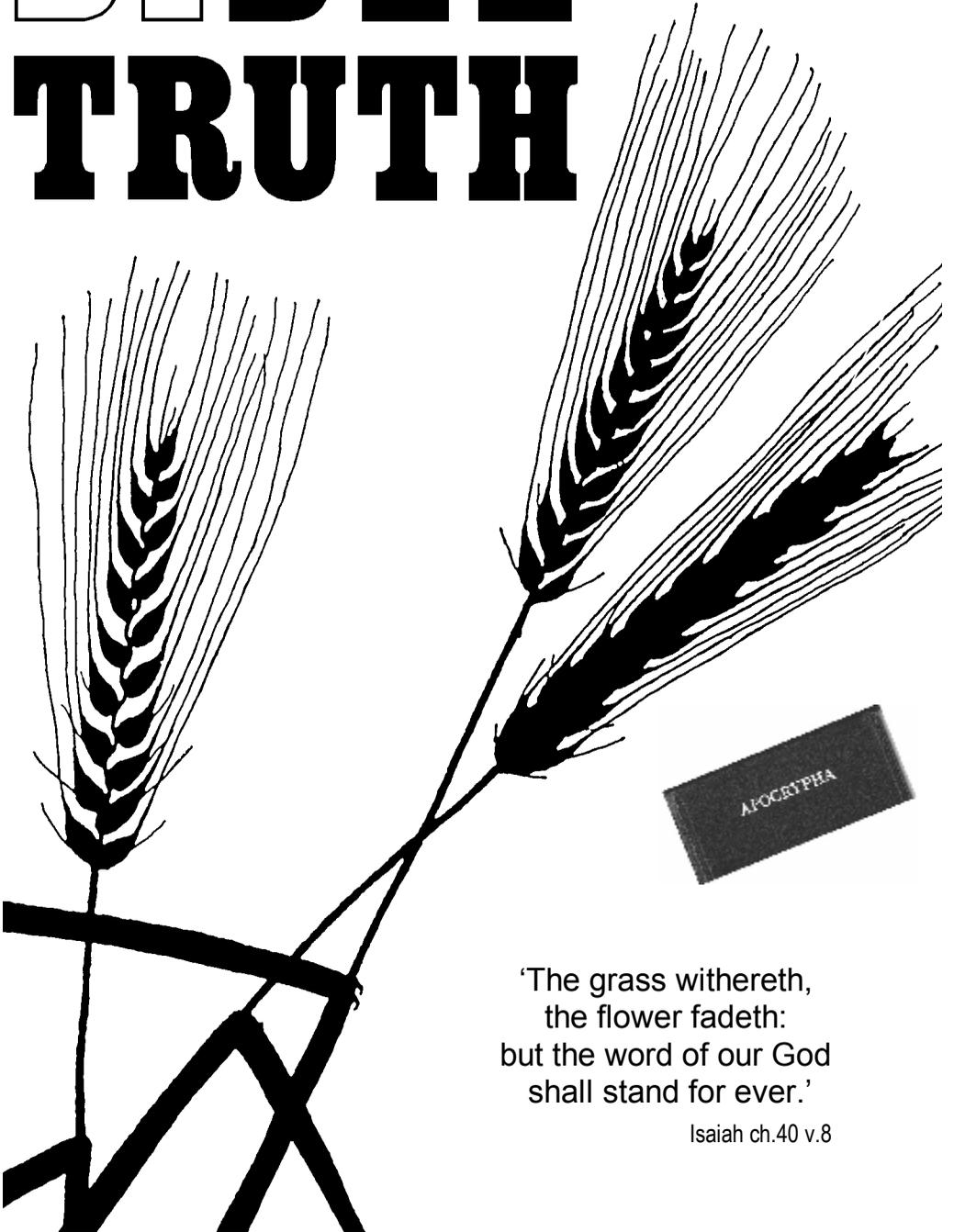


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'The grass withereth,
the flower fadeth:
but the word of our God
shall stand for ever.'

Isaiah ch.40 v.8

Do We Learn from History?

by Pastor Curtis C. Ewing

Do we ever learn from the lessons which history can teach? Possibly not very many of us do. In fact, many are not interested in history at all, it is too dry and complicated. One of today's great historical and philosophical writers is Dr Will Durant. With the aid of his wife he has recently completed, a ten volume work, *History of Civilization*. *The Los Angeles Times* carried an interview with Dr Durant from which are quoted these timely words,

'Americans are the best informed people on earth as to the events of the last 24 hours. We are not the best informed as to the last 60 centuries. We are starved of history and choked with news. And when the news comes we lack the background perspective through which to interpret and understand it. Those who do not know history are forever condemned to repeat it'.

