

Prophecy: What Is It?

(English Standard Version throughout, except where noted)

A couple of years ago I was able to speak about prophecy, examining two elements of that subject. Rather than focus on the "when?" of prophecy, which I discussed very briefly, I focused rather on the "why?" of prophecy - or, to put it another way: "What is the purpose of prophecy?"

In that sermon I also pointed out that most people are simply only interested in the "when?" of prophecy. I also helped set out some of the problems that other peoples, other religious groups have with prophecy, and the very limited views that they take to prophecy.

As a goal of that sermon I hopefully established that prophecy existed to bring about the establishment of a relationship between our Father and His creation! In that sermon I stated that God was concerned about the relationship of His people both among themselves and with Him. The prophets were inspired by God to bring the people back into a relationship with God based on His law. In fact, the acid test of a true prophet of God was not his ability to predict the future, but the teaching of the laws of God and the rebuilding of relationships of the people with their God.

Today I would like to take the opportunity to build on that concept and explore that aspect more fully. I think many of us will appreciate in a very personal way that when we use the term "prophecy" people's minds automatically associate future events and the TIMING of those events. It's almost as though it is an instinctive reaction:

"Prophecy ... future events ... when is it going to happen?"

When we hear the expression such as we in the ministry hear, from time to time, that, "We don't hear sermons about prophecy!" it is a very narrow aspect of prophecy that is being addressed: the future element. Yet we have sermons about or associated with that aspect of prophecy every Holy Day because it is impossible to separate the Plan of God from the future.

So let's take a step back today and define prophecy so that we can appreciate this subject more completely and fully, and not fall into the trap of seeing prophecy in a future manner.

This has a very personal application as far as I am concerned. Mr Hulme and I had an acquaintance in college days, a young man who was well known to those of us who attended in Bricket Wood. In the early 1970s he was a rising star in the ministry. He was sent out "into the field," ordained and had various responsibilities given to him. He was a very competent man.

He came to Pasadena for the Ministerial Conference in 1974, and returned to his assignment afterwards. A month or so later, he told his superior that he could no longer continue in the ministry as he didn't believe the Bible any more!

He hadn't got caught up in any of the great debates that were raging within the Church at that period of time. He had come to the United States, seen the "good life," and as far as he was concerned, all that he wanted in life was the good life to be had here in the United States! It was a rather shocking experience. I can attest to that myself and I can attest to what I saw it do to other people. His supervisor's hair turned white almost overnight. Such was the shock!

On enquiry, it was established that most, if not ALL of his baptismal counselling was about prophecy and prophetic events. When they didn't materialise in 1972 - 1975 he literally threw everything away. He was, in my mind, characteristic of those who see prophecy through a very narrow lens, a blinkered view of God's Word.

Prophecy is certainly about the future. But prophecy relates to, and makes demand upon us here and now! If we never catch sight of that or if we lose sight of it, we are lost - just as that young man is lost, in terms of his relationship with God.

So how does the Bible look at prophecy? And how does the Bible define this form of writing?

As the apostle Peter is approaching the end of his life, he talks about some of the needs he sees for the Church, the fact that what they have experienced needs to be bound up for them and to become part of their very being. Peter, together with James and John had witnessed the transfiguration on the mount (Matthew 17). Having talked about the experiences that they had had with Jesus Christ, Peter concludes the first chapter of 2nd Peter by saying:

2 Peter 1:19 And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,

He said they had something very sure to depend on: the prophetic word. He describes it as being a lamp shining in a dark place. It illuminates the world in which we live. It gives us understanding of this world, "until the day dawns and the morning star (Jesus Christ) arises."

20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.

21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Here we have a valuable starting point in studying prophecy. We have a reference to the "prophetic word." The noun "prophecy" is used twice in verses 20 and 21. The apostle Peter is speaking of prophecy in contrast to the "myths" that some people claimed that he addressed in verse 16.

16 For we (the apostles) did not follow cleverly devised myths (or fables) ...

... as some people claimed. He said, "Rather, we have the prophetic word of which you do well to pay attention." This is a great contrast between myth on the one hand, and the prophetic word on the other.

What does Peter mean by the term "prophecy"? An understanding of prophecy as related purely to future events is far too NARROW a definition for Peter's usage in verses 19-21.

For a starter, let's look at how the term "prophecy" is used in the New Testament. We can make connections from some of these events here to comparable Old Testament Scriptures as well. So we see a constant view of prophecy throughout God's Word.

