

THE PROPHETIC SCRIPTURES:
What Lies Before Us?
Scripture Reading: Revelation 20:1-7
Message 2

INTRO: We are in a series on prophecy. We are in our first point, looking at some of the important preliminaries that will help us understand prophecy better when we get to it. In our last message we defined prophecy in the sense in which we are using it in this series and that is we will be looking at the things recorded in the Bible about what lies before us; things that have been prerecorded. In the daily news we hear, we hear about the latest events that are now history. In prophecy we are looking at things that are recorded before they happen. Only the God of the Bible has ever been consistently right in foretelling the future.

We saw also that the Bible stresses that it is important for us to know what lies before us. When Jesus was crucified, He reprimanded some disciples for being so sad at the event of His death because from the prophetic Word, they should have known it would happen. Recently we received a little booklet that gave 7 evidences of the new birth. How can I know if I have been born again? Well, this booklet gave 7 evidences and the last one was that a born again believer looks forward to the return of Christ. If you do not look forward to the return of Christ, you might want to check to see if you are truly born again and ready for glory. Yes, it is important to know prophecy. You see, all the information about the return of Christ is prophetic.

Then, in our last message we looked at the major historical events from a biblical perspective. If you missed that I would encourage you to catch up by getting the CD of that message.

What lies before us? In this preliminary section we want to look at the major views among Christians about the future, and surprisingly we can boil it down to only three major positions. And we will find that those positions are determined by one's view of Bible interpretation. So we want to cover two points this morning. If Bible prophecy is new to you, understanding this morning's message is of utmost importance!

D. The Major Views

So we ask, "What picture do the Scriptures present of the future?" Well, over the past 2000 years, three major pictures of the future have developed. These views centre around one key passage, Revelation 20:1-7. Here we have a time period of 1000 years mentioned 6 times. We call this the millennium, from a Latin word for 1000 years. Three views regarding the millennium have developed over the years. Which view one takes here, determines the major points of all one's eschatology, or end time views.

1. Premillennialism

The first view held by the early church until about 350 AD, was the Christ would return to earth and set up His kingdom and rule for 1000 years, according to Revelation 20. Since millennium means a thousand years, pre-millennialism means Christ comes before the thousand years. According to this teaching, Christ will return to this earth. He will set up His kingdom and rule for a thousand years, just as the Bible says.

On your chart you will see a short section of time just before the millennium. It is called the tribulation and it is 7 years given in two $3\frac{1}{2}$ year segments. We will look at all of this later. However, I bring it up here because pre-millennialists are disagreed as to just exactly where the Lord returns with regard to the millennium.

a. Pre tribulational premillennialist

Show on overhead

b. Mid tribulational premillennialist

c. Post tribulational premillennialist

2. A millennialism

About 300 years after Christ, a Roman emperor by name of Constantine was supposedly converted to Christianity. He made Christianity the official religion of Rome. This changed millennial

expectations. The expectation now was that this was the 1000 year reign of Christ. And thus a spiritualizing of this promised kingdom began bringing about what we today know as a-millennialism. The *a* of a millennialism means *no*. So a *millennialism* means *no millennium*. This view regarding the millennium has undergone various changes, but the basic that has held true is that there will be no literal millennium. What does this view do with Revelation 20? The same as it does with many other prophecies. It spiritualizes them to mean something entirely different from what it says. So the rest of our time-line does not exist for the a millennialist.

3. Post millennialism

The third view is called post millennialism. The *post* of this word means *after*. The teaching of this view is that Christ will come after the millennium. This view says that we will get Christians into places of authority such as government etc. and the Christian will make this world better and better until a time of peace of indefinite duration is brought about. After this time of peace, Jesus will return to earth.

How do we conclude regarding these interpretations? Well, it all depends on one's method of Bible interpretation. However, in my view we can reduce the three views to two. I believe the post millennial view is wrong in its system of Bible interpretation but it is wrong on another important matter. I do not find anywhere in all the Bible that this world will become better and better as time goes on. I do not find that Christianity gets more and more popular either.

Listen to a sampling of a few verses: 2 Timothy 3:1-5, "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure

rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" Then again in verse 13, "But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."

Jesus said in Matthew 24:12, "And lawlessness will abound and the love of many will grow worse and worse." And just before Jesus left, He left us with this thought provoking question, "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on earth?"

