

Crossroads of Prophecy

PRINCIPLES OF PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION-3

by Desmond Ford

Christ's Olivet discourse (Matthew 24) is a miniature of the book of Revelation. Both are safely understood only when rooted in the cross of Calvary.

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he same prophetic principles apply in both Jesus' Olivet discourse in Matthew 24 and the book of Revelation.

Jesus uses key words in his discourse. 'Betray' is one (Mt 24:10). 'Watch' is another (24:4). 'Hour' another (24:44, 50). In verse 36 we read, "No one knows about that time or hour."

This is the prophecy. What is its connection with the history, the sacred story? In the events that follow these same words are the key words.

Judas comes to betray Jesus (Mt 26:25, 46, 48), and Jesus says, "This is your hour—when darkness reigns" (Lk 22:53). Earlier, Jesus told his disciples, "Keep watch with me" (Mt 26:38); "Watch and pray" (Mt 26:41). The key words of the Olivet prophecy (Mt 24) are all found in the story of Christ's passion, when Judas betrays Jesus. Christ said it was the hour, and told his disciples to watch.

Christ's Head and Body

The key to New Testament prophecy is that what happens to the head happens to the body. What happens to Jesus, the Head of the church, happens to his Body, the church.

What happened to Jesus was that church (in the guise of Caiaphas) and

state (Pilate) united against him, and condemned him to death. Jesus had his time of trouble in Gethsemane, then had a greater time of trouble on the cross. He was then delivered by his resurrection, and glorified in his ascension. This is the pattern of the future.

The church is to have the nomi-



nal church and the state unite and turn against it. So says Revelation 13. The first beast (Rev 13:1) represents the power of the state under the devil. The second beast (13: 11) represents the power of religion under the devil. It has two horns like a

lamb, so is Christian by profession (see Mt 7:15).

The church is to be condemned to death. Those who do not receive the mark of the beast will be put to death (Rev 13:15-17).

At the great time of trouble there are signs and heavenly wonders, and the disciples flee. There is a death decree, there are signs in the heavens, and there will be fleeing.

All this is seen at the cross. There is an hour of darkness, an earthquake, and heavenly signs (Mt 27:45, 51-54). What happens to Jesus during his passion is the pattern of the whole future. Matthew 24, which is about the future, carries the key words of the sacred story that follows: betrayed, watch, and hour.

Final Conflict in Revelation

Matthew 24 is the book of Revelation in miniature. Both are modeled on what was to happen to Jesus.

The final great conflict is described in Revelation 16. Here is the heat of God's wrath that scorches all (Rev 16: 1) —and that's the finish.

This reminds us to look back at the cross. The Man who stands before Pilate is beaten and buffeted. His back is full of festering sores. He is sent to the cross where his blood flows. In agony he cries out. He is



being scorched by the heat of God's wrath. He cries out, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). Then follows the earthquake and intense darkness.

This same picture of wrath is in Revelation 16. The sores (Rev 16:2), the blood (16:3), the sun (16:8), the darkness (16:10), the demonic forces arrayed in all their ferocity (16:13), the great earthquake (16:18), and the cry, "It is done!" (16:17).

What Revelation 16 is revealing is this: Jesus endured the festering sores of punishment, the bloodletting, the heat of God's wrath, the darkness, the onslaught of demons, **on our account**. He persevered until the end, and died during the earthquake with the cry, "It is finished." Those who reject his atonement must suffer these same things themselves.

The chapter is about the unmixed, undiluted wrath of God. Jesus bore that wrath of God and the second death, **for us**. We either choose to bear it ourselves, or accept the fact that we were in him when he bore it for us. This chapter draws from Calvary all that will happen at the end—the sores, the blood, and the wrath.

This chapter pleads: "O sinner, all this your Savior did for you. Will you reject it? If you do, it will fall upon you. Don't reject it! Hide in Christ. He bore this wrath for you."

Series Summary

Prophecy grows out of the sacred story. We saw the principle illustrated in Genesis 3:15.

We saw it again in the prophecies of Daniel. The powers and characteristics of the little horn were acted out in the guise of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius. God's final deliverance of his people was demonstrated in the deliverance of the three Hebrew worthies from the furnace, and Daniel from the lions.

We saw the principle in Christ's great Olivet sermon (Mt 24). Finally, we saw it in Revelation, where the future is always seen through the cross.

If we want to understand the future, then we must understand that the Bible is only interested in the gospel, and the great conflict between good and evil. The Bible's focus is upon the

(continues on page 12)

(continued from page 8)

continuing conflict between those who accept the Christ who died for them, and those who reject Christ. This conflict is a preview picture of the future.

Prophecy has nothing to do with Attila the Hun, or the French Revolution, or the August 11, 1840, Treaty with Turkey. (A treaty which we have known for years never existed.)

Rather, Bible prophecy portrays the future through the lens of the cross. Bible prophecy is about the cross and the gospel. Bible prophecy brings us the joy of salvation, because it reminds us of the salvation already gained for us in our Savior, Jesus. ❖