

Speculators — Ancient & Modern

by Bill Crews

Most people have heard of “the Dead Sea scrolls,” that is, the ancient scrolls that were found in caves in the rocky and barren area near the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea in the land of Palestine. These were made and deposited by religious sects of the Jews that were residing in small communities near the caves, the first find being in the spring of 1947 in a cave near the ruins of a village that has come to be known as Qumran. One of the scrolls was a commentary on the Old Testament book of Habakkuk. F. F. Bruce, well-known and respected Bible scholar, wrote a book about these scrolls which he titled ***Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls***, published in 1956. Please read carefully an observation made by Mr. Bruce in chapter VII, and on pages 70-71:

“ ... We have already seen how they reinterpreted the situation in which Habakkuk found himself, and saw in his words a description of their own circumstances.

“There has never been any lack of people who have treated the Biblical prophecies in this way. In our own day we have seen how earnest Bible students thought they recognized in Hitler or Stalin the embodiment of the Antichrist foretold in the New Testament. In the early nineteen-thirties a gentleman in England, who edited a short-lived periodical to give currency to his highly individual interpretations of the Bible, published copies of letters which he had written to Mussolini and Einstein, informing them that they were respectively the Beast and the False Prophet — two sinister eschatological figures in the Book of Revelation. (Einstein sent him a brief and courteous reply, which was also published!) And throughout the Christian era there have been serious people who believed, generation after generation, that their own days were the days of fulfillment, when history was to be wound up.

“Our commentator, living some decades before the beginning of the Christian era (but a few hundred years after Habakkuk — BC), was sure that the time of the end was fast approaching, and that Habakkuk and the other prophets had prophesied primarily of the days which had now set in. Therefore he set himself to study and apply the words of Habakkuk according to what he believed to be their true meaning. That meaning was inevitably vague and mysterious until the time of fulfillment arrived; with its arrival, the meaning was plain for those who had eyes to see and hearts to understand. ”

This ancient and unknown scribe, who lifted the book of Habakkuk out of its context and engaged in distortions and speculations to reach his goals should remind us of some of the speculators of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries A.D. Such as William Miller, Ellen White, Charles Taze Russell, “Judge” Rutherford, Aimie Semple MacPherson, Herbert W. and Gamer Ted Armstrong, and a host of others. For hundreds of years the speculators have been using the same Bible passages to peddle and palm off their speculations that the end was very near, that great calamities were about to take place, that Christ was soon returning. Each would point to various current events — events taking place in his own day, as definite signs that the end was near. Some of them would even set exact dates (1844, 1874, 1878, 1914, 1918, 1925, 1975 — all of which have come and gone, and now 2,017). “End times,” “rapture,” “tribulation,” “the thousand year reign of Christ,” “the battle of Armageddon” are all part of a complicated human theory designed to keep people stirred up and in anticipation; and that theory has no more basis in the Scriptures than did the speculations of the Qumran scribe referred to above by Mr. Bruce. Many people are diligent listeners of radio broadcasts and diligent readers of religious magazines that lift Bible prophecies out of their legitimate contexts and away from their true fulfillments and misapply them to their groundless and endless speculations. It has been going on in every generation for hundreds of years because very few people look back into history and most people have short memories.

Do not let such people do your thinking or your studying for you. Diligently study the Bible for yourself and practice what was enjoined of first century Christians by the apostle, John. *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world”* (1 John 4:1).

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