

Major Bible Themes

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CHAPTER XLV

PROPHECY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

As the Old Testament closes with the expectation unrealized concerning the coming of Israel's King and His kingdom, so the New Testament opens with the advent of the King and the offer to that nation of His kingdom (Matt. 2:1, 2; 4:17). They rejected the King (Matt. 23:37, 38), and answered His claims by crucifixion. Before His death, He spoke in prophecy concerning that death, His resurrection, His departure from this world (John 16:5) and of His coming again (Matt. 24:27-31; 25:31). Likewise, He spoke in prophecy of a new hitherto unannounced age which was to intervene between His rejection and His return, and which was to introduce new and far-reaching divine purposes in the earth (Matt. 13:1-50). Thus at the very beginning of the New Testament, the message of prophecy contained in the Old Testament is advanced and broadened with great rapidity.

Though prophecy is included in nearly every book of the New Testament, the consummation of prophecy for the New Testament and for all the Scriptures is set forth in the last book of the Bible. That Book, though containing but twenty-two brief chapters is the termini of all highways of prophecy which like great trunk lines have threaded their way through all the Word of God.

Because of its relation to all that has gone before, the Book of Revelation cannot be understood apart from all preceding prophecy, nor can the preceding prophecy be understood until it is traced for its consummation to this closing portion of the Scriptures. Some of these highways of prophecy are: The Person of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King; The destiny of Israel, of the Church, of the Gentiles, of human institutions and governments, of Satan and his hosts both of earth and of Heaven. The extent of this Book is disclosed in the fact that in it this age and the future ages are also unfolded. It records the history of the Church on the earth in the present dispensation and unfolds the coming days of the Tribulation. It reaches on to the glorious millennial reign of Christ on the earth and unfolds the blessedness of the redeemed and the woes of the lost in the eternity to come.

The continuity of the whole Bible is shown in many ways, but in none is it seen more clearly than in the fact of prophecy and its fulfillment. The New Testament takes up unfulfilled Old Testament prophecy and carries it on to its consummation; it also introduces new themes of prediction and advances them to their fulfillment. The major themes of the New Testament are:

I. THE NEW AGE

The present dispensation which has extended already nearly two thousand years and which lies between the two advents of Christ, was never anticipated in any Old Testament prophecy. Also, in being mentioned as a "mystery" (Matt. 13:11), it is declared to be one of the sacred secrets hidden in the counsels of God until the appointed time of its revelation; for a "mystery" in the New Testament use of the word is something hitherto unrevealed (note Rom. 11:25; 2 Thess. 2:7; Col. 1:27; Eph. 3:1-6; 5:25-32; 1 Cor. 15:51). The phrase "The kingdom of heaven" refers to any rule God may exercise at any time in the earth. Being limited to the earth, it is to be distinguished from the kingdom of God, which embraces not only the sphere of the kingdom of heaven, but all that is in Heaven, and the whole universe. While the long predicted millennial reign of Christ in the earth is the final form of the kingdom of heaven and that which was foreseen by all the prophets and announced by Christ in His early ministry, the present dispensation, being that form of divine rule in the earth in which God is ruling to the extent that He is realizing the accomplishment of those things which are termed "mysteries," is rightly called "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11).

The first twelve chapters of the Gospel by Matthew present Christ as Israel's Messiah and record the first indication of His rejection by that nation. Following these indications of His rejection, He, as recorded in Chapter 13, announces by seven parables the features of the new age and indicates its character at its beginning, its course, and its end. At the opening of Chapter 13, the sphere of the divine purpose is changed from the nation Israel to the whole world, and Israel is seen only as a "treasure" hid in a field (13:44). The seed of the Gospel is sown in the whole world and the harvest is an out-calling of those who believe. These will be received and preserved as the children of God, while those who do not believe are to be rejected and judged.

This new age at its beginning was said to be evil (Gal. 1:4), and its course is characterized by the parallel development of both the evil and the good (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). Its "last days" and their evil character are set forth in one of the most extensive bodies of the New Testament Scriptures (2 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Jas. 5:1-10; 2 Pet. 2:1 to 3:8; Jude 1:1-24; Rev. 3:14-22).

