

# Outlines Of Prophecy

God's Self-revelation To Man  
Hebrews 1:1

*by*  
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## *God's Self-revelation To Man—Heb. 1:1*

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Prophecy is the way God chose to reveal himself to mankind. This fact distinguishes prophecy from all forms of prognostication or soothsaying, which are futile attempts to predict the future. This also means that Bible prophecy should not be viewed as a way to divine the future in the manner of fortunetellers or a Nostradamus or a psychic. All studies of Bible prophecy should be to learn God's lessons of His self-revelation. In this sense, the entire Bible is prophecy, God's self-revelation to mankind, first by the prophets of the Old Testament and then in Jesus Christ. Heb 1:1

### **The Nature Of History**

The ancient, "classical," view of history was that it is cyclical, that "history repeats itself," that historical events go in circles or cycles. This would make "progress" impossible. This is also the view of Hinduism and its "reincarnation." The modern view is that history has no meaning, that "the only lesson that history teaches is that it teaches no lessons." This has spawned both existentialism and nihilism. These philosophies are the assumptions of this modern age. The biblical view is that history is linear, that it has a beginning, that it was begun with a purpose and that it progresses to a goal or end. This view gives profound meaning to history and it is in this sense that we speak of Bible history.

## **The Nature Of Divine Revelation**

Prophecy was God's way of revealing Himself to mankind and it was always in the context of history. Heb 1:1 He used many means to reveal Himself and His truth: dreams, visions, angelic appearances, audible voice, miracles and even disasters. It is of prime importance to note that God's self-revelation was progressive. Adam did not know God in the way that Noah knew Him. Noah did not know God like Abraham did. Abraham did not know Him as Moses did. And Moses did not know Him like Isaiah and David. Then the revelation was fully completed for all time in Jesus, the Christ. Without understanding this progressive nature of revelation, the Old Testament and its message cannot be understood.

## **The Prophetic Mountain Peaks**

In the western United States there are a number of mountain peaks that were monuments for the westering pioneers. There are Devil's Tower in Nebraska and Long's Peak, Mount Evans, Pike's Peak and the Spanish Peaks in Colorado. Seeing these mountains, the pioneers knew they were on course and could tell their progress on each of the trails.

There are "mountain peaks" of God's revelation that form a framework for understanding God's Word and its prophetic message. The first "mountain peak" of prophecy is Genesis 3:16. This is the prophecy of "the seed of the woman." In this chapter man realizes that he is a sinner and fears God's holiness. But a redeemer is promised, "the seed of the woman." We do not speak of offspring as the "seed" of the woman, but of the man. Children are the "fruit" of the womb. This is a clear prophecy of the virgin birth of Christ. And this promise

was sealed in a sacrifice of blood, the blood of the victims to make clothing for Adam & Eve. The second great "mountain peak" of prophecy is found in Genesis 12:1-3. Here God makes a sevenfold promise to Abraham and in chapter 15 seals the promises in a covenant of blood sacrifice. This "mountain peak" revelation is that the Promised One will be of "the seed of Abraham." Gal 3:16 Each of these seven promises that God gave to Abraham is bound up in Christ! A third great "mountain peak" of prophecy is II Samuel 7. In this chapter God promises to David to establish and build his royal house **forever**. Here the Coming One will be royal and eternal. This prophecy concerns "The Son of David." A fourth prophetic "mountain peak" is Isaiah 53. Here the Promised One is the "suffering servant of the Lord," who is rejected by his brethren and whose death is an atonement for sin. These prophecies have been fulfilled. A fifth "mountain peak" is Matthew 24-25. Here Jesus sets a framework for the consummation from the viewpoint of the Jewish experience that was then future.

All of Bible prophecy must be put into this framework to be rightly understood. Thus the theme of the Bible is Jesus the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, the Seed of the Woman. Luke 3:23-38

### **Prophetic Eras**

The eras of prophecy are: the patriarchal, the former and latter prophets of Israel and prophecy in the Church. As each of these ages is a different stage of God's revelation, the character of prophecy differs in each of these times. The simplest definition of a prophet is "one to whom the word of God comes."

## The Patriarchs

The first prophetic era was the age of the patriarchs. Since the word of God came to Adam, he is the first of the prophets and his revelation from God was the promise of a redeemer for sinful mankind. Genesis three is the foundation for all prophecy that follows. Enoch was a prophet who "walked with God" and one of his prophecies is in the New Testament. Jude 14,15 This prophecy has to do with God's judgment at the consummation when he will judge the ungodly. Noah's prophecy concerned the course of nature to come and concerning human government. Gen ch.9 The key characteristic of his revelation was a covenant of God with all mankind. God's revelation to Abraham was also in the form of a covenant with a seven-fold promise for all time. Joseph, too was a prophet. His revelation was in the form of dreams.

