

## WHY STUDY PROPHECY?

### II Peter 1:16-21

Inherent in man is a desire to know the future. The craving to know the future has its source in man's consciousness of eternal being.

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? It is to be found in the Holy Scriptures.

God's Word contains startling predictions as to things to come. The fate of nations, the rise and fall of empires, the onward march of evil, man's defiance of God and the final victory of our Lord are foretold in the Bible.

Can man know the future? Yes, we can know the future through the Bible, but never apart from it. "We have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." How important is a light in a dark place? Very important. Even so, the prophetic message of the Scriptures is exceedingly important to the followers of Christ.

Much is said to discourage the study and teaching of prophecy. Some people seem to think that those who study the Bible prophecies are either ignorant or crazy. The reason some people are prejudiced against the study and preaching of the prophetic messages in God's Word is because of their lack of understanding of these great portions of God's Word. They do not understand what God has revealed in the Bible because of their unwillingness to study it or because they have closed their minds to it. Their opposition to the study of prophecy and their criticism of those who do study and preach or teach it constitute a public advertisement of the fact that they have not done so. It is another illustration of the widely known truth that a person is down on what he is not up on. The fact that they have not studied prophecy and, therefore, do not understand it does not mean that others have not done so and have been blessed greatly by it. Their personal ignorance of the subject does not mean that all others are in the same condition. Their criticism of those who proclaim the prophetic message advertises that they do not know and understand prophecy. That is like a person who criticizes a church program; he merely announces to his listeners that he doesn't have anything in it. That is like a person who condemns education; he calls attention to the fact that he does not have it. That is like a preacher who tries to minimize preaching; he makes it clear to his hearers that he cannot preach. He thereby calls to their attention why he does not have a pulpit to occupy. You will never hear any man who has been called of God to preach, and who can deliver the goods, go around whining about putting too much emphasis on preaching. So, if you hear somebody say, "We ought not to study prophecy because it is impossible to understand it," ignore what he says and study the prophecies of God's Word with an open mind and the Holy Spirit as your Guide, and they will become understandable as will the other portions of the Bible.

Why study prophecy?

#### I. It Constitutes A Large Portion Of The Bible.

Prophecy is prewritten history. There are two general types of prophecy--preceptive and predictive. Preceptive prophecy is forthtelling, whereas predictive is foretelling. Sometimes the prophets of old found it necessary to rebuke, reprove, counsel and admonish; thus they dealt with the present in the light of the future. That is preceptive prophecy. Predictive prophecy presents the future in the light of the present.

Prophecy, like all other parts of the Word, finds its origin in God. It bears the fingerprint of the Almighty. It proves conclusively the omniscience of God. The whole Bible is inspired, and that goes for the prophetic portions just as much so as the historical and devotional Scriptures.

Much of the Word of God is prophetic in character. At least seventeen books of the Old Testament--Isaiah to Malachi--and one book of the New Testament--Revelation--are devoted to prophecy. Those eighteen books constitute nearly one third of the Bible, but they do not contain nearly all of the prophetic Scriptures. Prophetic writings constitute the major portion of the Word of God. If emphasis is any criterion of its value, this fact is most eloquent. Hundreds of the prophecies have been fulfilled, but those that are yet unfulfilled will have just as complete and minute a fulfillment.

Prophecy held a large place in the preaching of the patriarchs, the prophets, the Lord Jesus and the apostles which was recorded in the Bible. We have often referred to Genesis 3:15, wherein God promised a Deliverer who would crush the head of the serpent, as the first great evangel of Scripture, and that is true; but let us not overlook the fact that it was prophetic. It was a promise made some four thousand years before its fulfillment. The prophets were mighty men of God and great preachers when speaking for Him to men. Prophecy held a large place in the preaching of Christ as He went up and down the highways of Palestine. One cannot read His messages as recorded in the four gospels without noting that very often He referred to "things to come." In Peter's great sermon at Pentecost, he quoted from Joel the prophet and then pointed to the "last days" and to that "great and notable day of the Lord." Paul instructed Timothy to deal with the "latter times" during which many would depart from the faith.

## II. It Strengthens Our Faith In The Word Of God.

"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:21).

Students of prophecy possess great faith in the Bible as the Word of God. No other book has ever told the future correctly. Let us note some fulfilled prophecies.

