

Major Bible Themes

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CHAPTER XLIV

PROPHECY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In all ages it has pleased God to pre-announce certain things He proposed to do. Those announcements are termed prophecies. All prophecy is history pre-written and it is as credible as any word God hath spoken (2 Tim. 3:16). While prophecy is found in almost every book of the Bible, sixteen books of the Old Testament and one book of the New Testament are wholly prophetic in character. In all, nearly one-fourth of the Bible was predictive when it was written. A portion of the Bible prediction has now been fulfilled, and, it should be noted, in every case its fulfillment has been literal or precisely as predicted. It is reasonably concluded, therefore, that all remaining prophecy will be as literally fulfilled.

It is probable that, to some degree, prophecy has been divinely sealed (Dan. 12:9) until the end of the age and it is therefore significant that to this portion of the Scriptures so much study is now being given with gratifying results. However, throughout its history the Protestant church has retained in a large measure the Roman Catholic assumption that the church is the kingdom and is therefore appointed to conquer and govern the earth. A right understanding of prophecy is

demanding if the student is rightly to divide the Word of Truth and to discern his own place and divine appointments in the world.

While it is not difficult to believe the record of events given in the Bible which have already taken place, it is a test upon faith to believe the record of events which are yet future and known only through the prophecies of the Bible.

A consistent interpretation of prophecy requires that all words such as Israel, Zion, Kingdom, and Church shall be given their natural and obvious meaning, and that no place shall be allowed for the supposition that there are various and equally acceptable ways of interpreting the Scriptures. The Bible lends itself to but one program of events and to this program all Scripture is in perfect accord. While men may earnestly contend for the "Post" or the "Non," or the "Pre"-millenarian interpretation, but one of these could be according to truth.

It is evident that all Bible interpretation will be incomplete without the knowledge of prophecy, and it is equally true that the right understanding of the New Testament is wholly dependent upon the right understanding of Old Testament prediction. The Apostle Paul stated regarding himself that he could gain the enviable title of "a good minister of Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 4:6) only as he in all faithfulness put his hearers in remembrance of things which were yet future (1 Tim. 4:1-5).

The prophet was God's representative to man, as the priest was man's representative to God. There is a beautiful order in the fact that he was first called "the man of God," then "the seer," and finally "the prophet" (1 Sam. 9:8, 9). There were many "false prophets" who uttered only their own messages; the true prophets of God were moved (Lit., borne along) by the Spirit of God (1 Pet. 1:21), though not all of them were called upon to write their predictions. All true prophets were patriots and reformers, and it is noticeable that their ministry was exercised at such times as the nation Israel, to whom they spoke, was drifting away from God.

While the study of prophecy is as inexhaustible as the Scriptures themselves, there are certain major themes of prophecy in both the Old and the New Testaments. The major themes of prophecy in the Old Testament are:

I. CONCERNING THE GENTILES

Old Testament prophecy relative to the Gentiles begins with the allotment of the portion of the sons of Noah (Gen. 9:25-27), which prediction has been fulfilled to the present hour. Another extensive Gentile prophecy of the Old Testament concerns the judgments of God upon the nations surrounding Israel -- Babylon and Chaldea (Isa. 13:1-22; 14:18-27; Jer. 50:1 to 51:64), Moab (Isa. 15:1-9; 16:1-14; Jer. 48:1-4), Damascus (Isa. 17:1-14; Jer. 49:23-27), Egypt (Isa. 19:1-25; Jer. 46:2-28), Philistia and Tyre (Isa. 23:1-48; Jer. 47:1-7), Edom (Jer. 49:7-22) Ammon (Jer. 49:1-6), Elam (Jer. 49:34-39) -- which likewise have largely been fulfilled (see, also, Amos, 1:1-15). Additional Gentile prophecy is recorded in the Old Testament as to world-ruling monarchies and their authority during the "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). This succession of governments was revealed to Daniel (2:37-45; 7:1-14) and subsequent history has proven these kingdoms to have been Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece and Rome. Old Testament prophecy also anticipates the final judgment of the Gentile nations (Joel 3:2-16; Zeph. 3:8). However, Old

Testament prophecy gives assurance that the Gentiles will come into great blessing in the kingdom age (Isa. 11:10; 42:1, 6; 49:6, 22; 60:3; 62:2).

