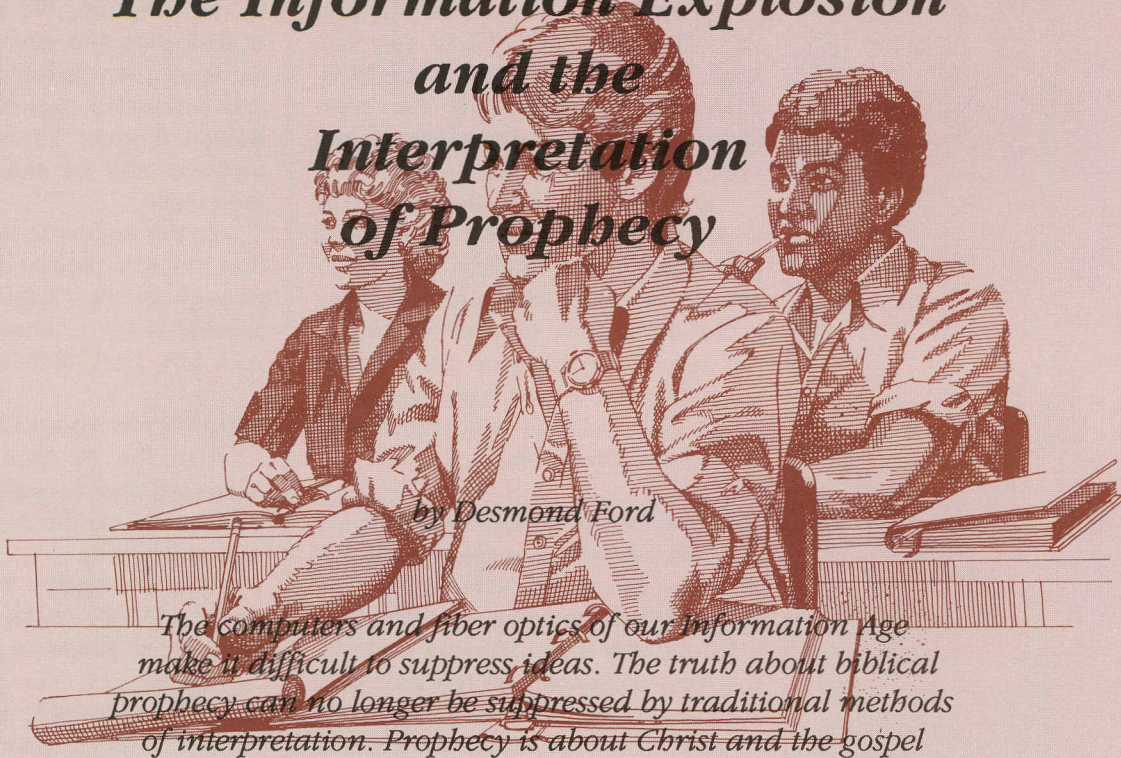


The Information Explosion and the Interpretation of Prophecy



by Desmond Ford

The computers and fiber optics of our Information Age make it difficult to suppress ideas. The truth about biblical prophecy can no longer be suppressed by traditional methods of interpretation. Prophecy is about Christ and the gospel

I was reading a *Biblical Archaeology Review* loaned me by Roy. In an article by Hershel Shanks, "Is the Vatican Suppressing the Dead Sea Scrolls?" a sentence suddenly stood out in neon lights. Here it is:

In short, in this day and age, it is difficult to suppress ideas. (November/December 1991, p. 69)

Wow! Only yesterday I was reading that the works of Galileo and Kepler were not removed from the Roman Catholic Index of Prohibited Books until last century. I have the same reaction—Wow!

Computer Expressway

Now put these ideas with a recent article in *Newsweek* (January 13, 1992, p.56). The article is entitled "The Highway to the Future," and tells us that, "thanks to fiber optics, the United States has broken ground for a computer expressway."

What does this mean? It means that in your children's lifetime, and perhaps in your lifetime, anyone will be able to retrieve information from just about anywhere through the use of computers.

For example, "Local schools can scan any book in a vast university library—copy any page, photo or chart—all in a matter of seconds" (p. 57). That's a snapshot of the future, thanks to fiber optics!

The same article predicts that, "the future apparently will be measured in gigabits—1 billion bits of data, roughly a 20-volume encyclopaedia—which can move across the land in barely a second."

By now we have about run out of them, but here's a last "Wow!"

