

EXPECTING A PERSONAL ANTI-CHRIST

DEAR BROTHER RUSSELL: –

In harmony with the spirit of a sound mind I prefer to think and speak of the things we *know*, the things for which we have such a clear, Scriptural basis as to make our position most assuredly correct. However, this letter is being written in order to *have your expression upon matters which I do not know*, but which seem to be within the range of possibilities, *quite a number of passages in the Lord's Word seeming to make them reasonable inferences.*

I have presented these suggestions in several discourses: and the brethren have been so stirred to greater diligence by them that, while desirous of saying more that might prove helpful to the various Classes, yet my confidence in your consecrated judgment prompts me to present the same for your criticism before making them too conspicuous in my ministry. Whenever given, emphasis has been laid on the point that I was not sure these ideas were correct, being merely inferential, but even if not right, a consideration of the possibility of such happenings could not fail to put us more effectually on our guard than before.

In the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew we find two *separate references to false Christs*. Verse 5 says, "For many shall come in my name saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." This evidently refers to pseudo-Christ's who have arisen during the Gospel Age, but before the closing part of the Age, for in the next verse He says, "For all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."

But when we come to verses 23 to 26 we read of another class of false Christs who would appear in the end of the Age. In verses 21 and 22 He speaks of the coming of the great "Time of Trouble such as was not since the beginning of the world, no, nor ever shall be,"

and after stating that unless those days were shortened no flesh would be saved, He continues:

"THEN, if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, [R5866 : page 76] or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs," etc. The adverb "then" is emphatic by position (similar to Matt. 25:1) and would connect the appearance of these false Christs with the time when the great tribulation was due.

It goes on further to inform us that these false Christs would show such signs and wonders that, if possible, even the Very Elect would be deceived. Would we not be justified in thinking that nothing has yet occurred which would warrant such a remarkably strong declaration? In such a case this sweeping deception must be still future, and as it has to do with this make-believe Christ, therefore the greatest of the false Christs must be yet to come.

Verse 26 offers additional clues to the meaning of this prophecy. It rather intimates there will be two kinds of manifestations of these counterfeit Christs. One is mentioned as occurring in the desert, the other in the secret chambers. You have clearly pointed out the secret chambers as designating the darkened rooms where Spiritism works her mysteries, and for some time past the fallen angels have impersonated our Lord, in addition to masquerading as the departed spirits of some of those present.

But when and where has the "behold He is in the desert" part of the prophecy had such a fulfilment as we might expect? May it not be just before us? Note that "the secret chambers" is in the plural, as though pointing out a deception oft-repeated, as has been the case; whereas "the desert" is in the singular, as if to teach us there would be but one occurrence of this sort – no more.

Can we assume that if the secret-chamber Christs have been the fallen angels, then the Christ who will appear in the desert will be

Satan, whose final effort to transform himself into an angel of light will culminate in his appearing as an impersonation of the Lord Jesus?

The hosts of Christendom have been taught that at some time Christ will return, but lacking a knowledge of the manner of the Second Advent, they have expected Him to come in the flesh, accompanied by a multitude of visible angels.

Furthermore, we find a widespread opinion that this event is near. Misinterpreting certain prophecies, the Seventh Day Adventists are proclaiming extensively the thought that when Constantinople falls Christ will come. Various denominational commentaries which give Mohammedanism an unreasonably prominent place in the prophetic portions of the Bible have expressed the same idea. Through internal anarchy or through outside influence the fall of Constantinople may not be very distant; and think of what would result if, coincident with that event, what looked like the long-expected return of Christ should take place on some desert out near Palestine!

It would not be our Lord, but the Evil One impersonating our Redeemer. Imagine the wicked angels appearing with him as though they were the holy angels whom many expect to come with Christ! Suppose other demons would impersonate a few of the dead, as if to indicate a beginning of the resurrection! Think of the signs and wonders they may work as evidence to further deceive the human race into believing Jesus has come!

That this could be done if the Lord would allow it seems a reasonable premise, and that it may be done seems a reasonable inference from certain Scriptures. I find there have been various Bible Students – even centuries ago – who thought they saw in the Word a suggestion that Satan was to appear as a [R5866 : page 77] man in the last days. The passage in Isaiah 14:16, where Lucifer is spoken of as a man, is probably the most direct of such references.

