

THE PROPHETS SPEAK

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INTRODUCTION

The following is a reprint of a series of articles on prophecy which we did in “The Messenger,” beginning in 1979. Except for a few corrections of a typographical nature, we have not altered the text at all.

The main thrust of these articles, except for a few of the “Armchair Chats” was to explore the whole issue of prophecy as a basic communication between God and His people, rather than predictions about the future.

In the centuries before the truth of God was written down for the public, it was necessary for God to speak to His people directly through the prophets. This was true even in the first century of the Church. Thus there were those with the prophetic gift who could perform this service. Today, with a complete revelation of God’s Word to us, such prophets are not so necessary. This point is misunderstood in the Church today and hence the confusion, as people not necessarily from God offer alleged “prophecies” in the body of believers, and tend to go beyond the revealed Word of God (although it is not impossible that there would be some such gifts). It is hoped that the following pages will help to sort things out and reduce the confusion about this most important aspect of God’s interaction with His people.

We have also included a series of “Armchair Chats with the Editor” on the subject of the Middle East. These appeared at the time Israel first entered Lebanon, which event caused a great deal of miscalculation on the part of the leadership, which again brought much confusion to the body. We felt it necessary to interrupt our series and discuss the situation at length.

What Can We Surely Know About Prophecy?

The predicting of future events has fascinated mankind from the earliest astrologers and seers of ancient Asiatic kingdoms to the modern day “psychics” and “market-media predictors.” Unfortunately, many Bible teachers, evangelists, and church leaders today have identified themselves with this stream of charlatans, by allowing themselves to be drawn into the extremely precarious position of making precise predictions about the future that are based, not upon the sureties of the Word of God, but upon speculations and symbolisms that cannot possibly be verified by the most careful Bible exegesis and exposition.

That is not to say that the speculations may not have some plausibility. Bible teachers are certainly welcome to speculate, as long as it is made clear that one is dealing in speculations and not Bible truths. One remembers the large numbers of Bible teachers that were drawn into a mood, several decades ago, of believing that Hitler or Mussolini was the Antichrist. This kind of speculation has been going on for all the centuries of the Church. In the days of early Rome, many believed that the Emperor Trajan (c. 100 A.D.) was the Antichrist. Indeed he seemed readily to fit the description even to the point of being most friendly to the Church for about three and a half years, and then suddenly turning in violent persecution of the Christians. Martin Luther was certain that the Pope was the Antichrist, and that Rome was the Babylon of Revelation 17.

The problem with these kinds of speculations is, of course, that the Bible is greatly discredited and then loses its claim to the truth. This kind of carelessness also leads to very serious confusion among the believers, and often gets them off into a sort of “fortune-telling” attitude toward the Bible. In the matter of prophecy, there is likely to be far more curiosity about the future, than concern for the knowledge of Christ. Such attitudes are often a form of

“escapism”—a keen desire to be rid of this troublesome earthly existence. While it is, of course, admirable and expected that one should long to see the Savior, at the same time, there ought to be a sharing of His attitude toward the world as expressed by Peter—“*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*” (II Peter 3:9 KJV). If Christ be the central focus, instead of deliverance from earthly trouble, then one might realize that Christ is, after all, still engaged in His work on the earth and we have the privilege of working shoulder to shoulder with Him in the great task. Once the final curtain falls on this age, we will never again have the camaraderie with Christ in the conflict that we now have.

All of these things have been said in the concern about the motive for studying prophecy. If the study of prophecy becomes merely speculations and predictions about future earthly events, then it will be identified perforce with the charlatans and chicaneries of modern day soothsaying. The Word will lack the impact of a “Thus saith the Lord.” And in the absence of precise biblical evidence, the “revelations,” claimed by many become lost in the clamor of innumerable counter-claims to revelation by everyone who fancies himself to be a “special agent” of the Deity. This, of course, includes all who make a claim to special revelation from every quarter of religious interest. If there is no biblical proof, then the claims of Christian “prophets” have no more weight than the claims of the non-Christian “prophets.” A great deal of teaching about prophecy in the Church today is based upon a symbolism which has no possible way of verification. Since very few of the modern day nations, and alignments of power, are mentioned in the Bible, it is obvious that one can only be speculating in the predictions about such nations. The moment we step aside from the literal interpretation of these many prophetic passages, we are in the wide wilderness of human speculation.

The question we must ask ourselves is, “How far do we want to go with this kind of speculation?” The only way that we are going to get rid of the confusion and come to confidence is to stay strictly with what the Bible specifically and directly states in the areas of so-called prophetic truth.