As I see it, the post millennial view is unbiblical. It does not square with Bible teaching to believe that this world will become better and better. So we are left with two major views to choose from; pre millennialism or a millennialism.

E. The Method of Interpretation

There are two major methods of interpreting Scripture. The first is what is often called the literal method. I believe it is better to call it the normal method. That is you take the Scriptures for what they say. That means when you have figurative language, you treat it figuratively and when you have literal language, you take it literally. Let me give you an example of figurative words and a figure of speech. Turn to 1 Peter 2 (read 1-3). Now it says we are to lay aside all malice, is that literal or figurative? (guile, lit; hypocrisy, lit; envy, lit; evil speaking, lit; evil speaking, lit; newborn babes, figure of speech, simile by word as; desire, lit; pure milk of the Word, fig.)

Now the book of Revelation has a lot of figurative language (read 12:1-6). Is this literal or figurative? Fig.) Now note the proof of this in verse 3 where it speaks of a fiery red dragon. Now go to verse 9 for the interpretation.

So, in literal interpretation, you treat language just like you would in every day use. If we say that someone is out to lunch on a certain matter, we are using a figure of speech and would be wrong to

interpret it literally. But on the other hand, if I say I went to Peace River you would take it literally. You would not interpret that to mean that I went to some celestial river in a spiritual sense. By literal interpretation we mean that if something is meant figuratively, we interpret it as such and if it is meant literally we interpret it literally.

There is a second way of interpreting Scripture. It is called spiritualizing Scripture or the allegorical method. We do not use this method in every day language, we don't even do it with most of Scripture. But if we hold to an a-millennial or post millennial viewpoint, then we interpret prophecy figuratively whether it is meant literally or not. For example, in Revelation 20, 6 times we have the phrase 'one thousand years'. What does that mean if you spiritualize it? Well, there are now no rules. You can make it mean whatever suits your fancy.

But those who hold to this view of interpreting prophecy, when it comes to salvation passages and historical passages, they too take them quite literally. But when prophetic passages that involve Israel are involved, then the allegorical or spiritualizing methods are used. Why? Because if they are to stand literally, then Israel will be restored and the millennium will happen. To avoid this possibility, such passages are spiritualized or treated allegorically.

In the OT many prophecies were made with regard to Israel that have never yet happened. For example, Scripture says the Lord would regather Israel from the nations and establish them in their own land in the latter days. He says He will cause the land to flourish again. It tells us that the wolf will lie down with the lamb (read Is. 11:1-9; Ez. 37:1-14). Well, we could read on and on.

Conclusion? If one holds to the literal interpretation of Scripture wherever possible, then both post millennialism and a millennialism are out. The only consistent view then is pre millennialism, and this is what God intended for us to understand. To not see this is to be what Jesus would call a

foolish one and slow of heart to believe all that was spoken in the Scriptures.

F. A Brief Explanation of Doctrine

Now let me explain briefly what doctrine is. You see, prophecy is a doctrine. A doctrine is a systematic teaching of any Bible topic. A doctrine is a teaching. The doctrine of eschatology or prophecy is the systematic teaching of Scripture on what will happen in the future. The Bible gives a lot of history, but it also gives a lot of prophecy. It is estimated that 1/3 of Scripture was prophetic at the time it was written. Today there is a large falling away from doctrine. Doctrine, we are told, divides. Therefore, do not teach doctrine. Well, it is true that doctrine divides. I always say that it should divide. It should divide unbelievers from believers. It should divide troublemakers from sincere believers. It should divide error from truth.

My wife and I went to visit a cousin of mine who is a rancher north of Fort St. John. We had already left Fort St. John and were traveling north when I thought, "I should have filled the car with gasoline. We might have a long way back." Well, we came to a service station and I filled the car and then went to pay. I saw a book rack with books for sale and they were Christian books. As I paid I said, "I take it you folk are Christians." And the lady said, "Oh yes." I said, "I'm a pastor." So she asked what church I was with and I told her it was a Mennonite church. Immediately she said, "Oh, we are non denominational. We don't believe in being divided over doctrine." She spoke as if non-denominationalism was far superior to being something like a Mennonite or Baptist. I call a non-denominational church the non-denominational denomination. We later learned that they were very denominational because they were Pentecostal in their views. Well, I told her there were some doctrines worth being divided over, and others that were not. My advice is never treat doctrine with disdain. It is doctrine that keeps the church on track. Lack of doctrine or weak doctrine is an open door for the devil.