There also exists a secondary reason why Satan wishes to be as a man. The True Christ has already returned, but with our natural sight we cannot see Him; however, spirit beings, like the Devil and his angels, can see Him, and as they behold our Lord doing successfully the preparatory work of the Kingdom, while they are helpless to thwart the same, it must make them hate that holy Son of God more than ever! How they must envy the human race, who cannot see that present Lord, and must wish they were human also, that they might not behold any longer the One they detest! Thus in permitting them to take on human nature the Lord simply grants them their wish.

Should it be this way, we can readily discern how fully it would, "if possible, deceive the very elect." Catholics, Protestants, Adventists, Mormons and every sect in Christendom would welcome this one as Christ, for isn't this the very way they have looked for Him? This would seem like convincing evidence to every infidel on earth, and they would hasten to acknowledge Him. Even the hosts of heathendom, unable to gainsay such a demonstration, would fall before Him. And those among us who had listened to discourses, etc., but never really made these things their own by a consecrated application of them, would hastily denounce us, and renounce our teachings, to bow their hearts to this spurious Christ.

Then we would discern why God had granted us so much light upon the manner of the Second Advent, and we would need it all. Think of what blasphemy they would consider us guilty as we insisted that this one they called Christ was really the Devil! The charge against us would resemble that against our Lord, and the indignation of the mob might quickly terminate the militant part of our experience.

But still other results would follow the appearance of such a pretended Christ: The Bible foretells a great confederacy of the two main divisions of Babylon. For several years the signs of that confederacy were everywhere discernible; but of late there has sprung

up a bitter feeling between the two sides, being fanned by anti-Catholic publications, etc., until there seems no likelihood of their drawing any closer together.

Suppose this impersonator of Christ uses his usual subtlety, appointing the Pope prime-minister, Billy Sunday minister of war, etc., or making some such recognition of both Catholics and Protestants; what would more effectively remove the partition separating the sects? How they would throw their arms around each other's necks, and only we would be disfellowshipped!

This would also make the prophecy of the anti-Christ and Man of Sin have a double application, even as you have shown in the instance of other prophecies. The coming of the Elijah had a double application – individually John the Baptist, collectively the Church. The Christ has likewise – individually our Lord, but collectively The Christ includes both Head and Body. So the collective anti-Christ was the papal system, the individual anti-Christ Satan. As the individual Christ is the Head of the greater Christ, so the individual anti-Christ would be the head of the greater anti-Christ.

May it be just possible that we have been so impressed with the wonderful application of the anti-Christian prophecies to the system that we have overlooked their coming individual fulfilment?

But we know that Satan could not impersonate our Lord for long with any measure of character-likeness to Him. With the awful wickedness of his heart, only a few days would suffice to reveal his true spirit, and he would plunge this world into worse than it ever saw before.

Out of reverence and fear for the one whom they supposed was Christ, the world would lay aside its swords only long enough to put us away, then would resume the conflict with renewed fury. The hopes of the nominal church and the world had been lifted high only

to be dashed to pieces as they perceived the wickedness of the one whose appearing they had hailed.

It has been suggested that the Lord might use His power in some way to prevent Satan from leaving the body of flesh, and thus it would become his prison throughout the Millennium. This would compel him to swallow his own teaching that the body was only a prison in which the real man was confined until liberated by death. He would be forced to experience the very thing he had so untruthfully taught. This gives great force to Isaiah 14:16-19.

There are other points I was going to mention, but probably the letter is already too lengthy; but before closing I wish to mention one advantage of considering these things.

Some of the friends seem to be saying, "The time may be many years off before the Church is all glorified, there is so much yet to be accomplished; let us go into business," etc. I have pointed them to these things with the remark, "If this conjecture should be correct, everything yet to be fulfilled before the glorification of the saints might be accomplished in a month." The time may be two weeks or ten years.

Friends have asked me, "But don't you expect the Seventh Volume first? and it will take months to write, publish and assimilate it." My answer has been this: How do we know but that it may simply be an issue of THE WATCH TOWER?