When we talk about prophecy, I think the starting point and the common ground for everybody is that it is foretelling the future. That's at least the one aspect of prophecy that everybody knows. Even Protestants understand that - even if they don't believe in the return of Jesus Christ, even if they don't believe in the Millennium, they understand that the Old Testament contained things about the birth of Christ. They were prophecy. "They foretold future events. They are very important because if they didn't happen, what is Christianity all about?"

So their traditional understanding of foretelling future events, prediction, is one aspect of prophecy. We can find that being used in the New Testament. Jesus Christ said to the disciples:

Matthew 13:14 Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled ...

Jesus is taking something from Isaiah, a future event, and saying that it is fulfilled right here, today. What was the future event? It was not a future event that we would normally think of:

14 ... that says: "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.

He is talking about a people who were blind and deaf.

A similar case is given where Jesus Christ talks about Daniel the prophet. We are not using the term "prophecy," here. We are using the term "prophet." Daniel is referred to as a prophet who predicted future events.

**Matthew 24:15 "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),
16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.**

Jesus Christ was using the term "prophet" or "prophecy" in terms of a future event. But the New Testament and God's word uses it in a larger sense than that. Prophecy is also seen as being a gift of inspired speaking - not necessarily speaking of future events, not prediction: but rather inspired speaking.

In Romans 12, the apostle Paul talks about the gifts of God's Holy Spirit.

Romans 12:6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;

Is it prediction that the apostle Paul is talking about here or is it, in fact, inspired speaking?

Speaking to the Church in Corinth, Paul returns to this aspect as well. He says to the Church:

1 Corinthians 14:6 Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?

Here the aspect of prophecy is involved with knowledge, teaching, the revealing of God's word and the understanding of God's word.

A little later in that same chapter, the apostle Paul continues by saying:

1 Corinthians 14:22 Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy ...

In this case I think he is clearly talking about inspired teaching ...

22 ... is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers.

He is talking about something that is not for unbelievers! He is not talking about when the end of the world is coming, and when Jesus Christ is returning. He is talking about something that is for the benefit of believers, something that helps build their relationship with God. So we have this aspect of inspired speaking.

We can go back through the Old Testament and find many occasions where the role of the prophet was to inspire the people to live God's way of life. We could look at the account of Samuel as a prophet, and the way in which he was inspired to teach and lead the people into a relationship with God. So the aspect of the term "prophecy" is also used in terms of inspired speaking within God's word.

There is a third aspect to prophecy as well, which is one you would appreciate very clearly. Paul speaks to this end by telling the Church at Ephesus:

**Ephesians 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,
20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the**

cornerstone,

21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

What does he say about prophets here? He said that prophets, together with the apostles are part of the foundation of the Temple that the Eternal is building. They are built around Jesus Christ who is the chief cornerstone. The apostle Paul understood, as did others of his day, that the Word of God was established through prophets. It just wasn't anybody who put together the canon of Scripture that we have today.

Josephus understood that very clearly when he told Apion that the Scriptures were written by the prophets and that there were no inspired writings from the time of Ezra because the spirit of prophecy had been taken from Israel. Josephus realised, and if he realised it, a lot of other people in that period of time understood it as well, that the whole concept of prophecy was involved in inspired writing.

It is to that end that the apostle Paul is talking here. Because the apostles also had that responsibility within the Church of bringing together the structure of the Scriptures that we call God's word.

Paul speaks to the Ephesians about the Word of God and how it is that the apostles and the prophets were granted that responsibility to preserve and propagate that knowledge.

The apostle John speaks in a similar way at the beginning and the end of the book of Revelation. He is told to record:

Revelation 1:3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

Let's stop and consider that for a moment. What is the prophecy that John is being directed to in this book? Is it chapters 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21? Is it only the parts of the book of Revelation that talk about future events that are being discussed in verse 3, or is it the whole book? Do we look at the messages to the seven churches as being prophecy: not necessarily in terms of future events, future predictions (although they can very clearly be that), but inspired writings and inspired teaching that effect, impact and place demands on each and every one of our lives?

John is told, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy," - the whole book. I don't believe Jesus Christ was making a distinction between various chapters of the book and saying: "The future parts are all prophecy. The other parts are something else." This whole book is a book of prophecy.

The messages to the seven churches are prophecy because if we don't heed them, those things can be future events for us! We can be cast out. We can be spewed out of Christ's mouth if we don't listen to the lessons that are being provided there. The book contains much in the way of inspired teaching and inspired writing for us.

