



Prophets
and
Prophecy

by
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Prophets and Prophecy

Lesson 1: Jehovah vs. Idols

1. Genuine and Counterfeit

A. The Scriptures declare God to be ...

1. The genuine cause or originator of the universe and each person. As such He is the sole sustainer of physical life and the source of continued existence afterward.
2. The only legitimate object of man's worship and reverence. This is not optional; God commands the recognition He is due as Creator and Savior.
3. The true source of knowledge. The things that we must know to live in spiritual harmony and receive God's approval come from Him. The Scriptures tell of a God who has spoken His will to His creation.

B. Human experience, however, recognizes many contradictory thoughts and declarations to those revealed in the Scriptures.

1. There is great antagonism in our world between religious doctrines, practices and belief systems. All claim the legitimacy of heaven.
2. Men profess to speak in the place of God, but their doctrines and actions are hopelessly contradictory.
3. This has always been true, because the nature of earthly life is adversarial and confrontational. The Bible itself tells us of truth and falsehood and the origin of each: the Creator has spoken truth, and Satan has spawned lies and denials.

C. How are men to recognize God's approved spokesmen? How do we know what God's true will is? If the counterfeit so closely resembles the original, how can we tell the difference?

2. The Mark of Authenticity

A. While God has given many evidences of His reality and veracity, there is one particular indicator of authenticity: When God's true representatives have spoken for Him, their words have unfailingly come to pass.

B. This is not due merely to a prescience or insight into future events. Rather, it is an indicator of the power of God to control people and events so that His declarations are proven truthful. The declarations merely pre-state the intentions of God.

C. Such ability is beyond the resources of man and thus beyond the resources of the gods created by man.

3. God's Knowledge of the Future

A. God's eternal plan – Ac 15:18. Few of us have an overall vision or plan for our lives; we “feel our way along” and often respond to events that are unanticipated or forced upon

us. God, however, had a clear plan and purpose for creation from the beginning.

B. God not only knows His own intentions; He has often declared them beforehand – Is 42:9.

1. People still marvel at the (mythical?) story of Babe Ruth pointing into the stands before hitting a colossal, decisive home run. We are enthralled with the idea of forethought and the power to enact our will. Why?
2. Because we realize how much we are at the mercy of forces and wills other than our own imposing themselves upon us. Even accomplished athletes speak much of “luck” or “chance.”
3. The history of God’s revelation is a history of advance pronouncements that God has brought to pass. This sets Him and the Scriptures apart from other pseudo-religious sources.

C. God not only knows His own future will; He even knows how man will engage his free will and what he will decide to do. God’s knowledge is so complete that He can set in place any contingency that will incorporate or overrule man’s choices. Neither well-intentioned “help” or high-handed rebellion can frustrate the purpose of God.

1. God knew that Pharaoh would stubbornly resist the release of Israel – Ex 3:19-20.
2. God was aware of the traitorous inhabitants of Keilah – 1 Sam 23:11-12.
3. God knew the princes of Judah would fight against Jeremiah and resist his words, but God would preserve the life of the prophet – Jer 1:19.

4. God vs. Idols

A. Jehovah repeatedly contrasts His consistent, clear words with the empty, self-serving declarations of idolatrous prophets.

1. God challenges the idols: *“Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; let them show the former things, what they were, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare to us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods ...”* (Is 41:22-23).
2. God declares His creative power: *“Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it”* (Is 42:5). He then declares: *“Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them”* (Is 42:9). True prophetic power rests upon creative power; only God can foretell and then fulfill the future.
3. God further testifies to Himself: *“I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,’ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass”* (Is 46:9-11).

4. *“I have declared the former things from the beginning; they went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass ... even from the beginning I have declared it to you; before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you, lest you should say, ‘My idol has done them, and my carved image and my molded image have commanded them’”* (Is 48:3-5).

B. Men make bold predictions, then equivocate and make excuses when they do not happen. Men also make vague, indefinite declarations that can be construed in a variety of ways. Men play upon the subjective feelings, vulnerable desires and timid compliance of their audiences to dupe them with falsehoods. God is not so psychologically manipulative. He simply states what is to be and challenges men to put it to the test.

C. Moses anticipates the future rise of false prophets and instructs the people on how to evaluate them (Dt 18:20-22). Even though a false prophet may work that which appears to be miraculous (Dt 13:1-3), he must ultimately be tested by the truthfulness of his words. If his words do not come to pass, then he has not spoken with God’s authority, for God’s plans cannot be frustrated.

Conclusion: The supernatural origin of the prophets of God, and thus the Scriptures they produced, is verified by real historical events which transpired according to aforementioned declarations. These declarations did not occur in a mere moment but were repeated throughout Biblical history. The continued existence of the Bible is testimony to its legitimate prophecies; otherwise, its failures would have long ago undermined its claims of divine origin.

Questions:

1. How have you observed in life that man doesn’t know the future beyond forecasting vague trends? Be specific. How have you been frustrated or surprised by unexpected events?
2. What is God asking for in Is 41:21?
3. What does God know about men that causes Him to prove Himself clearly (Is 48:4)?
4. In whose name does the “sign” in Dt 13:2 occur? Compare this passage with Is 46:7. How did Baal respond to his prophets on Mt. Carmel (1 Kgs 18:29)?
5. How does God’s former prophecies affect your own view of the future?

Prophets and Prophecy

Lesson 2: Prophets of God (1)

1. What Is a Prophet?

A. While this study will emphasize the divine evidence of the Scriptures through foretelling the future, this was only part of the prophet's role. More accurately, a prophet was an instrument by which God communicated His messages to man – whether concerning events in the future or reiterating what God had said in the past.

1. Terms: Prophet (used over 300x in the OT); seer (cf. 1 Sam 9:9); man of God (nearly half the references used of Elisha).
2. Prophets were not necessarily a class of men completely devoted to that vocation, though some were. Abraham, David and Daniel were prophets, but they were also dutifully occupied with other endeavors. What set a prophet apart was the direct call of God to deliver a message to the people – whether one time or repeatedly.

B. God has given instructions that clearly define His intentions for His prophets:

1. To Ezekiel: *“Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord God,’ whether they hear, or whether they refuse”* (Ezk 3:10-11); *“But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God’”* (3:27).
2. To Jeremiah: *“Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’ for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak”* (Jer 1:7).
3. To Amos: *“I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, But I was a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to My people Israel’”* (Am 7:14-15).

C. The moral obligation of the prophet:

1. Balaam – *“Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more ... The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak”* (Num 22:18, 38; cf. 23:12; 24:13).
2. Micaiah – *“As the Lord lives, whatever my God says, that I will speak”* (1 Kgs 22:14).
3. The courage of prophets to speak God's word and their fidelity to the message under threat of death is seen in Jeremiah (Jer 37:16-19), Elijah (2 Kgs 1:3, 16), Micaiah (1 Kgs 22:27-28), Daniel (4:19ff), Amos (Am 7:12, 16) and many others. On the other hand, Jonah demonstrates a spirit at odds with the commission and message of God (Jon 1: 2-3; 4:2-3).

2. Inspiration of the Prophets

A. Prophets were not paraphrasers or simply given to following vague urges. The Scriptures paint a definite, detailed picture of communication between God and messenger.

