

PROPHETIC PEN PICTURES

(CONTINUED)

CONSIDER GOD'S WAYS

(Isa. 28:23-29)

„Give ye ear and hear my voice; hearken and hear my speech: Doth the ploughman plough all day [always] to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain [prepared] the face thereof doth he not cast abroad the fitches and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat, and the appointed barley, and the rye in their place? For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him.”

Because of their short-sightedness, men are apt to think of God's works as aimless, and lacking definite object and time; but the Prophet shows us that God's times and seasons and plans are definite and methodical. Here he presents the familiar scenes of farm life, saying that as God instructs the farmer to observe order in his work, so he also observes the same order in his plans and methods. He first prepares the soil of humanity and breaks it up and makes it ready for the seed of truth. Then follows the sowing of seed and the harvest of each in its season.

This Gospel Age has been a sowing time. He that sowed the good seed is the Son of Man (Matt. 13:37), and his disciples have assisted under his direction. It will be followed by a „harvest,” as it was preceded by an age of breaking up and preparing men by the plow and harrow of bitter experiences with sin and Law. So, too, there are as many harvests as there are kinds of seed (1 Cor. 15:38-44), but order governs all.

But while all recognize that there is a proper time to sow, it is generally forgotten that a reaping time, a harvest, shall come. But for the same reason that God did not forever prepare the soil, he will not forever be sowing the seed, but in due time will give his attention to reaping and threshing.

This is the point of the illustration: the time of trouble coming upon the Church should be recognized as the *harvest*, the *threshing time*, the time for separating the real grain from the chaff and tares. The harvest represents two general classes, with some variety in each. The fitches and cummin (verse 27) were small aromatic seeds used sometimes for food, but more commonly for medicinal purposes. These grew in little pods very easily crushed, and hence required gentle threshing with a rod or staff to separate them. These, we presume, represent a class of saints who, not being closely wedded to the world and its systems, can be quickly and easily separated from it.

The other grains mentioned, of which much larger quantities are grown, all cling closely to the chaff, some more so than others; and hence it was necessary to use rougher means to thresh it free. Cart wheels were passed over them repeatedly until the separation was effected. So some of the Lord's children cling so closely to the world, its forms and institutions, etc., that they must be put through the severe ordeal; and every true grain shall be saved by some process (1 Cor. 3:15).

This is more clearly shown in another translation: „For the fitches shall not be threshed with a threshing instrument [with saw-like teeth], neither is a cart wheel turned upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. But bread-grain [though it ultimately] shall be broken small [or ground]; but [yet] the thresher shall not thresh it forever, neither shall the cart wheel hurt it, nor break it with its [thresher's] teeth. This also cometh forth from the Lord God of hosts to make his council wonderful and magnify justice.” (Vs. 28,29.)

This shows us that though the Lord will use severer and stronger measures to separate some of his children than is necessary with others, yet it is not his design that the time of trouble shall destroy them, but rather to bless them by thereby making them fit for his future service.

To realize that such is God's orderly plan enables us to understand the present threshing and sifting among God's children, and thereby to be co-workers with him, rather than to be found fighting against his work, now due and in progress. To realize this, is also, to catch a glimpse of God's goodness and justice.

WOE TO ARIEL

(Isa. 29:1)

Here, again, the coming distress upon the nominal church is illustrated, its necessity is shown, and also God's compassion afterward.

„Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! Add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices.” (Ver. 1.) Jerusalem was the city of David; and as Jerusalem is sometimes used to represent the nominal church, so Ariel here and Zion in verse 8 refer to the same thing. The prophet here declares that woe, distress, trouble, is about to come on the nominal church. But though the nominal church, as a system, has become corrupt, the Lord still permits her to add year to year, to prolong her existence a few years, that his truly consecrated children may complete their sacrifice. One important part of their sacrifice is to separate from the nominal systems and to stand connected only with the true.

„Yet,” Jehovah declares, „will I distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow.” (Verse 2.) Although the Lord will distress Ariel, the nominal church, yet he will remember that many within her are his own dear children; some of them weak, erring and negligent; and the very object of this distress is to awaken them and to liberate them from their bondage and worldly conformity. The fact that God will thus remember his own is clearly taught in various scriptures, and is suggested in the latter clause of this verse—“and [although I will thus distress it] it shall be unto me as Ariel” (Jerusalem or Zion). His own children now held in the bondage of the doomed systems are still dear to him; and he will save them, though with the majority it will be—“so as by fire”—through „great tribulation.”

The Lord here describes the overthrow necessary to separate the true Ariel—Jerusalem, or Zion—from the multitude of the worldly and unregenerate which she has received as her children, and because of whose presence in her she is sometimes termed Babylon, or confusion. He says: „I will camp against thee round about [O Babblers—*Young*], and will lay siege against thee with a mount [camp]; and I will raise forts against thee [bulwarks to hide myself from thee]. And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.”

Already the pride of the nominal church begins to be humbled. Once she loudly and boldly proclaimed her teachings of eternal torment, the damnation of non-elect infants, etc.; but now her voice is low, and she merely whispers these teachings in her writings, or cautiously from the pulpit.

She has been puffed up by what she esteems her success—her wealth and members. Worldliness has filled her

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heart, and the Spirit of Christ has been choked. Woe to Zion, for she shall find the Lord arrayed

against her, and he shall bring down her pride to the earth, that she may be humbled and cry unto him from the dust.