Other great historians have witnessed the same warning and we do not listen to them. Back in 1787 the English historian Edward Gibbon completed his great work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. This work is a standard in the historical records of Rome. In giving his summary of the reasons why Rome fell Gibbon says,

- Rapid increase of divorce, with the undermining of the home, which is the basis of society.
- Higher and higher taxes; spending of public monies for bread and celebrations.
- The mad craze for pleasure; sports becoming every year more and more exciting and more brutal.
- The building of gigantic armaments, when the real enemy was within; the decadence of the people.
- The decay of religion; faith fading into mere form, losing touch with life and becoming impotent to guide it.

Just compare these five reasons with those which caused the downfall of modern Germany, France or any other nation of our time or in the ancient world.

Note also the present trends in our own nation. Are we taking heed of these signs? It seems like most of our people couldn't care less.

Let us listen to the voice of another great contemporary historian, Arnold J. Toynbee. In his book *Civilization on Trial* (1948) Mr Toynbee tells us that alcoholism and race consciousness are two conspicuous sources of danger to Western civilization. He further states that a mixture of atheism, materialism, racialism and alcoholism have been the causes of the decline and decay of 19 out of 21 civilizations.

Do we take warning and listen? No, we just plunge right on with the same evils attending us that attended these other nations of the past. If it were not for the fact that we are Covenant bound to a sovereign God who is ever mindful of His promises, we would have long since gone down to the graveyard with other nations of the past.

People who subscribe to the evolutionary theory of man's origin and progress only deceive themselves and close their eyes to a world of facts from many sources. Yet they insist on believing that man by his own efforts will finally arrive at the ideal state. It is the same story of the man lifting himself over the fence by his boot straps — it just can't be done. Civilization has often been spoken of as the progressive development of men mentally, morally and spiritually. But it really takes something beyond man to bring about progress in any nation. That something is Christianity, the very thing that has made nations great and the very thing we must maintain to continue to be great.

R.R. Palmer, in his *History of the Modern World*, a standard college text states,

'It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the coming of Christianity. It brought with it ... an altogether new sense of human life. Where the Greeks had shown man his mind, the Christians showed him his soul'.

The history of the human race is not a story of a steady ascent by which man goes from one plane to a higher plane of living; rather, it is the story of ever recurring cycles in which God-given ideals and illumination have become embodied in man, giving capacity and impetus to forward movements in knowledge and its application to human needs. Each cycle has varied from the others in its character and achievements, but the downward curves of these cycles have always been brought about by the abuse and perversion of the knowledge and powers attained, thus bringing about a great loss to each civilization. The average age of the world's great civilizations has been about 200 years.

Dr Clarence E. Manion, former Dean of the Faculty of the Notre Dame Law School, has brought this out very clearly in a recent nation-wide radio address. He referred to the '... ten word cycle of civilization'. Here is his statement, it should be of great significance to us at the present time.

'Bondage is the first word — bondage, the place where civilization wakes up. Faith in God is the next word; and then out of faith comes courage, and with courage men acquire their liberty. Then, with liberty, inevitably comes abundance, the top of the arc. After abundance comes selfishness, and after selfishness complacency. From complacency comes apathy, and in apathy dependency — the handout stage; and after dependency, back, if you please, to bondage again.'

In a short paragraph this is a history of civilization to which all people should give heed. The present cycle began with God's selection of the Israel people as His instrument of expression for the rest of the world. To them were given ideals expressed in moral laws, the keeping of which made for their good. Later, God expressed Himself to these same people in the person of Jesus Christ, who was to become the means of bringing deliverance from the downward cycle to all who would accept His gracious gift.

This cycle is not inevitable, it can be interrupted. All the advance that has been made in the modern-day descendants of Jacob-Israel during the Christian era has been made possible through this gift of God. Now we are at the end of another cycle, long foretold in the prophetic Scriptures, which will terminate in '... the battle of the great day of God Almighty', in which the forces of evil and the forces of righteousness will clash for a last great stand. We are assured that righteousness will be triumphant. Thus the upward cycle will start, to which there will be no end. We believe God and what He has given us in His word. However, without Divine intervention, that which has happened to nation after nation would be bound to happen to us. It will not be to our credit if we are spared, but to the sovereign will of God being worked out in His world. I believe we have been chosen of Him to be His humble servants in this 'new order' which is coming. In fact, we are taught to pray, 'thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven'.

Just because we are persuaded of better things to come it does not license us to ignore the lessons of history. In fact, the Bible expressly states we are to learn from the past as the Apostle Paul relates,

‘For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope’.

Romans ch.15 v.4

Again in 1 Corinthians ch.10 v.11 Paul writes,

‘Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples [margin - types]: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come’.

Once more we read in Jude v.7 these timely words,

‘Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire’.

If we had nothing but the examples of the Bible to read, our generation would be without excuse, for the lessons are given in abundance in the Scriptures. Without a revival along Biblical patterns we are coming to our end and that quite rapidly. However, we also believe in the God of revivals and further believe He has promised us a greater revival than ever has taken place in the past. It is for us to pray that God will hasten the day of renewal and deliverance of our people. So with these thoughts in mind let us pray with Habakkuk the following words,

‘... O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy’;ch.3 v.2