1. *“Now the Lord had told Samuel in his ear the day before Saul came ... and when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said to him, ‘There he is, the man of whom I spoke to you ...’”* (1 Sam 9:15-17).
 2. God refutes Samuel’s personal judgment in favor of Eliab (1 Sam 16:7).
 3. God informs Ahijah that Jeroboam’s wife is coming to him in disguise to inquire about the health of her son (1 Kgs 14:5-6).
- B. Nathan presents an example of a prophet speaking without due consultation with God and therefore misadvising the hearer – David in this case (2 Sam 7:1-5).
- C. Not all oral prophets were writing prophets. But when men either wrote or spoke for God, He empowered them by the Holy Spirit to deliver His message accurately.
1. 2 Pet 1:20-21 – Believers should have the utmost confidence in the divine origin of the Scriptures. Peter speaks of the importance of eyewitness testimony of the apostles (1:16-18) but adds to this the greater witness of the “prophecy of Scripture.” It had been adequately demonstrated through history that the prophets did not deliver the words of God filtered through their own culture, judgment, preferences, etc. Rather, they spoke *“as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”*
 2. Regarding the plans of the temple, David gave Solomon *“the plans for all that he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the Lord ... ‘All this,’ said David, ‘the Lord made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans’”* (1 Chr 28:12, 19).
 3. The NT affirms the inspiration of the Spirit behind prophetic writings: David (Ac 1:16; Mt 22:43-45); Isaiah (Ac 28:25); Jeremiah (Heb 10:15); the Psalms (Heb 3:7ff).

Conclusion: God has employed human agents of communication through the centuries, men who were empowered by God, Himself, to speak on His behalf. We can be confident that God governed this process so that what was originally communicated and what has been preserved is, indeed, His true words to mankind.

Questions:

1. What distinction in terminology is made in 1 Sam 9:9?
2. What do false prophets prophesy (Jer 14:14; 23:25-27)?
3. What does God urge upon Jeremiah (Jer 1:8, 17)? What would make God forsake Jeremiah (Jer 23:33)?

Prophets and Prophecy

Lesson 3: Prophets of God (2)

1. Prophets and Miracles

A. In reference to miracle-working by the prophets of God, consider the following:

“This sort of authentication of the prophet’s ministry (miracles, jj) was particularly evident in the work of Elijah and Elisha. It was, however, the exception rather than the rule. Comparatively few of the prophets mentioned in the bible ever performed miracles. Persons unfamiliar with the Bible often think it is filled from cover to cover with unbelievable supernatural events. Actually, God has used unusual powers of this type only sparingly in authenticating His messengers. Providentially directed events are far more common than acts that would be considered miraculous by the observers. Most of the miracles recorded in the Bible are gathered around a few main crises in the relation of God to humanity. Elsewhere they seldom occur” (*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 4, p. 886).

B. By revelation, reputation and, occasionally, miraculous confirmation, the genuine prophets of God became known to the people.

1. The servant of Saul said of Samuel: *“Look now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honorable man; all that he says surely comes to pass ...”* (1 Sam 9:6).
2. When Jehoshaphat wished to inquire of the Lord about war against Syria, Ahab called 400 “prophets” (yes-men) who blessed the proceedings. Yet Jehoshaphat knew these men could not be trusted. He asked, *“Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of Him?”* (1 Kgs 22:5-7). Ahab’s assessment of this prophet of God: *“There is still one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil”* (22:8).
3. The Shunammite woman said of Elisha: *“Look now, I know that this is a holy man of God who passes by us regularly ...”* (2 Kgs 4:9). The Israelite slave girl said of Elisha to Naaman’s wife: *“If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy”* (2 Kgs 5:3).

C. Further, certain prophets were even recognized by Gentiles:

1. Jonah successfully (to his dismay) converted the Ninevites.
2. When the Syrian king wonders how Israel seems to know his every move, one of his servants responds: *“Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom”* (2 Kgs 6:12). Later, the Syrian king, Ben-Hadad, is informed of Elisha that *“the man of God has come here.”* He then instructs Hazael to go and *“inquire of the Lord by him, saying, ‘Shall I recover from this disease?’”* (2 Kgs 8:7-8).
3. Jeremiah was treated with great deference and respect by Nebuchadnezzar at the fall of Jerusalem (Jer 39:11-14; 40:2-4).

2. Extent of Prophecy

A. It appears from various passages that there were at times in Israel’s history communities of

prophets, men reverentially devoted to God and serving Him in ways not entirely spelled out in Scripture.

1. The sons of the prophets from Jericho (2 Kgs 2:5, 7, 15; cf. 2 Kgs 4:1, 38; 9:1).
 2. When Jezebel massacres the prophets of the Lord (a massacre implies a significant number), Obadiah hides 100 prophets in a cave and feeds them (1 Kgs 18:4).
 3. When a "*certain man of the sons of the prophets*" disguises himself and confronts Ahab, the king recognizes him when he reveals himself as "*one of the prophets*" (1 Kgs 20:41).
- B. On the other hand, reference is made to the scarcity of revelation upon occasion: "*And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation*" (1 Sam 3:1).
- C. On the whole, however, God affirms that He has spoken amply through His messengers, enough that the people are responsible for their lack of obedience to Him.
1. "*I have also spoken by the prophets, and have multiplied visions*" (Hos 12:10).
 2. "*Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, namely every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments'*" (2 Kgs 17:13).
 3. "*Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them*" (Jer 7:25; cf. 11:7; 25:3-4; 26:4-5; 29:19).

3. The Common Fate of the Prophets: Persecution

- A. In spite of the prophets' divine calling, inspiration and reputation, the kings of Israel often had their own agenda and rebelled against God's words.
1. Even miracle-working Elijah was threatened with death by Ahab and Jezebel. He was hunted among the nations during the time of drought (1 Kgs 18:10). After his great, miraculous display upon Carmel, Jezebel was more intent than ever upon murdering him (1 Kgs 19:2).
 2. Micaiah is imprisoned upon predicting that Ahab will be defeated (1 Kgs 22:27-28).
 3. Jeremiah was grossly mistreated and endured a lifetime of resistance, threats, imprisonment, etc. God told him not to marry because of the incredible suffering that he would endure as Judah shuddered through the throes of death (Jer 16:1-4).
- B. Jesus summarizes the treatment received by the prophets in ancient times as He, Himself, endured the same:
1. When warning His disciples of coming persecution, He exhorts them to "*rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you*" (Mt 5:12).
 2. When looked upon with suspicion in Nazareth, Jesus says: "*No prophet is accepted in his own country*" (Lk 4:24; cf. Jn 4:44).

3. At the end of His life, Jesus pours out His wrath upon the Jewish elite: *“Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’ Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets”* (Mt 23:29-31).

C. When men speak for God – Moses, prophets, apostles, etc. – we consistently see accompanying persecution and suffering. We should not be surprised or dismayed, therefore, when it happens to us. Neither should we remain silent so as to avoid hardship.

Questions:

1. What kind of men were the prophets (Jas 5:17)?
2. What did Stephen ask the Sanhedrin about the prophets of old (Ac 7:52)?
3. What did Ahab call Elijah (1 Kgs 18:17)? What was Elijah’s response?
4. What instruction did Nebuchadnezzar give concerning Jeremiah?
5. What had Gideon and his generation not seen for a long time (Jud 6:13)?
6. What temptation might Jeremiah have faced in Jer 37:16-18?
7. What is the significance of God saying that He sent His prophets “early”?

Prophets and Prophecy

Lesson 4: False Prophets

1. The Gradual Unfolding of Revelation

A. Through Moses God had provided for written, codified law to serve as a reliable guide.

1. Moses repeatedly called the people's attention to the written law and urged them to keep it diligently: Dt 5:1ff; 6:1-3, 20-25; 8:1, 6, 11, etc.
2. God did supplement this written code and made various clarifications and additions. God *"at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets"* (Heb 1:1). Poetry, history and prophecy were delivered piecemeal in dreams, visions and direct discourses.
3. Sometimes God's revelation was innovative, as in the case of David's introduction of instrumental music (cf. 2 Chr 29:25-27). But at other times, God delivered messages that were contingent upon the choices and responses of the people. This could cause God's prophets difficulty, as in the case of Jeremiah. Jeremiah began by calling the people to repentance, but when they resisted and sealed their doom, he then advised them to surrender to the Babylonians and "take their medicine." This change of message caused him to be seen as a traitor.