We find the same sentiment being given right at the end of the book. Here is something that the Eternal wants to convey to each and every one of us so that we never lose sight of it. Why do I say that? It is because He literally repeats it. In other words, this is important.

Revelation 22:18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book ...

Are we just talking about selected chapters, or are we talking about the whole book. I put it to you brethren that we are talking about the whole book!

***18 ... if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book,
19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.***

The writing, compilation and preservation of the Word of God was a prophetic responsibility. It was a function of prophecy together with inspired speaking (some of which is recorded for us), and prediction of the future.

Lastly, the prophets also undertook physical acts on behalf of God. In some cases they were His messengers. They undertook miraculous events. We can see this in Revelation 11 where it talks about the two witnesses having the power to shut the heaven:

Revelation 11:6 They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.

Prophets undertook physical acts, whether they be miracles or acting as messengers to individuals on behalf of the Eternal God.

The role of the prophet that affects us today encompasses not only predicting the future, but also inspired teaching or preaching as well as writing.

Returning to Peter's comment in 2nd Peter 1:19-21, which of these is Peter addressing? As I have already pointed out to you, he is contrasting what is already written and what they are conveying to the Church as opposed to what some people claimed were in fact myth. He is talking about God's word. He is talking about the inspired writing. He is doing some inspired teaching at the same time!

Is he really addressing future prediction at all in these three verses? I don't believe he is. He is really focusing on some of the other aspects of prophecy.

Clearly that would be in mind when we get to the second chapter, when he talks about false prophets. It is definitely, unequivocally in mind when Peter gets to chapter three. But here he is addressing the prophetic word provided by the prophets and the inspiration of that word through God's Holy Spirit.

In Hebrew, the term "prophet" derives principally from the word *nabiy*, which has its basis from concepts of: "to proclaim" and "to be called." Those two elements are part of the underlying idea behind the word *nabiy*. The prophets in the *Tanakh*, the Old Testament, were individually called and were simply proclaiming the words of the Eternal. There are some wonderful cases of their calling and their reluctance to take up on the calling.

A classic case is the wonderful confrontation between Amos on the one hand as a prophet of God and the High Priest at Bethel. We are in the northern kingdom of Israel at this time, under King Jeroboam II. It was a time of great prosperity for the northern kingdom.

Amos 7:10 Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words.

11 For thus Amos has said, "'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.'"

12 And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah ...

"Go back to where you came from! We didn't invite you here!"

12 ... and eat bread there, and prophesy there,

13 but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."

So, being given the brush off by the High Priest, Amos didn't do a "Jonah thing" and sulk off somewhere and hide under a bush. He retorted ...

14 Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, "I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs.

15 But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'

"I'm not here at my own behest. I didn't take up the vocation of prophet because it ran in the family, or because it seemed a good idea. I'm here because the Eternal sent me - and this is what the Eternal sent me to say ..."

16 Now therefore hear the word of the LORD. "You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.'

17 Therefore thus says the LORD: "Your wife shall be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be divided up with a measuring line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land."

"Take that and digest it!"

What was Amos doing? Was he just predicting the future for Jeroboam's house and for the house of Amaziah? Clearly, here was a man who had been called by God to proclaim what the Eternal desired. The role of a prophet such as Amos was to convey the divine perspective on the situation in this world, whether it relates to sin with its judgment and punishment or to righteousness and its ultimate reward. Let me repeat that:

The role of a prophet is to convey the divine perspective on the situation in this world, whether it relates to sin with its judgment and punishment or to righteousness and its ultimate reward.

In the 21st century, we could say that prophecy contains the metanarrative of God's plan for this world and His creation. It contains the account of how God is going to reconcile and restore this world to Himself! Any narrower view of prophecy is deficient. You might say that we are now talking about future events. Yes, but future events as rooted in the present because it demands something of us now! Abraham Heschel wrote what was a landmark work on prophecy in the 1960s. He stated that:

"The prophet's task is to contain a divine view, yet as a person he IS a point of view. He speaks from the perspective of God as perceived from the perspective of his own situation."

He did not allow that to mean that prophecy was only relevant to the day and the age of the prophet. Clearly, what the prophets said was timeless. They were issues of inhuman injustice that a world, blinded by Satan, indulges itself in. As Heschel noted, there is no society to which Amos's words would not apply. He quotes from Amos 8:4-6:

Amos 8:4 Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end,

Is there a nation in the world at this time in the 21st century to which this does not apply? I have travelled far and wide and I have yet to find a nation to which it does not apply. How do they trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end?

