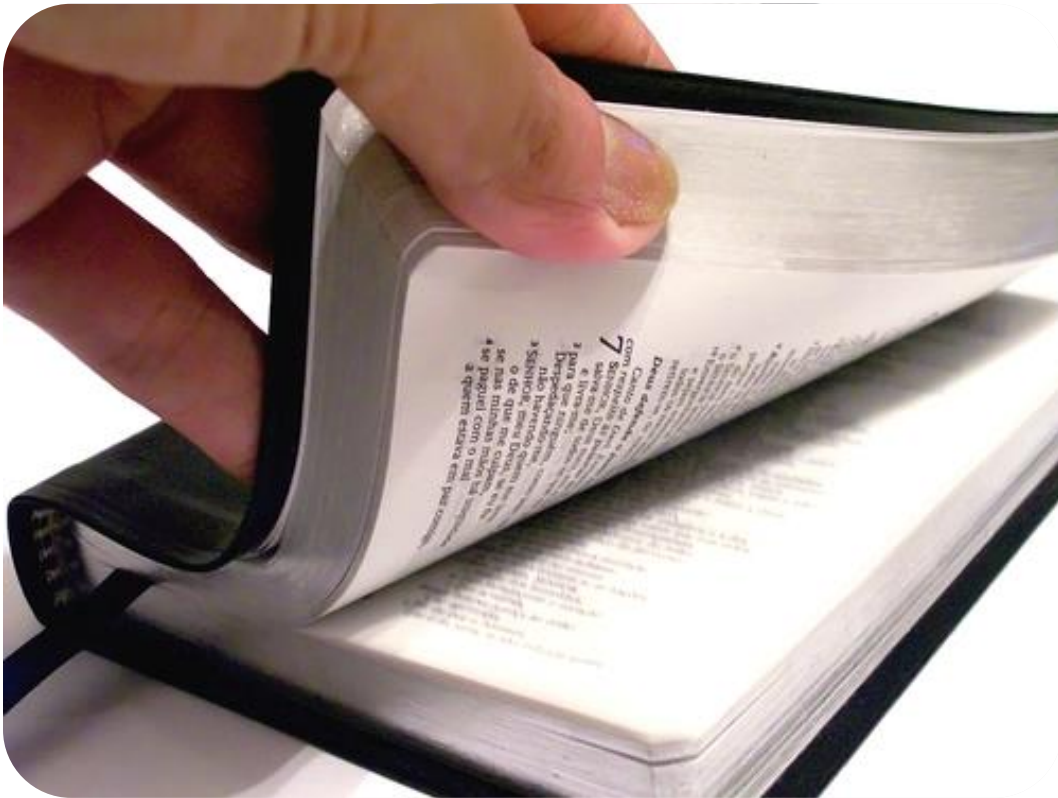


# Prophets and Prophecy



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## I. WHY THIS TOPIC IS IMPORTANT

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- A. It shows that God is a covenant (promise) keeper, and how he remained faithful to the Old Covenant even when Israel failed to keep its part.
- B. It shows how God is moving history toward the blessing of his people, and the exclusive worship due him.
- C. It discloses how God chastens his people when they choose to live outside his will.
- D. It provides insights into both the first and second coming of the true Messiah.
- E. It gives thrilling details about the future Messianic Kingdom and what it will be like when King Jesus reigns on earth.

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## II. HOW TO READ THE OT PROPHETS

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- A. Review the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 28)
- B. Recognize that authors often jump back and forth between God's coming judgment on Israel and its future blessings in the Messianic Kingdom
- C. OT Prophets do not use NT terms for future events.
  - 1. "Day of the Lord" is a general term for Israel's future blessings (terms such as Second Coming, Rapture, Millennium, etc., are unknown to authors).
  - 2. The term "Day of the Lord" was a general term for God's future kingdom where the Messiah will reign on earth and Israel will be blessed as promised in the Abrahamic covenant.
- D. Recognize poetic genre (center justified text).
  - 1. Authors often use "word pictures" rather than hard facts.
  - 2. Example: Obadiah 1:4 "*'Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,' declares the LORD.*" → a reference to the Edomites who lived in the mountainous regions east of Arabah with elevations up to 5,000 feet, and their arrogance toward Israel.
- E. Use sound commentaries to better understand symbolisms and historical backgrounds.
  - 1. Example: Why was Ezekiel was commanded to lie on left side for 390 days (Ezek. 4:5, 9)?
  - 2. Answer: Each day symbolized a year (v. 6). Israel in the north was accountable during this span of time whose beginning and ending are uncertain (MacArthur 899).

