

WHY SHOULD WE "TAKE HEED" UNTO PROPHECY?

II Peter 1:16-21

Inherent in the heart of man is a deep desire to know the future. Historians, archeologists and anthropologists have furnished abundant evidence that this craving to know future events, as well as unseen things which man feels exist, was as marked in the beginning of history as it is in our own times. Attempts to know things to come are found everywhere, among all nations.

The craving to know the future persists and not alone among the illiterate, the ignorant and superstitious, but also among the intelligent, the cultured and so-called higher classes.

What then is the origin of this desire to know the future? Man has a future. Nations have a future and destiny. It is a postulate of our consciousness, that human history is heading towards a definite end. Man has endless being. He has a body over which the sentence of death is written, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." This is also true of the beast. But man has a soul, the very breath of the Almighty, and that part can never die. The consciousness of eternal being is the source of man's desire to know the future.

A young man was asked by a godly man about what he intended to do. He made known his desire of procuring a good education to make his mark in the world. The Christian asked, "What then?" And the young man spoke of his high ambitions of gaining a great reputation, of securing a high position in life, of having a charming woman for his wife, and sons and daughters, of becoming wealthy and enjoying life and the pleasures of life. Each statement was met by the same question, "What then?" Finally the youth said, "Well, I suppose as all men must die sooner or later, I, too, will have to die." Once more his questioner asked, "What then?" Yes, "What then?" Man survives the grave and eternity begins. It is this consciousness which is chiefly responsible for man's attempted search of the future.

God alone knows the end from the beginning. Omniscience is one of the great attributes of God. Has the Omniscient One made known to His creatures the secrets of the future? Has he uncovered what the future holds in store for the human race and for this earth? If so, where is it to be found? In the Bible.

The Bible contains most startling predictions as to things to come. The fate of nations, rise and fall of empires, onward march of evil, man's defiance of God, final victory of our Lord, as well as future of the earth and its final consummating destiny, all are minutely foretold in the Bible. That these predictions are trustworthy and absolutely reliable is vouched for by many scores of predictions which have found their literal fulfillment in the past.

In our day the liberalists deny prophecy and ridicule those who believe that God has revealed the future of Mankind and the physical earth.

Can man know the future? We answer, YES. We can know the future through the Bible, but NEVER apart from it. We need to examine prophecy, put confidence in it, walk and serve in the light of coming events, the shadows of which are rapidly lengthening.

This world is experiencing a colossal upheaval. Without doubt more nations have reached the most solemn crisis in their history. A gross departure from God is responsible for the present disorder and unrest. Because of its rebellion against God, this world is a battlefield. If civilization is to be saved from further disaster, we must have a revival of first-century Christianity, and that speedily. There must be a genuine repentance, and life must be ordered by the principles of Christ. There have been other crises in the world's history, and the message for each crisis is that of repentance, faith, hope, love, and loyalty to him Who is our Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Friend. The solution for this world's ills is not to be found in the schemes and so-called reforms of governments.

Take heed unto prophecy "as unto a lamp shining in a dark place." Too many of us have carelessly laid this lamp aside. Some have thought that everything concerning the future was unrevealed. Some believe that practically nothing beyond this earthly life is revealed. They are convinced that no one can understand prophecy; that the prophetic message is sealed; that God did not intend for us to understand prophecies. Some think that those who try to understand the prophetic message are either ignorant or crazy, and that intelligent Bible students do not attempt to understand prophecy. They think interpreters of prophecy make only wild guesses and advance fantastic theories for gullible people. Many have their eyes closed against the great message of prophecy.

The believer can understand prophecy. He should approach the Bible and the subject with an open mind, and let the Bible be its own interpreter, and the prophecies will become understandable as the other portions of the Word.

An understanding of the prophetic message of God's Word comes bit by bit. Great Bible truths are gradually unfolded to us. Just because some truth clearly revealed seems unreasonable to you, do not forget that you are human. What may seem unreasonable to you may be entirely reasonable with God. We are finite and He is infinite. Some things we are not supposed to understand until that great and glorious day when we shall see Him face to face.

But there is so much revealed -- all that we need to know, and these great truths God wants us to understand, else He would never have given us the Bible. Peter says that we have a more sure word of prophecy, "whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place." That is strong language. How important is a lamp in a dark place? Just so important is prophetic message of Scriptures to us who are His disciples. Why take heed unto prophecy? Why should we study the prophetic message of the scripture?

I. It will Strengthen Our Faith In The Bible As The Word Of God.

Students of prophecy possess great faith in the Bible as the Word of God. Why should not this be true? No other book has ever told future correctly. Let us note some fulfilled prophecies.

1. Ancient city of Babylon.

No city could compare with the magnificence of this ancient city. Ruled by the greatest king of all history, Babylon with her tremendous wealth, culture and military fortifications, was far ahead of Rome in the heyday of her glory. No other city in history was ever fortified and constructed as this one. It was 15 miles square, and surrounded by walls 87 feet thick and 350 feet high. The Euphrates River flowed through the city, from north to south. Who, living in the days of Babylon after beholding its wonders, fortifications and great strength, would have dared predict its fall? Despite this Isaiah predicted that Babylon would be destroyed by a man named Cyrus, and Isaiah wrote this prophecy 150 years before Cyrus was born. Isaiah 45:1-6. Jeremiah prophesied that "the walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken." People of the city doubtless thought the prophet was crazy, but God sees the end from the beginning, and God had spoken. No one else dreamed of such. People jeered and scorned. The years passed. One day the people found an army outside the city, under the leadership of Cyrus. They laughed and jeered in derision. They thought they were prepared for any siege and had enough food for 20 years. Why worry? Cyrus began digging a trench north of the city. He sent half of his army south of the city. While the leaders of Babylon were in a drunken revelry one dark night, Cyrus ordered the Euphrates River turned into a great ditch and away from its natural course through the city. He marched his army under the northern and the southern walls along the empty river bed, and took the debauched city. Thus prophecy was fulfilled.

