

The State of the Union: Ten Steps Forward for the Beast

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While the Congress cheered, President Nixon made it known that his legacy to the United States and the world would be a structure for a lifetime and our children's lifetime of world peace. This, said the President, has been his primary goal and will continue to be the primary goal of his administration. Such was the President's announcement in his state of the union address on January 30. This primary objective coupled with nine other subordinate objectives will constitute ten great steps forward to utopia. The energy crisis, inflation, Watergate are only minor obstacles in the way of sure progress. The nation's economy, citizen health, jobs, etc., etc., will all be accomplished without doubt because of the great strength of the American people. There may be hindrances here and there but we are moving steadily toward an inevitable utopia. We, as Americans, will live in security and prosperity.

Now, you might say that that's good news. We like security and we like prosperity, don't we? Who in his right mind would call for calamity and affliction and poverty. But, is that the question of the Christian, whether we will or desire to have security and prosperity? Is world peace, is security, is prosperity, is utopia the constant prayer of the Christian? Can we agree with the President and say, "Yes, Mr. President you are right. America is great, America will persevere because the American people, by their own ingenuity and strength will meet the crises head on and will once again persevere. And, we support you wholeheartedly in your efforts toward establishing a structure of world peace."

We know better, don't we than to answer this way. World peace, physical security, and material prosperity have never been objectives of the Christian because the Bible tells him differently. He knows and believes that there shall be wars and rumors of wars. He knows the running of the horses in Revelation 6. But, it will appear for a time that Mr. Nixon is right — we are heading for a seeming utopia. The reign of the beast, the antichrist, is sure to come. And, the rise of the beast to full power will bring with it a peace to the world. For a time it will appear that swords will be turned into plowshares and the much-longed-for universal brotherhood of man will be accomplished. What President Nixon has promised in reality, however, is ten steps forward for the beast.

You understand, however, that I am not saying that it will be America who will give birth to the beast nor dare I say who it will be who will give birth to the antichrist, which nationality he will be. We do not know; we can only speculate. But, one thing is sure: history is moving toward the reign of the antichrist and it ought to be clear to us that we are dealing presently not only with the talk, the dream, of world peace but with its imminent realization. The foundations are being laid for its accomplishment.

It makes one a bit uneasy, a bit fearful, does it not, when we begin to see more and more clearly the signs of the return of Jesus Christ. The Christian, contrary to any millennium theory, will not be removed from this earth but will be required to live through the history of the realization of antichrist. And, that scares us a bit. We do not like to face affliction and persecution; our earthly natures yearn for security and prosperity. But, pilgrims and strangers we are and as such we must live, not in fear but by grace with confidence that "all things work together for the good of them who love God." God, you see, in his infinite wisdom has given us Revelation chapters 4 and 5 before he gave us the rest of the book of Revelation. The vision of John in Revelation 4-5 is the vision of the victorious Lamb of God. The church, led by its head Jesus Christ,

is given the blessed assurance of sure victory. The antichrist will come. Each year presidents will prophesy peace and prosperity. Each year we move closer to the reign of the antichrist. But the Christian as pilgrim and stranger with his pilgrim's view of history will live in his life not in seclusion, not with his head in the sand, but he will live life with the knowledge of the assurance of victors. He knows and understands what is going on; his teleology is spiritually guided and by faith he will press on as Paul exhorts us to do in Philippians 3:14, "toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

What a different purpose in life, then, and what a different view of history, then, and what a different view of things contemporary, then, has the Christian. He does not set his hopes upon utopia, upon material prosperity and physical security. He knows that these things have no intrinsic value; he knows that all the things of the world are subject to moths, and rust and rot. His hope, rather, is the same as the "cloud of witnesses" in Hebrews 11, his hope is for a city whose builder and maker is God, and his assurance is that everything, including President Nixon and congressional colleagues with their grandiose utopian schemes, are in God's hands. All things will indeed work toward the deliverance of God's people.

As one views history, then, and as one listens to pronouncements such as President Nixon's state of the union address, one must keep his historical perspective. The Christian must not despair and wring his hands. God will realize his counsel. Rev. H. Hoeksema in his commentary on Revelation 4 and 5 in *Behold He Cometh* gives us that perspective. It bears repetition and emphasis:

Men have repeatedly exerted themselves to work out their own salvation and the salvation of the world. Systems of thought, world-systems of philosophy, have been built up by human minds one after another, to show the true way to peace and righteousness and to establish an imitation of the kingdom of bliss. But they have all met with utter failure and disaster. No human wisdom has been able to call back the paradise lost. The might of the world, kings and rulers, have throughout history attempted to realize the world-kingdom, embracing all the earth. If only they could attain their end, if only such a universal kingdom could be realized, they would surely bring peace to the world. Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great. Caesar, Charlemagne, Napoleon, William of Hohenzollern, and Hitler are their names. But they have failed. Their glory is faded. Their power is broken. Their name is trampled underfoot. Today we are told that the glorious dawn of a new day is faintly seen at the horizon of history. Democracy will perform what autocracy failed to bring. Crowns must be removed. Thrones must tumble in the dust. We must have the rule of the people. Besides, all the nations of the world must combine in this great movement for universal peace and righteousness. A league of nations is what we need and what has already been established. In this way righteousness shall come to dwell on earth, and peace shall reign undisturbedly. But already it may safely be predicted that also this ideal shall never be realized. Never shall it bring the much longed for kingdom of peace. Also in our day men of social service assure us that society must undergo a radical transformation. It must itself be regenerated. It must have new laws, new institutions, new customs, new relationships between capital and labor, shorter working days and better living conditions for the working man, the abolishment of liquor and other evils of society. If thus we labor, so they say, for the regeneration of society, we shall bring in the kingdom of God. All these human

efforts, put forth by mere human strength and ingenuity, present the historical realization of the challenge of the angel: "Who is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals thereof?" And the ultimate failure of all these attempts constitutes the historical realization of the statement: "And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon."

History must reveal the failure of all attempts to bring the kingdom of God without the Lamb, and that simply because of the great fundamental truth entirely ignored by the men of the world that at the basis of all trouble and confusion and war and destruction lies the guilt of sin and the corruption of the nature of man.

When John heard the response to the question that no one was worthy to open the book, he wept bitterly. He wept, that is, until he saw the "Lamb as if it were slain" and then realized that the Lamb was worthy. The Lamb of God, Jesus Christ has earned the right to open the book. He had ascended to the right hand of God and was given "all power in heaven and earth." He it is that now rules and lie it is that will control and direct all things for the good of His people. Glory to the Lamb who now lives and reigns forever.

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