

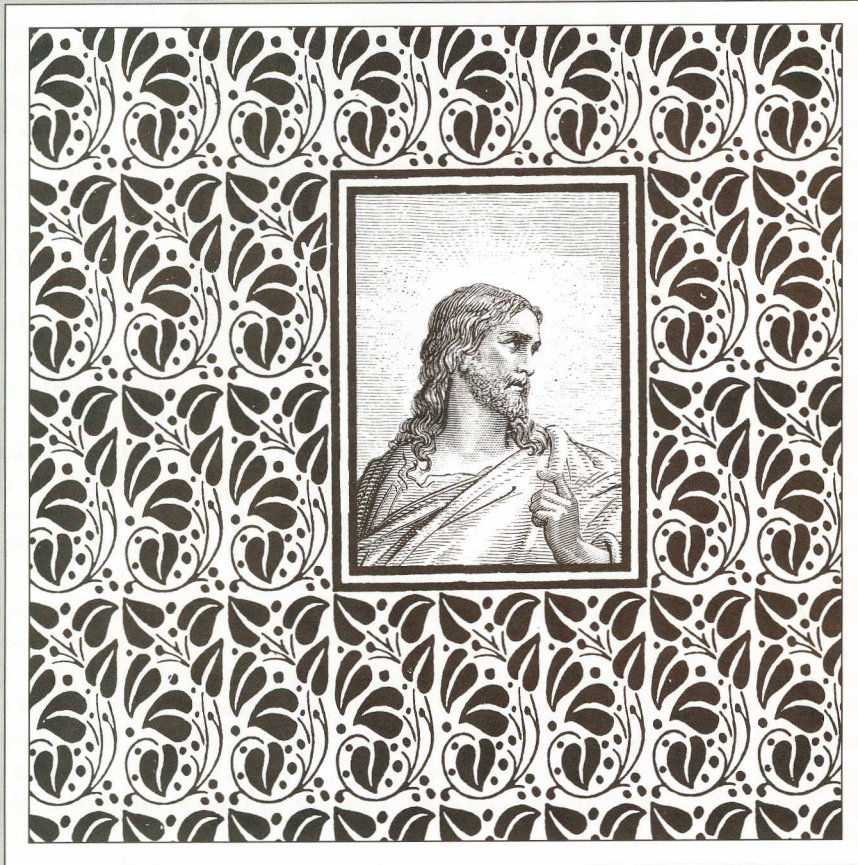
Christ—the Key to the Future

“THE PATTERN OF PROPHECY”

by Desmond Ford

The Bible writers were inspired to see a recurring pattern to God’s mighty acts in sacred history.

This pattern is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and is the pattern that unlocks the future.



Some of you heard the farewell speech of TV newsman, John Chancellor. After nearly 45 years in the media, at his retirement, he said:

When I began in 1950, there were some certainties in this world.

- There was the certainty that America was always going to be the world’s leader, and it was financially so rich it would never be embarrassed.

- There was the certainty that in Europe the countries would get together and form a stable, united government.

- There was certainty that Japan would have a strong government and would go on and on with financial security.

- As for communism, Soviet Russia would be an unceasing, unending perpetual threat to the West.

John Chancellor said they were the four certainties of 1950. They were all wrong.

This great country of America had to borrow money for Desert Storm. America’s now rethinking its attitude to ruling the world.

Europe has never really united. The various nations of Europe have only a very tenuous economic relationship.

Japan is in recession. As you

know, that country has continuing governmental upheavals.

Official Soviet communism is no more. That's a miracle we should never forget. If you have any doubts about what the Lord can do in the future, just think what he's done in the last few years. That's a mighty miracle. Don't ever get used to it.

So, John Chancellor said, "We were all wrong." He asked, "What does the future hold? Nobody knows."

Popular Views of Prophecy

There are at least 100 million Americans who think they know what the future holds. In this country there's something near that number of people interested in the study of Bible prophecy.

The problem is this: Popular ideas on Bible prophecy have usually been wrong in many respects.

