

Lesson 30 Prophecy Overview

When we began our study of The Prophets Speak eight months ago, it was September 12th/13th. We as a nation, and as individuals, were reeling from national disaster. Planes were grounded, families were separated, shock at the staggering loss of life and chaos of massive destruction made people ask, Why? Who? What's next? Where was the warning? Where was God to let all this happen to us – one nation, under God? Was this the beginning of the end?

Many had questions . . . but we turned to the Book of Truth, our Bible, for the answers. We learn the future by examining the past. This lesson had us look at 2 Peter 1:19-21, which says:

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

You're here and you have examined the prophets. And more than once, we've heard someone say, "I can't believe how relevant this is to us today." And why is that? The rebellious nature of mankind today against God is reflected in those same rebellious actions of Israel and Judah that we've studied. God's love warned them; God's righteousness punished them; God's mercy preserved them; God's sovereignty directed them to a hope for the future.

The 52 chapters of Jeremiah taught us some things about the man and about his ministry. As you discovered, if you didn't already know it, his book was not written in chronological order. He had messages for five kings – repent, submit to God's judgment of Nebuchadnezzar's conquest, go to Babylon for 70 years, God will take care of your enemies, and God Himself will restore you to the land and be your Shepherd. And in the book of Jeremiah we have God's phone number Jeremiah 33:3 – "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable thing you do not know."

But Judah didn't call. – Jeremiah 6:15 "Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush." (What does that say to us today?)

And for his faithfulness in proclaiming God's Word, Jeremiah got reduced to tears – Jeremiah 8:20 "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." He wore the rotten girdle; he observed the lesson of God's sovereignty at the potter's house; he saw his scroll shredded in the fire and it had to be rewritten; he was thrown in the cistern; he received the vision of the good figs and bad figs; and he witnessed the literal fall of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah is a book of warning – looking ahead, but nobody was listening.

Lamentations is a book of mourning – looking back, when everybody was suffering. The fall of Jerusalem – the unbelievable had happened. Three lessons from Lamentations:

1. Sin's pleasures are often shared, but its consequences are felt individually.
2. When we experience the consequences of our personal sin, there is never any reason to blame God.
3. There's no greater misery than the misery that follows disobedience.

We studied that Ezekiel and Daniel were among those taken to Babylon in the first deportation before the fall of Jerusalem. Ezekiel's 48 chapters covers a period of 22 years in exile. He was God's spokesman out among the people. He had visions of God, visions of the temple desecrated by idolatry, the vision of God's glory leaving the temple. Sometimes he used visual aids such as lying on his side, packing a bag and going through the wall, not mourning

when his wife died. There was the allegory of the cooking pot and a prophecy against the nations who were rejoicing over Jerusalem's fall.

But in chapters 33-48 there is good news of restoration. Ezekiel was appointed a watchman. And God affirmed in 33:11 "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live." Again there was the promise that God Himself would be their Shepherd. "I will make a covenant of peace with them. THEN they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them and that the house of Israel, are my people."

Ezekiel 36:26 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." Dry bones will come to life.

And Ezekiel was given the glorious vision of the millennial temple. All nations will stream to worship the King and the reinstitution of animal sacrifices will serve as a purification rite to enter the Lord's holy presence.

Daniel's mission was in the king's court. He passed the test of integrity with the king's food; he interpreted dreams; he was a trustworthy official; his friends survived the fiery furnace, while Daniel survived the lion's den.

He was a man of prayer and great things were revealed to Daniel about the near future and the distant future. The kings of the north and south in chapter 11 can be pinpointed with such great accuracy as to their literal fulfillment by names, that many say Daniel couldn't have written it ahead of time. While still in prayer, Daniel was told of the seventy sevens (70 weeks of years called a Heptad) – 490 years. After 483 years the Anointed One will be cut off. (Exactly when Jesus was crucified.) There is one week of years left – one seven year period we call the Tribulation when the Antichrist will rule.

Zechariah was a prophet to the people after they had been released from captivity in Babylon and returned to Jerusalem. His purpose was to motivate those working on rebuilding the temple in spite of their own crop failures and financial distresses. Through eight night visions, the prophet revealed a fresh voice from God portraying various ways God was sovereignly working. Rather than rebuking or condemning, Zechariah inspired the people to work. He gave the workmen hope that there is a better day, a far more glorious day yet future. Vivid scenes of the Messiah are included. He is revealed as coming, rejected, returning and conquering. Zechariah predicts more about Messiah than any other prophet except Isaiah.

I'd like to say that's a thumbnail sketch of where we've been, but really it's more like a fistful. It's been heavy stuff . . . and today, these are heavy times. Jerusalem, Israel, the Arab nations, terrorism, the search for peace are all headlines we wake up to each morning. We're still asking the question, What happens next?