## The Prophets Of Israel

The second prophetic era is the prophets of Israel. Moses is the first and greatest prophet of Israel. His position is unique, as he is the prototype for all who would follow and he gave the requirements for a prophet of the Lord and defined the nature of prophecy in Israel. Deut 13:1-5 & 18:15-22 A prophet was to speak God's **words**. He would not speak of himself, but as God "commanded" him. He could give a "sign" to confirm his words. How could the people know a false prophet? If his sign did not come to pass or if he advocated "other gods," he was to be rejected. Isaiah (8:20) says that if a prophet did not speak according to "the law and the testimony," (The Torah or all God's previous Word) there was "no light in them."

Further, Moses said (Deut 18:15) that the Lord would raise up a **final** prophet. This is quoted three times in the New Testament regarding Christ. John 6:14, Acts 3:22 & 7:37 Thus did God's Word come to man gradually and came to completion in Jesus the Christ. Heb 1:1

### **The Former Prophets**

The Bible books that we call "historical books" are in the Hebrew Bible called "the former prophets." The books from Joshua to Second Kings are more an interpretation of Israel's history from a prophetic viewpoint than a chronicle of the times. Though the authors are unnamed, likely they were prophets. Since the Word of the Lord came to Joshua and the Judges, they were all prophets in the broad sense of the word. The Former Prophets begin with Joshua and end with Elisha in Second Kings. Among them are Deborah (Judges 4:4) the only woman named, several are nameless, (Judges 6:8, 10:11, I Samuel 2:27, I Kings 13:1, 11-13) Samuel (I Samuel 3:20) who is also called a seer, (I Samuel 9:9) David, (Acts 2:29,30) Nathan, (II Samuel 7) Gad, (II Samuel 24:11) Elijah, (I Kings 17:1) Elisha, (II Kings 2:11) and Jehu, son of Hanani the seer. (II Chron 19:2) None of these prophets left writings, unless they were authors of these "historical" books.

The Former Prophets were men of action whose ministries were occasioned by crises in Israel and Judah. They were not "professional" prophets in the sense of earning a living by their prophetic gifts. Thus they were able to fearlessly confront any and all with God's message.

### **The Latter Prophets**

The Latter Prophets, also called the writing prophets, are those who have left works in their names. In

our Bible they are the books from Isaiah to Malachi. They lived from the eighth to the fifth centuries BC. They are divided between the "Major Prophets" and the Minor Prophets." The Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, although in the Hebrew Bible Daniel is included in the miscellaneous "Writings" instead of with the prophets. The "Minor Prophets" are from Hosea to Malachi and in the Hebrew Canon are one book called "the scroll of the twelve." They are called Major and Minor because Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel are very important for the prophetic revelation and the first three are quite long while "the twelve" are short and their prophecies are more limited in scope. There are in the Gospels prophets of the Old Testament order like the former prophets. John the Baptist was a prophet whom everyone likened to Elijah. Matt 11:13,14 Simeon and Anna, (Luke 2:25-38) were like "the men of God" of the Old Testament whose ministries were brief and directed to particular events. Living and ministering before the cross, they were of the old economy.

### **The Captivities**

From the time of the division of the Israelite kingdom following the death of Solomon, the northern tribes led by the largest tribe, Ephraim, assumed the name Israel. Hosea calls this kingdom Ephraim. Hosea 5:3, 13:1 The southern tribes, led by Judah, the largest of them, assumed the name Judah. Isa 1:1 Over time, as Israel became more and more apostate, the priests and Levites in the north migrated to Judah, as did many of the commoners. II Chron 11:13-17 Thus in the kingdom of Judah were peoples of all the tribes and the term "Jews," from Judah, came to mean the whole nation after the destruction of the kingdom of

Israel by Assyria in 722 BC. The kingdom of Judah lasted for more than a century before it was conquered by the Babylonians. Many people of the northern tribes exiled to Assyria assimilated and lost their national identity. Those who migrated to Judah were among those later exiled to Babylon, but they retained their tribal identities. Acts 26:7 There never were any "ten lost tribes of Israel!"

## **The New Testament**

The third prophetic era is that of the Church. In the Book of Acts we read of "certain prophets and teachers" in the church that is at Antioch. Acts 13:1 There was "a certain prophet named Agabus" at Caesarea. Acts 21:10 Among the offices in the Church Eph (4:11) was listed that of Prophet. Many prophesied who were not called prophets. The four daughters of Philip the Evangelist, prophesied (Acts 12:9) as did the disciples at Ephesus when "the Holy Ghost came upon them." Acts 19:6 Disciples at Tyre warned Paul "through the Spirit" that he should not go to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4) and Paul himself, prophesied the fate of the ship, and all aboard, that was bound for Rome. Acts 27:25 In I Cor 14:24 Paul writes "but if all (the congregation) prophecy---" There is a difference in the gift of prophecy, which is one of the nine gifts of the Spirit (I Cor 12:10) and the office of Prophet in the Church. Eph 4:11

Just as Moses defined the nature of prophecy for the Mosaic era, so Paul defined the nature of prophecy for the Church. First Corinthians 14:3 says that prophecy is for edification, exhortation and comfort. There is no indication in the New Testament that prophecy should vanish from the Church. Just as in the Old Testament, so in the New, all prophecy must be judged by the scriptures.