Take the Jewish nation as an example. No one studied the Word of God as closely as did the Jews. Many ancient Jews could recite the whole Old Testament from the first verse to the last. When Messiah came, instead of recognizing him, they crucified him. God's people, God's church, the guardians of the Scriptures, and students of prophecy—misread prophecy.

Do you think we're better because we're gentiles? Think of Waco, Texas. Think of those incinerated little children.

It grew out of a wacky—not a Waco—interpretation of prophecy. The Branch Davidians believed they were the angels of Ezekiel 9 with the slaughter weapons.

Popular views on prophecy have always been wrong in many respects. The main error is that popular views separate prophecy from the rest of the Bible, and separate prophecy from Jesus. The great problem is that popular views separate prophecy from the gospel.

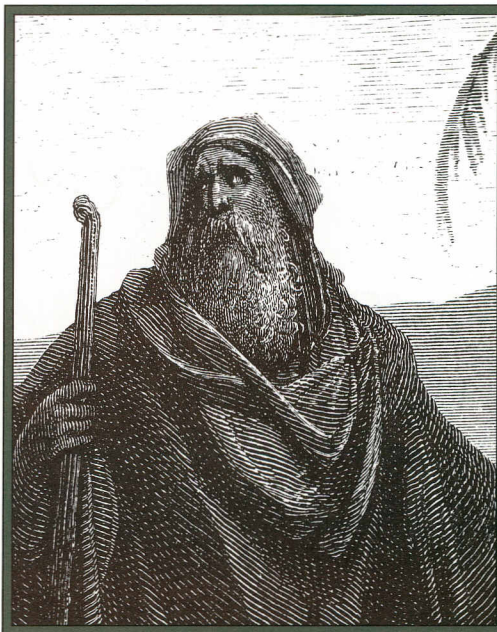
Pattern of Prophecy

You often hear the platitude, "A third of the Bible is prophecy." That's just not true. **All** the historical sections of the Bible are **also** prophetic.

"That which is to be, already has been," says Ecclesiastes 3:15 (RSV). That's a very important principle. If

you want to know what the future holds, look back to the past. That which is to be has already been.

That's because God's nature doesn't change. The devil's nature doesn't change. Human nature doesn't change. Therefore, that which is to be



has already been.

For example, let me remind you of the first story about Abraham, in Genesis 12. Being called by God out of Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham goes down to Egypt. There's trouble, and God sends plagues on the Egyptians. Abraham and his first family of Israelites leave Egypt with much wealth.

In the next Bible book, you have the same thing, haven't you? When you come to the book of Exodus, again you find Abraham's seed. They're in the same country. They're in trouble again, as Abraham was in trouble. God sends plagues, and they go out from Egypt with great riches.

Centuries pass by, and now the Israelites—Abraham's seed—are in Babylon. God dries up the water of the river Euphrates, enabling the armies of King Cyrus to enter the city of Babylon. Plague upon plague, so to speak, fall upon the ancient Babylonians. Again, Israel—the seed of Abraham—goes out, with riches. Cyrus, the richest monarch on earth, supported them financially.

When you come to the end of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, God is

again calling his people out from the bondage of this world, or spiritual Babylon. Again, plagues fall. God's people are delivered, and go out to the Promised Land with the great riches of Christ. Do you see the recurring themes, the repeated restatements? "That which is to be, already has been." What you first find about Abraham in Genesis 12—the bondage, the captivity, the plagues, the coming out, the riches—that's the pattern for what happens all down the way.

Pattern of Creation

God is known by his mighty acts. God speaks through his deeds, not only through his words. I want you to notice that there is a pattern that prevails in all of God's mighty acts.

Now, concentrate with me. In the first mighty act of God, creation begins with chaos. The earth is without form and void. Darkness is upon the face of the deep. Waters swirl—the deep is troubled.

Then the Spirit of God moves upon the face of those swirling waters. (Some Bible versions say "wind," rather than "spirit." It's the same word in the Hebrew. Because the rushing wind is invisible, it can represent the Holy Spirit.) As God speaks, and the Spirit moves, the chaos gives way to cosmos. Darkness is displaced by light. Separation is made between darkness and light, between earth and water. The earth comes up from the waters in resurrection on the third day.