3. Know certain key events such as the period of the kings, the conquering of kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians, the conquering of the kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians, the period of the Exile in Babylon, the destruction and rebuilding of the temple, etc.

### III. THE ROLE OF THE PROPHET

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- A. The biblical term "prophet" (Heb. *nabhi'*, *naw-bee'*) refers to one who *speaks for another* (Exod. 7:1-2). The role of the prophet was to speak for God.
- B. Non-Writing & Writing Prophets
1. Four non-writing prophets → Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha.
  2. Sixteen writing prophets:
    - a) Four Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah (Lamentations), Ezekiel, Daniel
    - b) Twelve Minor Prophets which were grouped together by the Hebrews because they were small and as separate rolls might have become lost.
- C. Other biblical terms for prophets are:
1. Seer: The mode of receiving divine revelation by "seeing." See 1 Sam. 9:9-19; 2 Sam. 15:27; 24:11, etc.
  2. Man of God: common term used for a prophet emphasizing his holy calling, moral character and divine ministry. See Deut.33:1; 1 Sam. 9:6; 2 Kings 4:9, etc.
  3. Servant of the Lord: This title emphasizes the holy relationship between Yahweh and his faithful messengers. See Deut. 34:5; Josh. 1:1, 13, 15; Judges 2:8; 2 Chron. 24:6, etc.
  4. Messenger of the Lord: The term is used for both messenger and angel. Just as angels were messengers for God, so too were prophets. See Hag. 1:13, Mal. 3:1; 2 Chron. 36:15-16; Isa. 44:26.
- D. Old Testament prophets sometimes received their messages (oracles<sup>1</sup>) from God through dreams, visions, or trances (Freeman 40-41, 53).
- E. Types of Oracles (Hill and Walton 409)
1. Indictment oracles: descriptions of the offences.
  2. Judgment oracles: description of punishment coming because of the offense.
  3. Instruction oracles: how the recipients were to conduct themselves.
  4. Aftermath of hope oracles: developments after the judgment or hope for deliverance and restoration.
- F. Their Functions: The three basic functions of the prophets in Israel were to be:

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<sup>1</sup> Many people in the ancient Greco-Roman world sought oracles, which were "the response of a god to a question asked him by a worshipper or oracular shrine" for advice and the prediction of future events. Oracles <<http://www.ozmore.com/greek/oracles.html>>.

1. Preachers: Expounded and interpreted the Mosaic law.
  2. Predictors: They predicted judgment, and deliverance.
  3. Watchmen: They watched over the nation and warned the people (Laney).
- G. Their Pattern: The prophets served as prosecuting attorneys. They represented God in bringing a case against a nation guilty of violating the Mosaic covenant. They did this by:
1. Elaborating on the stipulations of the covenant.
  2. Prosecuting the people for breaking the covenant.
  3. Confronting the nation with judgment--the cursings of the covenant (see Deut. 28:15-68. It was the result of Israel's disobedience to the covenant that the prophets appeared on the scene as prosecuting attorneys in behalf of Yahweh).
- H. Their Lawsuit Speeches: They acted as prosecuting attorneys by using lawsuit speeches. A lawsuit speech in which a legal complaint is brought against the people of Israel for their violation of the stipulations of the covenant. The lawsuit speech has frequently occurring elements:
1. Summons
 

*Jer. 2:1-3 "The word of the LORD came to me: "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown. Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them," declares the LORD.*
  2. Accusation
 

*Jer. 2:8b "The prophets prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols.*

*Jer. 2:9 "Therefore I bring charges against you again," declares the LORD. "And I will bring charges against your children's children."*

*Jer. 2:11b "...my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols.*

*Jer. 2:13 "They have forsaken me..."*
  3. Warning
 

*Jer. 4:5-6 "Announce in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem and say: 'Sound the trumpet throughout the land!' Cry aloud and say: 'Gather together! Let us flee to the fortified cities!' Raise the signal to go to Zion! Flee for safety without delay! For I am bringing disaster from the north, even terrible destruction."*

## IV. FORMER AND LATTER PROPHETS

The Hebrew Bible consists of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Prophets are divided into two groups:

- A. Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

- B. Latter (Writing) Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets which were grouped together by the Hebrews because they were small and as separate rolls might have become lost (Freeman 135).

