

# PREVIEWS OF COMING ATTRACTIONS

by  
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When we were children and went to the movies, a thirty cents admission fee would get us *two* feature films, a cartoon or two, and maybe a newsreel. Then, in an effort to attract us back to the theater the *next* week, the management would show us exciting portions of upcoming films. These were called "previews of coming attractions."

The Old Testament does much the same. This is what the Forty-two Martyrs of Amorion (March 6) told their Moslem captors.

During their many attempts to convert the forty-two Byzantine military officers to Islam, the Moslems offered bribes and used many arguments and devices to try to persuade their captives of the truth of Islam.

Finally, the Saints replied:

"If indeed you would be persuaded by the teachings of the Holy Prophets, it would be easy for us to prove your words false; and by the God-inspired Scriptures, we can condemn any position you take. Since, however, you do not accept the Divine Scriptures, but believe only in your own teaching, and since you revile us for suffering hardships because we do not believe in Mohammed, answer us the following: Two men had a difference and fought between themselves over a field. The one, quarreling, asserted without witnesses that the field must certainly be given to him, while the other, without quarrels, brought forward many tried and faithful witnesses who bore witness that the field belonged rather to him than to the other. To which of the two would you Saracens decide to give the field?" Then they answered, "It is evident that to him who brought forth the faithful witnesses."

Then the Saints said to them, "Well then, using reason, we too judge what is right concerning the Only-begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. He became man of the Virgin, as we have heard you also say many

times. He had as His witnesses all the ancient and true Prophets who foretold His coming. You affirm that Mohammed was also sent from God bringing us a third law. Ought he not also to have had some of the Prophets of God, or at least one witness to speak of him, to prove that he was sent from God?"

The Moslems had nothing to reply to this.

Indeed, our Saviour had many witnesses — the Holy Prophets of the Old Testament — who foretold His coming in great detail. Some of the Church Fathers who deal with this matter very extensively are St. Justin Martyr (+167), and St. Cyril, Patriarch of Jerusalem (+386).

Another Father of the Church who dealt with this in his writings is St. Athanasius the Great, Patriarch of Alexandria (+373). In his monumental work, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, the Saint writes the following:

For the Scripture says: "Behold our God...shall come and save us. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall hear; then shall the lame man leap as a hart and the tongue of the dumb be eloquent" (Esaias 35: 4-6). Now, what can [the leaders of the Jewish people] say to this, or how can they dare face this at all? For the prophecy not only indicates that God is to sojourn here, but it announces the signs and the time of His coming. For [the Scriptures] connect the blind recovering their sight, and the lame walking, and the deaf hearing, and the tongue of the dumb becoming eloquent, with the Divine Coming which is to take place. Let [the Jews] say then, when such signs have come to pass in Israel, or where in Judea anything of the sort has occurred. Naaman the leper was cleansed, but no deaf man heard, nor any lame man walked. The Prophet Elias raised a dead man; so did the Prophet Eliseus, but none blind from birth regained his sight... When, then, have [these signs] taken place, save when the Word of God Himself came in the body? ... For this was the very thing the Jews said who witnessed it, because they had not heard of these things having taken place at any other time. "Since time began, it was never heard that anyone

opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing." (John 9: 32-33).

(Chapter 38)

Now, to be truthful, there *are* Scriptural passages which speak concerning others who claim that they come "in the name of God."

Here is one of them:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; *because many false prophets have gone forth into the world.*

(I John 4:1)

Truly, the Holy Scriptures offer us many "previews of coming attractions."