Amos 8:5 saying, "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances,

He is talking about the economic system of literally every nation upon the face of the earth. It's a little more sophisticated in some cases than others, but it is all tarred with the same bitumen! What's the object of their economic approach?

6 that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?"

"We are not interested in other human beings. They are just commodities for us. We are here to make as much money in a short a period of time as we possibly can - for the least amount of service."

I am sure that each and every one of us has run across that, and could put together accounts where we have had to contend with those things. We live in a nation that is regulated to try to prevent some of that happening!

Rather, in terms of what Heschel said earlier on, God used all sorts of personalities to convey His view of human interaction and behaviour to His people - including you and me.

The prophets, just like the apostles, were not of one particular mould. They were diverse as human beings are diverse. You can get a crusty individual such as John the Baptist or Elijah. I can't imagine any other way of describing a man who lives in the desert wearing camel-hair cloaks and eating locusts and wild honey! Living by the stream and being fed by the ravens for a period of time would have made an impact upon Elijah. I think he would have been somewhat of a crusty old man - not the sort of person that you would have a great, warm relationship with. Yet they were prophets of God! God used them. God used them in spite of their lack of engaging personalities.

On the other hand, we have a very sensitive, emotional person like Jeremiah who wished that his eyes were streams of water that he could weep for the sins of his people. It just cut him up in a very, very profound way.

We have a simple worker of the land as in the case of Amos, compared with a sophisticate who lived and worked within the king's palace, as did Isaiah. The point is that God was able to use any type of person as His mouthpiece - on one proviso: that they were committed to the law of God. They saw that as being central to their whole lives!

In reality we have a situation whereby no generation, no personality type, no level of accomplishment can ever turn round and claim exemption from the necessity to hear and respond to the Word of God - because prophecy makes a demand upon us that we hear the Word of God.

What then should prophecy mean to you and me? Let's return to 2nd Peter. Rather than going to chapter one on this occasion, let's go to chapter three where Peter speaks of the end of this physical world: prophecy as prediction. The end of this age is given in terms of prophecy and in terms of God's plan. As I said before, in keeping the Holy Days we acknowledge that of which Peter speaks. But notice the direction in which he guides our attention from the certainty of that outline of events. Where does he take us to? Does he take us to how to work out WHEN it is going to happen? No, he doesn't. He leaves us totally blind to that! Rather, it is a very prophetic approach of what sort of people we ought to be.

2 Peter 3:11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved ...

"This is the reality, people. This physical world is not going to last forever! It has a time limit. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved ..."

11 ... what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,

12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

14 Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

That's what we have got to do! That is what prophecy places upon us as a demand: to be found without spot or blemish, and at peace.

15 And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,

16 as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Then he picks up that thought again by saying:

17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.

I would contend to you that that is what our mutual friend did back in 1974. On the other hand, knowing these things leads to us DOING something:

18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

... no detail of when, but a lot of detail as to what sort of person I am to be, and a lot of detail as to the demands God places upon me for knowing the certainty that is given within this chapter.

In chapter three, Peter is challenging us in the same way the prophets challenged the people of their day. Nothing has changed! It's the same situation, the same human nature, and the same mis-focus.

Let's go to a beautiful section of Scripture:

Micah 6:6 "With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high

...

"How do I worship God? Shall I come before Him with largesse and empty my wallet so that everybody can see it?"

6 ... Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil ...

Is that what God is all about? Is He just wanting to see what He can get out of us?

"How much can I SQUEEZE out of these people?"

"He's the ultimate tax collector."

In one country I used to live in, the tax return was very simple.

Line one was: "State your income."

Line two was: "Send it to us!"

Some people's view of God is that we can impress Him by giving Him more.

7 ... Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

"Can I make atonement through sacrifice of someone?" No ...

8 He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

You might say that sums up the prophetic message in a very profound way. Micah was not introducing a new system of worship or religion for Judah as many people would like to suggest. "We've got competing ideas here. Micah is promoting a way which is contrary to the Temple and the sacrifices in the Temple."

Not at all! He was rather pointing out the lesson that they were supposed to teach: WHY they had been

instituted, what we are supposed to learn from them. Micah is highlighting the descriptive aspect of God's law as opposed to the prescriptive view that human beings always have.

