*Principles of Prophecy: A Study of Our Future Hope*

Rediscovery of Prophetic Truth

Lesson 10 – November 3, 2013

**Focus Thought**

God restored prophetic truth that was key to the modern Pentecostal revival.

**Focus Verse**

Isaiah 28:11-12

For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

**Lesson Text**

Isaiah 28:9-13

9 Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.

10 For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:

11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.

12 To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

13 But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

**Culture Connection**

Dark Glasses

by Gary D. Erickson

The most educated and respected theologians in the days of Jesus missed Him. The coming of the Messiah was the core of biblical prophecy—yet they missed it! Nothing in God’s divine plan for the ages was as important as the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Savior of the world. Ancient Jewish scholars expected the Messiah to come, but they did not understand that He would come as a suffering Servant. They embraced all the prophecies that described His deity and kingship, but ignored the predictions of His servanthood and sacrificial death. Their own longings and wishes got in the way of good prophetic interpretation.

The moral of the story is that prophecy is difficult to interpret due to the fact that it is frequently written in metaphors, hyperboles, and symbolisms. This leaves the interpreter a lot of latitude. We have to ask, “Is this prophecy to be interpreted literally or symbolically?” Even though we interpret the Bible literally, that does not negate the fact that some prophecies are to be interpreted as symbolisms. “Does this prophecy apply to my generation, past, future, or to the generation at the time of the writing?” “Does the prophecy have a single fulfillment or multiple fulfillments?” Many questions arise for a serious student of Scripture.

**Lesson Outline**

**I. HISTORY AND THE EARLY CHURCH**

A. Belief in the Soon Return of Christ

B. Belief in the Tribulation and Antichrist

C. Belief in the Millennium

**II. THE GRADUAL APOSTASY OF THE CHURCH**

A. Anti-Semitism

B. Amillennialism

**III. POSTMILLENNIALISM**

A. America Founded with Eschatological Hope

B. Desire for the Kingdom of God

**IV. A RETURN TO PREMILLENNIALISM**

A. An Expectation of the Coming of Christ

B. The Quest to Be Ready

C. Restoration of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost

**Contemplating the Topic**

In his book The Everlasting Gospel, D. William Faupel “contends that Pentecostalism was propelled into the world stage when early adherents felt commissioned by God to announce that Christ would soon return to establish His kingdom on earth.” This “eschatological hope” was “the motivating force for Pentecostalism’s rapid growth.”

A reading of any of the documents written by early twentieth-century Pentecostals reveals their expectation of the Second Coming. They believed that the fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit signaled the nearness of Christ’s return. For example, Andrew D. Urshan, considered to be one of the most influential pioneers of Oneness Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century, frequently warned of the nearness of the Rapture, the necessity for world evangelization, and the dangers awaiting those who were not prepared for Christ’s return. One of his books, published in 1917, was titled Timely Messages of Warning: Five Pointed Messages to the Saints of God Admonishing Them to Be Prepared for the Return of Their Soon Coming Lord. In his book Supreme Need of the Hour and the Source of Mighty Revivals, published in 1922, Urshan wrote, “we are living in the last days of this dispensation.” Further, he claimed that “[g]igantic battle is almost to burst forth both in the air and on the earth, of which not only the Spirit of prophecy is foretelling and calling our attention to it, but even the scientific men of the world are tremblingly proclaiming it.”

As scientific proof of the impending doom, Urshan offered an article from the December 20, 1921, edition of the Montreal (Quebec) Gazette, titled “World to Be Shaken,” and subtitled, “Almost every kind of disaster prophesied for 1926.” The article predicted that Armageddon would take place in 1932 in “a final conflict between Mohammedanism, allied with Bolshevism, against the united Anglo-Saxon world.” This would end in “a ‘universal peace’ in 1932.” Urshan followed this forecast by saying, “Surely the Almighty is on the job, finishing the work and cutting it short in righteousness.”

Another of the influential pioneers of Oneness Pentecostalism was Frank Ewart. In his book The Phenomenon of Pentecost, he wrote, “We are nearing the end of the church age; the signs are all around us. Judgment has begun at the house of God.”