II. CONCERNING ISRAEL'S EARLY HISTORY

This group of predicted events which began with Abraham covers Israel's life both in the land and in bondage, and the detailed predictions are found in the Pentateuch and the Books of history. All of these prophecies have been fulfilled and in the most literal manner.

Some of these predictions are: (a) Israel's Egyptian bondage and release (Gen. 15:13, 14); (b) The character and destiny of Jacob's sons (Gen. 49:1-28); (c) Israel in the land following the Egyptian bondage (Deut. 4:26-30; 31:14-23); (d) Israel's three dispossessions of the land (Gen. 15:13, 14, 16; Jer. 25:11, 12; Deut. 28:62-67. See, also, Psa. 106:1-48; Deut. 30:1-3; Lev. 26:3-46; Neh. 1:8; Jer. 9:16; 18:15-17; Ezk. 12:14, 15; 20:23; 22:15; James 1:1).

III. CONCERNING THE NATION ISRAEL

Beginning with the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:1-4; 13:14-17; 15:1-7; 17:1-8), and continuing throughout the Old Testament there is prediction concerning the chosen earthly people of God. To them has been promised: a national entity (Jer. 31:36), a land (Gen. 13:15), a throne (2 Sam. 7:16; Psa. 89:36), a King (Jer. 33:21), and a kingdom (Dan. 7:14). All of these divine blessings are endless in their duration; yet reservation is made whereby these blessings may be interrupted as a chastisement upon the nation, but never can they be abrogated. The importance of the chosen people in the reckoning of God and the extent of the Scriptures bearing upon their past, present, and future, is disclosed when it is seen that all Scripture from Genesis 12:1 to the end of Malachi relates to them directly or indirectly. As to their future, this people will, according to prophecy, take the leading place among all the peoples of the earth, planted forever upon their own land under the gracious reign of David's Greater Son sitting on David's throne.

IV. CONCERNING THE LAST DISPERSION AND REGATHERING OF ISRAEL

By the Assyrian captivity of the Northern Kingdom and the Babylonian captivity of the Southern Kingdom and as a national punishment for sin, the whole house of Israel was taken from off the land and in due time was scattered among the nations of the earth.

This was in fulfillment of multiplied prophecies (Lev. 26:32-39; Deut. 28:63-68; Psa. 44:11; Neh. 1:8; Jer. 9:16; 18:15-17; Ezk. 12:14, 15; 20:23; 22:15; Jas. 1:1).

In no case would Israel's national entity be lost even through centuries of dispersion (Jer. 31:36; Matt. 24:34). They refused the divine offer and provision for their regathering and kingdom glory which was made by their Messiah at His first advent (Matt. 23:37-39), and, as at Kadesh-barnea where their wilderness experience was extended (Num. 14:1-45), their chastisement was continued, and will be continued until He comes again. At that time He will regather His people into their own land and cause them to enter into the glory and blessedness of every covenant promise of Jehovah concerning them (Deut. 30:1-10; Isa. 11:11, 12; Jer. 23:3-8; Ezk. 37:21-25; Matt. 24:31).

V. CONCERNING THE ADVENT OF MESSIAH

From 1 Peter 1:10, 11 it is clear that the prophets of the Old Testament were unable to distinguish two advents of the Messiah. So perfectly was the present age a secret in the counsels of God that, to the prophets, these events which were fulfilled at His first coming and those which are yet to be fulfilled, at His second coming were in no way separated as to the time of their fulfillment. Isaiah 61:1, 2 is an illustration of this. When reading this passage in the synagogue of Capernaum, Christ ceased abruptly when He had concluded the record of those features which were predicted for His first advent (Luke 4:18-21), making no mention of the remaining features which are to be fulfilled when He comes again. In like manner, the Angel Gabriel, when anticipating the ministry of Christ, combined as in one the undertakings which belong to both the first and the second advents (Luke 1:31-33). According to Old Testament prophecy, Christ was to come both as a sacrificial, unresisting Lamb (Isa. 53:1-12), and as the conquering and glorious Lion of the tribe of Judah (Isa. 11:1-12; Jer. 23:5, 6). Considering these two extensive lines of prediction, there is little wonder that there was perplexity in the minds of the Old Testament prophets as to the "manner of time" when all this would be fulfilled (1 Pet. 1:10, 11).