THE CONFUSION THAT EXISTS IN THE CHURCH TODAY OVER PROPHECY IS THE DIRECT RESULT OF USING SYMBOLISM THAT IS BOTH UNWARRANTED AND UNVERIFIED BY THE SCRIPTURES.

How then should we handle prophecy? The way to handle prophecy is the way to handle any other subject in the Scripture—by careful analysis of the words of the text and the exposition of biblical statements in such a way as to eliminate speculation. That is, we must speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent. If there is no absolute biblical permission for the use of a symbol, we must avoid it. For example, there is no need for speculation about the brazen serpent in the wilderness. Jesus Himself said that this brazen serpent was a symbol of His own crucifixion. Similarly, there is no need for speculation about the tabernacle, for example, or the sacrifices, or Noah’s Ark. Half the battle will be won in the attempt to come to truth about prophecy, if, from the beginning, we agree to avoid unwarranted or unverifiable symbolism.

Another area of difficulty is in the definition of prophecy. Both the Hebrew (*Naba’*), and the Greek (*propheteuo*), were used to indicate the declaring of Divine and revealed truth. The idea of future prediction was only one facet, and perhaps the smallest part of the entire concept.

Thus, the Old Testament Scriptures were brought down to us through a great number of Divinely appointed prophets, each of whom declared great truths about God and man and the

world, but only under certain conditions engaged in the prediction of future events. In fact, in the days before Israel had a king, the main link between God and His people was through prophets such as Moses and Samuel.

In order to handle the subject of prophecy properly, we must understand then the several aspects of prophecy, both declarative and predictive. In actuality they blend together in one grand theme of God's deliverance of His creation from the evil into which it fell. Deliverance is as much a matter of past processes as of present realities and of future fulfillment. These elements really cannot be separated. Nor do any of the Old Testament prophets do so. All of the prophets from Moses to Malachi interweave the past, present and future deliverance of Israel and the Gentile nations into one grand hymn of Divine truth. The great thing is that the God of the Universe has communicated with man regarding the nature of His being and the nature of man's relationship to God for time and for eternity. To try and pick out the predictive elements of prophecy is like picking the raisins out of the cereal. The taste is sweet, but the nourishment provided by the grain is lacking. It is not well to place an undue emphasis on the future aspects of the words of the prophets.

Still another area of problem in the study of prophecy is the place of "traditions." Jesus had the same difficulty with the Pharisees. Much of the accepted symbolism that is found in large numbers of books on prophecy is based upon earlier Christian writings and not upon the Bible itself. For example, it has been accepted for a great many years, and by the majority of writers in the prophetic field, that "north," in terms of prophecy, means the Far North. However, in Ezekiel 26, the "North" is identified with the king of Babylon. Babylon is normally associated with the East, but a study of geography will indicate that the only way for the king of Babylon to get to Israel was via the "Fertile Crescent," which follows the Mesopotamian Valley into Syria, and thus must enter Palestine from the north.

Nothing in any statement of the Bible in any of the prophets requires a consideration of any area north of the Caucasus Mountains, as regards the future of Israel. That is not to say that these areas could not be considered, but rather that it is not necessary in terms of the words and phrases of the Bible to include these areas. Traditionalism has so "locked in" the mind of Christendom, however, that to speak of the north in any other term than Russia, for example, would be in the minds of many, heresy. The strange part is that Russia is never mentioned in the Bible, and even the names that seem to represent Russia are only on the fringes, and have very little relationship with the heart of the U.S.S.R. Again, this is not to absolutely deny that Russia could be indicated here, but rather to show how strong traditionalism is in our consideration of Bible prophecy.

The fact of the matter is, that these fringe areas just below the Caucasus Mountains are dominated by Moslem influence, and have been so for a thousand years. The likelihood that they might become separated from the U.S.S.R. and once again become aligned with the vast Moslem Empire of the Middle East is not only possible, but quite likely. We have not yet seen the end of the Moslem menace. Today, the Moslems hold the Western world by the throat, as it were. It might be well to re-evaluate the Scripture in this matter. There are 750 million Moslems in the world today. They totally surround Israel. They have no use for the Western world, including Russia. The entire Moslem area is easily identified literally in the prophetic Scriptures; and they have been a menace to the people of God for over a thousand years. They are as little likely to align themselves with Russia as they are with the rest of the Western world, whom they despise. They will squeeze out of the Western world (including Russia) all that they can, and then drop the curtain on it. But, more of that in detail later.

