

7. Foundations for Prophecy (2Q 2025 Allusions, Images, Symbols)

Biblical material: Isa. 6:6–8, Gen. 3:21–24, Ezek. 1:4–14, Rev. 4:1–11, Num. 2:3–25, Isa. 14:12–14.

Quotes

- I have made a covenant with God that he sends me neither visions, dreams, nor even angels. I am well satisfied with the gift of the Holy Scriptures, which give me abundant instruction and all that I need to know both for this life and for that which is to come. *Martin Luther*
- Nothing is so damaging in the study of New Testament prophecy as to imagine that the eternal God who stands outside and above time is bound by the clocks and calendars of men. *E.M. Blaiklock*
- I know that some are always studying the meaning of the fourth toe of the right foot of some beast in prophecy and have never used either foot to go and bring men to Christ. *Vance Havner*
- Prophecy is like the German sentence—it can only be understood when we have read its last word. *Augustus H. Strong*
- The future belongs to those who belong to God. This is hope. *W.T. Purkiser*

Questions

How do the texts given in this study help us understand prophecy? What would you say are the foundational principles for interpreting prophecy? What do we do with misguided explanations of the meaning of different prophecies? How can we best point to prophecy as God's communication with us, not to satisfy our curiosity but to lead us to him?

Bible summary

Isaiah responds to God's call to be a prophet. Isaiah 6:6–8. Genesis 3:21–24 records the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden and the placement of cherubim to guard the entrance.. Ezekiel 1:4–14 describes Ezekiel's first vision, with winged beings and full of symbolism. Similarly John saw through an open door in heaven and described the scene of the throne room with many symbols. Revelation 4:1–11. Numbers 2:3–25 details the assigned places for the Israelite tribes around the Tent of Meeting. Isaiah 14:12–14 describes the fall of Lucifer under the symbol of the "morning star" in the prophecy against the king of Babylon.

Comment

There's no question that prophecy is part of the evidence. But in another sense, the greater emphasis should be on the nature and character of this prophecy-fulfilling God. For even if prophecy is true, no one would want a relationship with a God who is as the Devil describes him. Consequently we have to look not only at the events, but at reasons and consequences. God is always working for good, yet in this world of sin tragic and problematic things happen. That's another thing we need to learn from history--that sin is very corrosive to God's kingdom and methods, that the innocent suffer with the guilty, and that God is affected too.

The issue is truly a question of trust. Not only whether God can be trusted to fulfill prophecy, but whether he can be trusted to run the universe wisely and well, and whether we will be comfortable and happy in his presence. Most importantly, do we trust God enough to give ourselves to him, so that he may repair the damage done by sin, to heal us from the disease of evil, to remake us into his divine image once more? Only then can we say we truly trust this trustworthy God.

This study is particularly concerned with how we interpret prophecy. The same approach however should apply in all areas of life: examine, understand, and accept the evidence. In fact this is the same fundamental principle that underlies the scientific method. The essential aspect is

evaluating and thinking logically about what is presented, and drawing the correct conclusions. Most of all we are looking for meaning—not just any meaning, but the meaning that was intended, and the source that brings meaning to life.

The truth is that we *are* here for a reason. More than that, we were not made for this world alone. And ultimately, the heart of joy and satisfaction and meaning is in knowing that God made us, and saves us. As Christina Rossetti writes, “Were there no God, we would be in this glorious world with grateful hearts and no one to thank.”

When I reflect on those times when I have felt so close to God, I realize that my delight has not been in achievements we so often define as success. Nor is there the lasting satisfaction in the things we usually chase after for enjoyment—the physical simply does not last, and eventually every earthly pleasure cloy. Ultimately all our grasping after feeling good leaves us empty, unsatisfied.

For this life cannot be all there is. “Our Creator would never have made such lovely days, and given us the deep hearts to enjoy them, above and beyond all thought, unless we were meant to be immortal,” says Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Meant to be immortal. That’s why we seem so out-of-harmony here, in this world of sin and death where nothing lasts. God planned for us to live with him forever. As C. S. Lewis writes, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

That’s exactly the truth about our place here. We were made for another world—Eden, one in which goodness and truth and right were the principles of existence. That was the world we were made for. The world we are being made for is the world to come, again “where righteousness dwells.”

Prophecy is not primarily about predicting the future. Like the prophets of old, we are to be messengers for God, sharing his message. Our role is to interpret God to our world. May we always strive to speak well of our loving Lord, both in word and action, conscious of our privileged role as part of God’s answer in settling the charges against him in the great controversy.

Ellen White Comments

Those who so presumptuously preach definite time [of Christ’s second coming], in so doing gratify the adversary of souls; for they are advancing infidelity rather than Christianity. They produce scripture, and by false interpretation show a chain of argument which apparently proves their position. But their failures show that they are false prophets, that they do not rightly interpret the language of inspiration. The word of God is verity; but men have perverted its meaning. These errors have brought the truth of God for these last days into disrepute. Adventists are derided by ministers of all denominations. Yet God’s servants must not hold their peace. The signs foretold in prophecy are fast fulfilling around us. This should arouse every true follower of Christ to zealous action. {RH October 20, 1885}

Let none think, because they cannot explain the meaning of every symbol in the Revelation, that it is useless for them to search this book in an effort to know the meaning of the truth it contains. The One who revealed these mysteries to John will give to the diligent searcher for truth a foretaste of heavenly things. Those whose hearts are open to the reception of truth will be enabled to understand its teachings, and will be granted the blessing promised to those who “hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.” {AA 584-5}

It is our privilege to know something in regard to this book that many ministers say cannot be understood. To many, the Revelation is a closed book. But we are to know “what saith the Scriptures,” and we are also to understand their meaning. We should understand the book of Revelation much better than we do. The blessing pronounced upon those who read, and hear, and keep the words of this prophecy may be ours. If we take up the study of this book in a receptive frame of mind, with hearts susceptible to divine impressions, the truths revealed will have a sanctifying influence upon us. {2SAT 213} Prepared October 7, 2024 © Jonathan Gallagher 2024