### 1. The ancient city of Babylon.

No city could compare with the magnificence of ancient Babylon. 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 fifteen miles square and surrounded by walls eighty-seven feet thick and three hundred and fifty feet high. The Euphrates River flowed through the city from north to south. Who, living in the days of Babylon, after beholding its wonders, fortification and great strength, would have dared to predict its fall? Despite this, Isaiah predicted that Babylon would be destroyed by a man named Cyrus, and Isaiah wrote this prophecy one hundred and fifty years before Cyrus was born. Isaiah 45:1-6. Jeremiah prophesied that "the walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken." The inhabitants of the city doubtless thought that the prophet was crazy, but God sees the end from the beginning, and God had spoken. Nobody 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 twenty 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. Then he marched his army under the northern and the southern walls along the empty road bed and took the debauched city. Thus God's prophecy was fulfilled.

### 2. The great city of Tyre.

Ships from all parts of the world anchored in the harbors of this ancient metropolis, which was the New York of Asia. 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 twenty years that proud and haughty city was laid in ruins by Nebuchadnezzar. After two hundred and fifty more years had passed, the ruins remained. In 332 Alexander the Great took the walls, the timbers and the 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," God said, and it remains the same to this day.

### 3. The mysterious land of Egypt.

In the days of the Old Testament prophets, Egypt stood out as the undisputed queen of the nations. No other nation could boast so long an unbroken line of kings. The country was famous for the pyramids, art, science, great learning, armies and the Pharaohs. Her future appeared to be one of unending prosperity. However, 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 of these prophecies has come true. For two thousand five hundred years Egypt has been under the hand of strangers.

When prophecy is fulfilled time and again, as in the cases which I have mentioned, it greatly strengthens our faith in the Bible as the Word of God.

## III. It Is Enlightening.

Prophecy is to be read, studied and understood. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein" (Revelation 1:3). Every Christian should study prophecy in order to be delivered from inexcusable ignorance. You can tell some of these things to people, and they will look at you and say, "I know about that, but you see, I don't believe it." They seem to think that in this way they have disposed of the whole subject. Do you suppose that you can dispose of a fact or make it false just by refusing to believe it? Don't try to dispose of the Word of God by the sin of ignorance.

Study prophecy in order to know the mind and purpose of God. Since He has told us His purpose and plan, it is of tremendous importance that we should study it. I want to know what God is doing and what He proposes to do.

Ignorance of prophecy was one factor in causing the Jews to crucify Christ. The Scripture had told them plainly what to expect, and they were fulfilled before their very eyes. Being ignorant of the Scriptures, they failed to recognize Him. Ignorance of prophecy caused the disciples to be "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" concerning the Christ. If they had known the prophetic Scriptures and believed them, they would have expected His crucifixion.

Students of prophecy are not drifting in darkness, knowing nothing about the future. They have the more sure word of prophecy to guide them. We need not drift helplessly on an uncharted sea without a compass to guide us. Our guide book will enlighten us and let us know what lies ahead even yonder at the journey's end.

## IV. It Enriches Our Lives.

No hours can be spent more profitably than following step by step the unfolding of God's plan for the ages, as it is revealed in the prophetic message of His infallible Book. A study of prophecy will settle for you for all time the glorious fact that the sacred Scriptures are fully inspired of God. 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.

Prophecy, which is God's foreknowledge, gives us insight into the tremendous movements of the present. What could be more practical and helpful to us than this?

The study of prophecy will bring great peace and joy to the child of God. It will enable him to grow in patience, comfort and hope. Romans 15:4 says, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." The anticipation of His coming is a powerful incentive for good in the lives of Christians. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (I John 3:3). People are thrilled to learn that some day Christ will return in glory, that living believers will be translated, that the graves will be opened, and that the righteous dead will be gathered unto Him.

#### V. It Increases Our Usefulness.

If we would be useful in God's service, we must heed the admonition recorded in the Scriptures: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15). Would you like to be useful for the Lord? Then, study the word of truth, much of which is prophecy, and learn how to divide it rightly.

God's people are entitled to know what His program is. Since it has been recorded in the Bible, let us study it and learn what is coming to pass, and then let us convey that information to others who are yearning to know about coming events. We ought to know where we are going. It is the mark of wisdom to know toward what we are traveling, even as it is the height of folly to press on without knowing whither we are bound.