B. There were times, however, when Israel lost touch with the written law.

1. In the days of Josiah, for example, the Scriptures had long been lost amid the debris of the dilapidated, unused temple (2 Chr 34:14-19). Josiah was mortified when the law was read to him and he realized how distant Judah was from the standards of Moses.
2. False men would easily take advantage of such times when the law had faded from people's minds and they were dominated by self-interest.
3. *"The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so"* (Jer 5:31).

C. Thus, true prophets were often reformers, calling the people back to the standards of godliness and the statutes and ordinances that He had instituted for Israel. Reformation is always a harder task than original construction.

2. The Problem of False Prophets

A. While the specific term "false prophet" is not actually found in the OT, certainly the concept of men prophesying falsely is well documented.

1. A definitive passage on false prophets is Jer 23:9-32. Note God's descriptions:
 - a. Both prophet and priest are profane – 23:11.
 - b. They prophesied by Baal – 23:13.
 - c. They commit adultery and walk in lies – 23:14.

- d. They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord – 23:16.
- e. I have not sent these prophets ... I have not spoken to them – 23:21.
- f. The prophets ... prophesy lies in My name, saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed" – 23:25.
- g. They are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams – 23:27 (cf. Ezk 13:1-10).

B. Examples of false prophets:

1. Hananiah – Jer 27:1-28:11. Here we see two diametrically conflicting prophecies: Jeremiah assuring Judah that it will go into captivity (and urging them to surrender), and Hananiah, falsely promising that Nebuchadnezzar will be overcome (and urging continued defiance).
2. The old prophet – 1 Kgs 13:11-22. This is a strange story as pertains to the motive of the old prophet, but the facts of the case are these: 1) God gives the young prophet specific instructions (13:8-9, 22), 2) the instructions are understood (13:10, 16-17), 3) the old prophet lies when he claims an angel has spoken to him (13:18), 4) God holds the young prophet accountable for believing a lie (13:22, 26).
3. Balaam – 2 Pet 2:14-15 (cf. Rev 2:14). In discussing false teachers, Peter says they have *"a heart trained in covetous practices ... they have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam ... who loved the wages of unrighteousness."*

C. When false prophets told the people what they wanted to hear, they were favored over true prophets. The power of false prophecy is in the desire of the hearer. When men want something other than the truth, they are vulnerable to signs and smooth words, regardless of how clearly God has spoken upon a given subject.

Questions:

1. What does the false prophet hope about his prophecies (Ezk 13:6)?
2. Describe the false prophets Ahab, Zedekiah and Shemaiah (Jer 29:21-32).
3. Was Isaiah a false prophet in 2 Kgs 20:1? If not, why not?

Prophets and Prophecy

Lesson 5: Prophecies Fulfilled in the Old Testament (1)

1. Short Term Prophecies

A. Sometimes prophecies looked into the short-range future and gave specific indications of what would transpire. While it is possible for an uninspired forecaster to analyze a trend and project an outcome with a degree of certainty, Biblical prophecies often foretell what is unforeseeable.

B. Examples:

1. The birth of Isaac – Gn 17:15-22. While God had been telling Abraham for some time that his descendants would be multiplied, the prophecy becomes more intense in Abraham's 99th year. For it is then that God specifies that: a) Sarah would bear the child of promise (17:16, 19, 21), b) the child would be a son (17:16) and c) the birth would take place the following year (17:21). The birth occurs as foretold.
2. Moses declares the dramatic end of the rebels – Num 16. Moses calls the people away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (16:26). He predicts that the earth will open up and swallow these men and their families, which happens almost immediately, even *"as he finished speaking all these words"* (16:30-31).
3. Samuel's prophecy concerning Eli – 1 Sam 3:11-14. God had earlier told Eli directly that both his sons would die on the same day as a consequence of his disobedience (1 Sam 2:34). Samuel reaffirms this, and thus *"all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the Lord"* (3:20). The prophecy comes true (1 Sam 4:17) a short while later.
4. The death of Jeroboam's son – 1 Kgs 14:1-18. When Jeroboam's son falls sick, he sends his wife incognito to Ahijah the prophet. He has confidence in Ahijah because he had correctly prophesied Jeroboam's reign (14:2). Ahijah's answer, however, is more than Jeroboam bargained for. He tells Jeroboam's wife that the minute she steps foot back in the city, her son will die (14:12). He also issues some longer range prophecies.
5. The end of the famine – 2 Kgs 7. During the reign of Jehoram, son of Ahab and Jezebel, Samaria is besieged by the Syrians and the famine becomes intense. In the midst of such dire circumstances, Elisha shockingly prophesies that Samaria's fortunes would reverse, and the next day food would be plentiful (7:1). One of Jehoram's advisors, hearing this prophecy, thought it so preposterous that he ridiculed Elisha. The prophet continues his unusual prophecy: the official would see the spectacle, but strangely he would not eat of the abundance. How could a starving man not eat? The answer comes as Elisha predicted (7:17-20).

C. For further research:

1. An unnamed prophet foretells Israel's defeat of Ben-Hadad that very day and by whom (1 Kgs 20:13-14).
2. Elisha's prophecy of the defeat of Moab (2 Kgs 3:11-25).

3. Jahaziel prophesies that Jehoshaphat will win the battle the next day against the Ammonites and Moabites without fighting (2 Chr 20:1-30).

2. Deliberate Fulfillment

- A. A skeptic might object that short-term prophecies could easily be fulfilled deliberately by others and thus are no indicator of divine revelation.
 1. In fact, there are examples of conscious fulfillment of prophecy. One such is found in 2 Kgs 9:25-26, where Jehu assassinates Jehoram (or Joram). Jehu commands that the body of Jehoram be unceremoniously thrown into the field of Naboth.
 2. Jehu reminds Bidkar that they had been present when Elijah issued this prophecy against Ahab, who had taken possession of Naboth's vineyard after his murder – 1 Kgs 21:19.
 3. So, it cannot be denied that others had knowledge of prophecies and may at times have consciously fulfilled them.
- B. However, what is not so easy to dismiss are all the attendant factors that are out of human control leading up to such fulfillment. In the above example, Jehu did not determine where Jehoram would go to recover from his wounds (9:15); he could not anticipate that Jehoram would come to meet him in his chariot; he could not foresee that they would meet up at the property of Naboth (9:21). Perhaps it is not until the moment of truth, when he shoots Jehoram in the chariot, that he becomes fully aware of the significance of the events.
- C. What we must also recognize is that the vast majority of prophecies are fulfilled either by enemies who have no stake in proving God right or by men totally unaware that they are fulfilling the word of God.

Questions:

1. What does God call the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas in 1 Sam 2:34?
2. What did Moses say the people should learn from the manner of the rebels' deaths?
3. Who does Jehoshaphat urge the people to have complete belief in (2 Chr 20:20)?

Prophets and Prophecy

Lesson 6: Prophecies Fulfilled in the Old Testament (2)

1. Medium-Range Prophecies

A. Things prophesied and fulfilled within a life-span:

1. Death of the false prophet Hananiah – Jer 28:12-17. When Jeremiah had prophesied the captivity of Judah by wearing the yokes, Hananiah opposed his prophecy and declared that Judah would be restored to the land within two years (28:2-4). Jeremiah thus passes sentence against Hananiah: *“This year you shall die, because you have taught rebellion against the Lord”* (28:16). Hananiah dies two months later (28:1, 17).
2. Prophecies against Saul. Samuel had told Saul several years before his death that *“the Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you”* (1 Sam 15:28). After David is anointed and begins his ascendancy to the throne, Saul tries everything possible to derail the prophecy. Later, Samuel even speaks posthumously to Saul and tells him that *“the Lord has done for Himself as He spoke by me ... and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me ...”* (1 Sam 28:17, 19).
3. Sennacherib’s departure from Jerusalem and death – Is 37:6-7, 36-38. Things looked dire for Jerusalem as the great Assyrian king, Sennacherib, besieged the city. Hezekiah pleads for Isaiah’s intercession on behalf of Judah, and Isaiah assures the king that Sennacherib would return home and eventually be assassinated. Historical records indicate that this occurs twenty years later.
4. The preservation of Joshua and Caleb. When Israel balked at entering Canaan, God determined to exterminate the adult generation and prohibit anyone over twenty years of age from entering the land – with two exceptions: Joshua and Caleb (Num 14:20-24; 32:11-12; Jsh 14:7-12). This prophecy took over forty-five years to fulfill.