The same problem of symbolism in the traditions is a concern in the description of various instruments of war. To insist that certain description must apply to modern weaponry, such

as tanks and guns, is to engage in speculation. Once again, it is not to deny this possibility, but rather to say that once we get into the realm of symbolism, we must realize that it is strictly speculation. For example, perhaps the horses mentioned in Ezekiel 38 are, after all, horses. Again, the practice of identifying the instruments of destruction which are from God with man-made weaponry puts everything on a human level. Perhaps the destructions identified in Ezekiel 38 may be, in fact, of God's power, and not man's. No one will be amazed at the greatness and glory of God in the event of nuclear holocaust. But, the manifestation of His power is the precise purpose of God's destructive force at that time. Perhaps, in the area of predictive prophecy, we have been too quick to find man revealed, and not God. But this is in keeping with the mood that investigates prophecy from the point of view of curiosity about the future, rather than the search for the knowledge of Christ.

Summary

Perhaps the entire discussion of our approach to the study of prophecy can be summarized under three main ideas—(1) Motive; (2) Meaning; (3) Method.

Motive—We must come to the study of prophecy, not out of curiosity about the future, but out of sincere desire to come to a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ, and of His purposes in the world. Studying prophecy out of curiosity can only breed anxiety and focus on the flesh.

Meaning—In order to properly interpret the prophetic statements of Scripture, we must understand the meaning of prophecy as including the past, present and future aspects of God's deliverance of mankind. If we focus on the predictive elements only, we will distort the ultimate meaning and purpose of God.

Method—We must agree at the outset to remain strictly with the clear and literal statements of the Bible. Symbolism can only be used properly as it is verifiable in the Bible itself. The twin specters of tradition and speculation have haunted the teaching of prophecy throughout the history of the Church. If speculation is engaged in, it must be so noted. Remember well these words: SPECULATION IN THE NAME OF REVELATION IS THE WATCHWORD OF DECEPTION.

In the following sections, we will attempt to take the entire subject of prophecy and bring it into some kind of manageable organization of material, so that we can look at it with a view of the entire scope. We will try to determine just what it is that God really expects us, or wants us, to know about the subject; where we find the teachings on the subject; who the prophets were, and what the nature of their contribution to the subject was; who were the identifiable nations and personalities involved in prophecy; and to what degree are timetables available. When we have brought the subject into manageable limits, then we will proceed to analyze in depth the prophets of the Bible and their prophecies.

The Interpretation Of Prophecy

Probably the most crucial problem in dealing with the subject of prophecy is that the material is so extensive that the average reader tends rather to look for simplistic books on the subject than to plunge into the mass of material that is given in the Bible itself. This is, of course, quite understandable, but, on the other hand, does make the average reader quite vulnerable to deception. Unless one has mastered the contents of all the biblical prophecies, it is very difficult to tell whether or not the author of a given book has really adequately studied the Scriptures himself. The original writings of the prophets were written in other languages—

Hebrew and Greek—which are not thoroughly understood by more than a small number of teachers. To attempt to handle the text in any kind of authoritative way is futile apart from the languages, because so many of the phrases used in biblical prophecy are obscure and symbolic. The Hebrew language is especially difficult because it is a much more simple language than Greek, and therefore not as precise. It is a gargantuan task to take the basic Hebrew and Greek text of the prophetic utterances of the Bible, and study them thoroughly enough to be able to arrive at substantial conclusions as to what the Holy Spirit actually wants us to learn from the writings. If one is going to speak with authority, it is not enough merely to have a variety of translations and commentaries. It is necessary to know the words that are used back of the translations. Furthermore, it is a most perilous thing to pit one interpretation over another merely on the basis that one group is more “spirit-led” than another. It would be most presumptuous for anyone to believe that he is more qualified to interpret the Word because he is more “spirit-filled,” or more honest than another.

