

Your **QUESTIONS** About Prophecy

ANSWERED Part II By Larry G. Jaffrey

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Is the **Study of Prophecy** Important?

When I first began in the ministry, conferences on prophecy were a very significant part of Evangelical Christianity. Summer retreat centers had at least one week devoted to prophecy. The Jewish mission organization I worked for had an annual prophetic conference in New York City which included some of the best Bible teachers of the day. Of course churches were always looking for good prophecy speakers to come and speak. At a high point of this movement Hal Lindsey came out with his book, "The Late Great Planet Earth," and prophecy was popularized to the rest of society.

Then things began to change. First, there were the attacks by those who disagreed with Hal Lindsey, his book and those who hold that the Rapture of the Church will be prior to the Tribulation. These were not just books and messages presenting different theological positions on "Last Day" events, but they were vitriolic attacks. Soon prophecy became a very emotional and controversial subject in churches. Many pastors decided to avoid the subject all together in their messages and by not having prophecy speakers in their churches. When pastors did preach on a prophetic passage they tended to minimize the prophetic and emphasize the "here-and-now" practical application.

A couple of years back I preached a message on Matthew 24 in a local church. A lady came up to me after the service and showed me her Bible which was filled with her personal notes taken over the previous

twenty years while listening to her pastor's sermons. She pointed to Matthew 24 and several other passages I referenced in my message and there was not a single note on those pages other than what she had written that morning. She had not heard one message on the Last Days and Jesus' second coming in those twenty years!

Becoming a controversial subject was just part of the problem. The Baby Boomers were coming of age and began influencing the church culture. They and their children cared about the here and now. The future was not something to be concerned about. This "here and now" mind-set impacted not only the sermons but the music as well.

Dr. Ergun Caner, President of Liberty Theological Seminary, was speaking recently at a meeting of pastors in Virginia. After a wonderful time of worship led by a very popular praise band, Dr. Caner came to the podium and began talking about music preferences of individuals in his family. Then he made the following statement, "Modern music does not talk about the return of Jesus Christ." Reason - because the writers and performers don't believe in it or believe that it is not an important doctrine. After hearing that message, I decided to check the topical index of an old hymnal in my library. Guess what? That old hymnal has a separate section listing the hymns relating to the Second Coming of Christ.

Is there a need for preaching and singing about the

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Second Coming of Jesus and the events leading up to it? In the next two issues of *Jacob's Ladder* we are going to look at why prophecy is so important.

It is important to God

If prophecy is not important, why did God inspire the writers of the scriptures to write so much about it? In the New Testament alone, one book (Revelation) deals primarily with Last Day events, the Gospels spend several chapters on Jesus' teaching concerning His return. Even Paul's letters to the Thessalonians are full of teachings on prophecy. One in thirteen verses deals either with Rapture of the Church or Last Day events. Paul's letters to the Corinthians and Romans also contains important prophetic teachings. Then we have the Old Testament. It contains numerous passages on the regathering of Israel, judgment of the nations and the coming of the Messiah to reign as king.

Paul stopped off at Miletus on his third missionary journey and called the elders of nearby Ephesus to come meet with him so he could bid them a final farewell before continuing on to Jerusalem. In that farewell speech he said, "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the **whole counsel (purpose) of God.** (Acts 20:26-27) In making this statement at the end of his ministry, Paul was most certainly including his teaching on the prophesied future as part of the whole counsel of God. Therefore can we say we are declaring the whole counsel of God if we ignore or avoid trying to understand what yet lies ahead for the Church and the world at large?

We are commanded to understand prophecy

We can agree that the Scriptures are replete with passages on prophecies of Last Day events and the Second Coming of Jesus. You may be asking – "so, what?" Recently, we in the church have viewed the study of prophecy as a subject only for those with the time and interest. Prophecy, including the Second Coming, for the rest of us, isn't as important as the other major doctrines . . . especially those doctrines that can impact us in the "here and now."

What does the Bible have to say about the study and understanding of prophecy? When Jesus was answering the question of the disciples concerning the signs of His Second Coming, he made the following statement after He listed several signs, "*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand)*" ... (Matthew 24:14-15 NKJV)

In this passage the word "therefore" highlights a key sign relating to Jesus' return. That sign is the "abomination of desolation." The sign is followed by a parenthetical statement "(whoever reads, let him understand.)" This is an imperative statement meaning **we are commanded to understand** the "abomination of desolation" that Daniel wrote about.

This simple command is stating that Christians reading Matthew (and its parallel passage in Mark 13) must take the time to understand Daniel's writings and their implication. By studying the Book of Daniel we learn that the "abomination of desolation" is a defiling of the Temple and its worship system and not its destruction. This did not happen in 70 AD when the Temple was destroyed. It is yet future. If it is yet future, the Temple must be rebuilt. Before the Temple can be rebuilt the Jews must be in control of the Temple Mount and Jerusalem. This naturally assumes that if the Jews are in control of Jerusalem, they have returned to their homeland and have become a nation. Therefore, we can see Jesus' seemingly simple statement encompasses more than a single event.

We at Light to Israel want to help local churches better understand the prophetic scriptures dealing with the Last Days and Jesus' Second Coming. As a result, we have put together a three-hour seminar which is now available for presentation in churches. Check out the "What in the World is Going On?" announcement in this newsletter.

In the next issue we look at the "here and now" benefits of studying prophecy.

-Larry Jaffrey