An ordinary looking copy of THE TOWER arrives, and the brother who has learned to value its message takes advantage of the first opportunity to read it. There in the middle of one article he finds a point which proves a key to many passages of Scripture in Revelation; on another page is another such point; and as he reads, it begins to dawn on his mind that he has the Seventh Volume! What comfort and help and assurance it brings, and he is ready for the trial time just ahead!

Another, less appreciative of the light he has been getting, lays that same TOWER aside for a more convenient time, unwilling to have it crowd out his pleasures or intrude on his comfort, little realizing what that TOWER contains or what he is soon to face, unprepared for it because of a failure to walk in the light already received. [R5867 : page 77]

I meant to make this letter a query, but it sounds almost like a sermon. However, I am sure you will understand the spirit which prompts it. Do you think of any Scripture which would seem to disprove it, or do you believe such ideas might in any way prove detrimental to the Lord's people?

Like a younger brother I have ever valued the privilege of looking up to you as an elder brother, and the God of Wisdom has directed you, for in so many ways you have been a blessing to me. The Lord guide you to the very end of the way!

Yours with much Christian Love,

B. H. BARTON.

THE EDITOR'S VIEW IS DIFFERENT

We think it not unwise to lay before THE WATCH TOWER readers the above article from the pen of our dear Brother Barton. It may do no harm for us to have the thought before our minds. To some others, as well as to Brother Barton, it may seem to be the Truth.

But the view presented does not appeal to the Editor as the correct one. He still believes in harmony with the presentations in STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES. The particular passage in question from our Lord's great prophecy in Matthew 24 is treated in detail in STUDIES, Volume IV. He still believes that to be the proper interpretation. However, we claim no infallibility. We claim that there is no direct inspiration from God since the days of the Apostles.

It should be remembered that each church organization claims to be the Ecclesia, or Body of Christ, of which He is the Head; and that each regular organization has an executive person or committee that really serves as the head of such organization – as Christ's representative in His Body. This thought had its origin in the Eighth Century, when our Roman Catholic friends declared that they set up the Kingdom of God, and from which date they count that His reign has been continuous, and that the popes have been His Vicegerents – reigning instead of Him. Protestant sects have not gone to the same extreme to claim one of their number as substituting for the Lord; but very generally they do claim that Christ's Kingdom has been set up and is in operation. The original thought in the organization of various denominations of Protestants was that it was the true Church. It is only of late years that Protestants have agreed to the thought that Christ Jesus has many bodies – many churches. Yet in a confused way they will admit with us that the Bible teaches only one Church, or Body of Christ; that it is to enter into glory with the Lord by resurrection "change" at the Master's Second Coming; and that His Church is composed of the saints of the Lord, regardless of denominational lines.

These are the false Christs – false bodies of Christ with false heads, or governments not authorized by the Word. They have deceived many – practically the whole world. On the contrary, the people comparatively more or less deranged mentally who have claimed to be Christs have deceived very few in comparison with all mankind. We believe that we have presented the right thought. The Editor is not expecting any personal anti-Christ, nor that Satan will materialize as a man and misrepresent the Lord. On the contrary, as the great Time of Trouble progresses the spirit of evil will be made manifest more and more in all the "children of disobedience"; **[R5867 : page 78]** and more and more they will become vexed and angry with the children of obedience, who will be standing loyally by the Word of God and the principles of righteousness and love. It is from such a division of the people, we believe, that the antitypical Elijah class will

suffer violence; first, represented by the chariot of fiery trouble; secondly, by the whirlwind of anarchy.

However, let us cast our care upon the Lord and wait patiently for His time and be fully content therewith. Then all will be well with us, whatever way the matter may turn out. The time, apparently, is not far distant when these matters will be very fully demonstrated. The spirit of anger, malice, hatred, envy and strife burns more and more fiercely in the hearts of the children of disobedience – in whom the works of the flesh and of the Devil will undoubtedly be more and more manifested. In other words, Christ will be more and more exhibited in His followers, but the spirit of Satan will be more manifest in the remainder of the world.

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