

PROPHETIC PEN PICTURES OF OUR DAY

Nowhere do we find more striking and forcible figures and similes than in Jehovah's words through the prophets. We here consider some statements of Isaiah 28th and 29th chapters relating to the church nominal. It is described under various figures—Ariel, Jerusalem, Babylon, Ephraim, Zion, etc.—each representing some special feature.

DRUNKARDS OF EPHRAIM

(Isa. 28:1-8)

Here the Prophet's illustration is Ephraim, probably because like Ephraim the Nominal Gospel Church was to increase in number and influence, and become proud and corrupt. The name Ephraim came to be applied to the ten tribes who revolted against the kingdom of the Lord and established a different mode of worship. So the prophet very aptly uses it here as an illustration. He recognizes the fact that it has what is considered a glory and beauty, and fruitfulness, but shows that their glory is really their shame, and that their proud and haughty spirit must have a fall.

The nominal church is represented as crowned with pride and overcome with wine—intoxicated with the spirit of the world and its pleasures. They are not on the mountain or hill top enjoying their privilege of communion with God, but they are down reveling in the fatness of the valley, the pleasures of the world. And Jeremiah says: "Wherefore gloriest thou in the valleys, thy flowing valley, O backsliding daughter? that trusted in her treasures. (Jer. 49:4.) But says the Lord, Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim. The crown of pride the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under feet. vs. 1,3.

"And the glorious beauty which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, and as the hasty fruit before the summer; which when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up. vs. 4.

The glory of the nominal church is in numbers, wealth and worldly prosperity. She has been more anxious to have a show of growth, prosperity and fruitfulness before the world, than to have fruit acceptable and well pleasing to God. God's plans work out slowly, and come to maturity not by

sudden spasmodic efforts, but by slow and steady development,

“The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.”

But the nominal church was not satisfied with God’s plans, and in her haste she has discarded his and adopted plans and theories of her own. The result

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has been great fruitfulness of a certain kind. Moral and philanthropic enterprises have been undertaken on a gigantic scale and the church has rapidly grown to immense proportions, and has gained a most prominent and influential position and name among men. Seeing this hasty fruit and regarding it good, the world with its spirit of pride has greedily swallowed it. The spirit of the world has swallowed up all the benevolent enterprises and stamped them all with pride and boastfulness. And so also its fruit in numbers, is swallowed up by the spirit of the world.

Again he says (vs. 7.) “The priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink; they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink, they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.”

What a picture of the present condition of things: Not only are the people of the Church intoxicated with the spirit of the world, but the priests, the clergy also. And because of this intoxication they err in vision and are unable to discern the truth; and they stumble over the plain statements and marked fulfillments of God’s Word.

This condition of things is true of the whole nominal church of every denomination, so that “All tables are full of vomit and filthiness so that there is no place clean.” v. 8. The tables, which should be laden with the bread of truth, are instead, covered with a repulsive mass of mingled traditions and abominable errors.

The Lord has permitted the unfaithful stewards for a long time to pursue their own plans and accomplish their own desires, but it shall not always be so, for the Prophet declares: “Behold the Lord hath a mighty and strong one which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand. The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under foot.” (vs. 2,3.)

The Lord has mighty agencies preparing for and already beginning this very work, as we have seen, for the nominal church is already being cast down. But while calamity and destruction awaits

the great nominal church; and while their pride is to be humbled in the dust, it is not to be so with the little flock of faithful ones to whom the Lord has called, "Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins and that ye receive not of her plagues."

Of these he says: In that day—the very day of Babylon's fall—shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty to *the RESIDUE of his people*. (verse 5.) And not only so, but the Lord will be "for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate." He will give judgment, discretion, to those of his children who are endeavoring to judge, to discern between the right and the wrong, the truth and the error, and who bring all things new and old to the test of his Word. His strength also will be furnished to all who battle against the forces of error.

"WHOM SHALL HE TEACH?"

If such is the condition into which the Church has fallen; if the priest and the prophet and the people are all thus intoxicated and out of the way, Isaiah raises the question, "Whom shall he [God:: teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine?" and answers, them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breast." v. 9.

Here the illustration of an infant is used, which Paul so forcibly applied to newly consecrated saints, whom he terms babes in Christ. (1 Cor. 3:1.) And Peter also says that such should as new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby. 1 Pet. 2:2.