The lack of stress on doctrine, especially in end time teaching is clearly expressed in Rick Warren's book, "The Purpose Driven Life". This is a book that is having greater impact in the church than any other I know and Mr. Warren touches on what he believes the church's view of prophecy should be. Here is what he writes on page 135, "When the disciples wanted to talk about prophecy, Jesus quickly switched the conversation to evangelism. He wanted them to concentrate on their mission in the world. He said in essence , 'The details of my return are none of your business. What is your business is the mission I've given you. Focus on that.'"

Now where did he get that? Turn to Acts 1 (read 6-7). Now Warren commits an interpretational sin here. It is his way to find a verse that fits his view and then use it for that purpose. If we only had Acts 1:6-7 we might tend to agree with Warren. But turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 (read). Paul had taught the Thessalonians who were new to the faith in detail about these things. Were they to know these things or not? Of course they were. Did Jesus in Acts 1 mean that end time teaching was not the apostle's business? Not according to a rather weighty number of passages.

I do not want to spend time proving Acts 1:7 does not mean that Jesus said, "The details of my return are none of your business." Let me simply say this: If that is so, why then did Jesus give prophetic events in great detail in Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 12, 18 and 21 and more? Why did Paul teach the relatively new converts; the Thessalonians about the return of Christ in great detail? Why was the book of Revelation written, giving in great detail future events? Why were the major and minor prophetic books of the OT written if the details of Christ's return are not our business?

So, not only is there a dislike for doctrine in the church today, but there is a special dislike for the doctrine of prophecy, and that is sad news for the church. David Hocking, in the "Hope For Today" Newsletter of 2006, Volume XI, number 4 writes, "We have been informed by many of you of statements made by key evangelical leaders (including pastors of very

large churches!) concerning the divine nature of prophecy and that the wisest course of action for our churches is to avoid messages on the subject. Along with these warnings is a definite 'turning away' from any public support of the Nation of Israel. We, of course, here at HOPE for TODAY, do not accept this reasoning and we believe that it is a part of the deception of the end times. If there ever was a day when Bible prophecy should be emphasized and taught, it is now.

If the church you are attending does NOT teach any subjects or matters relating to Bible prophecy you should be deeply concerned. If there is a resistance to teaching about what the Bible says about Israel, you should be upset! Israel is the most frequently mentioned subject in the Bible next to the LORD Himself! You will find it 2566 times in the Bible. God has never forsaken His people nor cancelled His covenant with them. It is NOT based on their performance but upon His love and faithfulness - Deuteronomy 7:6-9; Psalm 105:8-11."

So there is a dislike for doctrine today and a special dislike for the doctrine of prophecy.

G. A brief history of prophetic views in the Church

Now let me give you a very brief history of prophecy in the church. The early church, for the first 300 years, expected a tribulation time period to come and then the 1000 year reign of Christ. The early church held a to the pre-millennial view of the return of Christ. Well, an unbelievable event happened after that. Constantine, a Roman emperor, supposedly converted to Christianity. He declared Christianity the official religion of Rome, and from there came the Roman Catholic Church. The expectation now was that this was the 1000 year reign of Christ. And thus a spiritualizing of this promised kingdom began bringing about what we today know as amillennialism.

Well, the true view of prophecy was buried for over 1000 years. In the 17 and 1800's, the subject of prophecy experienced a revival and once more was studied. With renewed study the original view once more became prominent. But in the 1900's, prophecy

again began to die down and amillennialism once more gained prominence.

I had realized that of late a millennialism was once more making a big comeback. But I was amazed when I read one of the most comprehensive works on prophecy written by J. Dwight Pentecost in the late 1950's, that at that time already there was a big swing back to a millennialism.

CONCL: So, in conclusion, we have looked at the three major views of the return of Christ. I am fully convinced that the premillennial view is what the Bible teaches. I conclude that from the view that the literal or normal approach to Bible interpretation is what God intended. This method does not allow any other position than the premillennial position.

Then we stated that there is a present dislike for doctrine in the Church today, and a special dislike for the doctrine of prophecy. We are losing sight of one of the most important doctrines with regard to the Church, and that is the return of Christ. So let me close by reading John 14:1-6.