Yet another pioneer who had a profound influence on the Oneness Pentecostal Movement was G. T. Haywood. A gifted preacher, teacher, and writer, Haywood was also the composer of gospel songs that endure to this day. These included songs that proclaimed the soon coming of the Lord.

Transparency 1 compares Isaiah 28:11-12 with I Corinthians 14:21.

Isaiah 28:11-12 served to shape the early twentieth-century Pentecostal understanding of Scripture. This text seemed especially significant because of Paul’s use of it in his letter to the church at Corinth. (See I Corinthians 14:21.)

It was common to read Paul’s reference to Isaiah as indicating that the experience of speaking with tongues was a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. We may not know for certain how Paul interpreted Isaiah 28:11-12, but a careful reading of his writing suggests that he saw in Isaiah’s prophecy about the pending captivity of Israel in Assyria a close parallel with one of the functions of speaking with tongues.

The context of Isaiah’s words was the looming judgment of God on the northern kingdom, Israel. Because of their habitual rebellion, he described the people as spiritually immature, able to receive only minimal revelation, and therefore destined for destruction. The tongue, or language, by which God would speak to them would be the language of the Assyrians, which would sound to them like “stammering lips.” In this sense, the “tongue” was a sign of God’s judgment on the unbelieving Israelites.

Early twentieth-century Pentecostals tended to read Isaiah’s statement about “rest” and “refreshing” as a reference to the baptism with the Holy Spirit. In view of its context, however, it is more likely that Isaiah had in mind the rest that had been promised to the people of Israel in the Promised Land upon the condition of their obedience. (See, e.g., Deuteronomy 12:9; Jeremiah 6:16.)

This does not mean there is no connection between Isaiah 28:11-12 and I Corinthians 14:21; it means only that the connection is possibly broader than has sometimes been understood. Its broader connection introduces significance that a person might overlook when narrowly connecting the two verses. This can be seen in the following table:

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| --- | --- |
| **Isaiah 28:9-13** | **I Corinthians 14:20-23** |
| Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to **understand** doctrine? them that are **weaned from the milk**, and **drawn from the breasts**. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: for with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: **yet they would not hear**. But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and **fall backward**, and be **broken**, and **snared**, and **taken**. | Brethren, **be not children** in **understanding**: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in **understanding be men**. In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that **will they not hear me**, saith the Lord. Wherefore **tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not**: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or **unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?** |

The words in bold indicate that Paul saw a connection between the New Testament experience of speaking with tongues and Isaiah’s prophecy about the Assyrian language that would be spoken in the place of Israel’s captivity, which seems to have included a rebuke to the spiritually immature Corinthians, comparing them to the rebellious Israelites. The Israelites could not understand because they were still on “milk.” They had not been weaned. Paul urged the Corinthians not to be children in understanding. Just as the Assyrian language was a sign of God’s judgment on unbelieving Israel, so were tongues a sign of His judgment on unbelievers who rejected the gospel message. Rather than being a recommendation for good pedagogy, Isaiah’s reference to the word of the Lord coming to Israel little by little seemed to be an indication of Israel’s spiritual infancy, which would result in their falling backward and being broken, snared, and taken into captivity. Those who did not recognize God’s hand in the Assyrian captivity would miss the spiritual restoration available to those who responded in repentance; those who rejected speaking with tongues would likewise fail to experience the restoring work of the Holy Spirit in the era of the New Covenant.

**Searching the Scriptures**

**I. HISTORY AND THE EARLY CHURCH**

The most important influence on our beliefs today should be those teachings held by the first-century church, but it is also instructive to see that the next generation of believers—those of the second century—continued to adhere to belief in the soon coming of Christ, a period of tribulation, the rise of Antichrist, and a one-thousand-year millennium.

**A. Belief in the Soon Return of Christ**

In both his first letter and the Book of Revelation, John indicated his belief in the Second Coming. (See I John 3:2; Revelation 22:20.) The Second Coming will be an experience of further transformation; we will be like Christ (I John 3:2). This is an experience for which all believers should join John in prayerful anticipation.

Why has this event not already occurred? Two millennia ago Jesus said, “I come quickly.” Has this promise failed? No, because the Greek adverb tachu, translated “quickly,” does not require the meaning that there will be only a brief interval between the promise and the fulfillment. It can mean that when Jesus comes, it will be a “swift” coming, not a gradual revealing or growing awareness. When the time comes for Jesus’ return, it will be “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (I Corinthians 15:52).