## V. ISRAEL'S SPIRITUAL CONDITION

- A. Israel<sup>2</sup> before the Exile
1. Worshipped idols.
  2. Abandoned the Law & Yahweh.
  3. Lived like pagan nations.
- B. Israel during the Exile
1. Discouraged.
  2. Spiritually lost.
  3. No hope.
- C. Israel after the Exile
1. Momentarily revitalized.
  2. Worshipped God outwardly only.
  3. Extremely legalistic.

## VI. TRUE AND FALSE PROPHETS

- A. False Prophets
1. A false prophet was motivated by self-interest and a desire for acceptance and popularity.
  2. A false prophet wanted popular acceptance so much that he approved the sins of the people and their moral wickedness. He foretold peace and security to Israel when they were about to be judged for their disobedience.
  3. A false prophet was self-appointed.
  4. A false prophet sometimes spoke in the name of a pagan god.
  5. A false prophet would attempt to authenticate their words with divination (the practice of attempting to foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge by occult or supernatural means), sorcery (the art, practices, or spells of a person who is supposed to exercise supernatural powers through the aid of evil spirits; black magic; witchery), and the like (Jer. 29:8-9; Deut. 18:9-14).
  6. A false prophet prophesied for money (Micah 3:5, 11)

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<sup>2</sup> The term "Israel" as used here refers to the collective nation of Israel, whether in total or in the surviving post-exilic tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

7. A false prophet was a drunkard (Isa. 28:7).
8. A false prophet was profane and wicked (Jer. 23:11).
9. A false prophet conspired with others to deceive and defraud (Ezek. 22:25).
10. A false prophet was arrogant and treacherous (Zeph. 3:4).
11. A false prophet committed adultery and lived a lie (Jer. 23:14).
12. A false prophet spoke from his own thoughts, not the Lord's (Ezek. 13:2; Jer. 23:16)

#### B. True Prophets

1. A true prophet was appointed by God.
2. A true prophet always used the prophetic formula, "...says the Lord.
3. A true prophet spoke only in the name of the Lord (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20).
4. A true prophet spoke only by revelation from God or inspiration (See 2 Pet. 1:20-21).
5. A true prophet could be identified by the testimony of his own moral character. The character of the prophet would be consistent with the holy and righteous nature of God as He revealed himself to Moses.

#### C. Nine Biblical Tests of a True Prophet

Some of the tests of a true prophet could be duplicated by false prophets (signs, miracles, speaking in God's name, etc.) so it was important to know that no single test was sufficient to distinguish between true and false prophets (Freeman 102-111).

1. A true prophet speaks only in the name of the Lord (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20).
2. A true prophet spoke only by revelation and inspiration.
3. A true prophet's life had high moral character.
4. A true prophet is conscious of a definite call experience (1 Sam. 3; Amos 7:14-15). The true prophet never sought the office on his own initiative.
5. A true prophet's message was authenticated with signs and miracles (Exod. 4:1-9; Josh. 3:7-13; 1 Sam. 12:16ff; Isa. 7:14; 1 Kings 22:28; Ezek. 4-5; Amos 8:1-3).
6. A true prophet's message was to be in harmony with previous revelations from God (Deut. 13:1-3).
7. A true prophet's message had historical confirmation (Deut. 18:21-22; Jer. 28; 1 Kings 22).
8. A true prophet's message had high moral and spiritual content.
9. A true prophet's message was recognized by others as coming from God (Ezek. 2:3-7).

## VII. THE LANGUAGE OF PROPHECY

There were essentially three methods by which the prophets delivered their messages.

- A. Oral: Preaching or proclaiming God's word (1 Kings 22; 2 Sam. 12). The prophets often used symbolism; figures of speech, such as simile, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole, personification, parables, allegory, and metaphor.
- B. Written words (Scripture).
- C. Symbolic acts.
1. Jeremiah wore a yoke around his neck through the streets to depict the impending Babylonian bondage (Jer. 27—28).
  2. Hosea was commanded to marry a prostitute to symbolize the adulterous unfaithfulness of Israel (Hos. 1—3).
  3. Isaiah walked naked and barefoot as a sign to Egypt and Ethiopia of their fate at the hands of the Assyrians (Isa. 20:1-6).
  4. Ezekiel was commanded to make a small model of the coming siege on Jerusalem and to lie on his side for a 390 days to depict of Israel's punishment for its sins (Ezek. 4:1-8).
  5. Ahijah upon meeting Jeroboam, tore his garment into 12 pieces symbolizing the division of the Nation of Israel (I Kings 11:30 ff).