How shall we handle the dilemma? It is obviously neither possible nor necessary for everyone to be an authority. But if one is going to be a teacher, one must equip himself as adequately as possible for the task, and then take the Scriptures, and with careful and honest scholarship and ultimate dependence upon the Spirit of Christ, attempt to come to the truth as nearly as the Spirit allows. But what about the other interpreters? It is not possible to vouch for other interpreters. One can only judge one’s own work as to its honesty, diligence, and openness to the guidance of the Spirit. If the ministry is coming from Christ, then those who receive it should sense the presence and power of Christ in it. If it is not of Christ, then it will merely be another academic effort. But is not everyone who prays for help guided by the Spirit? Apparently not, otherwise there would not be so many variant interpretations. But why, if they pray, does not the Spirit respond by giving them the truth? Perhaps some teachers are relying too much on inspiration and too little upon perspiration! Prayer is essential, but the vessel must be prepared. Again, as far as the individual believer is concerned, perhaps he is trying to set aside all teachers and go on his own to get his private interpretations directly from God. He may find that the Holy Spirit is not interested in presenting private interpretations for everyone. Perhaps the necessity of submissiveness to a teacher is important. If God had expected everyone to be His own private interpreter of the Word, He would not have placed teachers in the Body.

But, we must ask, how do we know which teacher to follow? The answer lies in openness to the guidance of the Spirit in seeking out a teacher, and in the motive for our search. If we are seeking to know Christ, we will not be satisfied until we have come to that teacher who most reflects the Spirit of Christ in his teachings. If we are seeking for education, or for religious experience, or for the satisfying of curiosity about future events, then we may find it difficult to discern the false from the true. The Christian, confronted with thousands of books on the subject of prophecy, as well as thousands of presentations in the various media and in the pulpit, must earnestly seek Christ for a proper teacher and shepherd. Those who surround themselves with books, and go from place to place, seeking new voices and new expressions, are going to be confused and that without remedy. Some assume that we must have variety in the ministry, but this would be like sheep going from shepherd to shepherd to find a different kind of food to eat. The truth is One. Men have different varieties of expression and of presentation, but in the end, the task of the shepherd is to feed the sheep on the nourishment of the Word of God. If the shepherds are all receiving their own supply from the same source, the food should all be about the same. If we seek for variety of style or presentation, we are merely indulging the flesh. If one has been led by the Spirit to a shepherd or teacher, it is well to sacrifice variety for the sake of safety. It is better for children to eat at home, than to travel about from neighbor to neighbor in search of something of variety in their meal.

It is not wrong, of course, to take advantage of other ministries from time to time, but it must

be on a limited basis and dependence upon the guidance of the Spirit. The sheep are especially vulnerable when it comes to the matter of prophecy. There are so many thousands of interpretations—so many thousands of supposed revelations, that the believer must be very discerning as to where he gets his information. Those whose ministry has been a blessing to one in many areas of life, may also be trusted in the area of prophecy. It is much more risky to look to the “specialist” in prophecy, whose ministry in other areas has not been tried. The Word of God is One. Prophecy is so interwoven with the entire text of the Scripture, that to separate it as a distinctive area of specialization may give rise to imbalance in the ministry. It is with these thoughts in mind that this author, who has been given the charge of feeding the sheep, has sought to provide for those whom the Spirit has led to his ministry, a dependable guide to the study of the prophetic theme. If the Holy Spirit attends this effort, then it should provide a significant help to the readers. If one does not sense the Spirit in the writing, then one should discontinue the reading of it immediately. As we approach this study of prophecy, we shall try, in the first place, to set aside for the moment, all traditional views, not because they are necessarily wrong, but because we want to approach the Scripture with an open mind to try and determine just what the Spirit of God intended to say to us. We will give much attention to the original Hebrew and Greek text. We have no way to determine just exactly how others have approached this subject, but it will be our intention to bring to the study an open heart, a prepared mind, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit witnesses through these writings that there is truth here, then we will have done our work well, but if there is not such a witness to the reader, then we will have to merely classify it as another effort of the flesh. Please pray along with us as we pursue this study.

In all our approach to this subject, we must first go more deeply into the definition of prophecy, and determine what areas of the Bible should be included in the discussion of it. Then we must determine, what may be specifically known and what is still subject to speculation.

The Definition Of Prophecy

Going back to the central idea of prophecy, it really has to do with the communication between God and man. In its basic usage, it does not simply deal with prediction of future events, but rather with God's use of human persons as instruments of the communication of His Words to the people of the earth. The nature of these communications is such that there are often statements regarding His future purposes and ultimate intentions for His creatures, but there is far more to His communications than future predictions.

