**“Signs of Christ’s Second Coming” The Signs of the Times, 8, 1.**

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In our brief examination of Scripture, we have found that the personal, visible coming of Christ is a fact that admits of no dispute. To deny it is to deny the plainest teaching of the New Testament. The next question that naturally arises is, Have any signs been given by which we may know something concerning the time? Is there any probability that this awful event may take place in our day? But we do not find people generally concerning themselves much in regard to the matter. By far the larger part of mankind desire to hear nothing of it. Some ignore it entirely; others say it is spiritual, or in the past; while others admit all the points which we have thus far examined, but they say that it is impossible for any body to know anything about it. They say that for a man to inquire concerning it is prying into the secrets of the Almighty. Arguing from their own desires, they think that he will not come in their day at least, and imagine that ignorance or forgetfulness will excuse them from all responsibility to the matter. {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 7.1}

But the Lord will certainly come, and no amount of indifference will cause him to delay. Moreover, some persons will be alive, and will see him come. Now it is not in accordance with God’s dealings with men in the past, to spring any great event on them unawares. “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.” Amos 3:7. Every judgment has been preceded by a warning, and ample time has been given to prepare for it. It was so in the case of the flood, the destruction of Sodom, the Babylonish captivity, the destruction of Jerusalem, and other instances. Reasoning from analogy alone, we should conclude that this event, so vastly more important than any of those mentioned, should also be preceded by a warning. And we learn that this is so from 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4: “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.... But ye, brethren are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.” Paul is here speaking to those who shall be “alive and remain” to the coming of the Lord; see chap. 4:16, 17; and his language proves that such will know of that event. {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 7.2}

But because this was addressed to the Thessalonians, some have argued that the apostles and early Christians expected the Lord in their day, and were disappointed-that we have no more duty to look for his coming than people have had in all ages since his first advent. “He may come to-day, and he may not come for a thousand years or more,” they frequently say; but the Bible gives no authority for any such statement; and the actions of those who say so, plainly show that they themselves do not believe it. {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 7.3}

It is just as contrary to the Bible to say that people might with propriety have expected Christ to come at any period in the past, since his first advent, as it is to say that he will not come at all. There were some in Paul’s day who thought that the coming of the Lord was near, but he disabused their minds in the following language: “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4. All agree that this “man of sin” is the Papacy, which resulted from the “falling away” from the simplicity of the gospel. Until that power had arisen, and had run its course of blasphemy and oppression, it was not proper for men to teach that the coming of the Lord was at hand; it is, therefore, very important to the proper understanding of our subject, to know the facts concerning the rise and progress of the Papacy. {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 7.4}

Without entering into any exposition of the prophecy, for lack of space, I will simply state that Bishop Newton, Sir Isaac Newton, Dr. Scott, and other eminent commentators agree that Paul’s “man of sin” is identical with the “little horn” of Daniel 7, and refers to the Papacy. In Daniel 7:25 its actions are described thus: “And 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.” By comparing this text with Revelation 12:6, 14, we learn that the “time and times and the dividing of time” is twelve hundred and sixty days. This, if it were literal time, would be an insignificant length of time for the continuance of a persecuting power. But we must remember that the power is represented under the symbol of a beast; and in order for the prophecy to be harmonious, the time must also be symbolical. Turning to Ezekiel 4:6 we find that in the prophecy a day is used for a year. Applying this rule to the prophecy in question, we have twelve hundred and sixty years. The Papacy then, was to continue with power to persecute, twelve hundred and sixty years. {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 7.5}

We next inquire when the Papacy was developed sufficiently to fill the specifications of the prophecy. We find that in the year A.D. 538, Justinian’s decree that the bishop of Rome should be the head of all the churches, went into effect. This gave the Bishop of Rome power to decide what was heresy, and to call people to account for manifestations of it. From that time onward, the most blasphemous assumptions were made by this self-styled “viceregent of the Son of God,” and persecutions without number were carried on in the name of Christianity. This meets the terms of the prophecy fully. Now can we find any event at the end of twelve hundred and sixty years that would mark the downfall of this system of oppression? In 1798 just twelve hundred and sixty years later, Berthier, a noted French general, took Pope Pius VI. Prisoner and carried him into exile, where he died. Although another individual was soon after proclaimed pope, the power was broken, never to reach its former greatness. The power of the pope has gradually wasted away, until nothing remains to him now but a name; and although the will to persecute is as active as ever, the power to do it openly, ceased at that time. {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 7.6}

