

## **BIBLICAL PROPHECY**

1. How Does the Bible Define a True Prophet? Exodus 7:1-2 (compare 4:16): The true prophet gets his message from God and is defined as a “spokesman” from God to others or to the people.
2. Moses is the pattern of a true prophet, Deuteronomy 34:10; 18:22.
3. The OT makes a distinction between true and false prophets, between prophets and diviners or soothsayers, Deut. 18:14-15; Jeremiah 27:9-10 (compare 23:25-32); Micah 3:7-8.
4. Abraham is called a prophet, Genesis 20:7, yet he did not preach messages from God, but was qualified to pray to God for others, that is, he knew God personally and God heard him.
5. Moses followed up on this and gave us his prophetic wish: that all the people of God were prophets and that God would put his Spirit on them all, Numbers 11:29.
6. The prophets looked forward to and predicted the “last days,” Isaiah 2:2; Hosea 3:5; Amos 9:11; cf. Galatians 4:4 where Paul speaks of the arrival of “the fullness of time” when God sent his Son. The “last days,” “the last day,” “in that day,” refer to the Messianic age that began when Jesus came. We now live in that age, especially if we are part of his kingdom and partake of his Spirit.
7. Joel predicted the coming of the Messianic age in which all classes of God’s people would prophesy, Joel 2:28-29, 32—that is, they would know God and be able to speak for him to others. This was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:16-21. We are living in the last age, the Messianic age, for the Messiah has come and inaugurated that promised age, though he will come again to bring it to culmination, 1 Corinthians 10:11; 1 John 2:18, 20-22. All born of the Spirit know how to tell others what happened to them and the way to God.
8. Some focus so much on the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming that they seem blind to the fact that he has come and inaugurated the last age. Is this not similar to what Moses told the Israelites in Deut. 18:14-15? Jesus warned us about false prophets and letting ourselves be deceived, Matthew 24:3-14.
9. Acts 1:7-8 ought to be sufficient to put our emphasis on the will of God for us in regard to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming and related matters. No need to focus too much on those events, only try to understand them in a basic way, but give ourselves to witnessing and working for the Lord “until he comes!” Note some key statements of Jesus about all this: Matthew 24: 36, 42, 44-46, 50.
10. The question of the Millennium. Are you Pre-millennial, Dispensationalist, Post-millennial, A-millennial or Pro-millennial? What in the world does this all mean? We will seek to offer a basic guide.

- A. Though some of the views we will outline have existed since early centuries of Christian history, most were introduced and developed **from the 1800s** until now. Five major approaches exist among Bible student, though most of us have heard of only one or two. These approaches developed as sincere efforts to answer the question will there be a millennium reign of Christ over the earthy, a reign of more or less one thousand years of duration?
- B. Millennium comes from Latin (*mille* – “thousand” plus *annus* – “year.” The corresponding Greek expression in Rev. 20:4-7, *chilia ete* gave rise to “chiliasm,” a synonym. Chiliasm was used while Greek was the dominant language, then Millennium when Latin became dominant.
1. Revelation 20:4-7 is the only place in the Bible where the term “a thousand years” is used of Christ’s reign upon the earth. Thus, it is the source of talk about the millennium.
  2. In the OT various predictions are given about the messianic reign upon the earth. They are usually introduced with “in that day” or “in the last days” (Amos 9:11; Hosea 3:5; Isaiah 2:2). Such terms refer to the final period of history, when God’s kingdom will dominate. The NT presents the days of Jesus as the epoch in which the last days began (Galatians 4:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 1:1-2). The events of His second coming will terminate the final period. After these will begin the eternal reign of God (Acts 17:30-31; 1 Peter 1:3-5).
- The predictions about the restoration of Israel and Judah to their land, present that future time in the terms of God’s reign as known to Israel and Judah during the monarchy, although in ideal conditions. How else could people in the time of those prophets have understood what was being presented? They would occupy **the promised land** (Jer. 30:3; Ezek. 47:3-48:29). **The temple** would be rebuilt and its worship renewed (Ezek. 42:2, 4, 5; 43:2-5; Is. 44:28). **The kingdom of David** would be reinstalled (Amos 9:11-12; Hosea 3:5; Micah 5:2, 4; Is. 7:14; 11:1-5; Jer. 33:15). The kingdom would be **purified** and its inhabitant would **walk in righteousness** (Is. 4:4; 2:3-4; Ezek. 36:24-31; Jer. 33:7, 11).
- C. During the periods of Christian history from the time of Acts 1 until now, many have focused upon how to understand the views of the OT prophets and the NT apostles about the future kingdom on the earth. Though some of the views we will outline existed in earlier centuries, most were introduced and further developed from the 1800s until now. Five understandings, or theories, exist among Christians and Jews today, though most of us may have heard of only one or two of these. Such understandings developed as efforts to respond to the question: will there be a millennium, a reign of Christ over the earth in the last phase of human history, a reign of a thousand years of duration?
1. **Postmillennialism** holds that the Gospel will become universally accepted, and then Christ will return, judge the world and begin the eternal kingdom. The famous Jamieson, Fausset and Brown commentary takes this view, as did John Wesley, Matthew Henry and seemingly C. H. Spurgeon (Moody, pp. 553-4). In SBC circles, B. H. Carroll, the founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary was a strong Postmillennialist.