2. Tyre was another great city.

This ancient metropolis was the New York of Asia. The ships anchored in her harbors from all parts of the world. In her glory and power she was queen of all the great cities of her time. Yet, God, speaking through his prophet Ezekiel in 590 B. C. said, "They shall destroy the walls of Tyre, and break down her towers. I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea; for I have spoken it saith the Lord God . . . and they shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the water . . . and I will make thee like the top of a rock; thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon; thou shalt be built no more: for I the Lord have spoken it, saith the Lord God." Ezekiel 26:4-14.

In less than 20 years that proud and haughty city was laid in ruins by Nebuchadnezzar. 250 more years passed by, and the ruins remained. In 332 Alexander the Great took the walls, timbers, and stones and dumped them in the ocean to make an approach for his armies to an island half a mile from the shore. They needed material so badly that they scraped the dust from the remains, thus fulfilling prophecy. "Thou shalt be built no more." It remains as God said it would.

3. Egypt the land of mystery.

In the days of the prophets, Egypt stood out as the undisputed queen of the nations. No other nation could boast so long an unbroken line of kings. It was famous for pyramids, arts, science, great learning, armies and the Pharaohs. Her future seemed one of unending prosperity. The prophets predicted it would become a "base kingdom" the "basest of nations." "There shall be no more a prince in the land of Egypt." Each prophecy has come true. For 2500 years Egypt has been under the hand of strangers. Not once has she been under the hand of her own prince. It is now under British rule.

II. It Will Enable Us To Rightly Divide The Word Of Truth.

It is one thing to believe the Bible and another to understand it. God says what He means and means what He says. He expects us to understand. Christ said, "Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy." Don't be afraid of being branded an ignoramus just because you believe the Bible. Let us study the Bible. We can't do that by passing by hundreds of verses dealing with prophecy.

III. It Is Dangerous Not To.

It is dangerous to neglect part or all of the Bible.

1. It was their ignorance of prophecy that caused the Jews to crucify their Messiah. The scriptures had told them plainly what to expect, and every prophecy was fulfilled before their eyes. Because they were ignorant of the scriptures, as some of us are, they utterly failed to recognize Him. If we fail to "discern the signs of the times," it is simply because we have wilfully refused to "take heed unto prophecy."
2. It was their ignorance of prophecy that caused the disciples to be "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" concerning the Christ. If they had studied their Bibles they would have expected Christ's crucifixion.
3. Prophecy makes up a great portion of the Bible and we dare not slight any portion of God's word. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." II Timothy 3:16. We dare not cast any portion of the scriptures aside.

IV. It Is Enlightening.

Students of prophecy are not drifting in darkness, knowing nothing about the future. They have the more sure word of prophecy to guide them. God's prophetic word will illumine every man who will come to its light. We need not drift helplessly on an uncharted sea, with no compass for a guide. We have a guide book that will enlighten us, and one that has stood faithfully every test. We can know what lies ahead, even yonder at the journey's end.

V. It Helps Us To Live Better Lives.

A study of prophecy will bring greater joy and peace to the true child of God. No hours can be spent more profitably than following step by step the unfolding of God's great plan for the ages as revealed in the prophetic message of His infallible Book.

No one can study the prophetic message of the Scriptures without being convinced that Christ Jesus will some day return to this old earth. The anticipation of His coming is a powerful influence for good in the daily lives of Christians. In this world where we are beset on every hand by so many temptations we need to use every weapon available for our defense against Satan. An understanding of prophecy is a powerful aid to Christian living.

VI. It Will Increase Our Zeal As Soul Winners.

People who understand prophecy are evangelistic and active in winning souls to Christ. Any Christian understanding the future as revealed in prophecy will want to warn others of the dark days that are ahead when under the domination of the Antichrist there shall be a time of "Great Tribulation" such as this earth has never seen. Another incentive to spur us on as soul winners is the hope of reward from the very hands of Christ at "The Saints Judgment."

VII. It Will Be A Blessing To The Church.

People are ignorant of the Bible, especially that part known as prophecy. They need instruction or teaching. We know the world is in spiritual darkness, but that does not mean that no light is available to those desiring it.

1. It will draw crowds.

Pastors who preach to crowds offer the Word of God.
Men of faith, believe the Bible, and study prophetic message.

2. The masses are interested in prophecy.

Visit a place where the most ordinary speaker preaches on it and see crowds. It is like a message from a new book. Masses thrilled to learn that some day Christ will return in glory, that living believers will be translated, that the graves will be opened, and the righteous dead gathered unto Him.

VIII. It Is A Wonderful Inspirer of Hope.

Pessimism and Bible prophecy do not go together. It is through prophecy that we learn the world's destiny, and become assured that the march of the centuries is towards a legitimate and glorious future. Listen to this: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15:4). The Bible has many unhesitating, unafraid pronouncements concerning things to come. It never guesses. Its voice is one of authority. We ought to know where we are going. It is the sum of wisdom to know toward what we are travelling, even as it is the height of folly to press on in ignorance as to whither we are bound.

IX. It Will Cause Unsaved To Believe In Christ.

Prophecy has been and is being used to win the lost to Christ. Our Lord wants the unsaved to hear His prophetic message. Paul, Peter, and the early disciples used prophecy as a most effective message to convict and convert sinners. Prophecy has been used to move sinners to repentance.

Not only the prophets of old and the apostles themselves but the great preachers and evangelists of our age have used prophetic preaching for the winning of thousands to Christ.

We must preach the full gospel which includes prophecy.