There were several purposes for this overview lesson.

1) It was to remind you again that the Old Testament tells of a coming Messiah, a restoration to the land for Israel, victory over enemies, punishment for the wicked in the Day of the Lord, and reward for the righteous as they live and dwell in a kingdom of harmony, peace, and safety with God in their midst.

It was more important that you read these passages for yourselves, than how you might have summarized the text on your question sheet this week. If you want truth – we read God's Word directly.

2) These passages should have reaffirmed the themes of prophecy we've covered over our course of study. But sometimes we're reading along and begin to wonder is this part of the millennium or the new heaven and new earth? Is this referring to the tribulation period or the evil events that happen at the end of the millennium before the Great White Throne judgment?

Confusion isn't new . . . the leaders in Jesus' day did not see that Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 applied to His First Coming as a sacrificial Lamb of God who would die for the sins of the world. They expected a victorious Messiah who would bring about all the glorious restoration, right every wrong, and lead Israel into the era of peace and safety.

Remember how Jesus in Luke 4:18-19 sat down and read from Isaiah 61:1-2 and said, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” But Jesus ended mid-verse with the words “the year of the Lord’s favor” . . . for 61:2 goes on to say next, “and the day of vengeance of our God.” Vengeance will take place at the Second Coming. The point I’m making is we keep the big picture in mind. We do the best we can to put some order to a scenario that takes into consideration all prophetic Scripture, but God may surprise us all.

3) The third goal was to remind you again that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8) God is consistent in character and purpose. Our Bible was written over a 1,500-year span by 40 different authors from every diverse walk of life.

Daniel was a prime minister, Amos a fig-picker, Peter a fisherman, Matthew a tax collector. It was written in times of war and times of peace; from dungeons for Paul to the wilderness for Moses. However mankind is leaping ahead in technology and knowledge, God’s purposes are still set in concrete . . . and what He has written will take place.

So, . . . 1) prophecy is not an afterthought, it is an integral part of God’s will and as Christians we need to be in tune with the will of God; 2) prophecy may be confusing, but it is to encourage the consecrated, not entertain the curious; and 3) God’s consistency in His plan, and His faithfulness in revealing that plan, along with warnings and provision for escape, should strengthen our faith.

We gave you a glossary of terms with the initial lesson package. You might review that in the next day or two before you put all your study papers away. It will probably make much more sense to you now. There are basically two things I want to cover before I draw some applications to close with.

First, I want to review again the various positions that people take on prophecy; and, second, to review in-depth the premillennial position we’ve presented over these last lessons.

Millennium or millennial means 1,000 years. This has to do with when people think Jesus Christ will return as was told in Acts 1:11, “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” That’s the Second Coming.

The postmillennial view of last things holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the world will eventually be Christianized; the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteous and peace commonly called the millennium. To them the Second Coming will be followed immediately by the general resurrection of everyone, the general judgment of everyone, and the introduction of heaven and hell in their fullness.

To usher in this golden millennial age, the church must be about the directive of the Great Commission - to go into all the world and preach the gospel. We need to remember that post-millennial advocates still believe in a personal, visible return of Christ in great glory. They do not see, however, an earthly kingdom where humanity of the old earth is living with Christ and the saints in immortal bodies. To bring Christ and the saints to live again in the sinful environment of this world seems to them to be the equivalent of introducing sin into heaven. So briefly, no earthly reign of Christ in Jerusalem, just the Second Coming, resurrection, judgment and God makes all things new.

If you want a good book on the whole millennial subject, The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views by Robert Clouse is excellent.

The amillennial viewpoint looks at prophetic Scripture from a spiritual, symbolic standpoint, not taking it literally. Therefore, they do not see a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ. Christ is reigning now through the church, He will never again set foot on this sinful earth. Christ won the decisive victory over sin, death and Satan at His First Coming and the kingdom of God is both present now in the believer and future in heaven.

They do not believe the Jews have a part in the literal restoration of the throne of David. The kingdom of God means the reign of God in Christ over his entire created universe, nothing more. As far as Revelation 20, we are in the millennium now. The Second Coming is a single event followed by a general resurrection, judgment, then the new heaven and earth merge together into a purified state where lamb and lion lie down together, etc. that describes the millennium atmosphere, and God's people possess the land.

You have heard me make the statement before, "If plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense." I personally have more trouble trying to fit prophetic Scripture into symbolic ideas and spiritual concepts, than I do just taking God's Word for what it literally says.