These testimonies agree then, that while the doctrines or revelations of God are for his children, yet until they have passed the infant stage, and appropriated

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the milk of first principles, they cannot be taught of him the deeper things. Alas! how few to-day make such use of the first principles as to grow thereby; and how applicable to many are the Apostle's words—"When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles [doctrines] of God; and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat *belongeth* to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

We find that for this very reason, because they do not grow but continue babes, many are so weak and helpless that in the day of the Lord they will have great distress in their inability to understand the Lord's dealings.

“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little.” (v. 10.)

Because God deals with us as a wise parent, with his children knowing that we need our food little by little, and the lighter diet before the strong meat, therefore his truth is so arranged as to meet our necessities: A little of the truth on any subject is placed here and a little more there; and as we take these littles and put them together we gain strength and are able to appreciate the whole of it. As we deal with children, so God deals with us, giving us line upon line, and precept upon precept—the same truths repeated over and over from different standpoints, thus enforcing his teachings.

“For with stammering [despised or scorned] lips and another tongue will he speak to this people—to whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye shall cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing; yet they would not hear. But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little—so that they go and have stumbled backward, and been broken and snared and captured.” vs. 11-13. [Young.]

Though the word of the Lord has been thus plain and sufficient for the instruction and growth of his children, they have disregarded it and gone backward, substituting their own theories in its place, and in their attempt to substantiate their own theories by a reckless and often deceitful handling of the Word of God, they have wrested the Scriptures, and so stumble over its plain and harmonious teaching. The Lord had said, This plan for the redemption, restitution, and blessing of mankind, as revealed in my Word, is the comfort wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest. But the nominal church has refused to hear, and priest and people are alike deaf. Therefore the whole church nominal has gone backward, is taken in the snare of the adversary and must fall and be broken.

But though the great system of religious organization must fall, we rejoice to know that the saints who are blinded and deceived by it, shall be delivered by its fall. Though the false teachers whom they have heaped to themselves, having itching ears for worldly praise (2 Tim. 4:3) saying peace, peace, when there is no peace, (Jer. 6:14) have misused their office, the Lord will raise up other servants who will faithfully proclaim his truth. They will not seek to please the ear with soft words, nor to lull the drowsy, but will proclaim the unvarnished truth exposing hypocrisy and deception. With stammering [despised or scorned] lips and *another* tongue will he speak to this people. He will not choose the most approved and pleasing instruments to human fancy, but the scorned instruments in his hand shall be mighty in exposing the error and proclaiming the truth.

The great rock of truth on which both the houses of Israel fall, is Christ as the world's Redeemer. This was the rock over which the typical Jewish house did fall, and true to the type, we find the Gospel house (nominal) *ready* to stumble over the very same rock. No small number of the influential in the church nominal have already declared, and boldly teach that Christ was not our ransom or substitute, bearing our death penalty for us, in our room and stead. But notwithstanding all the deceptive sophistry that men may use to establish their theories, the plain simple statement of God's Word is that "The wages of sin is *death*"—not everlasting dying but everlasting deprivation of life—and that "God sent his Son to be the propitiation [satisfaction:: for our sins ... and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2 and 4:10); that by his paying our penalty we might be released from death—have a right to life—to a resurrection.

This is the only foundation of the rest wherewith we may cause the weary to rest, and whosoever accepts of the ransom through the precious blood of Christ, may securely rest in full assurance of hope: Jesus said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

But as with the Jew, so now, men object to God's way and desire a way of their own; and the plainest statements of Scripture and experiences of life are twisted and mystified, and the church is found bolstering up Satan's lie—"Thou shalt not surely die." Their belief concerning the future condition of the righteous and wicked is expressed in the following verses and many others of similar import:

"It is not death to bear
The wrench that sets us free,
From dungeon chain to breath the air
Of boundless liberty."

And again:

"What to be banished from the Lord
And yet forbid to die,
To linger in eternal pain,
And death forever fly."

If eternal pain and deep despair are the wages of sin, they do not believe that Jesus became their ransom, substitute, assuming that penalty and thus liberating them.

The cross of Christ loses its power and value in their sight as soon as they begin to reason and mix the truth with their false traditions. The ransom was to the Jew a stumbling block, and to the

worldly wise of to-day it is foolishness; but to us who believe, it is precious, and in its merits we rest. With such a belief they are unprepared to see that Jesus' death as a man was the settlement of the indebtedness of mankind incurred by Adam's sin; and error on this point blinds to every other doctrine of Scripture built upon it. This is the very first principle of the Gospel and to those who are unskillful in this, how can God teach his doctrines or plans based on this? It is because they fail to use his lines and precepts that they fail to grow, and are weak against the besetments of the adversary in this day of the Lord. Who shall be *able to stand*? (Mal. 3:2.) We find the great mass of our beloved fellow-Christians in just the position described where they shall be ensnared and captivated by error; hence we cry aloud and spare not.

