, he gives 445 BC as the date for the commencement of the seventy weeks. "But," he queries, "what about the seventieth week of prophetic time?" Then he replies, "This has not begun. The prophetic clock stopped when Christ was crucified. Israel was set aside when Christ was crucified, and this period [is] known as the church period." Then the most amazing statement follows, when he uses Acts 15:16 as proof of his argument. He says: "After this period, when the church is being gathered, God will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down!"—The Presbyterian, August 13, 1942.

The text referred to is a part of the famous apostolic pronouncement uttered by James, the president of the council, in justifying the gospel's going to the Gentiles. The building again of "the tabernacle of David" was clearly interpreted by the apostles, and was being accomplished by Paul and Barnabas and others who were bringing the Gentiles or heathen into the fellowship of the Christian church. To try to make those words fit into some future event is to do violence to the clear word of God. To suggest that, there could be any virtue in the re-establishment of the ancient Jewish sacrificial system is to remove the very foundation stone of Christianity. The finished sacrifice of Christ, who was offered once for all, is the mighty truth which removed the barrier that separated Jew and Gentile, thus making "of twain one new man, so making peace." Ephesians 2:15.

How far futurism is removed from apostolic faith! It not only misinterprets the prophecies, but attacks the Lord Himself, and makes whole books of the Bible of none effect. It extinguishes the very light given by God to guide His church through her wilderness wandering. It is surely one of the movements which is helping to set the stage for the final act in the drama of sin. John envisioned the whole world worshipping the beast after his deadly wound was healed. (Revelation 13:3.) This will be brought about when the image to the beast is formed and religious intolerance becomes a world-wide issue. In order to prepare a people to stand through this time of crisis, God is sending a special message to the world.

Those who carry God's last message that makes ready a people prepared for the Lord will have an "understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do." 1 Chronicles 12:32. They will understand the times because they understand time prophecy. They are the "wise virgins" of the parable. In Daniel 12:3 they are called the "wise" or the "teachers" (margin) that will "shine as the brightness of the firmament." This is our special work. Just as we have been called by God to expose the man of sin who has

attempted to change the law of God, so we are also called to reveal the one who has attempted to change the times and seasons of the prophetic word of God.

The book of Revelation opens with the injunction, "Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." A special blessing is pronounced upon these who study and teach the message of this book just before the Lord comes. Futurism takes this book, and hurls it of into the future where its prophecies become lost in the fog of human speculation. The powerful prophetic symbols are interpreted as literal—making the whole study of prophecy grotesque. H. Grattan Guinness declares that futurism "quenches the precious light which has guided the saints for ages, and kindles a wild, delusive marsh fire in its place. It obscures the wisdom of divine prophecy; it denies the true character of the days in which we live; and while it asserts the nearness of the advent of Christ in the power and glory of His kingdom, it at the same time destroys the only substantial foundation for the assertion, which is prophetic chronology."—"Romanism and the Reformation," pp. 298, 299.

But "the foundation of God stands sure" in spite of all false theories. The Reformation interpretation, which is the foundation of the advent message, is being heralded in almost every land, and the promise is that the whole earth will be lightened by its glory. Those brilliant lights of prophecy, which like steadfast stars dispelled the darkness and superstition of medievalism, which guided the Waldenses, the Lollards, and the Bohemians of pre-Reformation days, which led the wise men of the sixteenth century to lay their homage at the feet of the Prince of Peace, and which from apostolic days have guided watchful saints in every land, are shining still in the firmament of God. No man can change the decrees of the Eternal; they will shine on till the enemies of our Lord are made His footstool. They will continue to dispel the darkness of error until their "radiance melts at last in the splendors of eternal day."

Then will you, dear friends, make God and His word your hope for the future? Will you cherish the message which He sends you in love? Will you decide to follow in its light till at last, with sanctified feet, you stand with the over comers upon the sea of glass, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb? If you will, then stand to your feet now and lift your heart to God in prayer. Let us pray.

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