Prophecy stipulated that the Messiah must be of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), of the house of David (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 33:21), born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14), in Bethlehem of Judea (Micah 5:2), that He must die a sacrificial death (Isa. 53:1-12), by crucifixion (Psa. 22:1-21), rise again from the dead (Psa. 16:8-11), and come to earth the second time (Deut. 30:3) on the (clouds of Heaven (Dan. 7:13). Jesus of Nazareth has fulfilled, and will fulfill, every requirement of prophecy concerning the Messiah as no other claimant can ever do.

VI. CONCERNING THE TRIBULATION

Closely related to the present age-long chastisement of Israel, Old Testament prophecy anticipates a time of unprecedented tribulation in the earth (Deut. 4:29, 30; Psa. 2:5; Isa. 24:16-20; Jer. 30:4-7; Dan. 12:1). Though this line of prediction is greatly enlarged in the New Testament, the Old Testament prophecy indicates the one essential feature of this period. It is said to be "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:4-7), and comes to that nation as the consummation of their sufferings at the hand of Jehovah for their sins.

VII. CONCERNING THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM AND THE DAY OF THE LORD

In respect to the amount of the Scriptures involved, there is no theme of Old Testament prophecy comparable with that of the Messianic kingdom. Lying beyond all the predicted chastisements that are to fall on Israel is the glory which will be theirs when regathered into their own land, with unmeasured spiritual blessings under the glorious reign of their Messiah-King. This vision was given to all the prophets and as certainly and literally as Israel, in fulfillment of prophecy, was removed from the land and caused to suffer during these many centuries, so certainly and literally will she be restored to marvelous blessings in a redeemed and glorified earth (Isa. 11:1-16; 12:1-6; 24:22 to 27:13; 35:1-10; 52:12; 54:1 to 55:13; 59:20 to 66:24; Jer. 23:3-8; 31:1-40; 32:37-41; 33:1-26; Ezk. 34:11-31; 36:32-38; 37:1-28; 40:1 to 48:35; Dan. 2:44, 45;

7:14; Hos. 3:4, 5; 13:9 to 14:9; Joel 2:28 to 3:21; Amos 9:11-15; Zeph. 3:14-20; Zech. 8:1-23; 14:9-21).

Old Testament predictions concerning the kingdom are often a part of the predictions concerning the return of the King and when these two themes are combined into one, it is termed The Day of the Lord, which phrase refers to that lengthened period extending from the second coming of Christ and the accompanying judgments in the earth, to the end of His millennial reign (Isa. 2:10-22; Zech. 14:1-21).

Because of the fact that none of the great prophecies were fulfilled in the days covered by the Old Testament, that portion of the Bible is in itself incomplete and therefore to that extent disappointing. By the second coming of Christ who is the fulfiller of her prophecies (Matt. 5:17), the "consolation" of Israel is to be realized (Luke 2:25).

QUESTIONS

1. What relation does prophecy sustain to history?
2. What portion of the Bible is prophetic?
3. What may be said regarding the interpretation of prophecy?
4. What may be said concerning the men who were prophets?
5. Name four features of Old Testament prediction concerning the Gentiles.
6. Name four features of Old Testament prediction concerning Israel's early history.
7. Name five covenant blessings which according to Old Testament prophecy are to come to Israel.
8. Name some of the predictions which speak of Israel's present dispersion and her future regathering.
9. Under what limitation did the Old Testament prophets write concerning the advent of Messiah?
10. Name the specifications which the true Messiah must fulfill.
11. Could any individual other than Christ meet these conditions today?
12. What essential features of the Great Tribulation are mentioned in Old Testament prophecy?
13. What time and what events are included in the Day of the Lord?
14. In what sense is the Old Testament incomplete?