This use of tachu, translated “speedily,” is also seen in Luke 18:8. In a parable intended to teach the importance of ongoing prayer (Luke 18:1), Jesus taught that God will “avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long [makrothumei] with them” (Luke 18:7). Although some translations render this phrase in a way that misses this point, the meaning of makrothumei and the point of this parable is to indicate that even though our prayers may not be immediately answered, we should keep praying with the assurance that God will answer and that when He does, it will be a quick answer.

Even if we read Revelation 22:20 as a promise that the Second Coming would occur soon after the Book of Revelation was written, we still must acknowledge that God’s measurement of time is not like ours.

*“But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (II Peter 3:8).*

Although there was diversity in the eschatological views of second-century Christians (commonly called the church fathers), Larry V. Crutchfield points out that many of them “believed they were living in the last days and were looking daily for the return of Christ” (When the Trumpet Sounds). This includes Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Barnabas, and Hermas, all of whom wrote during the late first and early second centuries. The same expectancy that is seen in the New Testament is seen in their writings.

**B. Belief in the Tribulation and Antichrist**

As we saw in lessons three and eight, the first-century church believed there would be a future fulfillment of Daniel’s seventieth week, the Great Tribulation, and the appearance of Antichrist. Since the Roman Empire, understood to be Daniel’s fourth beast, was still in existence during the second century, and since severe persecution of Christians was the order of the day until Constantine’s Edict of Milan in ad 313, it was not uncommon for these early Christians to believe they were experiencing the prophesied suffering and to identify Antichrist with Rome.

**C. Belief in the Millennium**

In lesson nine we discussed John’s prophecy of the Millennium, a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. The anticipation of this era of peace, foretold by John shortly before the end of the first century, prevailed during the next two centuries. Robert Clouse points out that it “is found in the works of Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Methodius, Commodianus, and Lactantius” (Walter A. Elwell, ed., Evangelical Dictionary of Theology).

**II. THE GRADUAL APOSTASY OF THE CHURCH**

**A. Anti-Semitism**

It was not long after the origin of the church that anti-Semitism reared its ugly head. The Jewish revolt against Rome in ad 66-70, resulting in the defeat of the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem, was interpreted by many Christians as a sign of God’s rejection of the Jewish people. When Christianity became the state religion of Rome in 321, Jews were treated as second class citizens, unable to share in privileges available to Gentiles.

John Crysostom, a late fourth and early fifth-century bishop, said, “The synagogue is a brothel and a theater, . . . a den for unclean animals. . . . Never has a Jew prayed to God. . . . They are all possessed by the devil.” During the Middle Ages, Jews were required to wear identifying clothing and “maligned as ‘Christ-killers,’ desecraters of the host, murderers of Christian infants, spreaders of the black plague, poisoners of wells and sucklers of sows.” Many committed suicide to avoid forced baptism during the First Crusade of 1096. As the Middle Ages drew to a close, many Jews, expelled from England and various European countries, were homeless wanderers.

In 1492, during the Spanish Inquisition, thousands of Jews were tortured, burned at the stake, and forced to convert to Christianity. Martin Luther published hateful pamphlets against Jewish people, urging his readers to “drive them out of the country for all time.” (For documentation of this discussion of anti-Semitism, see M. R. Wilson in Elwell’s Evangelical Dictionary of Theology.) More recent atrocities against Jews are well known and must never be forgotten.

Anti-Semitism is in sharp opposition to God’s purposes. In spite of the rejection of Jesus as their promised Messiah by many Jews, God loves them and desires to redeem them unto Himself. (See Romans 11:26, 28-29.)

**B. Amillennialism**

Augustine (ad 354-430) introduced amillennialism, an allegorical interpretation of Revelation 20. The adoption of Christianity as the official state religion of the Roman Empire invited a reexamination of the millennial hope of earlier generations of Christians. For Augustine, the millennium was simply Christ’s rule with His saints in the church. Although amillennialism was not universally accepted by all professing Christians, it became official church doctrine in medieval times and through the Reformation era. (See Clouse, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology.)