The Catholic Church, many mainline denominations, Church of Christ . . . all adopt the amillennial position on prophecy. That does not mean they are not Christian, or that they reject the clear teaching of the Second Coming, it simply means that they see a difference in sequence, timing, the place of the Jews, and God's plan for the future. So when it comes to holding a premillennial position . . . we agree to disagree. It has been our desire to present the Scripture to you and let the Holy Spirit guide you into whatever viewpoint you wish to hold. It is not a test of our fellowship together.

Now the premillennial position simply means Christ's Second Coming will be (pre) before the millennial age. He will usher in the golden age for a thousand years before the final judgment. Let's review what we've tried to show you in this overview lesson.

Romans 9, 10, 11 is Paul's statement about the Church and the Jews. The church has been grafted into the vine. The Jews are God's chosen people, yet hardened for a while until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. (We call that the church-age.) 11:28-29 "As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."

In the last days (which began when Christ ascended into heaven and continues until now) the world will go from bad to worse, apostasy will overtake the church as it begins to preach what people want to hear, to put its ritual/traditions above Scripture, to separate instead of unify or unify by compromising Bible truths. Evangelism emphasizes the "social gospel" – what the church can do for the individual rather than what Christ has already done for salvation.

There will be a point in God's timing when the church will be taken up into heaven (the trumpet will sound and both the living and dead believers will be raptured – snatched away so to speak

(1 Thessalonians 4:13-19) – given spiritual resurrection bodies like Jesus had and taken to heaven to face the judgment seat of Christ to receive their crowns/rewards. Then those in heaven will sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb to celebrate. Revelation 19:7)

Meanwhile on earth, the apostatized church that is left will join with the Antichrist in a political - religious alliance and the events of Daniel's 70th week, called the Tribulation period, will take place. God will seal a force of 144,000 Jews (Rev. 7) to testify for Him during this seven-year period. Many will come to Christ and be martyred, but not all. People will be saved during the Tribulation period. At the end of the seven-year period, forces will gather for the battle of Armageddon and before mankind destroys itself, Jesus will descend in what is known as the Second Coming, (Zech 14) along with all those raptured saints in heaven, and defeat the Antichrist.

Then those who have lived through the Tribulation will come before Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles. He will separate believers from unbelievers as a Shepherd would separate the sheep and goats (Matt. 25). The unbelievers will be sent to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his evil angels and only the tribulation believers will enter into Jesus' Kingdom on earth called the millennium – a thousand year period. (Rev. 20)

Jesus will rule from Jerusalem, but His kingdom is worldwide. Israel will have permanent possession of their land (Ezekiel 45 & 48) and the saints in glorified bodies will be

given positions of responsibility as Jesus assigns it. We need to remember that glorified bodies do not have the restrictions of time, space and whatever else limits our human bodies.

There's another important thing to remember. The millennium is the antechamber **of** /and the preparation **for** the eternal state. Its glories are less than those of eternity, but they are of the same nature. One of the purposes of the millennium is to demonstrate the presence of sin even in a state of perfect environment.

The church is not Israel. Promises for Israel are not promises for the church. The church is being perfected as the Bride of Christ during this period of the Gentiles. Our preparation for the eternal state is claiming the shed blood of Jesus Christ now, being His witnesses and proclaiming His Glory until the rapture of the church, or death, which will bring us into His presence – then we will behold Him face to face.

Israel, however, going into the millennium will be brought again to that which is their heritage, temple worship. A temple will be built, (Ezekiel 40-44) and again, what is familiar to them, approaching a Holy God with blood sacrifice. That brings us to the issue of sacrifices.

This is a major argument that amillennialists have against the premillennial position. Many say these sacrifices will be like we use communion to look back on the sacrifice of Christ's blood on the cross.

When you read Hebrews 9 – read these verses as it relates to the blood: vs.15-21 relates to the covenant; vs. 22 relates to forgiveness; and vs. 23-28 relates to salvation. Hebrews 10:3 reminds us that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.”

In the millennium, these sacrifices are not a reinstitution of the Levitical system, although there are similarities. The blood of Jesus still is the sacrifice that affects salvation. Remember in the millennium, those who enter have accepted Jesus – they have survived the judgment of the sheep and goats of Matthew 25, but children will be born who still have to make that choice. And we know from the last chapters in Revelation that a time will come when Satan will be loosed for a season and will find a following because of the wicked, unrepentant heart of mankind even living in a perfect conditions.

But these sacrifices are of a purification nature. To prepare God's people to approach the Living God who actually dwells among them. Sacrifices in the millennium are also mentioned in Isaiah 56:7; 66:20-23; Jeremiah 33:18; Zechariah 14:16-21; and Malachi 3:3-4. The prince will offer sacrifice and worship, so it's not Mosaic. This is something new – God's prerogative.