The creation of the animals follows. You have lights in the heavens mentioned. Finally, a human image of God is created, Adam and Eve. God makes a covenant with them in Adam and gives them dominion over the earth. They enter into the rest and the peace of Eden, because they are one with their Maker. You know the story.

Now, friends, come to the next mighty act of God—the flood in Genesis 7-9.

It begins the same way. Swirling waters. Chaos. The sun is blotted out by the rains. Darkness. Then the record says, "God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided" (Genesis 8:1 NASB). Just as it did at the creation.

Then your attention is drawn to

the animals in the Ark. This is followed by a sign in the sky, a light in the sky—the rainbow. (In the creation story, you also had lights in the sky.) God then makes a covenant with the new Adam, Noah, and gives him dominion over the earth. The story of the flood is told the same way as the story of the creation. The waters, the chaos, the moving of the wind, the separation, the animals, the man, the covenant, dominion—the same story.

Pattern of the Exodus

The next mighty act of God—the exodus—is told the same way.

Israel is trapped in the darkness and chaos of slavery. The Spirit of God moves on a man called Moses. God's people come out of the chaos of bondage with great riches. They go through the waters of the Red Sea as on dry ground. The waters are separated by a great wind.

They go out with the riches of their flocks and their herds. God wants them to be lights in the world. They enter in upon their inheritance, their Eden, a land flowing with milk and honey. God makes a covenant with them in Exodus 20. The story is told with the same pattern as the stories before.

Pattern of the Babylonian Deliverance

The next mighty act is the coming out of Babylon. It's predicted by Isaiah in the language of the Exodus.

God will scatter the darkness of their captivity. When Israel's enemies come in like a flood of waters, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up his hand against them. The water of the Euphrates that ran beneath the city of Babylon, that tyrannous power, was dried up. You remember the Medes and the Persians diverted the river. Their armies came along the dry riverbed into the city and overthrew Babylon.

God's people went out with their flocks and their herds, and God made a covenant with them. Isaiah, the Bible book that tells this story, finishes with a description of a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 66), the new Jerusalem.

Pattern of the Christ-Event

But the greatest fulfillment of this pattern is Jesus.

It says in the first book of the New

Testament, that when Jesus came, "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Matthew 2:15 NIV). Jesus comes out of Egypt when as a child he returns to Nazareth. Then we see him going through the waters—the waters of baptism (Matthew 3:16). We see the Spirit of God coming down



when Jesus is in the waters (verse 16). Then Jesus goes into the desert to be tested and tried in the Temptation (4:1-11) as Israel of old was in the wilderness experience. Finally, we see Jesus in his baptism of blood at Calvary, and he enters into glory.

Jesus is the new Moses, saved in infancy from a tyrant who would kill him. (The tyrant in Jesus' case is Herod, in Moses' case, Pharaoh.) Jesus is the new Aaron, the high priest. Aaron wore representations of the people on his robes when he went in before God during the sanctuary service. Jesus has the names of his people on his heart and bears our names on his shoulders. Jesus carries our burdens, the burdens you bear right now. Don't feel that they weigh too much. Jesus has them. He's the new Aaron.

Jesus is the new David. (David was a shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd.) David never lost a battle when he cooperated with the Lord. Neither, of course, did Jesus.

Jesus is the new Solomon. The name "Solomon" means "peaceful." Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Jesus is the new Jonah. Jonah was out of sight for

three days when swallowed by the great fish, but then appeared on the seashore. Jesus was three days out of sight and then came forth in resurrection glory.

Jesus is the new Prophet, the new Priest, the new King, the new Israel, the new Temple. Jesus is all of it. So the pattern is fulfilled in him.

Christ Delivers from Darkness

Remember how Isaiah spoke about the chaotic world of darkness?