**III. POSTMILLENNIALISM**

In simplest terms, postmillennialism is the view that rather than Christ’s return introducing His reign of one thousand years on earth, the evangelistic efforts of the church will result in a long period of peace on earth, after which Christ will return. During the latter half of the twentieth century in America, this notion became known as Reconstructionism or Dominion Theology and was connected with the idea that it was the responsibility of the church to infiltrate all segments of society with the aim of restoring the law of Moses as the rule of civil government.

**A. America Founded with Eschatological Hope**

The Puritans who settled New England embraced the idea that America was the “New Israel,” a new “Promised Land,” in which the postmillennial vision would ultimately prevail. These ideas are the source to which many go in their search for America’s “Christian” origins.

Transparency 2 quotes portions of Article VI and the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

It is often overlooked, however, that Article VI of the Constitution of the United States of America declares that “no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.” To protect this idea, the First Amendment of the Constitution reads, in part, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The Puritan ideal was not enshrined in the nation’s founding documents.

**B. Desire for the Kingdom of God**

Jesus said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). The Puritan hope and that of those who followed their vision probably was well-intentioned and noble, even if biblically misinformed. Unfortunately, this vision has often been clothed with divisive rhetoric that associates God’s purposes with political agendas.

**IV. A RETURN TO PREMILLENNIALISM**

The postmillennial fervor of the nineteenth century waned as wars ravaged Europe and the United States of America. Once again premillennialism became an attractive option to many. The dispensational views of Edward Irving and John Nelson Darby, later popularized in the Scofield Reference Bible, provided an organized structure of biblical prophecy with a premillennial conviction. The bestselling Left Behind series of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries demonstrated the continuing wide acceptance of the Second Coming and the premillennial establishment of Christ’s kingdom on earth.

**A. An Expectation of the Coming of Christ**

Although the expectation of the Second Coming waxed and waned during the past two thousand years, it is only right that we faithfully maintain our confidence in Christ’s return. The first divine revelation after His ascension was the promise of the Second Coming (Acts 1:10-11).

**B. The Quest to Be Ready**

Early twentieth-century Pentecostals recognized a call to holiness in their eschatological expectancy. This is a common biblical theme. After referring to the Second Coming and the destruction of the present heavens and earth, Peter wrote,

*“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?” (II Peter 3:11-12).*

The good news is that this cataclysmic event will be followed by “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (II Peter 3:13). To know this should encourage us to “be diligent that [we] may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (II Peter 3:14).

**C. Restoration of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost**

Although it has been established that people were filled with the Holy Spirit with the sign of speaking with tongues throughout the past two thousand years, it was not on a scale of the outpouring of the Spirit that has been experienced since the early twentieth century. Clearly, God began to do something on a global scale at that time that had its precedent only in the first-century Day of Pentecost. This renewal calls for the restoration of the full range of biblical faith and practice, including the prophetic perspectives of the first-century church.

**Internalizing the Message**

With the passing of time, a theological drift reshaped the prophetic views of professing Christians. This is not surprising; the gradual departure from a wide range of biblical truths by succeeding generations of those who identified themselves as Christians is well documented. Pentecostals are among those who embrace a restoration impulse, the desire to return to first-century beliefs and practices. In the case of Oneness Pentecostals, we desire to return not only to the prophetic views of our first-century forebears, but also to their spiritual experiences and God-honoring lifestyles.

Some individuals, however, do not think it is important to hold to specific prophetic views. But does this not suggest there are biblical teachings that are less important or perhaps even unimportant? Does that not compartmentalize biblical truths? We have seen in this lesson that to depart from biblical eschatology can lead to serious error.

Have you ever shared your view of prophecy with someone who does not profess faith in Christ? Did you feel thoroughly equipped to do this, or did you feel there were gaps in your understanding of eschatology?

**Reflections**

• Do you still hold the views of prophecy that you have always held, or have your views changed with the passing of time?

• Are you sensitive to the problem of anti-Semitism? Have you ever caught yourself telling jokes about Jewish people or using caricatures to describe them?

• Can you readily define premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism?

• Have you thought through the distinction between the Puritan faith and the perspective on religion that is expressed in the founding documents of the United States of America?

• What kind of lifestyle do you think should be lived in view of the Second Coming?