It is not God's fault that such stumble and are ensnared by the adversary. The Scriptures abound with testimony as to the reality of death and the necessity and value of our ransom. The blood marks may be traced from Genesis to Revelation. By Apostles, Prophets, and types, the Lord has shown that, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins"; and those who stumble on this subject are without excuse.

The nominal church, as a whole, has not yet reached this climax of unbelief, but their course lies in that direction, and such will be the inevitable result.

As soon as the spirit of inquiry which is abroad, forces them to think, they will see the dilemma in which they are placed between the doctrine of ransom and the theory of eternal torment. And so tenaciously do they hold to the latter, that they will prefer to deny the former when pressed for a reason for their belief.

To the unfaithful teachers of to-day, Isaiah calls, "Wherefore hear the Word of the Lord ye scornful men that rule this people which is in Jerusalem, [another symbol of the church] because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death and with hell [sheol—the tomb] we are at agreement, when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves." Verse 15.

This is rather to be understood as the Lord's opinion. He terms their theory that "Death is the angel God has sent," an agreement with death, and their system of false theories, a refuge of lies.

"Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." V. 16. Other foundation can no man lay than that which God laid—Jesus Christ, who died for our sins—the just for the unjust. There is no other real foundation, and faith built upon any other is not recognized nor owned of God. They who build upon their own works, and they who build their faith on the

changeableness of the unchangeable God and suppose that he who once condemned man as unfit to live, will reverse his decision and bring him to life again, build upon the sand and have no foundation; for God lays but the one foundation—Christ,

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who by the favor of God tasted *death* for every man.

Some in their "*haste*" pass by the ransom and its legitimate fruit the resurrection—restitution. This is too slow a process for them. They have a speedier way by which that which God terms "the last enemy"—DEATH—becomes a near and hasty road to glory. But he that believeth God's testimony "*shall not make haste*;" such, taking God's plan instead of hastily constructing theories of their own, are resting on the sure foundation. They await in hope and trust the time when the value of the *ransom* will be shown in the release from *death* of all for whom Christ died—every man. Such find it as the Lord promised: "This is the rest wherewith ye shall cause the weary to rest and this is the refreshing."

"Judgment also will I lay to the line and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place." For centuries God has permitted the God of this world, Satan, to blind men and to mystify and obscure the truth. He has permitted good to be called evil, and evil good. He has permitted his own character and plans to be misrepresented. But now comes the time when woe will be unto them which call evil good and good evil and pervert the way and word of the Lord. He will mark out clearly and definitely with line and plummet, the right and wrong, the crooked and the straight. Everything wrong must be overthrown and the crooked made straight. The more firmly error is rooted the greater will be the shock. This will apply to truth and error on every subject and especially in the greatest of all—religion. Already the shock begins to be felt both by the church and the world, but more especially by the former.

Water symbolizes truth and hail represents hard, cold forcible truths, or truths put in a forcible way, as judgments. Thus we are shown that when God's time comes, all error and deceit, every refuge of lies will be swept away and destroyed, for God will have all men to come to the knowledge of *the truth*, that they may avail themselves of its advantages.

The burning up of all the hay, wood and stubble, errors of those building *on the rock* of Jesus the ransom, is shown by Paul, (1 Cor. 3:12.) and the overthrow of all systems which reject the only foundation is well illustrated by Jesus in his simile. (Luke 6:48.) The difference between building *on the rock*, and building in the sand *alongside* the rock is very great when the floods come and beat upon such a faith.

“And your covenant with death shall be disannulled and your agreement with hell [*sheol*, the tomb] shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge [whip, rod—chastisement] shall pass through [in the Day of the Lord], then ye shall be trodden down [oppressed] by it.

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From the time that it goeth forth [in its very commencement] it shall take you; for morning by morning shall it pass over by day and by night; and it shall be a vexation [distress, perplexity] only *until he shall make you to understand doctrine.*” [See margin.] Verses 18,19.

Because the church is so largely composed of *babes* uninstructed in the word of the Lord, and therefore unable to understand his dealings, therefore in this time of judgment—testing and sifting such will be discouraged, vexed, and much troubled as they shall witness the overthrow of many things which they had deemed essential to the progress of God’s cause in the world. They do not see that the separation of wheat and tares, and of the ripe and unripe wheat is now due. They do not see that those building on the sand must be manifested and distinguished from those who build upon the foundation which God hath laid, hence their distress as their wood, hay and stubble faith is consumed, and when they see the “refuge of lies” which they mistook for truth, entirely swept away. But this overthrow and destruction of venerated theories shall be a vexation to them until they are made to understand the *true doctrine* revealed in God’s word. When thus liberated they will rejoice in the overthrow of every form of error and its replacement with truth.