For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,
and gross darkness the people:
but the Lord shall arise upon thee,
and his glory shall be seen upon thee. (Isaiah 60:2 KJV)

The people that walked
in darkness
have seen a great light:
they that dwell in the land of the
shadow of death,
upon them hath the light shined. (Isaiah 9:2)

For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given:
and the government shall be
upon his shoulder:
and his name shall be called
Wonderful, Counselor,
The mighty God,
The everlasting Father,
The Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government
and peace
there shall be no end. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

You have the same pattern again. The darkness, the chaos, the waters (in Christ's case, the waters of baptism), the Spirit coming down. Then you see him as the new Israel, reflecting the image of God (like the first Adam).

No wonder Jesus said:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets [the Old Testament]; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17 NIV)

Paul writes, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ." (2 Corinthians 1:20). Paul preached to the worshipers in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. He said,

"We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus" (Acts 13:32-33). All the things God promised our forebears were fulfilled in Jesus.

Christ the Pattern of the Future

Now, dear friends, just take a minute or two with me to think of the next mighty event of God. Let me tell you about the future.

Gross darkness will cover the whole earth again. It will be moral darkness, spiritual darkness; the darkness of tyranny, and economic depression.

Then, upon Bible Christians all around the world, the Spirit of God will come. The earth will be lightened with the glory of the gospel. It will shine out of the darkness of this world as a new Pentecost takes place in a thousand, thousand places around the world. For, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be [must be] preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14 KJV). It will take a new Pentecost to do it, to bring the end.

The earth will be in terrible darkness again. You see, I've gone back to Genesis again. I've gone back to the pattern.

It will seem as though the people of God are in great bondage in this world, because they will be hated and oppressed.

If you are an ordinary professing Christian and you don't stand out by the way you live, the devil doesn't mind you one scrap. But if you begin to live like a real Christian, if you begin to try to walk in the straight and narrow way—you'll stand out and you'll be hated. "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12 NIV). That's the way it will be in the end-time.

So, I repeat, the Genesis pattern will be seen all over the world. The Bible often uses the flooding river as a symbol of persecution. Revelation, the last book of the Bible, says that a great flood will rush out over the church of God. This is a great flooding of people, a great host of nations, and multitudes, that support unholy Babylon (see Rev-

elation 17:15).

By "the church," the Bible does not mean a denomination. It means Christians, those who are in Christ by faith.

They are in Catholicism, they are in Protestantism. They're in the charismatic churches, in the noncharismatic churches. They're among the dispensationalists, and among the nondispensationalists. Bible-believing Christians who know that the fruit of the Spirit is even more important than the gifts of the Spirit. (That's because you can counterfeit the gifts but you can't counterfeit the fruit.)

If you are a loving Christian, people will know it. There is no argument for the gospel like a loving and a lovable Christian.

Future Repeats the Prophetic Past

The Bible's prophetic scene of the future is as in all God's mighty works. It repeats the pattern.

There will be darkness, then (as in Genesis) the Spirit of God will descend. Pentecost will be repeated all over the world. The light will come. God will speak. The word of the gospel will go forth.

There will be some who make a difference between truth and error, between light and darkness. The people of God will be lights in a dark world, as the stars. "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).

They, like Adam, will reflect the image of God. Not in an ultimate sense, because in this world we still have our sinful nature. But the essence of God is his love, and they will be a loving people. They'll have the fruit of the Spirit.

When the multitudes of people and the nations try to destroy them, that, my friends, will be the time when Jesus will come back again. Then the new covenant will be completely consummated, and God remembers our sins no more.

Then the law will be written in every fiber and cell of our being, and we will immediately and spontaneously do what's right. Now, in this world, I have to fight to do what's right. In that great

day, "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption" (1 Corinthians 15:54 KJV), when God makes a new covenant with his people again, we'll be made new. We'll enter, as did Adam the first, into a new, fresh, perfect world.

So, you see, the pattern of the future is the same as the pattern of the sacred past. It's the pattern of the creation, the exodus, the Babylonian captivity, and the Christ-event. ❖

[The three articles by Dr. Ford in this magazine are adapted from his presentations at the 1993 GNU Summer Congress, "The Future! How to tell fact from fiction"—Roy.]