D. How to Interpret Symbolic Acts

Example of Symbolic Act: Ezekiel is told to eat the scroll (Ezek. 2:8--3:3)

*"But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth."*  
Ezek. 2:8--3:3 (NIV)

1. Principle #1 – Keep the interpretation based on the context. Notice the context in Ezekiel 2:3; God's judgment of a rebellious people (Israel) is coming.
 

*"He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their fathers have been in revolt against me to this very day." Ezek. 2:3 (NIV)*
2. Principle #2 – The symbol may be explained in the context.
  - a) Scroll in Ezekiel 2:10 describes coming lament and mourning and woe.
  - b) Meaning of eating the scroll --> Explanation is not given in the context but it suggests that the prophet's message is to internalized. He is not reading a prepared script, like a radio announcer.
  - c) The stress on sweetness suggests the joy of receiving God's words (Ps. 119:103).
3. Principle No. 3 -- The symbol may also be used in other passages.
  - a) This same act is duplicated in Revelation 9:20-21.



Rev. 10:2, 8-11 (NIV) "He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

- b) The bitterness of John's eating the scroll in Revelation suggests the psychological impact of identifying himself with his readers and taking seriously what God says concerning the coming judgment (Tribulation) on the many peoples, nations, languages and kings (Mickelsen 276).
- c) It may also represent the perishing of the wicked (Job 20:5-14).  
*"...that the mirth of the wicked is brief, the joy of the godless lasts but a moment. Though his pride reaches to the heavens and his head touches the clouds, he will perish forever, like his own dung; those who have seen him will say, 'Where is he?' Like a dream he flies away, no more to be found, banished like a vision of the night. The eye that saw him will not see him again; his place will look on him no more. His children must make amends to the poor; his own hands must give back his wealth. The youthful vigor that fills his bones will lie with him in the dust. "Though evil is sweet in his mouth and he hides it under his tongue, though he cannot bear to let it go and keeps it in his mouth, yet his food will turn sour in his stomach..." Job 20:5-14*
- d) The lack of bitterness in Ezekiel suggests that Israel will not be destroyed but will someday be spiritually restored. This interpretation would be consistent with Romans 11:26 ("all Israel will be saved").

4. Principle No. 4: Don't force meaning into a symbol that isn't there

## VIII. CHRONOLOGY OF THE PROPHETS

The following table relates Old Testament prophets to the period of their ministry (Walton 152).

	To Israel	To Judah	To Foreign Nations
Assyrian Age	Amos ca. 760 Hosea ca. 760-730	Isaiah ca. 740-700 Micah ca. 737-690	Jonah ca. 770 (Nineveh)
Babylonian Age		Habakkuk ca. 630 Zephaniah ca. 627 Jeremiah ca. 627-580 Daniel ca.605-530 Ezekiel ca. 593-570	Nahum ca. 650 (Nineveh)
Persian Age		Haggai ca. 520 Zechariah ca. 520-518 Joel ca. 500 Malachi ca. 433	Obadiah ca. 500 (Edom)

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## IX. GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING PREDICTIVE PROPHECY

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Appreciation and recognition for the following is given to the article by this same title found in the NASB Precepts Version (NASB: Precept Ministries 2103-2105).

- A. The Greek word for prophecy, *propheteia* comes from two Greek words, *pro* meaning "forth" and *phēmi*, meaning "to speak."
  1. It means to speak forth the mind and council of God.
  2. According to this definition, all Scripture is in a sense prophecy.
  3. Concerning predictions about the future, the Bible says, "No prophecy (speaking the mind and council of God) was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). This truth is evident in the fact that, unlike the false prophecies made in other religions or by individuals such as Nostradamus, the Bible has never once been wrong – every time the Bible has predicted a future event, it happened exactly as Scripture said it would (Got Questions Ministries).
  
- B. There are two purposes for predictive prophecy.
  1. The chief purpose is to affect the conduct of those who hear the prophecy.
  2. Another purpose is met only when the prophecy is fulfilled. The fulfillment establishes confidence in God who miraculously foretold the events (John 13:19; 14:29; 16:4)
  
- C. Some scholars divide predictive prophecy into two categories.
  1. Forthtelling: messages about the present immediate time. Often this is a call to godly living in the light of prophecy yet to be fulfilled.
  2. Foretelling: prophecies containing a message about what God will do in the future.
  
- D. When a prophet spoke for God, the prophecy could refer to the following:
  1. A present or near fulfillment.
  2. A future fulfillment.
  3. A two-fold fulfillment: a near fulfillment and then a later, future fulfillment.
  