In no sense does the Bible predict a converted earth in this dispensation (Matt. 13:1-50; 24:38, 39; 2 Tim. 3:16); but it does anticipate the perfect realization of the purpose of God.

II. THE NEW DIVINE PURPOSE

The New Testament introduces the Church as a new classification of humanity in addition to the Jews and the Gentiles who have been seen throughout the Old Testament (1 Cor. 10:32). By the word Church (note its first use -- Matt. 16:18) reference is made to those from all kindreds and tribes who in this age are born again, and thus, by receiving the new resurrection life of Christ and by being baptized with the Spirit, are in Christ forming the New Creation. Into this company both Jews and Gentiles are gathered (Eph. 3:1-6) through the preaching of the Gospel of divine grace. This redeemed company are now related to Christ as, His sheep (John 10:6-16), the branches in the Vine (John 15:1-5), the stones in a building (Eph. 2:18-22), a kingdom of priests (1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 8:1), the New Creation (2 Cor. 5:17), the body (Eph. 1:22, 23; 3:6), and they will be related to Him as His bride in Heaven (Rev. 19:7, 8; 21:9).

When the divine purpose in the out-calling of the Church has been completed, Christ will come to receive His own (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:13-17). Those who may have died will be raised (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 4:13-17), and those then living will be translated (1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:13-17), and all, whether by resurrection or translation, shall receive a new body like unto His glorious body (Phil. 3:20).

New Testament prophecy carries the Church through all the pilgrim experiences on the earth (Rev. 2:1 to 3:22), sees her received into Heaven at the Coming of the Lord, and sees her returning with Him to reign with Him on the earth (Rev. 19:14; 20:6).

III. THE NATION ISRAEL

New Testament prophecy takes up the nation Israel where Old Testament prophecy leaves them -- a disorganized and partly scattered people a portion of whom are living in the land but without right or title. Dispensationally, they are nationally set aside, but individually they are on the same plane with the Gentiles (Rom. 3:9) and alike shut up to the offer of salvation by grace alone. Christ predicted that the wrath of God would fall upon them and that their beloved city would be destroyed (Luke 21:20-24) which prophecy was fulfilled by the siege under Titus in the year 70 A.D. Likewise, He predicted the sorrows of the Tribulation (Matt. 24:8-22), their sifting judgments preparatory to their entrance into their kingdom glory (Matt. 24:44 to 25:30; note also, Ezk. 20:38), and His own occupancy of the throne of David (Matt. 25:31; note, also, Luke 1:31-33; Acts 15:16, 17) when their blessings under the Davidic covenant will be realized. The Apostle Paul prophesied of Israel's national conversion (Rom. 11:26, 27) and the Apostle John prophesied of their place in the Tribulation (Rev. 7:4-17; 12:13-17) and of their coming kingdom in the earth (Rev. 20:4, 6).

At its beginning it was predicted that, throughout this dispensation the nation Israel would be hid (Matt. 13:44), blind (Rom. 11:25), broken off (Rom. 11:17), without their national center (Luke 21:24), and scattered (Matt. 10:6; Jas. 1:1); that in the Tribulation they are to be hated (Matt. 24:9); and in the kingdom they are to be regathered (Matt. 24:31) and saved (Rom. 11:27).

IV. THE GENTILES

"The times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24), which began in the last dispersion six hundred years before Christ, are characterized by a succession of world empires (Dan. 2:37-45; 7:1-14), continue their course throughout the present dispensation and are ended by the coming of Christ. Fulfilling Daniel's prophecy of the "smiting stone" (Dan. 2:36-45), He comes in "the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God" (Rev. 19:15), conquering the God-defying nations of the earth in the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:17-21; 17:8-18). Then, also, the nations are to be judged and from among them appointments made of those who shall be counted worthy to enter the coming kingdom (Matt. 25:34), and those who shall be dismissed into everlasting fire (Matt. 25:41-46).

The divine purpose in the present dispensation is that the Gospel shall be preached to Gentiles as well as to Jews (Acts 9:15; 13:47; 15:14; Rom. 3:9, 29; 11:11; 15:9-27; Eph. 3:6).