B. Things prophesied and fulfilled over successive generations:

1. The slaughter of Jeroboam’s house – 1 Kgs 15:29-30. Because of Jeroboam’s role in Israel’s apostasy, Ahijah prophesies that God *“will cut off from Jeroboam every male in Israel, bond and free; and I will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as one takes away refuse until it is all gone”* (1 Kgs 14:10-11). This occurs several years later when Baasha becomes king. *“He did not leave to Jeroboam anyone that breathed ... according to the word of the Lord ...”* (15:29).
2. Punishment on the house of Ahab – 1 Kgs 21:29. As a result of Ahab’s extreme wickedness, God vows to *“make your house like the house of Jeroboam ... in the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house”* (1 Kgs 21:22, 29). Later, Elisha commissions one of the sons of the prophets to go and anoint Jehu and give him the following instruction: *“You shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel”* (2 Kgs 9:7). Jehu proceeds to kill Jehoram, Ahab’s son and king of Israel, Ahaziah, the son-in-law of Ahab and king of Judah, Jezebel, the seventy sons of Ahab, Ahaziah’s forty-two brothers, and all others related and allied to Ahab (2 Kgs 9-10).

3. The house of Jehu – 2 Kgs 10:30. God rewards Jehu's faithful purging of Ahab from Israel by promising that his house would rule to the fourth generation. This is fulfilled in Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II and Zechariah, all of whom were wicked and worthless rulers. When Zechariah died, *"this was the word of the Lord which He spoke to Jehu, saying, 'Your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.'* **And so it was**" (2 Kgs 15:12).
4. The time of the captivity – Dn 9:2. Even someone as close to God as was Daniel refers to getting information from the writings of Jeremiah: *"I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord, given through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem"* (cf. Jer 25:11-12; 29:10). This seventy-year period is incredibly short, considering that it addresses the reconstitution of a whole nation fragmented by Babylonian exile.

2. Long-Range Prophecies

- A. Sometimes great stretches of time are interposed between God's prophecies and their fulfillment. This is inconsequential as to the certainty of the prophecy made, for God doesn't unnecessarily procrastinate or forget His promises.

1. He is not "slack" concerning His promises – 2 Pet 3:9.
2. *"For I am the Lord. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will no more be postponed; for in your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word and perform it"* (Ezk 12:25). These complaining rebels failed to understand that God was delaying for their sakes, for they did not realize that they and not the Babylonians would be the targets of His wrath.
3. God's delays are always for the benefit of man. Yet unbelieving men will always take advantage of those delays, saying, *"Where is the promise of His coming?"* (2 Pet 3:4), or *"God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see it"* (Ps 10:11).

- B. Long-range prophecies concerning individuals:

1. The man who rebuilt Jericho – Jsh 6:26. This curse upon rebuilding Jericho comes to pass some 500-600 years later in the death of Hiel's two sons (1 Kgs 16:34). Here is a case where certainly the subject would not have wanted to deliberately fulfill the prophecy (cf. Jeroboam's wife, 1 Kgs 14:12).
2. Josiah mentioned by name – 1 Kgs 13:2. In the midst of Jeroboam's establishment of apostate Israel, an unnamed prophet pronounces judgment against the altar that has been built in Bethel. The prophet a) names Josiah, b) indicates he will be of the house of David (long after the house of Jeroboam will be extinguished), and c) foretells that Josiah will defile the altar with the bones of idolatrous priests. This comes to pass some 300 years later (2 Kgs 23:16). Note that the men of the city had remembered the prophecy and had preserved the tomb of the prophet who issued it (2 Kgs 23:17-18). What must Josiah have felt when he was made aware that both he and his actions were prophesied long before?!
3. Cyrus named as liberator from captivity – Is 44:28; 45:1, 3. Almost 200 years before Cyrus is born, Isaiah refers to him not by some vague, amorphous generalization but *calls him by name*. Furthermore, Isaiah tells of something that heathen conquerors of the time were not disposed to do: let their enemies go back to their homelands and rebuild their cities and cultures. Homer Hailey comments on this prophecy:

“Cyrus is simply an instrument in Jehovah’s service; the emphasis is on Jehovah’s carrying out His plan through him. The Cyrus Cylinder clearly indicates that he was a polytheist and not a monotheist ... His world conquest was not his own doing, but the work of Jehovah. Through Jehovah, Cyrus was able to loose the loins of kings, to strip them of their power, reducing them to weakness ... The power by which Cyrus conquered was the power of Jehovah; God was doing what He had said He would do” (*Commentary on Isaiah*, p. 378).

C. Long-range prophecies concerning cities and nations:

1. God does not confine His prophecies to Israel; i.e., to events that can be manipulated and controlled by people who have ulterior interests in portraying God as supernaturally powerful. God’s prophecies reflect that truth that He is in control of *all nations* and determines their future well-being based on their response to Him.
2. Note the following citations dealing with prophecies against foreign powers: Nineveh (Jonah; Nahum); Edom (Obadiah); Egypt (Is 19-20; Jer 46; Ezk 29-32); Babylon (Is 13-14:23; 21:1-10; 47; Jer 50-51); Tyre (Is 23; Ezk 26-28); Moab (Is 15-16; Jer 48; Ezk 25:8-11); Ammon (Jer 49:1-6; Ezk 21:28-32; 25:1-7).
3. This list is by no means exhaustive. Other judgments are made in great detail. But note the variety of times and places in which the prophecies are given. Biblical prophecies are not dark sayings that could manipulatively be construed as vaguely resembling something that later occurred. Those who dismiss the truthfulness and divine origin of the Scriptures must do their own manipulating to avoid the obvious impact of prophetic evidence.

Questions:

1. How might modern critics explain away prophecies written hundreds of years in advance?
2. What does God not do, given that He is not man (1 Sam 15:29)?
3. What is a proverbial description of dishonorable death (1 Kgs 14:11; 16:4; 21:23-24)?

Prophets and Prophecy

Lesson 7: Messianic Prophecies (1)

1. Centrality of Messianic Prophecies

- A. All OT prophecies, while valid in their own right, are peripheral to the major strand of prophecy: the coming of a Savior.
- B. God began speaking of this event thousands of years before it came to pass. We find a procession of anticipatory statements that are gradually refined through later prophecies and events. From the vantage point of the original recipients, many of the prophecies were only curious and tantalizing, lacking in complete clarity (cf. 1 Pet 1:11-12).
- C. The several hundred Messianic prophecies and allusions had their desired effect: by the time Jesus came, the people were intensely filled with anticipation and expectation.

2. Following the Messianic Trail

A. Early prophecies:

- 1. Gn 3:15 – This is the first prophecy of salvation and it is spoken to the serpent, identified later in the Scriptures as Satan, the adversary of man. The prophecy specifies the ultimate defeat of the serpent by the seed of woman, the very one whom Satan had enticed and subverted. Conflict is also highlighted in this prophecy: enmity would exist between the seed of woman and the seed of the serpent, and eventually the tension would lead to open conflict and the serpent's demise (but not without injury to the seed of woman).
- 2. Abrahamic prophecies. The prophecy later narrows from potentially any of Eve's offspring to a specific descendant: Abraham. The first recorded promise is Gn 12:3: *"And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* As time goes by, God makes it clear that it is a chain of descendants which will lead to the Messiah rather than Abraham directly (cf. Gn 17:7, 21; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).