„Moreover, the multitude of thy strangers shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones [tyrants—*Leeser's trans.*] shall be as chaff that passeth away”; „and this shall be at unawares—suddenly” (verse 5—*Leeser's trans.*) The principal cause of nominal Zion's distress is her multitude of strange children—the children of the world, unregenerated, who compose the greater part of her numbers. These she has come to consider her strength, her power. Their wealth, their influence and their standing in the world, she is trusting in; and by these she has been puffed up.

„Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and with great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire” (verse 6). These are symbolic expressions of the great storm of trouble now gathering and soon to break with force on nominal Zion. The *thunder* and *noise* indicate controversy, and we find infidelity in its most subtle form springing up in the midst of the Church. Its most marked feature is the denial of the *ransom* given by Christ our Lord. This error, which strikes at the very foundation of God's truth, is boldly proclaimed by some of the most prominent of the nominal church, and many are following their leading. Under the general and widespread spirit of doubt and unbelief, it will soon be discovered that none are able to give a reason for their hope, and that much has been taught which is entirely without support. Dogmas hitherto unquestioned will be brought to the test of reason, which, unguided by the Scriptures, will surely lead to open infidelity, and the nominal church systems, with their clashing creeds, will become more and more lightly esteemed, as men throw off the yoke of superstition, and yet fail to consult the word of God, and to recognize the true Church. A fearful storm and tempest is thus gathering, and the condition of the mass of the nominal church, when it fully breaks upon it, is here fitly symbolized by an „earthquake.” The „devouring fire” is an apt symbol of the certain destruction that in the end shall surely consume these false systems.

Before this fearful storm the multitude of strangers—the worldly—who come into the Church for respectability, society, business interests, popularity, etc., shall, as verse 5 shows, be scattered

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like the fine dust. „And the multitude of the terrible ones [tyrants—*Leeser's trans.*—the leaders, priests, rulers, or clergy] shall be as chaff that passeth away.” Many have entered the ministry of the nominal church for popularity, ease, money and respectability; and these lord it over God's heritage, strengthen the bondage of fear, fetter thought and retard growth in grace and knowledge, while they exact and devour her revenues. But when these systems cease to be popular and financially successful, these too will soon be scattered like chaff. But while many of

the clergy are of the stamp here described by the prophet, we rejoice to know that among these, as well as among the laity, some true wheat exists, yet few compared to the whole, and these are rapidly being separated.

Those who are not of the Lord's true children shall be swept away in the coming storm, when the Lord's sharp threshing instruments shall have separated them as chaff from the grain in this day of harvest and separation. The chaff and dust will be speedily removed from the chastened of the Lord, who shall be brought to the lowly and humble condition from which they should never have departed.

„And the multitude of all nations that fight against Ariel, even all that fight against her and her munition [bulwark], and that distress her shall be as a dream of a night vision. It shall even be as when a hungry man dreameth, and behold he eateth; but he waketh and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth and behold he drinketh, but he awaketh and behold he is faint and his soul hath appetite [thirst]: So shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against mount Zion.” (vs. 7,8.)

In the Lord's controversy with Zion the infidel and worldly of all nations will be ready and willing instruments for her chastisement, and for the overthrow of her errors. But though like Satan (another of his agent, whose wrath is made to praise Jehovah), they shall for a time seem to succeed, yet it shall be only *seemingly*, for out of the nominal Zion arises the true, stronger and better for her visitation and purification. And those who fought against her munition or stronghold—the Bible—and who for a time will think that they have completely destroyed her stronghold, will find only the wood, hay and stubble of human tradition gone, and the original bulwark impregnable. Their victory will prove to be but the delusion of a dream, when they shall have accomplished a work in which they are used as the Lord's instruments.

It is not surprising that in their blindness, the unfaithful children of God in nominal Zion mistake their most faithful friends, for enemies. Through some of his chosen ones „the Lord hath a controversy with his people.” (Micah 6:2.); and these must obey his command—“Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgressions.” (Isa. 58:1.) These faithful reprovers are generally abused as enemies; and to oppose the false systems that blind and fetter the true Zion, is generally looked upon as infidelity.

But the Prophet draws the line clearly and distinctly, showing who are the real enemies referred to. It is the multitude *of the nations* not even professing to be the children of God, but who boldly, not only fight against Zion (God's children, however strong or weak), but also against her munition, her bulwark,—the Bible. This is just what the hosts of infidelity are endeavoring to do;

not only to overthrow the nominal church systems (in which work they are *unwittingly* the Lord's instruments), but they are also endeavoring to demolish the Bible—the blessed fortress of truth in which even the weakest child of God shall find a sure refuge. To these enemies of Zion and of God, it shall even be, as described in vs. 7 and 8.

The valiant for the truth, have ever been considered enemies by the nominal mass. Thus to Elijah it was said, „Art thou he that troubleth Israel?” (1 Kings 18:17.) He was so considered because of his zeal for Jehovah and his opposition to the worship of the images of Baal. So Jesus was called by those termed „orthodox” of his day, a perverter of the people, Luke 23:2,14; and Paul was esteemed by the same class „a pestilent fellow and a mover of sedition” Acts 24:5. Hence all who endeavor to withstand error in its popular forms must expect to bear the same reproach, and for a time be esteemed the troublers of Israel.

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