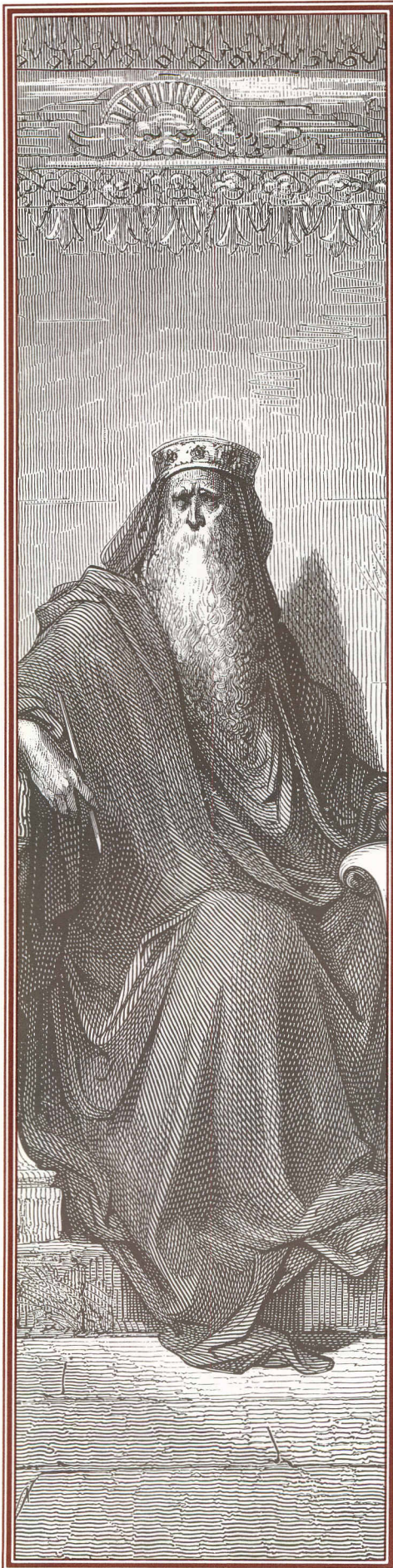
Control of Information

What does all this mean to those who search for truth as for rubies? It means that the barriers of centuries

will be swept away. It means the end of the hangovers from the medieval centuries during which the laity were kept in ignorance. Only the few in power handed on tidbits of knowledge—or withheld such—as they saw fit.

Even today, when we consider the whole population of the planet, most still cannot read. While some countries have an 80 percent literacy rate, others have far, far less. Hierarchies of the past had little trouble controlling the information flow. They could create information drought when and where they wished. But now that day is well-nigh over.

Ours is not the Stone Age, or the Iron Age. It would be more accurate to call it either the Garbage Age, or the Information Age. (This is certainly not to suggest that knowledge is garbage. The truth is the reverse.) This age has multiplied both garbage and information.



Information and Wisdom

Of course, we must not mistake information for wisdom. In an old classic by James Fenimore Cooper, two greenhorns are listening to an Indian guide. He points to a distant fire and says, "Paleface fire." "How can you know that?" whispers one of the Europeans. "Much smoke, little fire, pale-faces," is the reply. Knowledge is not wisdom. Often, it is only smoke.

It would take more than 400 years to read just the titles of the books on the world's bookshelves. But titles alone would be only smoke, not fire. It has often been pointed out that in our age of specialization an expert is someone who knows more and more about less and less—until he knows everything about nothing!

Wisdom Surpasses Information

Wisdom surpasses information and mere knowledge as the sun's light surpasses that of the moon, and the ocean your kitchen sink. Wisdom dives to the heart of things, and concerns itself with centralities rather than peripherals. It takes into account the principle of prioritization.

Wisdom sees things in proportion. It puts the spiritual above the material, the eternal above the temporal, and the divine above the human. Knowledge and information compared to wisdom are as the years of Methuselah compared to those of Jesus—or a mountain of mud to the Kohinoor diamond.

Fortunately, we do not need a computer to find wisdom. Life, interpreted by the Holy Spirit's application of Scripture, yields that treasure. But knowledge and information have their place, and here the computers of the future will yield inexhaustible resources.

Prophetic Interpretation

Sometimes, "For want of a nail the shoe is lost, for want of a shoe the horse is lost, for want of a horse the rider is lost" (George Herbert). A little thing is a little thing; but a little thing in its right place can be a big thing.

Take, for example, the interpretation of biblical prophecy.

Many there are who fail to see that prophecy given by the Spirit of

Christ is chiefly about Christ and his work (see 1 Pe 1:10-12).

Such people have tried to dogmatize about scriptural passages by yoking history books (or today's newspaper) to the Scripture. We hear from them of dark days and meteoric showers, of the French Revolution's Reign of Terror, and successive onslaughts on the old Roman Empire. Thrown in for good measure may be the Ottomans, and their feats.

In this endeavor, it has been taught that Scripture predicted not only events throughout the Christian era, but the specific years of those events, such as A.D. 538, 1798, 1840, and 1844.

Prophecy Is About Christ

Can fire be found amid all this exegetical smoke? Not if you really have information on the facts of both Scripture and history.

The Ostrogoths were **not** rooted up in A.D. 538. Neither was 1798—in its military affairs—a unique disaster for the papacy. Nor is there any evidence that the Bible was forbidden in France in 1793, only to be restored three and a half years later. The Ottoman empire did not come to its end August 11, 1840 . . . et cetera.

In earlier years it took much hard work to separate the smoke from the fire when it came to exegeting prophecy. The task is simplified as soon as you understand that, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev 19:10). That is, the Holy Spirit, in prophecy, testifies about Jesus (Jn 5:39 RSV).

For those who also wish to disentangle historical truth from error, the information explosion has made (and will continue to make) that task much easier.

Exegetical images which at first glance seem to some to have heads of gold will be found to possess only gilded heads and (certainly) feet of clay. Such idols will fall, leaving their worshipers to find everywhere in Scripture what it is intended to yield: Christ and his everlasting gospel. Alleluia! ❖

[For more information on the study of prophecy, see Dr. Desmond Ford's two Crisis! volumes. These are a commentary on the book of Revelation—Roy.]