

Chapter I

A KEY TO THE PROPHETIC SCRIPTURES

Prophecy is history pre-written. Everything contained in the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ was prophetic at the time of its writing. Likewise there are vast portions of the Old Testament Scriptures, which are concerned with the second advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, that remain prophetic. These Scriptures, along with many portions of the New Testament, will provide the materials for our present study of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are certain events associated with the coming of our Lord that have been prophesied in both the Old and New Testaments. These events are yet to come. Eight of them immediately come to mind: the first resurrection; the revelation of the antichrist; the great tribulation; the second coming of our Lord; the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth; the millennial reign of Christ; the great white throne judgment; and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. If we rightly divide the word of truth, this will provide the prophetic key to move from one

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of these events to another.

These events are much like looking at mountains in the distance. One can see the major peaks (the events), but cannot see the lesser mountains, hills, valleys, streams and other details that are in between the peaks -- until one gets a closer view. The partial fulfillment of a certain prophecy, some fifty-eight years ago, has provided us with a closer view of the return of our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth. This event has enabled us to see and understand many things our Christian brethren in times past hoped for, but did not see in their lifetimes.

Specifically, this was the reconstitution of Israel as a nation, May 14, 1948, which was a partial fulfillment of the dry bones prophecy in the thirty-seventh chapter of the book of Ezekiel. This partial fulfillment definitely puts us (prophetically speaking) in the latter part of the *latter days*.

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest.

Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. (Ezekiel 37:1-6)

Prior to Israel becoming a nation again in 1948, this portion of Scripture, along with a text in the twelfth chapter of Daniel, was used to teach a separate resurrection from the dead for the nation of Israel: a resurrection apart from the resurrection described in First Corinthians chapter fifteen. This theory was flawed for many reasons that were not immediately evident to those who held it; but once Israel was a nation again, back in her own land, it lost many of its adherents.

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With Israel's restoration as a nation among the nations of the world, it became evident that our Lord had prophesied of Israel's burial among the Gentile nations of the world in His public ministry to them. He told the Jews, *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate*. He spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem, and He cursed the fig tree while on His way into Jerusalem, the last week of His earthly life. The next day, while observing the withered fig tree, He told His disciples:

Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. (Matthew 21:21)

In the book of Daniel, mountains were used of God to represent kingdoms, and the sea was used to represent the Gentile nations of the world. These keys of understanding make the above statement a prophecy of Israel's judgment and destruction as a nation in 70 A.D., when the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem. During those terrible days many Jews were killed, others were starved to death and the remainder were scattered among the Gentile nations of the world.

In 1948, following the atrocities of World War II, Israel was resurrected (by a mandate of the United Nations) from among the Gentile nations of the world, where she had lain dead (as a nation) for nearly nineteen hundred years (*and, lo, [the bones] were very dry*). Ezekiel tells us specifically, *these bones are the whole house of Israel*.

Since her resurrection from the Gentile nations of the world, Israel has flourished, despite the Arabs attempts to destroy her. In the language of the prophet, the bones have taken on flesh and are once again upon the mountains of Israel; but God's Spirit is not yet in them, and will not be until they are redeemed as a nation, at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth.

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And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sin (Romans 11:26-27).

And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. (Zechariah 12:9-10)

One would think that the salvation of the nation of Israel would bring extreme joy, rather than mourning, and it will; but the Jews' first reaction will be to mourn. They will mourn because they declared, at the first advent of our Lord, *We will not have this man to reign over us*. They also cried, *Crucify him, crucify him*. Their national rejection of Jesus as the Christ resulted in their alienation from God all of these years. It brought them into terrible judgment because of their self-invoked curse: *His blood be upon us, and on our children*.

Our Lord pointed us to this prophecy in Ezekiel, when He spoke of the last days, in the twenty-fourth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew.

Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. (Matthew 24:32-35)

This quotation directs us to the thirty-sixth chapter of Ezekiel, which leads us directly to the dry-bones prophecy in the thirty-seventh chapter.

But ye, O mountains of Israel, ye shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to my people of Israel; for they are at hand to come. For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn unto you, and ye shall be tilled and sown: and I will multiply men upon you,

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all the house of Israel, even all of it: and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded: and I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bring fruit: and I will settle you after your old estates, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings: and ye shall know that I am the LORD. (Ezekiel 36:8-11)

Prophecy is difficult to separate into its various component parts. This is because many things that are written together, like the flesh upon the bones and the breath within the bodies in the thirty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel, are not fulfilled together. It would be easy to assume, because of the way the text is written, that the flesh upon the bones and the breath within the bodies should occur at the same time, but they have not. Israel is a nation again, in her own land, but she has not yet trusted the Lord as Savior and received His indwelling Holy Spirit.

There is an additional prophecy in the thirty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel that distinguishes this resurrection from the Gentile nations of the world from a previous restoration (recorded in the book of Ezra), after seventy years of captivity in Babylon. In that restoration the Jews were still divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. However Ezekiel declared in *the two sticks* prophecy:

The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: and join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand.

And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these? Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes.

And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two

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nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.

And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.

Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore. (Ezekiel 37:15-28)

This prophecy provides that when Israel is restored as a nation she will no longer be divided into two kingdoms, but will have one political head. Like the *flesh* and the *breath* of the earlier prophecy, this prophecy takes us beyond the restoration of Israel as a nation to the return of the Lord and the establishment of His Kingdom upon this earth. It takes us to the time when Israel will have been redeemed and shall dwell in the Kingdom forever. Like the earlier prophecy in this chapter, this prophecy declares events that are fulfilled at separate times as if they are fulfilled at the same time.

Our Lord supplied us with a very important key to the understanding of prophecy in the fourth chapter of the book of Luke:

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet [Isaiah]. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.*

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And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. (Luke 4:16-21, emphasis mine)

If we carefully examine this text in Luke with the text in the book of Isaiah, it becomes evident that our Lord closed the book in the middle of a sentence. If He had kept reading, He could not have said, *This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears*: because the remainder of the text, as well as the remainder of the chapter, is associated with the second coming of our Lord to this earth and the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon this earth.

The differences between the portion of Scripture which our Lord read and the portion He did not read must be understood in the light of several Scriptural principles: *All scripture is given by inspiration of God; God cannot lie; God is Omniscient and Immutable; prophecy has its source in God; and prophecy is given from God's perspective, not man's*. These factors were all in play when our Lord closed the book of Isaiah, saying, *This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears*. He closed the book at the precise place where the prophecy changed from His first advent to His second advent: revealing the principle that things written together are not necessarily fulfilled together. Peter enlarged upon this principle in Second Peter, chapter three:

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. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

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? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new

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heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. (II Peter 3:8-13)

This text has confused many with its description of prophetic events, despite the fact that Peter commanded them not to be ignorant: ... *that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*

The text states, *the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat...* If we apply the principle Peter gave concerning *a day is with the Lord*: this actually speaks of three events, not one. There is a separation of time between the events, even though they are written as if they are one event. This is determined by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

The day of the Lord describes the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth. In the book of the Revelation, John tells us when that occurs, *Every eye shall see Him*. This is hardly a description of *a thief in the night*. There is no contradiction, the view is the view of an Omniscient God. All time is in the present tense to One Who is Omniscient, but we are subject to time and space. So there is a separation of seven years between the *day of the Lord* and our Lord's coming, as a *thief in the night*. *The thief in the night* aspect of our Lord's coming speaks of when He comes to meet us in the air: when He comes to gather His jewels (the redeemed) to Himself. Whereas the day of the Lord speaks of the time when He will come as *King of kings and Lord of lords*, and *every eye shall see Him*.