V. THE TRIBULATION

Continuing with greater detail the Old Testament predictions concerning the Tribulation, the New Testament is both explicit and extensive. Christ spoke of that time in relation to Israel (Matt. 24:8-31), the Apostle Paul writes of it in its relation to the forces of evil (2 Thess. 2:1-12), while the Apostle John records at length the tremendous divine program which will be enacted in those days (Rev. 3:10; 6:1 to 19:6). In this brief period which is probably at most but seven years (Dan. 9:24-27, and shortened a little, Matt. 24:22), judgments are accomplished in the earth, the forces of evil are first released and then terminated, while both ecclesiastical and political Babylon are destroyed.

VI. SATAN AND FORCES OF EVIL

Prophecy concerning Satan begins in the Old Testament (Ezk. 28:11-19; Isa. 14:12-17) and concludes with his expulsion from Heaven into the earth (Rev. 12:7-12), his binding and confinement to the abyss (Rev. 20:1-3), and, after he has been released from the abyss for a little season and has led the last revolt against the authority of God (Rev. 20:7-9), his final doom in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).

Closely related to prophecy concerning Satan is that of the Man of Sin which prophecy also begins in the Old Testament (Ezk. 28:1-10; Dan. 7:8; 9:24-27; 11:36-45) and includes the prophecy by Christ in which the coming of that wicked one is pointed out as a sign to Israel of the end of the age (Matt. 24:15). Likewise, the Apostle Paul foresees him desecrating the restored temple, declaring himself to be God, and then to be destroyed by the glorious appearing of Christ (2 Thess. 2:1-12); while the Apostle John sees him in both his governmental power and his final doom (Rev. 13:3-10; 19:20; 20:10).

VII. THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

This the greatest theme of all prophecy was the subject of the first prediction by man (Jude 1:14, 15), and is the last message of the Bible (Rev. 22:20). It is the dominant feature of all Old Testament prophecy concerning the Day of the Lord and, likewise, is the major theme of New Testament prophecy. Beginning with the first evidence of Israel's rejection of His Messianic

claims, this great event was continually upon the lips of Christ (Matt. 23:37 to 25:46; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-38). Again, it is emphasized by the Apostle Paul (Rom. 11:26; 1 Thess, 3:13; 5:1-4; 2 Thess. 1:7 to 2:12), by James (5:1-8), by Peter (2 Pet. 2:1 to 3:17), by Jude (1:14, 15), and by John throughout the Revelation.

VIII. THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

Continuing this major theme of the Old Testament prophecy, the New Testament adds many details. The kingdom teachings of Christ, addressed to Israel as recorded! in the Synoptic Gospels, portray the character and glory of that coming age, while the Apostle John reveals its duration to be a period of one thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6).

IX. THE ETERNAL STATE

While little is written in the Old Testament, the final estates of both the saved and the lost are in view throughout the New Testament. Of those who testify regarding these future conditions, Christ and the Apostle John have spoken with greatest emphasis (Matt. 25:46; John 14:1-3; Rev. 20:14, 15; 21:1 to 22:15).

QUESTIONS

1. Indicate the manner in which prophecy relates the Old and New Testaments.
2. What relation to all Bible prophecy does the one prophetic book of the New Testament sustain?
3. Is the continuity of the Bible indicated by prophecy and its fulfillment?
4. a. Distinguish the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God.
b. What is meant by the "mysteries" of the kingdom of heaven?
5. a. What are the essential details of Christ's prophecies in Matthew 13?
b. What is the divine purpose in this dispensation?
6. a. What are the essential features of the Church?
b. How is the Church to be removed from this world?
7. What additional facts does New Testament prophecy add to the message of Old Testament prophecy concerning Israel?
8. What additional facts does New Testament prophecy add to the message of Old Testament prophecy concerning the Gentiles?
9. What additional facts does New Testament prophecy add to the message of Old Testament prophecy concerning the Tribulation?

10. What does prophecy reveal concerning the origin and destiny of Satan and the Man of Sin?
11. What additional facts does New Testament prophecy add to the message of Old Testament prophecy concerning the Second Coming of Christ?
12. What additional facts does New Testament prophecy add to the message of Old Testament prophecy concerning the Messianic Kingdom?
13. What Scriptures predict the eternal state of man?
14. What are the subjects of prophecy which are peculiar to the New Testament?