- E. As you read the prophecies of the Bible, keep in mind the following guidelines and discern whether the prophecy refers to one or more of the following six major prophetic events:
  1. The prophet's own time and/or a future time.
  2. The captivity and/or restoration of Israel or Judah.
  3. The first coming of Christ and any events connected with it. See the following "Prophecies of the Messiah."
  4. The second coming of Christ.
  5. The last days or end times (i.e. Tribulation Period and events leading up to it). See Isaiah 2:2; Acts 2:17; 2 Timothy 3:1; 2 Peter 3:3). See the following "Prophecies of the Messianic Kingdom."

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6. The New Heaven and New Earth (e.g. Isaiah 65:17; 66:22).
- F. The prophets did not always indicate intervals of time between events, nor did they always write their prophecies in chronological order.
1. Intervals: Old Testament prophecy could include the first and second comings of Christ without any indication of the time span between the two comings.
  2. Chronological order: In Isaiah 65:17-19 Isaiah is talking about the new heavens and the new earth (in which there is no death), and then in verses 20 he talks about a time when a youth dies at age 100. Chronologically, verse 20 comes before verses 17-19.
- G. Always approach a prophecy as literal (in its usual, ordinary meaning) unless one of the following occurs:
1. The grammatical context shows that it is figurative language by the use of similes, metaphors, parables, allegories, symbols, or types).
  2. A literal interpretation violates common sense, is contrary to what the author is saying, or is contrary to what the rest of Scripture teaches.
- H. When a prophetic passage cannot be taken literally, look for what the author is trying to convey through his figurative or symbolic language. To discern what the author is saying, look for answers in the following places:
1. Within the context of the book in which the passage appears
  2. In any other writings of that author
  3. In any other prophetic writings to which the author had access (for example, other prophetic books or passages in the Word of God)
- I. Remember that often when a prophet refers to future events, he does not use the future tense.
- J. When you interpret Scripture, consider the historical context of that writing, remembering that God was delivering his prophecy to a particular people at a particular time.
- Remember that the meaning of a specific prophecy could not always be understood by the prophet or by the people who heard the message. For example, Daniel could not understand what he had written, since it was to remain sealed until the end time (Daniel 12:8, 9).
- K. Remember that many New Testament prophecies include Old Testament quotations and allusions.
- L. When you study prophecy, watch for phrases which indicate periods of time. For example, look for:
1. "In the last days"
  2. "Day of the Lord"
  3. "Day of wrath"

4. "End of the age"

## X. PROPHECIES OF THE MESSIAH

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The prophets foretold many of the conditions and events surrounding the Messiah (Christ). Zechariah alone contains some of the clearest of these prophecies. The principle ones are:

- A. Messiah's First Coming
  1. Christ's entry into Jerusalem on a colt (Zech. 9:9).
  2. Christ's betrayal for thirty pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12-13).
  3. The piercing of his hands and feet (Zech. 12:10).
  4. The Messiah as a suffering servant (Zech. 9).
  5. Christ's rejection by Israel (Zech. 11).
  6. The death of the Shepherd (Zech. 12--13).
- B. Messiah's Second Coming
  1. Christ's return to the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:3-8).
  2. The conversion of Israel (Zech. 13).

## XI. PROPHECIES OF THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

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- A. Old Testament prophecies often centered on Israel's near future (relative to the prophet), and Israel's far future when it will experience glorification, salvation, and blessing in the kingdom age (Pentecost 351).
- B. The term "last day, days" when used in the OT (Isaiah 2:2, Hosea 3:5, and Micah. 4:1) often refers to the Messiah's coming and his subsequent reign on earth as King. Elwell explains how OT prophets often predict that "in the last day" (e.g. Amos 8:9-14; 9:11-15) the Lord will act in a mighty way to judge evil and redeem his people. Usually the order is judgment followed by redemption, which Elwell designates as F<sup>1</sup> (Future) and F<sup>2</sup> (Future) respectively (Elwell 670)
- C. NT authors use the various Greek translations of the expression (generally rendered "in the last days") in the belief that, since Jesus inaugurated his messianic kingship by his resurrection, the latter days have arrived in a decisive way, while at the same time the last days await their complete realization and final fulfillment at the end of the age (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; Jas. 5:3; 2 Pet. 3:3; and probably 1 Pet. 1:20; John 2:18). (Crossways Bibles 1243, Isa. 22).
- D. The Day of the Lord

