

Lecture 11 Prophecy Overview

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This week's lesson had several objectives in mind:

- 1) Revelation is the last book of our Bible, but it is not an afterthought of God about what the future has in store for mankind. 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 – read God's Word directly.
- 2) These passages should have reaffirmed the themes we've covered the last ten lessons. 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 when Satan is released for a season before the Great White Throne judgment?

Confusion isn't new . . . the leaders in Jesus' day didn't 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 in Luke 4:18,19 how Jesus 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" . . . however, 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 to keep the big picture in mind. Don't major on the minors. 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." 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 the wilderness for Moses to dungeons for Paul. However far 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, again . . . 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 your initial lesson package. You might review that sheet over the holidays before we begin study of the book of Revelation in January. It will probably make much more sense to you now.

Several times the lecturers have presented the various positions that people take on prophecy (postmillennial, amillennial, premillennial), so I'm not going to repeat that for you again. Basically, however, the differences have to do with whether or not there will be a literal millennium (1000-year) period with the Lord Jesus reigning on earth; the timing of the church rapture and/or timing of the Second Coming of Christ; and where the Jews fit into end-time prophecy.

Now, hopefully, as we encounter the themes and terminology we've covered in the ten lessons of prophecy preview, you'll begin to see them play out in the book of Revelation.

Every lesson focused on Jesus Christ and His redemptive work on the cross to pay the debt of sin we owe. He is the One who will keep us from the terrible judgments we'll read about in Revelation. He is our Blessed Hope.

Many of you expressed your surprise at how much the Psalms had to teach us about both His First and Second Coming. What didn't surprise us was Scripture's description of conditions in the world in the last days. 2 Timothy 3:2-6 tells us people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholly, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, no self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure instead of God, and have a form of godliness but deny its power. Don't we see those characteristics all around us today?

At the core of the different viewpoints on prophecy interpretation is when people think Jesus Christ will return as was told in Acts 1:11. That verse says, "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.

Those of us who believe in the literal meaning of God's Word tend toward the premillennial interpretation of prophecy.

Now the premillennial position – that takes Scripture at its literal interpretation – 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 Great White Throne judgment. Let's review what we've tried to show you over the last ten lessons that should answer the question, "Give a brief outline of the end times even though some information might be controversial."

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 and to put its rituals and 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 (and we don’t know when) when the church will be taken up into heaven – quickly, like a thief in the night, unannounced (the trumpet will sound and both the living and dead believers will be raptured - snatched away so to speak). We’ll be given spiritual resurrection bodies like Jesus has and welcomed into heaven to face the judgment seat of Christ to receive our crowns or rewards. Remember this judgment seat is not to decide if we get into heaven, but is the bema seat of reward. Then those in heaven will sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb to celebrate.

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 to testify for Him during this seven-year period. Many will come to Christ and be martyred, but not all. There will be people saved during the Tribulation period. At the end of the seven-year Tribulation period, forces will gather for a great battle against Israel; however, before mankind destroys itself, Jesus will descend in what is known as the Second Coming 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. This has also been referred to as the judgment of nations. The unbelievers will be sent to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his evil angels and only the surviving believers will enter into Jesus’ Kingdom on earth called the millennium – a thousand-year period.

Jesus will rule from Jerusalem, David’s throne, but His kingdom is worldwide. Israel will have permanent possession of their land as God’s promises are totally fulfilled and the saints in glorified bodies will be given positions of responsibility as Jesus assigns it. We need to remember that we’ll have glorified bodies that do not have the restrictions of time, space and whatever else limits our human bodies.

There will be a temple rebuilt in Jerusalem for the millennial age that includes animal sacrifices. “Why?” you may ask. I don’t know. We know that “the life is in the blood,” and that blood is what God has chosen to be a propitiation for sin. Will people sin in the millennium? I would think so, even with Jesus present, sin / ego is part of human nature. Maybe the

sacrifices will be a way to look back, a physical reminder to the millennial population that Christ paid for sin with His own blood. Since there is no mention of a church per se in the millennium (the bride and the bridegroom are already one), there won't be the clean bread and wine we're accustomed to. Accept that explanation or not, Ezekiel just says there will be a temple with animal sacrifices.

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 probably jobs – daily living, if you will, 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 in a perfected environment in the millennium, but even with heredity and environment both on the positive side, mankind’s wicked heart will rebel. Do you think maybe there’s such a thing as having things “too good” that causes rebellion?

Satan, we know, has been bound for this thousand-years, so he and his demons are not at fault. Man’s own desire, 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. 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 of those who refuse to bow the knee to Jesus 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 past ages 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. Romans 3:12 says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” 1 John 1:10 says, “If we say we have not sinned, we call God a liar.”

No matter how moral a person is, how good a life 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. We can trust that God is completely fair, completely just. Those whose names were not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life are cast into hell.

It’s true, 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. The new heavens and new earth are created after the Great White Throne judgment . . . an eternal state that we call “heaven” living and dwelling with God in glorified bodies. The new heavens we’re told will 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. One thing I do know, for me personally my concept of heaven will be fulfilled because I can see my Lord Jesus face to face.

The goal of any study of prophecy really isn't to try and fit pieces of a jigsaw puzzle together, second guess God or have more Scriptural knowledge than our brothers or sisters 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, and 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 by not only 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 an old song, "Is that all there is?" The answer 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. (Philippians 4:19)
- 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. So, 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 can expect great things to happen!