In the Old Testament, this process was carried on by the very select few who had some special anointing from God for the task. Often the anointing was limited to a given occasion, or message. Since the Holy Spirit had not as yet come to the earth, as He did later at Pentecost, the people of God did not possess His Spirit within but rather depended upon His care of them through the agency of certain prophets and leaders, such as Abraham and Moses and David. The will of God was made known to the people through such prophets as Samuel and Elijah; Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; Daniel, and numerous other anointed messengers. When the Holy Spirit finally came into the world at Pentecost, Peter identified that coming with the prophecy of Joel, which states that the Spirit would be poured out upon all flesh, and that prophecy would be a common manifestation of the Spirit among all believers—sons and daughters; male and female—but the essential nature of this communication was the ministry of the believers to one another, as the Holy Spirit expressed Himself in them and through them. Each believer possessed by the Holy Spirit, was in a position to minister to a fellow-believer as a vessel of the Spirit. All communication between believers would have to be in one of the following categories: (a) an expression of the flesh or the natural mind; or (b) a direct quotation of the Scripture; or (c) by a word given in the Spirit.

In the latter category, any word of comfort or encouragement, or exhortation, which would not be a direct quotation of the Scripture, but would, on the other hand, not be from the flesh, would be an expression of the Holy Spirit within. In addition to this universal experience of prophetic ministry, there was also a specialized gift of prophecy, which was given to a more limited number. (In the same respect, there is a universal gift of faith for salvation, and also a very special gift of faith for the ministry). It was to the latter category of prophets that God gave, on occasion, a revelation of future events. But the primary use of prophecy, as indicated by Paul in I Corinthians 14 was for the edifying of the body of believers.

The purpose of the foregoing discussion has been to bring prophecy into a proper perspective, so that the teaching on the subject may be unto the edification of the believer and not unto the satisfying of curiosity about the future. If the latter be the motivation for the study of the subject, then one might well be disappointed in this series, in which it will be our purpose to lift up Christ and the glory of His redemptive purpose in the world.

THE STUDY OF PROPHECY

Prophecy And The Process Of Redemption

Based upon the above definition, we must consider prophecy to be the communication of God unto man in the great orchestration of the deliverance of His creatures from the bondage and devastation brought about by the intrusion of evil into the world, through the disobedience of its original inhabitants. In a certain sense, all of Scripture is the revelation of God's redemptive process. However, there is that thread of truth running through the entire Scripture that has to do more particularly with the master plan whereby God will actually bring about the total fulfillment of His purposes. It is this thread of truth that we will be searching out in this series on prophecy. Accordingly, we will begin with those prophets who have not been characteristically associated with the future aspects. In this way, we will keep our focus on the revelation of redemption, rather than on speculations about the future.

Prophecy And The Progress Of Nations

The process of redemption involves not only the restoration of God's creatures, but the development and destiny of the nations into which mankind has been organized. From the beginning of man, there has been a divinely ordained ordering of society into structured units controlled by some form of government. These units are referred to in the Bible under the general category of "nations." As far as God's purposes are concerned, there were only two categories of such nations—Israel and the Gentiles. The destiny of these nations is a very significant part of the subject of prophecy. The entire issue of government and nations must be searched out to determine what God's purposes are in the structured society—what is government? What is a nation? What is a Gentile nation? What is the ultimate meaning of Israel as a nation? We must determine what the Bible actually includes in the concept of Gentile nations—what is specifically stated? And what is only speculated? What Gentile nations in existence today are actually identified in the Bible? And what happens to those nations who are not specifically identified? Is the entire Western Hemisphere actually excluded from biblical prophecy? And what, if any, are the stated time factors?

Prophecy And The Projection Of The Kingdom Of God

The ultimate fulfillment of all God's purposes is to culminate, according to the Scriptures, in the grand kingdom of God. The kingdom of Satan is destroyed; the kingdoms of this world become the "kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ." The kingdom of God fills heaven and earth. There are many questions to be asked. What is meant by the phrase, kingdom of God? How many aspects of this kingdom are there? Is there to be a literal, earthly kingdom of Israel as a part of the kingdom of God? Is the kingdom of God completely spiritual, or are there earthly aspects that will parallel the spiritual kingdom throughout eternity? What is the relationship between Israel and the Church in the kingdom of God? What is the time factor involved in the kingdom of God? How much is it possible to know the time factor?

Conclusion

We have set for ourselves an immense task. With all our diligence, we will certainly not be able to exhaust the subject, and we will certainly not be able to answer all the questions, or perhaps not even many of them. To do anything thorough on the subject will require an extensive series, which will run far longer than the series on David, but we will keep faithfully at it until we have come to some stable understanding of what God wants us to know. We shall proceed with the investigation in great reliance upon the Holy Spirit. We shall know that we are on the right track if, in our search, we find ourselves constantly confronting our Lord Jesus Christ.

