

PROPHETIC PEN PICTURES CONTINUED

THE SEALED BOOK—ISA. 29:9-14

„Stay but still and wonder; turn your eyes away, and be blinded: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink.” (V. 9, Leeser’s trans.) With a touch of irony the Lord here addresses nominal Zion. The unfoldings of his truth at the time here referred to (the time in which we are living) are so marked, forcible and clear to faithful students of the Word, and observers of its fulfillment, that only those could be blinded, who deliberately turn their eyes away from the truth, and determine to sit still, enveloped in the darkness of human tradition. And in their darkness they wonder at what they think the strange course of the Lord’s dealings.

Their staggering is the staggering of indistinct vision and weakness, the halting and vacillating of bewilderment and confusion. They are not drunken with wine. The wine here referred to is that which symbolizes their consecration—that of which Jesus said, „Drink ye all of it,” and „Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?” (Matt. 26:27; and 20:22.) While this wine of sacrifice exhausts the human nature, it invigorates and makes strong the spiritual nature. It is not because of this wine or strong drink of sacrifice, then, that nominal Zion staggers, but because, as shown in the preceding chapter (verses 3-7), they have partaken of the intoxicating spirit and pleasures of this world.

„For the Lord hath poured out over you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: (over) the prophets, and your chiefs, the seers, hath he cast a veil.” (V. 10, Leeser.)

Since they have turned their eyes away from the truth, God permits them to sit in darkness and to be overcome with sleep. Who cannot see the spirit of lethargy and drowsiness regarding spiritual things which pervades nominal Zion. They are not asleep on temporal subjects; they are awake to all worldly ambitions—to the rivalry of numbers, of pulpit oratory, church music, imposing edifices, etc.—but to the teachings of God’s Word they are asleep. Over the teachings of the Prophets, and of Jesus and the Apostles, a veil is cast. „And the vision of everything [the revelation of God’s truth through these] is become unto you [nominal Zion] *as the words of a book that is SEALED.*” (V. 11, Leeser.) This they themselves admit, and therefore seldom attempt to expound the Scriptures, but merely take an isolated passage, and from it draw some moral lesson. Nominal Zion has discarded the teachings of the true Prophets and Seers of the church, and has taken instead the decrees of

human councils and synods, while the decrees of the real Head and teachers of the church are neglected. Hence they know not what to think of the present, and are still more confused if they think of the future.

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„Which [book—the Bible] men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he saith, *I cannot, for it is sealed*. And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he saith, I am not learned.” (Verses 11,12.)

The prophecies of the Old and New Testaments are sealed against their learning, for they have studied only at the feet of science and sectarianism, and have neglected the school of Christ and the study of its text-book, the Bible; hence their learned ones lack the true wisdom, and the true spirit, which alone will enable any to appreciate the deep things of God. (Compare 1 Cor. 2:5-14.) The unlearned, accustomed to look to earthly learning for instruction in heavenly things, and not to the testimony of Prophets and Apostles, will not even attempt to understand.

„Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: therefore, behold I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.” (Verses 13,14.)

Formality of worship and service has taken the place of heart service. When the service was from the heart, the Lord's plans were searched for, as for hid treasure. His Word was studied that the mystery of God might be appreciated as fast as his ripening and unfolding plans would permit. It was a longing such as Daniel experienced when he searched and fasted and prayed for weeks, that he might know whatever of God's plan he was pleased to reveal. It was the longing desire to comprehend with all saints the length and breadth and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, and be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:18,19.)

But the worldly spirit soon cast out this thirst for truth and knowledge, as the heart became interested in worldly aims and plans. Though the forms of godliness have continued and increased, the real worship and submission to God has ceased, and interest is bent to man-made plans. While they draw nigh to God with their lips, saying, „Thy kingdom come,” and „Thy will be done,” they are endeavoring to have their own wills done, and to establish their own sectarian dominions in the world. Their fear of God and their unrest in view of his supposed decrees, is not the result of the study of his Word, but is taught by the precept of men. Alas, how pitiable this condition! Yet they are ignorant of it, and say, We are rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing, and

know not that they are poor and blind and miserable and naked. (Rev. 3:17.)

Seeing it is thus, what shall the Lord do with them? Will he utterly cast them off? Will he leave them in their blindness? No. He says, „Therefore, behold I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.” (V. 14.)

As this already becomes evident to many, what a marvelous thing it seems to those accustomed to look to the professed leaders and teachers of the nominal Church. As the light of truth begins to dawn upon many minds from other sources, how often we hear the remark, „How strange that we do not hear these things from our ministers!” But the Prophet makes answer: „The wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.” The heavenly wisdom is hidden from those who are wise and prudent after the world’s fashion, and revealed unto those who are babes in simplicity and meekness. (Matt. 11:25.)