1. The term "day" does not imply a twenty-four hour period, but rather a whole program of events (Pentecost 174).
2. The phrase "day of the Lord" usually identifies events that take place at the end of history (Isaiah 7:18-25) and is often closely associated with the phrase "that day." One key to understanding these phrases is to note that they always identify a span of time during which God personally intervenes in history, directly or indirectly, to accomplish some specific aspect His plan.
3. Most people associate the day of the Lord with a period of time or a special day that will occur when God's will and purpose for His world and for mankind will be fulfilled. Some scholars believe that the day of the Lord will be a longer period of time than a single day—a period of time when Christ will reign throughout the world before He cleanses heaven and earth in preparation for the eternal state of all mankind. Other scholars believe the day of the Lord will be an instantaneous event when Christ returns to earth to redeem His faithful believers and send unbelievers to eternal damnation.
4. The phrase "the day of the Lord" is used nineteen times in the Old Testament (Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 13:5, 30:3; Joel 1:15, 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7, 14; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi. 4:5) and four times in the New Testament (Acts 2:20; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10). It is also alluded to in other passages (Revelation 6:17; 16:14).
5. The Old Testament passages dealing with the day of the Lord often convey a sense of imminence, nearness, and expectation: "Wail, for the day of the Lord is near!" (Isaiah 13:6); "For the day is near, even the day of the Lord is near" (Ezekiel 30:3); "Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand" (Joel 2:1); "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision" (Joel 3:14); "Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is near" (Zephaniah 1:7). This is because the Old Testament passages referring to the day of the Lord often speak of both a near and a far fulfillment, as does much of Old Testament prophecy. Some Old Testament passages that refer to the day of the Lord describe historical judgments that have already been fulfilled in some sense (Isaiah 13:6-22; Ezekiel 30:2-19; Joel 1:15, 3:14; Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:14-18), while others refers to divine judgments that will take place toward the end of the age (Joel 2:30-32; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 4:1, 5).
6. The New Testament calls it a day of "wrath," a day of "visitation," and the "great day of God Almighty" (Revelation 16:14) and refers to a still future fulfillment when God's wrath is poured out on unbelieving Israel (Isaiah 22; Jeremiah 30:1-17; Joel 1-2; Amos 5; Zephaniah 1) and on the unbelieving world (Ezekiel 38-39; Zechariah 14). The Scriptures indicate that "the day of the Lord" will come quickly, like a thief in the night (Zephaniah 1:14-15; 2 Thessalonians 2:2), and therefore Christians must be watchful and ready for the coming of Christ at any moment.

7. Besides being a time of judgment, it will also be a time of salvation as God will deliver the remnant of Israel, fulfilling His promise that "all of Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26), forgiving their sins and restoring His chosen people to the land He promised to Abraham (Isaiah 10:27; Jeremiah 30:19-31, 40; Micah 4; Zechariah 13). The final outcome of the day of the Lord will be that "the arrogance of man will be brought low and the pride of men humbled; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day" (Isaiah 2:17). The ultimate or final fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the day of the Lord will come at the end of history when God, with wondrous power, will punish evil and fulfill all His promises.<sup>3</sup>

#### E. The Greatness of the Messianic Kingdom

While some prophecies are open to interpretation, J. Dwight Pentecost boldly delineates many conditions that will take place during the Messianic Kingdom when Jesus Christ reigns on earth as King (Pentecost 487-490). Some of these prophecies are as follows:

1. It will be a kingdom without wars. Nations will no longer war against each other resulting in economic prosperity since their expenditures will no longer be needed to make weapons (Isa. 2:4; 9:4-7; 11:6-9; 32:17-18; 33:5-6; 54:13; 55:12; 60:18; 65:25; 66:12; Ezek. 28:26; 34:25, 28; Hos. 2:18; Mic. 4:2-3; Zech. 9:10).
2. It will be a kingdom of joy. A distinctive mark of the age will be the fullness of joy (Isa. 9:3-4; 12:3-6; 14:7-8; 25:8-9; 30:29; 42:1, 10-12; 52:9; 60:15; 61:7, 10; 65:18-19; 66:10-14; Jer. 30:18-19; 31:13-14; Zeph. 3:14-17; Zech. 8:18-19; 10:6-7).
3. It will be a kingdom of holiness. Holiness (H. *qadowsh*) meaning sacred, set apart, moral purity) will be manifested through the King and the king's subjects. The land will be holy, free of idols and pagan religions (Isa. 1:26-27; 4:3-4; 29:18-23; 31:6-7; 35:8-9; 52:1; 60:21; 61:10; Jer. 31:23; Ezek. 36:24-31; 37:23-24; 43:7-12; 45:1; Joel 3:21; Zeph. 3:11, 13; Zech. 8:3; 13:1-2; 14:20-21).
4. It will be a kingdom of glory. God's glory will be fully manifested (Isa. 24:23; 4:2; 35:2; 40:5; 60:1-9). Glory (H. *kabowd*) meaning abundance, riches, honor, splendor, reverence). God's glory and brilliant light are often associated with each other (Rev. 21:11, 23-24).
5. It will be a kingdom of comfort. The King will personally meet all needs in such a way that there will be a fullness of comfort (Isa. 12:1-2; 29:22-23; 30:26; 40:1-2; 49:13; 51:3; 61:3-7; 66:13-14; Jer. 31:23-25; Zeph. 3:18-20; Zech. 9:11-12; Rev. 21:4). Comfort (H. *nacham*), has the idea of being consoled, moved with compassion or to put at ease. Perhaps this suggests that God will comfort those who struggle with being ill-at-ease before him because of guilt (Isa. 6:7).
6. It will be a kingdom of justice. An administration that renders perfect justice (doing what is ethically right) to every individual will take place (Isa. 9:7; 11:5; 32:16; 42:1-4; 65:21-23; Jer. 23:5; 31:23; 31:29-30).