PROPHECY AND THE PROCESS OF REDEMPTION

Entering the vast jungle of prophetic studies, we have sought to clear a path by defining and analyzing what it is that the word “prophecy” is intended to convey. In general, we concluded that its essential use was in describing the process whereby God communicates to His people on earth through human channels of His own choosing. Sometimes these channels are especially anointed servants, such as Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, and a host of others. And, sometimes they are random individuals selected by God for reasons of His own, to convey a divine message in a particular circumstance. Such ones might give only one prophetic utterance in their lifetime, as for example, Saul, who was the first king of Israel. Just after his anointing by Samuel to the monarchy, he encountered a school of prophets and apparently, touched by the Spirit of God, prophesied among them. Under the New Covenant, and after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the use of prophecy broadened considerably to include a common part of the communication between the believers, as the Holy Spirit ministered through them. All who had received the Holy Spirit, then, became potential channels for His communication in the edifying of one another beyond their own natural capacities. But there was also the special gift of prophecy in the tradition of the Old Testament Prophets.

Thus, we have found that prophecy was not merely confined to pronouncements about the future, but rather was the running stream of God’s communication with His people, the central message of which was redemption. In the beginning, God’s communication with Adam was direct, and there was no need of a mediator. After the Fall, however, all that God had to say to man had to be said through special agents, who were called prophets. Properly used, then, the word “prophecy” is applied to all of the communications between God and His people, whether predictive, or merely instructional, and edifying. In the Old Testament the prophet was the teacher, and the teacher was the prophet. In the New Testament there was a distinction made between the two, and the prophet became the bearer of special messages from God, primarily for the edifying of the Body, and the teacher was the interpreter of the truths as they had been revealed through the Old Testament and through Jesus’ ministry on the earth. When the writings of the Old Testament were put together, there was a special classification for certain of the prophets, who had been the chief spokesmen of God in a tragic era of Israel’s apostasy and exile. These have been designated as the major and the minor prophets. One of the distinctions of these prophets is that they were all writers, whereas many of the earlier prophets had their prophecies recorded by others. On the other hand, Moses and David were communicators of a very large body of truth from God, and they were both writers, but they were not generally classified as prophets.

In order to bring this vast subject into some kind of organized presentation, we are going to treat prophecy as the mainstream of God’s revelation to man concerning His redemptive process as given through certain specially anointed and ordained instruments, who made specific contributions to that revelation. The main headings under which we are considering the entire subject were given in the last installment. They are as follows:

1. Prophecy and the Process of Redemption;
2. Prophecy and the Progress of Nations;
3. Prophecy and the Projection of the Kingdom of God.

In this present article, we are dealing with prophecy and the process of redemption. We are going to examine the message of representative prophets from the very beginning of the people of God down to the final exile, with a view to finding that thread which gives to us the gradual unfolding of the truths of redemption. We are going to divide these prophets into three time periods as follows:

1. Prophets of the Emerging People of God;
2. Prophets of the Developing Nation of Israel;
3. Prophets of the Apostasy and Exile.

As we study these prophets, we will find an intricate interweaving of both spiritual and material deliverance; current instructions; and future predictions. It is really not possible to divide these prophets in terms of their predictive or non-predictive assignments. The truth of the matter is that both elements emerge in all of the prophets. There are, of course, more of the predictive elements in the prophets of apostasy and exile, but the earlier prophets had a surprising amount to say about the future of God's people, too. It is only by seeing the entire scope of God's communication to man with reference to His deliverance and restoration, both spiritual and earthly, that we can put the predictive aspects into proper perspective.

PROPHETS OF THE EMERGING PEOPLE OF GOD

One of the unique features of the Judeo-Christian concept of God is the thoroughness with which He made Himself known to mankind. This revelation was given to man both in a personal and living way and in a verbal way, oral and written, whereas the Oriental mystic religions consign the individual to endless wandering in the wilderness of human thought process in the vague hope that he will not be self-deceived. The Judeo-Christian tradition is centered in a special revelation, called the Bible, which is a record of God's dealings, personally and orally, with mankind (See author's pamphlet, "Reality and Revelation").

In God's effort to identify with mankind, He established a family on the earth, through whom He would make Himself personally known. This family developed into a national entity which would be God's channel through whom to present the truth concerning Himself and the future of His creation. It is here that we must start in our search for the substance of prophecy. Throughout the Scripture, God's dealing with this body of people, first as a family, and then later as a nation, gives us an unfolding drama of the process by which God takes His fallen creatures, brings them through the ceaseless conflict with the forces of evil, and assures their ultimate glorification in the final sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His Son, who then becomes the Eternal Master of all elements of heaven and earth. Satan and the forces of evil are thus eternally destroyed and righteousness and peace established forever.