Now as to the bearing of all this on the subject of Christ’s coming. In answer to his disciple’s question, “What shall be the sign of thy coming, and the end of the world?” Matthew 24:3, Christ gave a brief outline of the condition of the world to the end of time. After warning them in verses 15-21 of the destruction of Jerusalem, he spoke of a time of “great tribulation” that should shortly follow, “such as was not since the beginning of the world.” The destruction of Jerusalem is not referred to here, for this reason: This tribulation was to come upon God’s people, for he said: “And except those days should be shortened, there should *no* flesh be saved; but *for the elect’s sake* those days shall be shortened.” Verse 22. Now when the final destruction of Jerusalem took place there were no Christians in the city, for all had fled according to the command of Christ. The time of trouble here referred to, then, must be the long period of papal persecution. And this corresponds with the statement in verse 22, for, as the result of the Reformation, the persecution actually ceased some years before the year 1798. {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 7.7}

We now have the data for a sign that of itself should be sufficient if there were no other. Jesus said: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light.” Matthew 24:29. As recorded by Mark, the language is still more definite. “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light.” Mark 10:24. A little while before the year 1798, then, this wonderful sign should have occurred. As a matter of fact, this prediction was fulfilled in the dark day of May 19, 1780. Of this day “Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary,” speaks as follows:- {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 7.8}

“DARK DAY, THE. May 19, 1890-so called on account of a remarkable darkness on that day extending over all New England. In some places, persons could not see to read common print in the open air for several hours together. Birds sang their evening song, disappeared, and became silent; fowls went to roost; cattle sought the barn-yard; and candles were lighted in the houses. The obscuration began about ten o’clock in the morning and continued till the middle of the next night, but with differences of degree and duration in different places..... The true cause of this remarkable phenomenon is unknown.” {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 7.9}

And Herschel the astronomer said:- {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 7.10}

“The dark day in northern America was one of those wonderful phenomena of nature, which will always be read of with interest, but which philosophy is at a loss to explain.” {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 7.11}

It has been well said that science is at a loss to explain this wonderful phenomenon, although numerous attempts to explain it have been made. But its value as a sign does not consist in its being unexplainable. Its value consists in the fact that it occurred just when our Saviour had said it would, more than seventeen hundred years before. If there had been a hundred other days equally as dark, it would not affect this testimony in the least. To illustrate: A man going on a journey is told that just before he reaches his destination he will come to a large tract of woods inclosed by a high fence, and on the other side of the woods, and just within the inclosure, he will find a log house. Now when he sees this house, just where he was told it would be, he is sure that he is on the right road, although he may have passed many similar houses. So in the case before us. It is a fact, however, that the dark day of 1780 stands alone and unparalleled. {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 7.12}

“And the moon shall not give her light.” This was fulfilled in the night following the dark day. Mr. Tenney of Exeter, N. H., said of that night:- {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 8.1}

“I could not help conceiving at the time, that if every luminous body in the universe had been shrouded in impenetrable darkness, or struck from existence, the darkness could not have been more complete. A sheet of white paper held within a few inches of the eyes, was equally invisible with the blackest velvet.” {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 8.2}

Other testimony might be given, but it is unnecessary as the facts are not doubted by any. {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 8.3}

“And the stars shall fall from heaven.” This is the next sign, and was fulfilled Nov. 13, 1833, in the wonderful display when many now living well remember. Professor Olmstead of Yale College said it was probably “the greatest display of celestial fireworks that has ever been since the foundation of the world.” {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 8.4}

If any one says that these phenomena have no significance,-no connection whatever with the coming of the Lord-then I ask what they will do with our Saviour’s words? Are they not to be fulfilled? Christ was here answering an important question which his disciples had asked him, and we cannot think that he would deceive them or put them off with an evasive answer. His language is very simple and literal. Why can we not believe signs that our Saviour gave, as well as those which we receive from men? If one of our friends goes away and tells us of some event by which we may know when to look for him, we do not think of doubting his word. Our Lord has done this, and has placed his signs in the heavens, so that they may be known by all; and if we neglect them, shall we not be without excuse? The world was once condemned by the preaching of Noah; what then will be the condemnation of those who reject infinitely greater light? {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 8.5}

But our Saviour does not leave the matter here. He says: “Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: *so likewise* ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.” This is a forcible illustration. Nobody has a doubt that summer is near, when the leaves put forth in the spring; and we may be just as certain, now that “all these things” have come to pass, that the Lord is near. There is no opportunity for doubt. It is indeed, a sin not to be certain of the nearness of the event. {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 8.6}

It is true that we cannot tell just the day that summer will come. After the buds begin to swell, there may be bitter frosts, and summer may be delayed; but still we are sure that summer is not far distant. In this the parable holds good. Christ says, “But of that day and hour knoweth no man.” For a wise purpose the exact time of the event is withheld from us, and it is idle for us to speculate in regard to it, but yet we may be just as certain that it is near “even at the doors.” And to put the fact beyond all doubt he says: “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” That is, the generation that shall witness these signs, or a portion of them, shall see the final consummation of all things. This is indeed a solemn thought. Many of those now living shall see the Lord come. What should be our position, then, at this time? Our Saviour himself gives the answer: “Watch ye therefore; for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, WATCH.” {SITI January 5, 1882, p. 8.7}