<sup>3</sup> GotQuestions.Org, *What is the Day of the Lord?* <<http://www.gotquestions.org/day-of-the-Lord.html>>. Accessed July 11, 2012. Used by permission.

7. It will be a kingdom that is no longer under the Edenic curse. The curse placed on creation (Gen. 3:17-19) will be removed resulting in a beautify productive abundance in the earth, and animals and people will co-exist peacefully (Isa. 11:6-9; 35:9; 65:25).
8. It will be a kingdom when there will be no sickness (Isa. 33:24; Jer. 30:17; Ezek. 34:16).
9. It will be a kingdom when there are no physical deformities (Isa. 29:17-19; 35:3-6; 61:1-2; Jer. 31:8; Mic. 4:6-7; Zeph. 3:19).
10. It will be a kingdom free from oppression. There will be no social, political, or religious oppression (Isa. 14:3-6; 42:6-7; 49:8-9; Zech. 9:11-12).
11. It will be a kingdom with economic prosperity. (Isa. 4:2; 35:1-2; 30:23-25; 62:8-9; Jer. 31:5, 12; Ezek. 34:26; Mic. 4:1, 4; Zech. 8:11-12; 9:16-17; Ezek. 36:29-30; Joel 2:21-27; Amos 9:13-14).
12. It will be a kingdom of increased light. The sun and the moon will shine like never before. This increase in light will most likely increase crop productivity and economic prosperity (Isa. 4:5; 30:26; 60:19-20; Zech. 2:5).
13. It will be a kingdom with a pure language. This may suggest that God will either give a pure language for worshipping him (instead of pagan gods), or he will give a single unifying language for worshipping and serving him (Zeph. 3:9).
14. It will be a kingdom without idleness. People will labor but not for survival as was done under the Edenic curse. Working will bring joy, satisfaction and productivity (Isa. 62:8-9; 65:21-23; Jer. 31:5; Ezek. 48:18-19).
15. It will be a kingdom where Jesus will teach his ways (Isa. 2:2-3; Jer. 3:15; Mic. 4:2).

#### F. Geophysical changes when Jesus returns

John Walvoord points out several geophysical changes that will take place when Jesus returns (Walvoord 333).

1. The Mount of Olives will split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south (Zech. 14:4).
2. On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter (Zech. 14:8).
3. The city of Jerusalem will be elevated (Zech. 14:10).
4. There will be other unusual phenomena occurring in connection with the return of Jesus Christ (Isa. 11:10; 34:4; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15; Matt. 24:29).

#### G. Israel will be restored spiritually

1. Israel will someday recognize Jesus as their Messiah and mourn when they realize what they had done (Zech. 12:10). This will most likely take place at the Second Coming (Walvoord 331).
2. All Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:25-27). Some commentators see this as being salvific (Crossways Bibles 2177), while others see this as Israel being saved from its enemies (Walvoord 453). The greater evidence seems to indicate that the ethnic nation of Israel will be saved from its sins when Jesus returns.

3. Pentecost writes, "The fulfillment of Romans 11:25-27 is in keeping with the Abrahamic Covenant which promises that Israel will endure as a nation forever and that they ultimately will be restored spiritually and to their land politically." (Pentecost 455)
4. Pentecost provides insights into Israel's role in the future Messianic Kingdom (Pentecost 507).
  - a) Israel will become the subjects of the King ((Isa. 9:6-7; 33:17, 22; 44:6; Jer. 23:5; Mic. 2:13; 4:7; Dan. 4:3; 7:14, 22, 27).
  - b) Israel will be exalted above the Gentiles (Isa. 14:1-2; 49:22-23; 60:14-17; 61:6-7).
  - c) Israel will be beautified to bring glory to God (Isa. 62:3; Jer. 32:41; Hos. 14:5-6; Zeph. 3:16-17; Zech. 9:16-17).