B. The selection of the families of Jesse and David.

- 1. Gn 49:10 – Judah is culled from the others as the ruling tribe (cf. Ps 78:68).
- 2. Jesse's name is specifically connected to Messianic prophecy: *"a Rod from the stem of Jesse"* (Is 11:1); *"a root of Jesse"* (Is 11:10).
- 3. But it is David who is the central figure in a special Messianic covenant:
 - a. Ps 110:1/Mt 22:42-45 – David, the ancestor of the Messiah, calls his own descendant "Lord" in a passage that prefigures the Messiah's heavenly rule.
 - b. Ps 16:8-11/Ac 2:25-28 – David prophesies of the Messiah's resurrection, and Peter again quotes Ps 110:1 as an indicator of the Messiah's ascension (Ac 2:34-35). Note Peter's inspired commentary on David: *"Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne ..."* (Ac 2:30).

c. Am 9:11-12/Ac 15:15-18 – The covenant of David also included the universal nature of the Messianic program, and James quotes Amos in this regard: *“And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written ...”*.

C. When Herod directs the Jewish scholars to locate the prophesied city of the Messiah’s birth, they answer from Micah 5:2: *“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel”* (Mt 2:6). Bethlehem is known as “the city of David” (cf. Lk 2:11). Note also the similarity between Mic 5:2 and the more obscure prophecy of Gn 49:10.

3. The Seed is Christ

A. Rather than just arbitrarily selecting a certain nation, family or individual at a given point in time to bear the Messiah, God crafted a lengthy genetic chain linking the first humans with the Savior several thousand years later. This process, beyond the control or foresight of mere mortals, further substantiates the divine power lying behind human history and the Scriptures.

B. This genetic chain, the seed of woman, the seed of Abraham, the seed of David, etc., finds its fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth: *“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ”* (Gal 3:16).

Questions:

1. What is known to God from eternity (Ac 15:18)?
2. Who are the heirs of the promises to Abraham (Gal 3:29)?
3. What did the Spirit testify beforehand through the prophets (1 Pet 1:11)?
4. What good thing had God promised to the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jer 33:14-18)?
5. On what condition could the covenant be broken (Jer 33:20-22)?
6. What words associated with a king/kingdom are found in the various prophecies above?
7. Link Gn 3:15 with Gal 4:4. What is the connection?

Prophets and Prophecy

Lesson 8: Messianic Prophecies (2)

1. Discrepancies in New Testament Citations of Prophecy

A. Why are NT citations of prophecy not always word-for-word quotations from the OT?

1. Liberal scholars suggest evidence of bad memory, loose or sloppy references, or an author attempting to twist a prophecy to his own purposes. These we reject, for at their heart lies a fundamental unbelief in divine inspiration.
2. Many discrepancies of specific wording can be traced to the speaker referring to the Septuagint version of the OT while our modern translation of the OT comes from Hebrew manuscripts. (The Septuagint version is a Greek translation of the Hebrew OT, made in Alexandria, Egypt about 200 B.C.)

B. Why do NT passages occasionally seem to take the OT prophecy out of its original context?

1. Example: Mt 2:15 – When Joseph and Mary flee to Egypt with Jesus, Matthew explains the significance of this development: *“that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt I called My Son.’”*
 - a. This is a quotation of Hos 11:1 which refers to God’s deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The broader background of the passage is Hosea’s recovery of his wife, Gomer, from harlotry. There is no *apparent* reference to the Messiah, and certainly no detailed indication of a flight from Herod in Jesus’ infancy.
 - b. Again, referrals to such vague passages and declarations that they were fulfilled in Jesus has led liberal critics to declare NT writers to be biased and unforgivably subjective in their use of the OT.
2. However, the idea of “fulfillment” goes deeper than merely the prediction of a future event.
 - a. As He ultimately engineered human events toward a predetermined goal, God sometimes prefigured later events by direct prophecy and sometimes more vaguely in types and shadows.
 - b. While no one at the time of the original OT writing or even afterward would make a direct prophecy/fulfillment connection, God is telling us through the inspired NT writer that the subsequent event is of the same nature or principle as the earlier one. Thus while the flight of Jesus from Herod and His return from Egypt might not have *apparent* relation to Hos 11:1, if God says He prefigured the event in the period of Egyptian bondage, then that should be accepted at face value.
 - c. Therein lies the amazing unity of divine revelation. The story weaves in and out, criss-crossing back and forth through generations, being told and retold through various people and nations and finally culminating in the ultimate expression of all that went on before: the life and death of Jesus Christ.
3. We must also remember that many prophecies had an immediate, literal fulfillment with an additional long-term application. An example would be the prophecy in 2 Samuel 7, where

Solomon seems clearly to be the immediate subject but the Messiah the more distant and fuller meaning. Inspired writers do not hesitate to make application of such prophecies to Jesus (cf. Heb 1:5).

2. Jesus' Awareness of Old Testament Prophecy

A. Jesus came to fulfill prophecy – Mt 5:17-18.

1. "Destroy" – *kataluo*, "to destroy utterly; to overthrow completely" (Vine, Vol. 1, p. 302).
2. "Fulfill" –
 - a. 5:17 – *pleroo*, "to cause God's will (as made known in the law) to be obeyed as it should be, and God's promises (given through the prophets) to receive fulfillment" (Thayer, p. 518).
 - b. 5:18 – *ginomai*, "to come to pass, happen, of events ... Mt 5:18" (Thayer, p. 115).
3. The danger Jesus faced in restoring the proper meaning to the teaching of the Law was the accusation that He did not respect the Law and was trying to replace Mosaic precepts with His own ideas. This Jesus denies emphatically. In fact, He was the one honoring and defending the Law; it was the Jewish scholars who had corrupted it. Jesus affirms that He is the very fulfillment of the Law. All that the prophets anticipated and foretold was to find consummation in Jesus.

B. The declaration in Nazareth – Lk 4:16-21.

1. Jesus "*was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah,*" but "*He found the place where it was written*" and then reads Is 61:1-2.
2. With eyes fixed expectantly upon Him, Jesus says, "*Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*" (4:21). Grammatically, "is fulfilled" is perfect indicative passive, of which Spiros Zodhiates says, "the context of the Greek may emphasize either the completeness of the action or the finished results" (*The Complete Word Study New Testament*, p. 867).
3. In other words, Jesus claims that what Isaiah anticipated in his Messianic prophecy has reached its completeness and finality in Him. Such a claim from their "hometown boy," coupled with Jesus' castigation of their skepticism, fills them with murderous anger.

C. Jesus' post-resurrection exposition of the prophets – Lk 24:25-27.

1. Encountering two disciples traveling to Emmaus on the day of His resurrection, Jesus beholds their utter dejection and consternation at the day's events. Perhaps reflecting upon the past three years of teaching, Jesus chides them for mental dullness.
2. According to "*all that the prophets have spoken,*" Jesus asks them: "*Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?*" (24:25-26). That is, what has transpired was foretold, and these two disciples should have understood it.
3. Jesus then gives a prophetic overview of "*things concerning Himself*" (24:27). Jesus knew exactly who He was and understood the significance of His life relative to the Old Testament prophecies.

Questions

1. What is the original context of Jer 31:15, the passage Matthew cites as fulfilled in the massacre of the children of Bethlehem (Mt 2:16-18)?
2. Why did the Jews think that Jesus was trying to destroy the Law of Moses?
3. How likely is it that any given man could take it upon himself to fulfill all the Messianic prophecies of the OT?
4. After reading Is 61:1-2 in the synagogue in Nazareth, how does Jesus indicate that He will be rejected by the citizens of his hometown?
5. What attitude did the two disciples have regarding the prophets (Lk 24:25)?
6. How did the author of Hebrews use 2 Sam 7:14 in reference to Jesus (Heb 1:5)?