I've tried to answer some questions you may have had as I've gone along, but perhaps here are some others I might address (in no particular order). Here are some about prophecy and prophets:

How do we identify a true prophecy?

Deuteronomy 18:22 tells us that, "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken." In other words, the test of a true prophet is 100% accuracy. Since the canon of Scripture is complete and we're told not to add to nor subtract from it, we align what we hear from any modern day "prophet" with the revealed Word of God. For example, when we hear a person set a date for the Second Coming, we know that does not agree with God's Word because He tells us, "no one knows the day or hour."

What do Jews believe about prophecy fulfillment?

Certainly, they are still looking for their Messiah to come as king and conqueror and set up his kingdom to fulfill all his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are aware of the special relationship they have with God. Many, however, are coming to recognize Jesus as their Messiah and grasp the concepts Paul taught in Romans 9 – 11 about Israel being set aside for a time until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, but believing God still has a future for Israel. For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. (Romans 11:29)

Are there modern-day prophets?

We think of a prophet as someone who sees some new vision of events of the future. Prophecy is not just "seeing the future" it is also forth-telling what will happen. Every time anyone has shared what Scripture says about the future, a prophet has proclaimed what God has determined is going to happen. People like Billy Graham weren't giving a new message, but were foretelling with certainty God's plan. Warning in order to win people to Jesus.

Here's a thought:

Some of our texts were written to the Israelites about their land, rebuilding the temple, etc. How can we be sure of the timeframe, and couldn't these verses and the ones describing tribulation come from other times in history?

The amillennial viewpoint believes that God is finished with Israel. Any promises yet unfulfilled belong to the church. Since Jesus is not going to set foot on this earth again, they take tribulation type events and apply it to an earlier age. For example, they see the Antichrist as Antiochus Epiphanes who in 170 B.C. (before Christ) captured Jerusalem and defiled the temple by offering a pig on the altar and tried to set himself up as God. His power lasted about 3 1/2 years. The amillennial position sees him as fulfilling the Scripture and believes there will be no other end-time antichrist. He does have much in common.

In the study of hermeneutics (which is the theory of interpretation) there is a "law of double fulfillment." That's a whole study in itself. Basically, however, prophets usually had a near term fulfillment of their prophecy and also a long-term fulfillment. Antiochus was before Christ was born, yet Jesus spoke in Matthew 24:15-16 of a time to flee when you see the "abomination of desolation" spoken of by Daniel set up in the temple (a future event). Our goal is to expose you to all the Scriptures and let the Holy Spirit lead you into truth. What do you think? Are we in a time of peace like the millennium description in Scripture? Is Christianity getting stronger and stronger and issuing in a "golden age of peace" as the postmillennialists believe? Has the world ever seen such total destruction as described in Revelation?

Last week you read and learned about the new Jerusalem. Perhaps you wondered about the significance of the names on the gates and foundation of the city.

While literal interpretation of the Bible means that if God says the 12 names will be on the gates and foundations of the city, so that's the way it will be; literal interpretation does not do away with spiritual applications.

The gates of the Holy City are probably named for the tribes of Israel. A perpetual reminder that "salvation is of the Jews." The way in. Not merely because it was the Jewish nation that gave us Jesus, but also because Israel gave us the Old Testament prophets and directed us toward the one true God.

The foundations symbolize stability and permanence. They could be named for the apostles of the New Testament who taught us Christ's truth and how to practice it. Just how the foundation will look physically is open to how the Scripture captures your imagination. All those jewels mentioned. One thing we know for sure, it will be breathtaking!

A related question might be: **Who is the 12th apostle since Judas was a traitor?** My guess would be that it's the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul.

As I told you in September, our goal has not been to fit today's current events into the prophetic Scriptures we've studied. There is no doubt, however, that daily we become more and more aware of the signs of the time.

What's the first thing we want when there is crisis in our life or in our country. . . a way out! Someone or something that will step in and solve the problem, take responsibility, bring back our peace of mind. Isn't that what the antichrist is going to offer? These times we experience now condition the world for a false "savior." But I can only tell you from my own experience that life cycles – good times / difficult times; having plenty / struggling to make ends meet; feeling secure / feeling dangerously close to the edge. We're a consumer nation used to the "good life" and, depending on your age, probably removed from the realities of harsher times like those of the last recession, or the great depression, or even the recent pandemic. These are tough times, no doubt about it. Struggling deepens our faith because we have to depend more on God and less on ourselves. I do know God does provide – He is faithful – He knows our need – He is able to see us through.

In our Christian community we have resources to help each other, if our pride doesn't get in the way of letting our needs be known. What's more, our great God enables us to help those outside our faith in tangible ways that demonstrate His love for a lost and dying world. These may be times of struggle, but it can also be a time of opportunity. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. Watch your credit, be wise, be frugal, be smart – the devil is out there prowling around to see whom he can devour and deter from their faith.

I'm proud of you for being so attentive to this prophecy overview. I really hope you found it helpful. I love you in the Lord even if you disagree with me.

As you know, we'll start the book of Revelation in January. For those of you who have never studied it, or feel reluctance that it might be too hard to understand, know that you've got a good solid foundation laid for you these last ten weeks of study. It is going to begin to fit together for you.

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.