## XII. HOW TO INTERPRET PROPHETIC MESSAGES

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Berkeley Mickelsen offers the following hermeneutic practices when interpreting prophetic messages (Mickelsen 299ff).

- A. Know the historical background of the prophet and the people to whom the prophet ministers. Know the context that *precedes* and *follows* the passage.
- B. State clearly to whom or to what the statement or passage refers.
  1. Is the passage addressed to the hearers and about them?
  2. Or is it proclaimed to them but about someone else?
  3. Is the passage predictive or instructive?
    - a) If predictive, what are the conditions attached to the message?
    - b) Some predictive messages have multiple fulfillments (e. g. the language describing Antiochus Epiphanes in Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 may also characterize the final Antichrist (Matt. 24; Mark 13).
- C. Where fulfillment is found in the NT differentiate between direct and typological prediction.
  1. Direct predictions: Fulfilled in the NT. Example: the birth of Christ at Bethlehem (Micah 5:2 --> Matt. 2:5-6).
  2. Typological predictions: An event in the OT which is also a "type" of something later in the NT.
    - a) Example: Zechariah's value of 30 pieces of silver is a type of the 30 pieces of silver valued for betraying Jesus (Zech. 11:12-13; Matt. 27:9-10). [Note: even though Jeremiah made a *direct* prediction of the 30 pieces of silver (Jer. 32:25), it was also predicted *typologically* by Zechariah].
    - b) Typological predictions are very common throughout the NT so knowing the OT context is important.
- D. When interpreting symbols in prophetic messages follow these principles (Mickelsen 278-9):



1. Principle #1 – Keep the interpretation based on the context.
2. Principle #2 – The symbol may be explained in the context.
  - a) If the symbol is not explained, then use every clue found in the immediate context or in any part of the book where the symbol is used.
  - b) Try to state what the symbol meant to the original hearers or readers.
3. Principle #3: The symbol may also be used in other passages.
4. Principle #4: Don't force meaning into a symbol that isn't there.

E. Example: Ezekiel is told to eat the scroll (Ezek. 2:8--3:3)

*"But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth." Ezek. 2:8--3:3 (NIV)*

1. Principle #1 - Context: God's judgment of a rebellious people (Israel) is coming (Ezek. 2:3)

*"He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their fathers have been in revolt against me to this very day." Ezek. 2:3 (NIV)*

2. Principle #2 - Explanation of the symbol in the context.
  - a. Scroll in Ezekiel 2:10 describes coming lament and mourning and woe.
  - b. Meaning of eating the scroll --> Explanation is not given in the context but it suggests that the prophet's message is to internalized. He is not reading a prepared script, like a radio announcer.
  - c. The stress on sweetness suggests the joy of receiving God's words (Ps. 119:103).

3. Principle No. 3 - How symbol is used in other passages.

- a) This same act is duplicated in Revelation 10:2; 8-11.

*Rev. 10:2, 8-11 (NIV) "He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.*

- b) The bitterness of John's eating the scroll in Revelation suggests the psychological impact of identifying himself with his readers and taking seriously what God says concerning the coming judgment (Tribulation) on the many peoples, nations, languages and kings (Mickelsen 276).

- c) It may also represent the perishing of the wicked (Job 20:5-14).
- "...that the mirth of the wicked is brief, the joy of the godless lasts but a moment. Though his pride reaches to the heavens and his head touches the clouds, he will perish forever, like his own dung; those who have seen him will say, 'Where is he?' Like a dream he flies away, no more to be found, banished like a vision of the night. The eye that saw him will not see him again; his place will look on him no more. His children must make amends to the poor; his own hands must give back his wealth. The youthful vigor that fills his bones will lie with him in the dust. Though evil is sweet in his mouth and he hides it under his tongue, though he cannot bear to let it go and keeps it in his mouth, yet his food will turn sour in his stomach..." Job 20:5-14*
- d) The lack of bitterness in Ezekiel suggests that Israel will not be destroyed but will someday be spiritually restored. This interpretation would be consistent with Romans 11:26 ("all Israel will be saved").
4. Principle No. 4: Examine your conclusions to see if you've forced your meaning into the text.

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