God's law was not just a set of rituals. God's law was to accomplish a radical change in the life of the worshipper. I use that term in a very non-modern approach. The term "worship" in the English is often translated from the Hebrew, "to serve." It doesn't convey any of the ideas of the current idea of worship which I so frequently characterise as being, "Entertain me." God was concerned about worship in terms of serving Him.

How far is it from Micah's statement to Jesus' comments to the religious leaders of His day in Matthew 23? The only distance between the two is in the years. The thought, the concept, the underlying principles are identical!

Matthew 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

It's the same sentiment, the same ideal that Micah was conveying. The tragedy for all generations of humanity is that they have missed the real purpose of prophecy. They have sought their own words, their own ends in its words. Jesus addressed this problem when He spoke about this relationship with the prophets:

29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous,

"You go about investing great time in venerating these prophets in various physical ways."

30 saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'

"Not me fellow! We would have listened to the prophets!"

31 Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.

33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell (the grave)?

34 Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town,

35 so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

36 Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

Zechariah, the son of Barachiah, is referred to in 2nd Chronicles, the last book in the *Tanakh*. He was the last righteous person murdered for his righteousness in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Let's continue because the whole crux of it is contained in the last few verses:

37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!

38 See, your house is left to you desolate.

39 For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

They never saw Jesus Christ coming "in the name of the Eternal." They just saw Him as a competitor for their own power, their own position.

What is the point that Jesus is making? Human beings, without God's Spirit, don't naturally recognise the message of God. They don't see the message of the prophet in the right context. For them, it is so often just another "opinion" to be silenced, another source of power to be quelled. "It is of men, not of God."

On the other hand, the religious leaders feared the people. Why did they fear the people? It was because the people, the little people, saw both John the Baptist and Jesus as prophets! We might ask ourselves, "Why?" Clearly, neither man was interested in the physical aspects of life. They were concerned about the same exact issues that God's prophets had always been concerned about - about the people developing a relationship with their Creator based upon His standards and not their own.

So a greatly overlooked aspect of prophecy is that it helps us appreciate the mind of God! Prophecy is an introduction to the mind of our Creator, the mind of our Ruler. It helps us appreciate what sort of people we ought to be as shown by the prophets through the inspiration of God. Paul, like Peter, like John and the rest of the apostles, understood this aspect clearly. To that end, Paul made the comments to the Church at Thessalonica, where he talked about this aspect of prophecy.

1 Thessalonians 5:1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.

2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

It's unknown!

3 While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

"We don't have to be surprised by what happens. We know what is going to happen. And when it happens, it should be no surprise to us! Why? It is because we are not children of darkness. We are children of light."

5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.

6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night.

8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

So all of our vital organs are protected. From where do we get the idea of hope, love and salvation? It is from the Word of God we understand these things. We can understand the very mind of God, God's aspirations, God's desires, God's standards, God's morality, and God's ethics - all of these things are laid out very clearly for us!

9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

The most successful way of living with another person is coming to understand how they think! Is that not a fair comment about the success in married life? If you don't come to learn how the other person thinks and be able to adapt to it, you can have a very lousy existence.

God gives us the opportunity to come to understand how He thinks so that we can have a relationship, a living relationship, with Him and His Son. It will be a very successful, a very smooth and peaceable relationship, rather than a stony and harsh relationship.

So it doesn't matter what happens to us in terms of this physical life. We can carry on. We will live with Him. We have a relationship with Him.

Speaking about prayer, one writer stated that:

"Prayer must be subversive. It has to be an affront to our complacency, rather than a confirmation of our values."

That's an interesting subject for a future sermon! But I would like to amend that a little, by saying that the same can be said of prophecy. The ultimate purpose of prophecy is to challenge our complacency! Prophecy exists to subvert us from our own way of thinking, to seek to understand the mind of our Heavenly Father, to seek Him in our lives day by day so that we are preparing for His future!

No matter whether prophecy is inspired teaching, inspired writing or predicting the future, the end result desired by the Eternal is the same: His character!

So we can return to the ultimate question of prophecy: the "when?" What we have to say is that the answer to the "when?" of prophecy is dual. Yes, the events will take place according to our Father's good timing.

But for you and me, the answer to "when?" is one word: NOW!

... Peter Nathan
23 Jun 07

[Back to Top](#)

[Back to Sermon Summary List](#)