Jesus, Paul, Peter, Jude and John (Revelation) all had very much to say about "the last things" concerning the future. Their prophetic writings complete God's self-revelation. All prophecy in Christian assemblies is for "edification, exhortation and comfort." It is not to impart new revelation of truth.

### **Prophetic Themes**

Moses was the pattern for all the prophets of Israel to follow. Deuteronomy is his exposition of his law and also states the themes of prophecy. God is the true king of Israel and their leaders are His regents and are answerable to Him. God chose Israel from among the nations, gave them His Law, obedience to His covenant would bring great blessings, apostasy would bring severe judgment and repentance would be met with mercy. Deut 4

The book of Judges records the repeated cycle of sin, servitude, sorrow (repentance) and salvation (deliverance). This was the pattern of Israel's history until the Captivities. The same principle governed the relation of individuals with God. A "man of God" pronounced judgment on the house of Eli and on Israel (I Samuel 2:27,36) while in chapter seven Samuel called Israel to repentance and God answered their prayer. The prophet Nathan (II Samuel 12) denounced David for his great sin and pronounced judgment. When David sincerely repented, admitting his sin, II Samuel 12:13 God forgave his sin, but did not remove the punishment. A "man of God" pronounced doom on the house of Jereboam ben Nebat of the kingdom of Israel for his apostasy. I Kings 13 Both Elijah and Elisha openly challenged the kings of Israel pronouncing doom that came to pass as foretold. The prophets were the moral and spiritual watchmen of God's people.

With the prophet Elijah a new prophetic theme developed, the doctrine of the remnant. When Elijah was depressed because of the apostasy of Ahab and the people of the kingdom of Israel, God assured him that there were seven thousand that were faithful to Israel's God. After the secession of the ten tribes to form the kingdom of Israel, and as the people and king became more and more apostate, the godly among the northern tribes migrated to the kingdom of Judah and became part of the people later called Jews. These were the remnant of the northern tribes. II Chron 11:13-17

Though many of Judah's kings were godly, others were not and gradually the people became idolatrous. The prophets pronounced doom on Judah by the Babylonians as they had pronounced doom on Israel by the Assyrians. Once again, there was "a very small remnant." Isa 1:9 & 10:22 This remnant returned from Babylon and rededicated themselves to the covenant. Ezra & Nehemiah But by the time of our Lord they had again apostatized and Paul wrote (Rom 11:5) that at that time there was "a remnant according to the election of grace." It was that remnant that evangelized the Gentiles.

Another of the themes of prophecy is that of "the last days" (Gen 49:1 & Isa 2:2) and "the latter days." Dan 2:28 "The last days" for some of these prophecies is the Gospel age. Heb 1:2 For many others it is after this Gospel age. I Tim 4:1, II Tim 3:1 The theme of the Messiah (Christ) is closely associated with "the last days" in both his first advent (Isa 53, Heb 1:2) and his Second Advent. Isa 61:1,2, II Thess 1:7-10 The restoration of Israel in faith is "in the last days (Isa 2:2) and "in that day." Zech 13:1

Jesus made it clear that before the prophet's promised golden age there would be "great tribulation" (Matt 24:21) before His return to Israel. Paul

wrote of "that man of sin" (II Thess 2:3) who is also "that Wicked One." II Thess 2:8 This is John's "Antichrist" who would be revealed and whom the Lord would destroy at His coming. The Revelation also describes these events. It should be apparent that nowhere does the Bible predict automobiles, airplanes, battle tanks or dates to calculate calendar dates for these events.

## The Revelation

The Revelation is a special case of New Testament prophecy. Like Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah, Revelation is an apocalypse. An apocalypse is a kind of writing that expresses truth by symbols, which are not meant to be understood literally.

The key to understanding Revelation is to note that all of its symbols are taken from the Old Testament. John knew those scriptures intimately and we must also be thoroughly familiar with them if we are to understand his symbols. Nowhere does John quote directly from the Old Testament but nearly every sentence is an allusion to it.

It is also important to understand that Revelation was not intended to be charted or to be presented pictorially. As pictures these scenes are grotesque but the hearing of this book is beautiful. "Let him that hath ears hear!" These chapters are "word pictures."

The most important thing to remember is this book was not written to satisfy curiosity, but to vindicate and glorify Jesus!

Thus we see the beginning of prophecy in Eden Gen 3:16 when the prophecy of a redeemer was given, the progress of God's self-revelation over the ages of time and its conclusion in paradise restored. Rev 21-22 Eden's tree of life Gen 2:9 is now the **trees of life**. Rev 22:2 Eden's river Gen 2:10 is now the **river of life**. Rev 22:1 The severed fellowship

with God Gen 3:8-11,24 is restored: "The Tabernacle of God is with man." Rev 21:3 Instead of a wife for Adam Gen 2:21,22 we see "the Bride, the Lamb's wife." Rev 21:9 Redemption is completed!





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