Prophets and Prophecy

Lesson 9: Messianic Prophecies (3)

1. Matthew's References to Fulfilled Prophecy

- A. "Matthew contains at least forty formal quotations; that is, quotations that are immediately evident as such, often being introduced by words such as 'that what was spoken ... might be fulfilled,' 'You have heard that it was said,' 'for so it is written by the prophet,' etc." (Hendriksen, *Commentary on Matthew*, p. 80).
- B. Various prophecies declared "fulfilled":
1. The virgin birth – Is 7:14/Mt 1:22-23. As studied previously, this is one of those prophecies that had a particular immediate reference; i.e., that Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, would be defeated within a short time and no longer threaten Judah. This was made known to Ahaz by reference to a child being born, "*for before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings*" (Is 7:16; for context see Is 7:1-6).
 2. The light upon Zebulun and Naphtali – Is 9:1-2/Mt 4:13-16. This refers to Jesus dwelling in Galilee and the Messianic light first dawning brightly in this region.
 3. The compassion of Jesus – Is 53:4/Mt 8:17. One of the greatest prophecies of the OT, the "servant song" of Is 52-53, is applied to Jesus. This prophecy speaks of the suffering to befall the Messiah and the reason for it: it is vicarious, on behalf of others, and not due to any real fault of the Messiah, Himself.
 4. Conflict arising from loyalty to Jesus – Mic 7:6/Mt 10:35-36. The original context is treachery and distrust among Israel in their downward spiral toward captivity. Jesus draws upon this statement and applies it to the division and persecution even within families because of Him.
 5. A humble, gentle Servant – Is 42:1-4/Mt 12:18-21. This passage clearly extends the scope of the Messiah's mission to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. It also reveals something of the character and demeanor of the Messiah: He would not be a political anarchist or the leader of a revolt. Revolutionary, yes. Rebel, no.
 6. Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem – Zech 9:9/Mt 21:5. This is not only an act of fulfillment, it is a statement about the character and station of the Messiah. He does not enter Jerusalem with an entourage, an army or with royal pomp. There has been no preparation, no rolling out of the red carpet, no welcome party of city officials. No, the Savior of mankind and Son of God comes in relative obscurity, riding on the foal of a donkey and accompanied by the common people who recognized and adored Him for His true qualities.

2. Prophecies Concerning Jesus' Death and Resurrection

- A. During the last week of Jesus' life in Jerusalem, events accelerate at a blinding pace. In anticipation of His crucifixion, over which later generations of Jews would stumble, many prophecies had been given which clearly identified Jesus of Nazareth as the long-awaited Messiah. Not only that, but the orchestration of events convince us that God's hand was in it all.

B. Note the following prophecies of the death:

1. The stone rejected by the builders – Ps 118:22-23/Mt 21:42. The Jewish leaders saw and listened to Jesus and discarded Him. They were opposed to everything He stood for. But God made this castoff the “*chief cornerstone*,” the heart and soul of the spiritual kingdom, the One by whom all others would be measured and added to the kingdom.
2. The scattering of the sheep – Zech 13:7/Mt 26:31. Jesus is well aware of how the events of His arrest will transpire and the effect it will have upon His disciples.
3. Numbered with the transgressors – Is 53:12/Lk 22:37. Jesus is aware that other details must yet be realized as foretold by OT prophets.
4. The actions of Judas and the chief priests – Zech 11:12/Mt 27:9-10. This prophecy is, as are several others, wholly outside the ability of Jesus to manipulate. Here the enemies of Jesus are acting in impulsive ways, Judas in throwing the betrayal money back and the priests deliberating on how to use the “blood money.” This passage has the difficult element of the prophecy being attributed to Jeremiah when it more specifically resembles Zechariah. Some scholars suggest a synthesis between the events of Jer 19 and the direct quote of Zechariah; others suggest a copyist error in the names.
5. Casting lots for Jesus’ clothes – Ps 22:18/Mt 27:35. The twenty-second Psalm, along with Is 53, are two of the strongest prophecies concerning the death of the Messiah. Each contributes different details of the nature of the death. It seems odd that the Jews would proceed with their plans in view of the prophecies, but such demonstrates how little of the OT they really knew.
6. The cry of Jesus – Ps 22:1/Mt 27:46. In this fulfillment Jesus simply acts without reference to the prophecy.
7. Jesus’ last words – Ps 31:5/Lk 23:46. How fitting that the last words uttered by Jesus were from Scripture. The Scriptures defined His life; He wrote the script before He ever came to the earth. And He followed the script to the letter, even when things were dark and painful. What a tremendous example He sets for us.

C. Self-interest vs. fulfillment – Mt 26:52-54. Jesus recognizes the difference between potential power and the will of God. What God *can* do and what He *wills* to do are often two different things. Jesus bows to the will of God expressed in prophecy, and He is willing to sacrifice Himself to uphold that will.

Questions:

1. How did Ahaz respond to God’s request for him to ask for a sign (Is 7:11-14)? How did God respond to him?
2. How was the suffering of Jesus perceived by unbelievers (Is 53:4)?
3. What connective statement to prophecy is missing in Mt 10:35-36 that is present in the other quotations?

4. What were the circumstances of Matthew's quotation of Is 42:1-4?
5. What demonstrates Jesus' divine knowledge in Mt 21:1-5?
6. Find one other place in the NT where Ps 118:22 is referred to.
7. What other prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus' crucifixion (cf. Jn 19:36-37)?

Prophets and Prophecy

Lesson 10: Other Kingdom Prophecies

1. The Early Days

A. The theme of fulfillment which so characterized the life of Jesus and was accelerated in His death and resurrection continues through the work of the apostles. Like Jesus, they seemed highly aware of their role in God's scheme, and they recognized the elements of OT prophecy that were coming to pass through their lives.

B. Prophecies in Acts:

1. The prophecy of Joel – Joel 2:28-32/Ac 2:16-21.

a. The consternation and curiosity raised by the coming of the Holy Spirit gives Peter the opportunity to preach. He begins by explaining that the phenomena are not some innovative or novel occurrence but only what the OT indicated hundreds of years previously.

b. Interestingly, new covenant prophecy was prophesied: *"Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy"* (Ac 2:17-18).

c. Finally, ancient prophecy, evidence through the life of Jesus, and now the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit are beginning to have their effect in softening the hearts of these obstinate people.

2. The opposition of the nations to God's plan – Ps 2:1-2/Ac 4:24-28. In their arrest and persecution of the Sanhedrin, the apostles saw the purposes of God unfolding. They were able to bear the suffering because they knew that 1) they served the Creator of the earth, 2) the prophecies of David indicated this would happen, and 3) the things happening were *"whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done."* There is great confirming power in prophecy.

3. The warning against fulfilling condemning prophecy – Hab 1:5/Ac 13:40-41. In the original prophecy of Habakkuk God warned of coming punishment by the Chaldeans. What He was going to do to Israel through them seemed impossible to the Jews, and they would reject warnings uttered through prophets. Paul uses this warning against the Jews of Antioch: *"Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you ..."* (Ac 13:40).

4. Turning to the Gentiles – Is 42:6; 49:6/Ac 13:47. The issue of accepting the Gentiles on an equal basis as the Jews becomes a major theme of the NT. Paul in the book of Romans extensively cites OT prophets. The book of Hebrews does as well. Cf. Rom 15:9-12 regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles as part of God's eternal scheme.

5. The tabernacle of David – Am 9:11-12/Ac 15:15-18. To conclude the debate on the acceptance of the Gentiles, James quotes Amos to the effect that God would restore the house of David and its ruling position. This would not be for the exaltation of Israel alone, but *"I will set it up so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name."* This prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus' reign and in preaching the gospel to the

Gentiles.