“For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it.” A bed is a place for rest and refreshment and symbolizes a faith—a creed. God provides the good and suitable resting place or faith in his word; saying, “*This is the rest* wherewith ye shall cause the weary to rest and this is the refreshing.” Rejecting his, they have made beds to suit themselves—sectarian creeds—but God condemns them; they are so short and contracted that only babes can stretch themselves therein—those who are more developed—men (“In understanding be ye men.” 1 Cor. 14:20) being cramped and uncomfortable, can find no *rest* in such, and are getting out of them.

“And the covering is narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.” The assurances offered by the *nominal* Church are so vague and unsatisfactory that those in such beds find it difficult to cover or assure themselves. Their knowledge of God is so narrow and meager that they know not the meaning of “full [wide; ample] assurance of faith.” (Heb. 10:22.) The uncovered, shivering and doubting condition of the great majority is expressed in some of the familiar hymns from which we give some extracts:

“Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought;

Do I love the Lord or no,
Am I his, or am I not."

"When thou my righteous Judge shall come,
To take thy ransomed people home,
Shall I among them stand?"

"But can I bear the piercing thought
What if my name should be left out,
When thou for them shalt call?"

"Thy pardoning voice O let me hear,
To still my **unbelieving fear**,
Nor let me fall I pray."

God declares—"Their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men." (Isa. 29:13.) The nominal church in its "*haste*" to convert the world has exaggerated and wrested parables and symbols in using them to threaten the world, and to frighten them into their *beds* for promised rest; but their unlawful "*haste*" has worked to their own unrest, for they have so convinced themselves of God's injustice that they find it difficult to satisfy themselves of their own security, fearing lest by some thoughtless word or act they should endure eternal torture. Hence saints who have grown so as to discover the shortness of the bed and the narrowness of the covering cry out:

"A point of time a moments space
Removes me to that heavenly place,
Or shuts me up in hell."

"A half-awakened child of man
An heir of bliss or pain,
A worm of earth, I cry"—

"Eternal things impress!
Give me to feel their solemn weight
And tremble on the brink of fate."

"What after death for me remains?
Celestial joys or hellish pains
To all eternity!

“How then ought I to live on earth?”
“My sole concern, my single care,
To watch, to tremble and prepare
Against that fatal day.”

Our hearts are full of pity for these whose fear and distress is caused by their short beds and narrow covering, and we urge them to come out into the broad place, and to rest with us in the testimonies of God alone.

Those who rest in God’s word are described in Psalm 149. While the others are in anguish and fear, these “Sing aloud upon their beds.” The high praises of Jehovah are in their mouths—the new song; and their security, his word is in their hands—the sword of the spirit.

“For the Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work, and bring to pass his act, his strange act.” (v. 21.) The cases mentioned as illustrations of the destruction of this day are remarkable. At Perazim the idol-worshippers who came against God’s newly anointed king, David, to oppose the establishment of his kingdom, met the power of Jehovah whom he represented. (2 Sam. 5:20,21.) At Gibeah there was a great slaughter by the Lord with hailstones from heaven of those who attempted to interfere with Joshua and Israel in taking possession of the promised land. (Josh. 10:10,11.)

The Lord warns that those who oppose the establishment of his anointed in the real Canaan, shall similarly bring upon themselves destruction. “Now, *therefore*, be ye not mockers lest your bands be made strong; for I have heard from the Lord of hosts a consumption

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even determined upon the whole earth.” (v. 22.)

Some seem inclined to treat lightly the predictions of overthrow or consumption of the present order of things and the introduction of the new order. Such feel so confident as they look at the perfection of Babylon’s ramparts of defence, and as they look at the formidable armament of nations, that they need the caution of the Lord’s words, “Be ye not mockers.” To take a position of opposition is to make the fall so much the more severe when it comes. Those who reject and mock at the truth are more tightly bound by Babylon’s cord of influence and prejudice—their bands are made strong. The consumption or destruction of hoary and venerated systems of error both civil and religious, is “the act—the *strange act*,” which the Lord will shortly bring to pass. It is a strange act to all those not instructed from his word, and who so highly esteem these false systems which are doomed to destruction.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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