The two resurrections of Rev. 20:4-6 are understood as spiritual, while the resurrection of bodies is taught beginning at v. 12.

2. **Amillennialism** holds there will not be a literal thousand-year reign on the earth. Augustine in the fifth century AD gave his understanding of this in *The City of God*. The first resurrection in Rev. 20 is spiritual—equivalent to the new birth, while the second is bodily. H. H. Hobbs, Ray Summers and Ray F. Robbins all held an amillennial view, though differing on details about the two resurrections. Erickson suggested that the two views (post and a) were not greatly differentiated during the first 19 centuries of Christian history (p. 1213). Christ has reigned in individual hearts of believers over all the earth for extended centuries. OT predictions about Israel and Judah restored to their land have been partially fulfilled in returned groups since the Babylonian captivity, or are in process of fulfilment with the conversion of Jews and their inclusion in the Church from the time of Jesus until the end of history, some holding that a large group of carnal Jews will be converted through the Gospel before the return of Christ. The true Church represents Israel reconstituted in terms spiritual and universal, the distinctions of race not having value before God.
3. **Premillennialism** holds that Jesus will return and inaugurate the millennial reign on earth, some holding it to be of a thousand years length and others holding it to be simply an extended reign over all the earth. The church father Tertullian basically held this view. In recent years George E. Ladd of Fuller Seminary, who started out as a Dispensationalist, led a return among evangelicals to classical premillennialism. Millard Erickson, Dale Moody, Robert H. Gundry and Dave MacPherson have all presented a version of this view. It holds that the Bible teaches that Christ will return and inaugurate a long reign over the earth, followed by the last judgment and the eternal kingdom. Some hold the thousand years to be literal and others that it is to be understood essentially as a universal and extended reign on earth. Most reject the primarily dispensational understanding that this will involve a literal fulfilment of OT prophecies about such things as the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.
4. **Dispensationalism** is a relatively modern reinterpretation of premillennialism. It is a development within Christianity apparently without roots in the history of the Church before about 1830 A.D (Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth*, p. 550). This theory was worked out by John Nelson Darby of Plymouth, England (1800-1882). He was a separatist who founded the movement known as the Plymouth Brethren. The volumes of his writings came into the hands of Charles H. Scofield, a converted lawyer and evangelist in New York State. Schofield adopted the dispensationalism of Darby and set forth its main lines in his famous annotated Bible published by the prestigious Oxford University Press (1909, 1917, . This system was taught in conferences on Biblical prophecy, many Bible institutes, Dallas Theological Seminary and Moody Bible Institute (Erickson, 1209).

The system is based on seven dispensations and eight covenants supposedly found in the Bible. The dispensations represent periods of Bible history in which God has managed the world under different dispensations, or economies: 1) that of **innocence**

when man was in the Garden of Eden; 2) that of **conscience**, from the fall of Adam to the flood; 3) that of **human government** from the flood to Abraham; 4) that of **promise** from Abraham to Moses; 5) that of **law** from Moses to Jesus; 6) that of **grace** during the period of the church; 7) that of **end times**, the final one. The system makes a strong distinction between Israel and the church, maintaining God's covenant with Israel is unconditional. The church, not being mentioned in the OT, is virtually a parenthesis within His plan of dealing with Israel. The kingdom of heaven is Jewish, Davidic, and messianic. Since it was rejected during Jesus' ministry, its appearance on earth was postponed and will take place after the return of Christ.

During these dispensations God has made **eight** different covenants that have characterized how He has dealt with mankind or certain groups. Two different understandings exist about the rapture of the Church: one is that it will happen **before** the tribulation and the second that it will take place **after**. A book that rocked the dispensationalist camp is that of George Eldon Ladd of Fuller Seminary, *Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God*, 1952).

Bible students who reject the dispensational view say the Bible reveals God made numerous covenants, but two are primary, the old (Law) and the new (Grace in Jesus). The form of the Bible reflects this: it is divided into the Old Testament (covenant) and the New Testament (covenant). In short, the Bible presents two primary dispensations and two primary covenants, not eight. For example, Moody's comment about the notes in Schofield: "On the very page where the book of Hebrews speaks of a 'first covenant' and 'a second' (8:7), a 'new' and an 'old' (8:13), there is a note that insists on eight. That is strange arithmetic!" (p. 53).

5. **Millennialism reinterpreted** is our name for classifying a fifth kind of interpretation about the prophesied messianic reign. Since conservative theologians have generally rejected its teachings, we will not delay our discussion on its meaning. It is found in many liberal-oriented books of modern scholars who reject the supernatural understanding of the biblical message and, in essence, dismiss the predictive element as little more than nationalistic hopes for a future reestablishment of the kingdom to Israel.