6. The obstinacy of the Jews – Is 6:9-10/Ac 28:26-27. Paul cites Isaiah in reference to the Jewish leaders in Rome as they dispute his presentation of the gospel. The original prophecy describes the Israelites in Isaiah's day some 700+ years previously. Every time the spirit of the prophecy is repeated, the prophecy is "fulfilled."

2. Other Prominent Prophetic Citations and Fulfillments

- A. Christ's gifts of servant-leaders – Ps 68:18/Eph 4:8ff. David's psalm concerning God's victory over His enemies is applied by Paul to the conquering Christ. Paul sees Jesus ascending to heaven and dispensing "gifts" – spiritual leaders – to help men mature.
- B. The just shall live by faith – Hab 2:3-4/Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:37-38. Habakkuk contrasts the proud man who seeks his own way and those who live and walk by faith. While faith has always been a requirement of God, it is not until the new covenant that the concept fully takes shape. In Romans it is tied directly to the gospel as the power of God unto salvation. In Galatians faith is contrasted with salvation by works of law. In Hebrews the passage is applied to perseverance and steadfastness.
- C. A new covenant – Jer 31:31-34/Heb 8:8-12. Over 600 years previously Jeremiah had foreseen a day when God would make a new covenant with Israel. Jeremiah does not mention Gentiles in this passage, for it is foreign to his purpose. Many other prophecies, especially Isaiah's, mention the world-wide nature of the new covenant. This covenant would differ from the one made at Sinai in various respects.
- D. A remnant of the Jews saved – Rom 9-11.
 1. Hosea 1:10; 2:23/Rom 9:25-26. In the Hosea passages, unfaithful Israel is under consideration. The prophet sees the day when Israel would be restored. There was no reason for Jews to feel superior to Gentiles who were entering the kingdom, for they, too, had become disobedient unto God.
 2. Is 10:22-23/Rom 9:27-28. Note the recurring prophetic phrase, "*And it shall come to pass in that day ...*" (Is 10:20). Four times in this passage Isaiah mentions a "remnant" of Israel returning and being blessed by God. It was difficult for Jews to accept that the Messianic kingdom included something less than all genetic Israelites. They took this to be a reflection upon God's faithfulness, and so many rejected the gospel. But Paul argues that God only intended to save a remnant of Israel, for only a remnant would be found faithful in the end.
 3. Is 1:9/Rom 9:29. Again, there is no ground for Israelite boasting and unrealistic expectations. So wicked did Israel become that they nearly became another Sodom and Gomorrah, and the only reason they didn't is because God graciously preserved a remnant of faithful ones to carry on His redemptive purpose.
 4. Is 52:7/Rom 10:15 – Paul affirms that the gospel had gone forth to the Jews with God's blessings and credentials even as Isaiah indicated in the Servant songs.
 5. Is 53:1/Rom 10:16 – But Isaiah had also indicated that the "report" or the message of Christ would be heard and rejected by those who should have recognized it.

6. Ps 19:4/Rom 10:18 – Paul cites Ps 19, which talks about the clear message of creation that there is a Creator, to indicate that the Jews had an equally clear message through the prophets of the Messiah to come. They just didn't pay attention to it.
7. Dt 32:21/Rom 10:19 – Again, the context of the prophecy is the disobedience of Israel: *“they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faith”* (Dt 32:20). God says He will move Israel to jealousy by offering His blessings to a nation they would despise.
8. Is 65:1-2/Rom 10:20-21 – The Gentiles had lived in their own way through eons of human history, but even among them men and women of faith would respond to the gospel. Even so, Israel (as a whole) would remain obstinate and rebellious.
9. Is 29:10; Ps 69:22-23/Rom 11:8-10 – The “elect” or the remnant of Jews have indeed been blessed by God according to prophecy. On the other hand, *“the rest were hardened”* (Rom 11:7), also as prophesied in the OT.
10. Is 59:20; 27:9/Rom 11:26-27 – “All” Israel, that faithful remnant which truly represents the people of God, will be saved under the new covenant of forgiveness. The main point of Paul's argument: *“God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew”* (Rom 11:2); all has happened according to prophecy.

Questions:

1. How and why did God “visit the Gentiles” (Ac 15:14)?
2. How does Paul refer to the prophecy of Isaiah in Ac 13:47?
3. What prophecy did Herod and Pontius Pilate fulfill? How did they do so?
4. Who spoke through Isaiah in Ac 28:25?
5. What is different in the wording between Ps 68:18 and Eph 4:8?
6. What justified God in making a new covenant with Israel (Heb 8:9)?
7. How does Paul feel about God as he reviews the prophecies relative to the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles (cf. Rom 11:33-35)?

Prophets and Prophecy

Lesson 11: Prophets and Prophecy in the New Covenant

1. Prophecy Did Not Cease at the Cross

A. Joel's prophecy of prophets to come – Ac 2:17-18. Peter says Joel foretold the events that were commencing on that Pentecost day. Of course, what Joel had foreseen was not fully operational in the preaching of the apostles on that day. But through their work as duly authorized representatives of the Lord, these things would be forthcoming.

1. "In the case of the OT prophets their messages were very largely the proclamation of the divine purposes of salvation and glory to be accomplished in the future; the prophesying of the NT 'prophets' was both a preaching of the divine counsels of grace already accomplished and the foretelling of the purposes of God in the future." (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers)
2. The apostles were by definition prophets, albeit a special class of prophets chosen and commissioned by the Lord for a specific task (Mt 28:19-20). All apostles, we might say, are prophets, but not all prophets are apostles.

B. Through the spiritual gifts imparted by the apostles, other Christians would be empowered with the ability to prophesy.

1. Disciples in Tyre "*told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem*" (Ac 21:4).
2. Philip the evangelist had "*four virgin daughters who prophesied*" (Ac 21:9).
3. "*A certain prophet named Agabus*" came from Judea to Caesarea to warn Paul of what lay ahead (Ac 21:10-11).
4. In the list of spiritual gifts prophecy is named (1 Cor 12:10), and Paul urges the brethren to "*pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy*" (1 Cor 14:1; cf. 14:39). In the Corinthian assembly they were to "*let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge*" (1 Cor 14:29). This should not be considered uncommon in that day given Paul's observation in 1 Cor 4:17 (cf. Rom 12:6).

C. Thus, the combined revelatory work of the apostles and prophets would establish the church in its early days with both the local revelation needed as well as the permanently inspired record we now have in the Scriptures: "*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone ... by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets ...*" (Eph 2:19-20; 3:3-5).

2. Prophetic Declarations in the NT

A. Short-term prophecies:

1. Paul's blinding of Elymas – Ac 13:10-11. This is the only miracle of the NT that displays a

debilitative purpose. In the OT, many prophecies pronounced death upon God's enemies, but not so in the gospel age.

2. The prophecy of Agabus – Ac 21:11. Only a few days later, Paul was taken captive as indicated.
3. The safety of the ship's crew – Ac 27:22-25, 42-44. Against the most unlikely circumstances, the events unfolded just as Paul had said.

B. Medium-range prophecies: There are a number of prophecies concerning the rise of false teaching and persecution that would plague the church in the future.

1. Ac 20:29-30 – *“But I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”*
2. 1 Tim 4:1ff – *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons ...”*
3. 2 Tim 3:1ff – *“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come ... And from such people turn away!”*
4. 2 Tim 3:13 – *“But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse ...”*
5. 1 Pet 4:12, 17 – *“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you ... for the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?”*

C. Long-range prophecies:

1. The destruction of Jerusalem – Mt 23:37-24:34(?); Lk 21:5-33(?).
 - a. This prophecy is partially obscure, just like the prophecies of the OT were obscure until they were fulfilled and explained in later revelation. Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, some 40 years after Jesus uttered these words. Jesus, Himself, appeals to the prophecies of Daniel in pronouncing doom upon Jerusalem (Mt 24:15).
 - b. But there is no revelatory explanation of Jesus' words. It appears that there is a dual meaning to His prophecy: part to be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and part that looks beyond this to the final coming. Thus the destruction of Jerusalem serves as an antetype of the universal judgment to come upon all men.
2. The return of Jesus – Just as the OT closed with many lingering prophecies of a coming Messiah, so the NT closes with the promises of Jesus' eventual return.
 - a. Jn 14:2-3 – *“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”*
 - b. Ac 1:11 – *“This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”*
 - c. 1 Th 4:15-16 – *“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and*

remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel ...”

