

Prophetic Parallels In The Christmas Story

By Jon Ikin

Some years ago a prophecy teacher called Dr Harry Rimmer wrote a book called, *"Straight Ahead Lies Yesterday."* Ever heard of it? Neither had I until I discovered it's title in another book. Having never read it I cannot recommend it to you, but I like the title very much. You see, the things of the past are often foreshadows of the future. What happened in Biblical history is a preview of events yet to come. As the title says, straight ahead lies yesterday. And that's something that hits me afresh each year with the Christmas story. The first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ has so many parallels with His Second Advent that we cannot help pondering the similarity.

Parallels in the Circumstances

When the Lord Jesus came to earth the first time **there was a Roman Empire** governing the world. Caesar Augustus was on the throne and, as you know, his decree led to Joseph and Mary travelling to Bethlehem for registration. *"So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered,"* (Luke 2:6). What a significant part the Roman Empire played, albeit unwittingly. Caesar's decree moved the young couple to the very place where our Saviour was to be born. And how amazing it is that the Bible prophesies the re-emergence of the Roman Empire in the days leading up to our Lord's return! The revived Roman Empire, symbolised in Daniel's vision of the fourth beast, will be dominant in the earth again, being *"the people of the prince who is to come,"* (Dan.7 & 9:26). Somehow Rome will rise again, no doubt through the very political activities we see taking place in Europe right now. A remarkable parallel between the two comings of our Lord.

Then consider the fact that when the Lord was born there were **signs in the heavens** that announced His arrival. *"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?"* asked the magi, *"For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him,"* (Matt.2:2). What this star was, I am not quite sure. Several theories have been proposed. Some think it was Halley's Comet which came in 12BC, but that is certainly too early. Some think it was a super-nova. Another view says that it was a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter which occurred in 7BC. This was the theory that Kepler came up with back in 1603, and others have carried this forward. But whatever it was, the Lord put the heavenly sign in the sky to announce the Messiah's appearance. And so it will be at His Second Coming too. Numerous passages speak of cosmic manifestations before the coming of the Lord. Luke 21:25 says, *"And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars..."* whilst Revelation mentions eclipses and occultation (obscuring) of stars in various passages. Many of our readers will also be informed regarding the notable Tetrads which will be taking place in the year ahead (see PW magazine March 2010). Certainly this is another parallel of significance.

Following on from there, we could compare the **nation of Israel** at the time of both comings. When our Lord appeared the first time Israel was back in the land but in a poor state spiritually. It seems that only a remnant were truly believers. This is exactly the situation as we near His Second Coming too. Certainly there are parallels in the circumstances of both advents

Parallels in the Characters

Next, let us consider some of the prophetic parallels in the characters of the Christmas story. I don't know about you, but I love the nativity accounts for the rich study they provide in Biblical characters. But amazingly, they parallel those who will be around at the Second Coming too. Take **Herod**, for instance. I believe he is a forerunner of the coming Antichrist, prophesied to appear in the Tribulation. As Fredrick Tatford wrote, *"...Herod, Antiochus, and many others were but typical of one who is yet to come..."* (The Climax of the Ages, p203). Just as the Antichrist, Herod came out of the Roman Empire having been appointed over the land in 47 BC. Yet he was not Italian. *"Herod was an Edomite who became a Roman citizen in order to be king of Judea, a Roman province. Perhaps the Antichrist may have a similar racial identity, and this is why Jordan will not be under Antichrist's control during the last half of the Tribulation,"* (N Hutchings, *Petra*, p144). He rebuilt the temple (Jn.2:20), massacred innocent Jews (Matt.2:16), and was a known deceiver – all of which are attributed to the Antichrist as well. He even worshipped the Capitoline Jupiter, just as the Beast will *"honour a god of fortresses,"* (Dan.11:38). Most significantly of all, though, he was anti-Jesus. He wanted the young Messiah destroyed and set out to kill Him. But before the second chapter of Matthew closes it is Herod who is dead, not the Lord of glory. So it will be with the final antichrist, *"whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming."* (2 Thess.2:8).

Then think of **Simeon and Anna**. These lovely believers remind us that there will be a faithful remnant watching and waiting for the coming of the Lord, just as they were at His first advent. How interesting that they were elderly, as are so many who hold the hope of the Lord's coming in their hearts today. A notable parallel? As you know, there were also **shepherds**, *"keeping watch over their flock by night"* (Luke 2:8). These men remind us of the pastors, who even in these dark days before the Lord's return, *"Shepherd the flock of God which is among you....and when the Chief Shepherd appears...will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away,"* (2 Pet.5:2,4).

Finally, there were the **Magi**, who were typical of the Gentile worshippers who will bring their tributes to the Lord in His Millennial Kingdom. As Isaiah says, *"All those from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord,"* (60:6). Notice they bring gold for a King and incense for God, just like the Magi, - but not myrrh. Why not? Because myrrh was representative of His future sufferings on the cross, but when the Lord Jesus returns, *"He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to*

bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him,” (Heb.9:28^{NIV}). Yes, there are prophetic parallels in the characters of the Christmas story.

Parallels in Complacency

Christmas always catches some people out, doesn't it? They have all year to get ready, but leave it to the last minute. Some don't make it. Some just can't be bothered. This was true at the first coming of our Lord too. One of the sorriest groups of people in the whole nativity story are the chief priests and scribes whom Herod consulted. They knew where the Messiah was to be born. *“In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet...”* (Matt.2:5) – but they couldn't be bothered to go themselves. What a tragedy! They were knowledgeable of the Scriptures about His coming, but did not come to know the Lord personally. What a warning! Sadly, this will be true of many at the Lord's return as well. Let us make sure it is not true of us. How terrible it will be to have all the details of prophecy at our fingertips and yet not know the Lord Himself. Let us be ready to meet Him when He comes.

Parallels Concerning Christ Himself

In closing, let us make the obvious point that it will be **the same Lord Jesus** who comes at the Second Advent as at the first. Strangely enough, some believe that the church is the Second Advent of Christ, but it is not. The angels said to the disciples on Olivet, *“This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven,”* (Acts 1:11). Also, our Lord appeared the first time, *“when the fullness of the time had come,”* (Gal.4:4), and so it will be at His return. Daniel's seventieth week will be completed before the Lord returns to the earth (although His rapture could happen at any moment). He will also **return to Israel**, just as He came there the first time: *“And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives...”* (Zech.14:4). And finally, He may well come at the **Feast of Tabernacles**, as many suspect He came the first time (John 1:14), because this Feast appears to speak prophetically of His coming reign (Zech.14:16-21). We'll have to see. But as the book title says, *“Straight ahead lies yesterday,”* and one of the joys of the season is to anticipate the Lord's Second Advent whilst praising Him for His first.

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