God will not leave his erring children; he will attract their attention back to his plans, causing all their plans to wonderfully miscarry and fail. Thus they shall see the folly of attempting to lay plans for God; and when their plans fail, they will look up, and lo! the Lord’s plans, which in their „haste” (Isa. 28:16) they discarded, will, like the century plant, suddenly burst forth in glory and beauty and perfection.

Meantime, while the „marvelous work” (v. 14) of overthrowing the present great systems of men (which, like the tower of Babel, is an attempt on the part of men to work their plans regardless of the Lord’s) is in progress, the Lord’s warning is, „Woe to them that seek deep to hide their counsel [schemes, plans,] from the Lord, and their works

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are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us, and who knoweth us?” (V. 15.)

It is possible to deceive fellow-men, and to convince them that certain plans are not different from, but in harmony with, the Lord’s plans. Yea, a man may also deceive even himself thus (2 Tim. 3:13); but he cannot deceive God. He knows that the controlling principles of sectarianism are earthly and selfish. He knows of the dark works and secret conspiracies in wrong, not only of the Jesuits, but also, in a less degree, of Protestants, who to accomplish *their plans* are willing to, and do resort, to many schemes and devices to raise money and to have their systems seem to flourish, which they would not care to have generally known among men, and which they seem to think God seeth not. How often reports are doctored to make a good impression. How often subscription lists are headed with prominent names and large sums of money *only for effect*, and

never expected to be paid. (This not infrequent custom was illustrated recently by the course of the officials of a prominent Brooklyn church, freely criticised by the public press.) All this is ostensibly to forward the *Lord's work*, but really to accomplish their own plans.

„Who seeth it? Who knoweth it?“ The Lord seeth in secret; in vain do they hide it, and tell him that they are laboring for him. Woe unto these, for their counsel shall come to naught; their cherished plans shall fail, and their pride will be humbled in the dust. The woe, distress and trouble coming upon the nominal Church will be in reality a blessing in disguise to the individuals that compose it; but it will be considered as calamity and trouble, until they are brought to understand and to come into harmony with God's plans.

But all this scheming will not succeed; for the Lord says, „Surely your turning of things upside down [perverting of the Lord's plans and doctrines] shall be esteemed as the [effort of the] potter's clay [to oppose the potter]. For shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? Or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He hath no understanding?“ Surely the Church is God's creation; it is „his workmanship“ (Eph. 2:10), but the spirit of the nominal Church is to look to other framers. Some look to Peter, some to Luther, some to Calvin, Knox and Wesley. And indeed, as they at present stand, this is true, for while THE CHURCH is God's workmanship, the division of that Church into fragments is the work of men, and may say to God, Thou hast not made me. And the fact that men to-day argue that the division (sectarianism) of the Church is an advantage, and to the advancement of the truth, is the equivalent of the thing framed saying to God, „Thou hast no understanding“; we know better how to frame and organize; you said that we all should be one, and that there should be no division among us (John 17:11,22; 1 Cor. 12:25); but we have learned better—that divisions are a great blessing and advantage.

Verily the great Potter shall have the schemes of the clay in derision, and shall break in pieces their workmanship [the systems or organizations, not the people] as vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, and shall show forth in glory of kingdom power *his* vessels of more and of less honor. What if God, willing to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory? Surely the present overturning of the Lord's arrangements shall be brought to naught.

„Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field; and the fruitful field shall be esteemed a forest.“ (Verse 17.) Mount Lebanon, with its tall and stately cedar trees, will here represent the majesty and dignity of the nominal Church, and the reverential esteem with which its ministry is regarded. The fruitful field might well represent the humble and lowly saints. In „*a very little while*“ things shall be reversed; that which is now proud and majestic shall be cut

down and plowed, and become humble and fruitful, while that which is now humble will be exalted as Lebanon to heavenly conditions, majesty and power.

This change, and this overthrow of the present systems, is at the time of the exaltation of the saints to spiritual glory and power, at the introduction of the Millennium. In harmony with this we read: „In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness.” What a blessed prospect is this for those who at present are so stumbled by Babylon’s confusing traditions! Not only will it bring blessing to those whose vision is obscured, but also to those totally blind and deaf and utterly ignorant of the precious information of God’s Word. „The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel; for the terrible one [Satan] is brought to naught, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch

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for iniquity are cut off: that make a man an offender for a word [spoken contrary to them], and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate [publicly], and turn aside the just [the righteous] for [or, as] a thing of naught.” (V. 21.)

This is in that same „DAY” that fleshly Israel shall be restored to favor under the direction of glorified spiritual Israel, their holy one. „Therefore, thus saith the Lord who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: Jacob shall not now [at that time] be ashamed, neither shall his face wax pale. But when he seeth *his children, the work of my hands* [the Christ, the spiritual seed] in the midst of him, they [fleshly Israel] shall sanctify my name [Jehovah], and sanctify the holy one of Jacob [Christ], and shall fear the God of Israel.” (Verses 22,23.)

„They also that erred in spirit shall come to *understanding*, and they that murmured shall learn *doctrine*.” (V. 24.)

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