3. The destruction of creation – Heb 1:11-12; 2 Pet 3:7-13. Peter writes *“that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior ...”* (3:2). The concept of destruction wasn't unique or novel in the epistle. God's patience would eventually end and the day of the Lord will come, resulting in the heavens and the earth being consumed with fire.
4. The judgment – Ac 17:31; Rom 2:5-10; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 5:10. No doctrine is clearer than the return of the Lord to judge all men based on the lives they have led. Each generation lives in the knowledge that Jesus may or may not return at any moment. The uncertainty of the time of His return is an added incentive for all to live responsibly.

3. Limitations of Prophecy

We should note that neither prophets under the Old or New Covenants had comprehensive knowledge of future events. Prophecy was not given for the well-being of the prophet or to satisfy his curiosity but rather for the accomplishment of God's eternal scheme. Thus Paul often bases his future plans on the unknown will of God.

Questions:

1. What did Paul believe in Ac 27:25?
2. In what sense does Paul mean that the mystery “in other ages was not made known to the sons of men” (Eph 3:5)? Does this mean the gospel was not the subject of prophecy?
3. What was the result of a prophet's speech in the assembly (1 Cor 14:3, 5)?
4. What makes Jesus' prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction so difficult to apply correctly?
5. How is the new covenant similar to the old covenant relative to the future fulfillment of Messianic prophecy?
6. Cite two NT passages on what attitude we should have relative to the Lord's return.

Prophets and Prophecy

Lesson 12: Abuse of Prophecy

1. The Mystery Revealed

- A. When prophecy had not yet reached a state of fulfillment and its meaning was not yet fully illuminated, the term “mystery” is attached to it. It was a mystery to the human mind because God’s purposes could not be anticipated, and He had not yet completely explained Himself. *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”* (Rom 11:33)
- B. But the NT speaks consistently of the “mystery” being *revealed*:
1. *“Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations ...”* (Rom 16:25-26; cf. Col 1:26; Eph 3:3-7).
 2. What was even hidden to the men who originated the prophecies gradually became clear by the preaching of John, the teaching of Jesus and the works He performed.
- C. Thus, while men were “in the dark” before the prophecies were fully realized and could be excused for not seeing clearly, they are without excuse when Jesus comes flashing divine credentials and explaining how He, Himself, is the fulfillment of prophecy. And men are without excuse today who ignore or pervert the prophecies to their own ends.

2. Wresting the Scriptures

- A. God’s communication with man is not “tamper-proof”; anything with legitimate meaning and purpose, including the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, can be used unto evil ends. Peter warns of the untaught and unstable twisting the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pet 3:16).
- B. The OT prophecies are fertile grounds for such abuse. Various systems of false teaching, including premillennialists and Jehovah’s Witnesses, are founded upon corruptions of prophecy. In fact, the foreign policy of the United States regarding the nation of Israel rests upon false assumptions from Scripture.
- C. Several things contribute to this:
1. Dissatisfaction with plainly stated fulfillment. Greedy, self-centered men who vie for money and prestige find God’s scheme boring and unmarketable. The prophecies have to be revamped and modernized to reflect current events in order to stimulate donations and sell books. The current “Left Behind” series of bestsellers by Tim LaHaye are a prime example to prophecy being turned into profitable fiction. The book of Revelation is constantly reworked to reflect the world’s changing landscape.
 2. The figurative language of the prophets, combined with the apocalyptic imagery of some OT prophecies, can easily be twisted to fit current events.
 - a. Some will literalize figurative passages, such as *“the wolf shall dwell with the lamb ... the nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole ...”* (Is 11:6-8). This is cited to support the

idea of a literally revamped earth wherein all dangerous elements are removed.

- b. Others will figurize literal passages. For example, Isaiah plainly addresses the “king of Babylon” when he says, *“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground ... Those who see you will gaze at you, and consider you, saying: ‘Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities ...?’”* (Is 13:1; 14:4, 12, 16-17). In spite of this, many take an unwarranted view that the language here applies to Satan.
 - c. Others simply ignore the clear NT fulfillment and state that the prophecy yet has future application. While the church is the clear fulfillment of all OT prophecy concerning the coming kingdom, premillennialists are reduced to denying that Jesus accomplished His mission to establish a kingdom. They assert that the kingdom prophecies were put on hold due to the unforeseen rejection of the Messiah and that the church was substituted as a temporary measure until the kingdom program could be resumed in the future.
3. Unfortunately, such corruption succeeds because people are ignorant of what the Scriptures actually teach, and because they would rather believe the titillating, exciting and culturally relevant interpretations than the clear inspired meaning.

3. Letting the Bible Interpret Itself

- A. The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible. If we study diligently and are attuned to God’s explanations of things, we will find the solution to much prophetic difficulty.
 1. When Daniel saw the vision of the ram with two horns and the goat, the angel Gabriel gives him the meaning: *“The ram which you saw, having the two horns – they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king ...”* (who, from secular history, we know to be Alexander the Great – Dn 8:20-21). Thus, if someone comes along and claims to see the expansion of China, the breakup of the USSR, the rise of Gorbachev, Reagan or any other modern political leader in Daniel 8, we can immediately know such interpretations are false.
 2. The Ethiopian treasurer was unsure of the meaning of Is 53 as he read without divine interpretation. But when Philip makes the inspired application to Jesus, he forever settles the issue (Ac 8:30-35). No one has the right to come along later and say that this OT prophecy applies to anyone else, now or ever.
 3. It is very common to hear people today speak of the “signs of the times,” indicators (they think) of the imminent return of Jesus. Jesus did say, *“And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars ... For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places ...”* (Mt 24:6-7). But Jesus also explained Himself: *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come”* (Mt 24:14). He spoke of fleeing from Judea to the mountains (24:16), the difficulties of pregnant and nursing mothers (24:19) and their flight not being in winter or on a Sabbath (24:20). He is clearly not speaking of a final judgment but the horrific destruction to be wrought upon Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70.
- B. This is not to say that interpreting prophecy is always easy or clear cut, but there are certain principles which, if followed, certainly help prevent wild, speculative theories. Some of these

are:

1. Don't haphazardly and indiscriminately make language figurative.
2. Consider the original setting of a prophetic passage. Does it have a bearing upon the meaning of the prophecy?
3. Respect the meanings of words. We are not at liberty to ignore the common definitions of words and make them mean anything we choose. Prophecies were given in a certain cultural setting and used certain items or phrases not common to us. It takes effort to discover the meaning of rods and roots, of shepherds and sheep, of tabernacles and temples, of the moon turning to blood and stars falling from heaven, etc.
4. Stop where the Scriptures warrant stopping. Don't indulge in speculative ideas or wander into areas where revelation is scarce or non-existent. There is nothing wrong with curiosity until it becomes infatuation.

C. Let us be cautious, studious and balanced as we seek to understand and apply the prophecies of God's word.

"Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand ... For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?" (Is 14:24, 27)

Questions:

1. How was the "mystery" revealed? What did Paul do with the knowledge he had?
2. What false prophetic notions underlie our support of modern Israel?
3. Why are people so enamored with prophetic portions of Scripture?
4. How is Eph 3:10-11 helpful in answering premillennial denials of the kingdom?
5. Are conditions in the world any worse today than in times past? Explain.