

14. THE ORDER OF FUTURE EVENTS

In the interpretation of the great lines of prophecy, Seventh day Adventists are not teaching some new, fantastic theories. On the contrary, they follow in general the expositions given by the Reformers, the founders of the Protestant churches.

Prophetic Interpretations of the Founding Fathers of Protestantism

In those marvelous prophecies in the second and seventh chapters of Daniel, outlining world history from the days of Babylon to the setting up of God's everlasting kingdom, we have foretold the successive world empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Grecia, and Rome; and then follows the division of Western Rome into ten parts, represented by the feet and toes of the image and the ten horns of the great beast. It was "a stone . . . cut out without hands" that smote the image on the feet and utterly destroyed it. The meaning of this stone which "became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth" was that, "In the days of these kings [the nations into which Rome was divided] shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed." Dan. 2:44. It is evident that Europe will continue in its divided state until the coming of Christ in glory. (Matt. 24:30, 31.) Seventh-day Adventists agree with many expositors of various denominations in finding these ten kingdoms to be in the past, and do not, with Mr. Jones and a school of modern prophetic expositors, look into the future for a "very brief period in which the ten-kingdom federation, which will constitute the Roman Empire in its final form, shall exist." (No. 39.). Says Dr. H. Grattan Guinness:

"Amidst unceasing and almost countless fluctuations, the kingdoms of modern Europe have from their birth to the present day averaged ten in number. They have never since the breakup of old Rome been united into one single empire; they have never formed one whole even like the United States. No scheme of proud ambition seeking to reunite the broken fragments has ever succeeded; when such have arisen, they have been invariably dashed to pieces.... And the division is as apparent now as ever! Plainly and palpably inscribed on the map of Europe this day, it confronts the skeptic with its silent but conclusive testimony to the fulfillment of this great prophecy."---The Divine Program of the World's History, pp. 320, 321.

With slight variations such scholarly theologians as Joseph Mede, Dr. William Hales, Sir Isaac Newton, Bishop Thomas, Newton, Rev. E. B. Elliott, and many others identify the ten kingdoms that supplanted Rome in Europe. Why should we disregard this accurate fulfillment of the prophecy and look for its fulfillment in some future age? If, as is claimed, there is to be a "final form" of the Roman Empire during the millennium, then the angel made a mistake when he told Daniel that these kingdoms should not "cleave one to another."

In Daniel 7 a power is introduced not referred to in the second chapter, "a little horn" that came up among the ten, and before which three horns were plucked up. Of this power, it is written: "He shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time." Dan. 7:25.

Seventh-day Adventists do not follow the expositors for whom Mr. Jones is speaking, in looking to the future for the fulfillment of this part of the prophecy. The rise of the papal power among the divisions into which Rome was broken a religio-political power fulfills in striking detail the predictions concerning this little horn. This, we believe, is "the man of sin" to which Paul referred, "the son of perdition! who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." 2 Thess. 2:3,4. This was the teaching of the early Reformers. Their clear identification of the Papacy as the foretold Antichrist was a most powerful factor in that great spiritual awakening which was the precious heritage of Protestantism. If such a power has already risen out of the Roman Empire, then why should we look for a future fulfillment, ignoring that which has already appeared on the stage of action?

The Westminster Confession of 1647, which expresses the fundamental teachings of the great Presbyterian Church, says: "There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof, but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself in the church against Christ and all that is called God."-WILLIAM A.

The Shift to Other Interpretations

Why should Protestants today ignore and repudiate the prophetic exposition of their founding fathers, and substitute therefor new and strange interpretations of prophecy? How this startling change came about is well told in the following statement:

"So great a hold did the conviction that the Papacy was the Antichrist gain upon the minds of men, that Rome at last saw that she must bestir herself, and try, by putting forth other systems of interpretation, to counteract the identification of the Papacy with the Antichrist.

"Accordingly, toward the close of the century of the Reformation, two of the most learned doctors set themselves to the task, each endeavoring by different means to accomplish the same end, namely, that of diverting men's minds from perceiving the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Antichrist in the papal system. The Jesuit Aleasar devoted himself to bring into prominence the preterist method of interpretation. . . . and thus endeavored to show that the prophecies of Antichrist were fulfilled before the popes ever ruled at Rome, and therefore could not apply to the Papacy. On the other hand, the Jesuit Ribera tried to set aside the application of these prophecies to the papal power by bringing out the futurist system, which asserts that the prophecies refer properly, not to the career of the Papacy, but to that of some future supernatural individual, who is yet to appear, and to continue in power for three and a half years. Thus, as Alford says, the Jesuit Ribera, about 1580, may be regarded as the founder of the futurist system in modern times.

"It is a matter of deep regret that those who hold and advocate the futurist system at the present day, Protestants as they are for the most part, are thus really playing into the hands of Rome, and helping to screen the Papacy from detection as the Antichrist. It has been well said that 'futurism tends to obliterate the brand put by the Holy Spirit upon popery.'" -REV. JOSEPH TANNER, B.A., Daniel and the Revelation, pp. 16, 17.

The Secret Rapture Theory

According to Ribera-and Mr. Jones in his arraignment of Seventh-day Adventists follows him in the essential points-there would first be a secret rapture when the church would be caught away silently. (No. 37.) The visible return of Christ in glory, when "every eye shall see Him" (Rev. 1:7), would be seven years later. First it is said, Christ would appear 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 Revelation from chapters 4 to 20-are to be fulfilled, according to this theory.

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." Rev. 22:10. Strange to say, in the effort to prove that Christ's coming for His saints is "alone" and "without manifestation," reference is made to 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, which reads:

"The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air."

Jesus Himself explained the part the angels would have to act at His coming for His saints:

"They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

And He shall send His angels with a trumpet and a great voice, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Matt. 24:30, 31, margin. This, we are told, refers to Christ's visible coming with His saints. Please reread these two passages and note the close parallelism, indicated by words and phrases italicized. There is really no Scriptural basis for this secret rapture theory; yet Adventists are charged with heresy for believing that these two Scriptures refer to the same event.

A strained effort is made by Mr. Jones to prove that Adventists do not believe Jesus' words that "of that day and hour knows no man." (No. 36.) Seventh-day Adventists have never set a time for the Lord to come, but teach that all may know when the time is near. (Matt. 24:32, 33, 36.) It is not unscriptural to believe that as Jesus descends to the earth His voice will be heard delivering the everlasting covenant to His people and announcing the exact time of His arrival.