The text goes on to describe the destruction of the earth, when the elements shall melt with fervent heat. However this does not occur at the coming of our Lord. It occurs, according to the book of the Revelation, at the end of the millennium, when the devil shall be loosed a little season

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and shall seek to destroy the Lord and His saints. At that time, the Lord will send down fire from heaven to destroy this insurrection. After that, He will create a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

At the beginning of this chapter, we stated that the reconstitution of Israel as a nation definitely puts us in the latter part of the *latter days*. The partial fulfillment of Ezekiel chapter thirty-seven certainly suggests this, and the prophet Hosea clinches it in the fifth and sixth chapters of his prophecy where he wrote, *I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early*. These words (recorded by Hosea) are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. The setting for them was on the mount of Olives (at the time of our Lord's ascension into heaven), when the angels said, *This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven*.

At the beginning of chapter six, Hosea recorded Israel's response to her affliction, which shall come upon her during the great tribulation period (*the time of Jacob's trouble*):

Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth. (Hosea 6:1-3)

If we apply the formula we learned from Peter, ... *a day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day*, it is evident we are in the latter part of the *latter days*. First, in the second sentence of this text, the word *after* is the Hebrew word *achar*. *Achar* means the *hinder part* and is often translated *latter days*. Second, if we apply this meaning to the word

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in context with the reconstitution of Israel as a nation; in context with our Lord's ascension and the destruction of Jerusalem, some forty years later; in context with the date of Israel's reconstitution as a nation: it is evident there were 1878 years from 70 A.D. to 1948, when Israel became a nation again. Third, applying the formula given to us by Peter: 1878 years is equal to 1.878 days, or as the text in Hosea states in Hebrew: *the hinder part of two days*. Fourth, at the present time, we have not yet reached the time of Israel's affliction. That will come during *the time of Jacob's trouble*, which will come when the church age is complete at the first resurrection. Fifth, the first resurrection is in three parts: the firstfruits (when Christ was raised), the main harvest (commonly called the rapture), and the gleanings (which includes those martyred during the great tribulation and the salvation of the nation of Israel at the coming of the Lord). Sixth, the very first tick of the clock, following the completion of the two days (at the end of the seventieth week of Daniel), will start the third day: when the Lord will establish His Kingdom upon this earth and complete His promise to Israel.

God has given us several prophetic overviews in Scripture. One of these takes us (in point of time) from the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar to the Kingdom of God, by means of Nebuchadnezzar's dream; another takes us from the first advent of Christ, through the church age, to the second advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is done in the observance of seven feasts of the Jews, which are associated with the early and latter rains, recorded in the twenty-third chapter of Leviticus. The first three feasts speak of our Lord's first advent and the last three feasts speak of His second advent. The details of the middle feast of the Jews (Pentecost, which represents the church age) are supplied by our Lord in the seven parables that He spoke in the thirteenth chapter of the

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Gospel of Matthew.

Details are added to these overviews by Nebuchadnezzar's golden image; the vision of the *seventy weeks*, given by the angel Gabriel to Daniel in the ninth chapter of Daniel's prophecy; by the vision of the *four beasts rising up out of the sea* in the seventh chapter of Daniel's prophecy; by the mystery of the Harlot Babylon; and by various other prophecies provided by Daniel and other Old Testament and New Testament prophets.

Another important principle in the dividing of Scripture, or the interpretation of prophecy, is that all of the information one needs to know is not found in one place in Scripture. Bits and pieces must be gleaned from all of the Word of God and skillfully assembled in a system of theology that is without contradiction. Then, and only then, will we be on the road to *rightly dividing the word of truth*, or plumbing the depths of the prophetic Scriptures.

This is an awesome task, given the fact we are dealing with events not yet fulfilled and our sight is not perfect. Therefore this study will require a detailed view of much of the Old and New Testaments, but this will not be without rewards. Remember the apostle John wrote, *Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand* (Revelation 1:3).