For a thousand years those who came out of the Tribulation and entered the millennial kingdom, wherever they are on earth, will have families, and since longevity is part of this golden age, the population will increase, and increase again, and increase again. An “explosion” of people if you will, since few die. Believers begin this growth and the environment is perfected in the millennium, but even with heredity and environment both on the positive side, mankind's wicked heart will rebel. Is there such a thing as having things “too good” that causes rebellion?

Satan we know has been bound for this thousand years, (Rev. 20) so he and his demons are not at fault. Man's own desires, own disobedience, own egos will set them up to eagerly follow Satan when he is released for a time at the end of the millennium. (Rev. 20:7-10) Remember, just because you were born in the perfect age doesn't guarantee final salvation, you still must accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior for a place in the new heavens and new earth. So Satan will gather a following and another battle will take place at the end of the millennium with Jesus as total victor.

The Great White Throne judgment is the last event before the creation of all things new. The unbelievers, living and dead of all ages past will be gathered before God for the final judgment. The books are opened. The Book of Life is a record of Adam's line . . . everyone who ever lived. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” “If we say we have not sinned, we call God a liar.”

No matter how moral a person is, how good he's tried to live, it still falls short of God's standard. Destination is hell forever. But there's another book -- the Lamb's Book of Life. In it is recorded all the names of those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, and those of the Old Testament whom God has declared righteous in their hearts such as Abraham and David, because He alone knows the thoughts and intents of the heart. God is completely fair, completely just. Those whose names were not written in the Lamb's Book of Life are cast into hell.

The kingdom of God is in existence now . . . it is within you. It is also future . . . a time when premillennial believers see a literal, physical kingdom on earth fulfilling all the promises to the Jews. But the new heavens and new earth are created after the Great White Throne judgment. An eternal state with God in glorified bodies that we call "heaven." Is it this earth renovated by fire or a whole new creation? I don't know. New heavens may mean no sun/moon/stars as we know them because the glory of God is there. New heavens (plural) may mean we are aware of and have access to all the galaxies and the ends of the universes. I don't know. But I do know that it will fit my concept of heaven because I can see my Lord Jesus face to face.

The purpose of any study of prophecy is not to try and fit pieces of a jigsaw puzzle together, second guess God, or have more knowledge than our brother or sister in Christ. Application is the important thing. Because we're aware of God's plan for the future, how should we be living today? Three simple thoughts:

- 1) Prophecy should encourage a godly life. The Holy Spirit and God's Word strive to make us more like Christ Himself. We know that love, grace, forgiveness, acceptance, self-discipline, obedience are all things God wants from us. There are terrible days ahead. We want to be ready for His presence at the trumpet call not only by being "in Christ" having accepted Him as Savior, but also ready to reign with Him because our heart is tuned to His heart.
- 2) Prophecy should discourage a materialistic life. Peggy Lee once asked in song, "Is that all there is?" No. There is a future and a hope. We're to lay up treasures in heaven, not on earth. Whatever we have here will disappear. People, not things, are the priority. And whatever riches we have in this life are nothing compared to the riches prepared for us in heaven. Be generous, let go . . . God will supply all our needs in Christ Jesus.
- 3) Prophecy should stimulate us to develop an expectant lifestyle. There is no prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled before the rapture. It's the next event on God's calendar. It could be before we go to bed tonight. In the twinkling of an eye, Scripture says. Are we making the most of each day God gives us here on earth, not only in our witness about Him, but as His ambassadors of love? God is at work both in us and in the world. We should expect great things to happen!

The Creator of this universe is a covenant making God who is faithful to all His promises. He cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). He cannot forget a promise (Deuteronomy 4:31). He is faithful even when we are unfaithful (2 Timothy 2:13).

Just as He fulfilled all the promises related to the First Coming of His Son, He is going to fulfill all those that relate to His Second Coming, including the promise of a millennial reign.

Many in the church may be ignorant of His unfulfilled promises. Others may have forgotten them. But God has not. He intends to fulfill every one of them.

We are privileged to live in a time when we can witness God orchestrating the events of this world to the fulfillment of ALL the promises of His master plan.

Ascribe greatness to our God!

The Rock! His work is perfect.

For all His ways are just;

A God of faithfulness and without injustice,

Righteous and upright is He.

Deuteronomy 32:3b-4

I'm proud of you for being so attentive to this prophecy overview. I really hope you found it helpful.

There are two truths I want to leave you with:

- 1) Everyone has eternal life - it's your choice where you spent it.
- 2) God has a plan - you can depend on the truth of God's Word.

Any questions?