The principal prophets who are God's channel during this period of the emerging people of God are Abraham and Moses. Aaron, who was the priestly agent in the sacrificial system, was also identified as a prophet, but he was actually a spokesman for Moses. Also Miriam, who sang Moses' song, was called a prophetess. But Abraham and Moses were the primary channels through whom God revealed His overall purposes for mankind.

Abraham

Abraham is not normally considered to be a prophet. Our justification for identifying him as one, is that the first time the word “prophet” occurs in the Bible, it is in connection with Abraham. Abraham had gone down to Gerar with Sarah his wife. In a most unfortunate incident where Abimelech, the King, had mistakenly taken Sarah for a wife, God intervened and came to Abraham’s rescue, saying to Abimelech, *“Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine”* (Genesis 20:7 KJV). Abraham had acted foolishly in the matter, (see the entire chapter) but God graciously came to his rescue and there established before the gentile king Abimelech that He regarded Abraham as a prophet. Furthermore, He identified one of the characteristics of a prophet—effective intercession on behalf of another. In other words, he was not only a channel by which God communicated with His people, but also one who personally sought God’s help for the people.

The revelation which God gave through Abraham was pivotal to the entire process of redemption. Abraham was a prime example of the prophet who not only gave a message, but himself became the message. He was thus, in a certain sense, a type of Jesus who was the living revelation of God. In later years, many of God’s prophets would become, at God’s request, object lessons of some particular truth that He wanted to make known. Hosea, for example, was called to marry a harlot in order to become an object lesson to Israel, of God’s relationship to them as an idolatrous and thus an adulterous people.

Abraham was, in fact, the symbol of God’s grace to the entire world. He was not related to God under the law, which had not as yet been given. He was offered a covenant by God completely apart from any merits of his own. The substance of this covenant is given in Genesis 22:17 as follows: *“That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; And thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”* It is under this covenant that the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, are granted redemption and restoration. Even the apparent indiscretion of Abraham, in having a son by his wife’s maid, became a useful allegory illustrating the difference between the covenant of law under Moses and the covenant of grace under Christ. The detailed accounting of this is given in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, especially chapters 3 and 4. It is important to realize that the sweeping promise to Abraham has not as yet been fulfilled. It has never, as yet, been true that all nations of the earth have been blessed in Abraham. The conditions for such blessings have been met in Christ, but the realization of the promise has not as yet come.

Romans 4 gives another aspect of the message of God through Abraham. Here it is the free flow of God’s grace to Abraham apart from works that is focused upon. Abraham’s faith in God was accounted to him for righteousness. Abraham, then, becomes the first identified prophetic instrument to proclaim the ultimate recovery of all things apart from the worthiness or work of man. Abraham was as much the message as the messenger, and throughout the Scriptures is seen as the evidence of God’s universal grace and the universal restoration of His Creation. The spiritual application of this proclamation has been fulfilled essentially in Christ, but other aspects that are evident in the blessing of the nations on earth have yet to be fulfilled.

From Abraham came Isaac, the child of promise and the symbol of God’s faithfulness and power. And from Isaac came Jacob, whose name was later changed to Israel, and who became the father of the nation which now bears his name. Thus, from Abraham, came a family which would itself be a witness to the world of the extent to which God involves Himself with the people of earth. Through a combination of circumstances, including a famine, the family found

itself in Egypt under bondage to the Pharaoh. In this circumstance, they became a type of the bondage of God's people under the yoke of Satan, the god of this world. From this point on, Egypt itself becomes, throughout the Scripture, a type of the world.

Moses

Moses, of course, was the grand type of Christ as the ultimate deliverer of God's people. The sons of Jacob, or Israel, had gone to Egypt, a small family group. In the course of time, they grew in number to multiplied thousands (the number of them was not, in fact, permitted). It was this abundant multiplying of them that had caused the Pharaoh to put them under bondage in the first place, and then later to insist upon the slaying of the firstborn. The wretched circumstances of the people of Israel would stand for all time as a symbol of the condition of the people of God in Satan's world. Moses, brought from the wilderness to deliver the people of God (see Exodus 1-3), did not regard himself as a prophet, and asked God for a spokesman, claiming himself to be inarticulate. God had complied, and given him his brother Aaron, but nevertheless, He regarded Moses still as a prophet. In Deuteronomy 18:18, God said to Moses: *"I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak unto them all that I command him."* Moses apparently accepted this designation at last and in turn said to the people, as recorded in verse 15, *"The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."* Again, as with Abraham, Moses became both the living message and the messenger. He was the constant liaison between God and His people. A series of miracles with which he ultimately accomplished the deliverance of Israel were reflective of the need of God's intervention in the life of every individual who ever escapes the bondage of Satan.

But, of course, Moses is primarily identified with the giving of the Law. In the light of our established definition of the word "prophecy," the Law must be seen as a prophetic utterance. While on the one hand, it was still an instrument of divine grace, it is not always seen in this light, but it ought to be understood that every ordinance which God ever gave to man was ultimately for his own good and well being. If, indeed, one would undertake to follow all of God's will, it would bring about the greatest possible personal fulfillment. But, of course, given the human condition, that it is not possible apart from the power of the Spirit of God within, as abundantly indicated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Furthermore, the Law was given in the context of great grace. Even while Moses had been on the Mount, receiving the Law, the people had fallen into gross idolatry, and were threatened with God's complete abandonment of them. Moses, too, was furious, and smashed the Tablets of Stone which God had given to him. However, he relented, and then interceded with God for the people, successfully. God then prepared two new tablets of the Law and gave them to Moses with the following revelation of Himself: *"And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sins, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation"* (Exodus 34:6,7 KJV). Thus, in the very act of giving the Law, God had revealed His abundant grace. This entire episode was presented in order to show the true nature of the giving of the Law as it relates to the process of redemption and deliverance. Whereas the Law might be seen as a form of bondage, it was in reality an instrument of God's grace. On the other hand, while the Law did provide an expression of the will of God for the welfare of the people, it also pointed out to them abundantly the weakness of the human condition, in the great difficulty experienced in keeping of the Law, and in the constant reminder of the sentence of death

which hung over mankind, reflected in the continual process of animal sacrifices. It was thus that the Law was an integral part of the great message of redemption and deliverance given by Moses, the Prophet.

But, whereas the Law represented the spiritual side of God's deliverance, Moses also had much to say about the future recovery of the land which God had promised them, and of the restoration of their kingdom. This was, of course, long before they had either land or kingdom to begin with. The promise of land as an earthly possession was first given to Abraham, and carried with it an eternal guarantee: *"And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever"* (Genesis 13:14,15 KJV). The nature of this promise is so specific as to rule out spiritualization. In addition to the land, God promised Abraham that his seed would be numberless. *"And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered"* (13:16 KJV). The promise of numberless people certainly suggests a kingdom to go with the land. Neither of these promises has as yet been fulfilled. While Israel has established a nation and a certain claim to the land, the outcome of their claim is not at this time certain; nor is there by any stretch of the imagination, a numberless quantity of its people. The boundaries of this land are even more specifically made known in Genesis 15:18: *"In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates . . ."* The promise goes on to name the various inhabitants of the land which God has in mind, and it becomes obvious that it includes the entire region from the River Nile Valley to the Mesopotamian Valley. This is, of course, a long way from being accomplished.

Moses, who had been the chief spokesman of God for the revelation of the spiritual deliverance of mankind through the Law and the sacrificial system, also picked up the theme of the Abrahamic covenant, and became the channel through which God presented to Israel His purpose to establish an eternal kingdom of an earthly nature. In the dozens of references to this promise throughout the five books of Moses, there is not once an indication that the promise is only symbolic of a spiritual recovery. We must conclude that there is both a spiritual and an earthly recovery, not only of Israel, but also of Gentile nations as well. Of course, the final confirmation of this point is in Revelation 21:1: *"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea."* There would, of course, be no point in the restoration of the earth, if there were to be no inhabitants for it; and indeed, Revelation 21:1 confirms this. Speaking of the new Jerusalem, John says, *"And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it"* (Revelation 21:23,24 KJV). Notice that "other nations" are included here in this promise of earthly habitation.

In the grand and climactic presentation of Moses to the people of God just prior to his demise, Moses gave the first authoritative statement as a prophet of God about the future apostasy of the people: *"Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them. For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands"* (Deuteronomy 31:28,29 KJV). In chapter 32, Moses goes into great detail about the disintegrative process whereby the children of Israel will come to apostasy, and God's subsequent abandonment of them. But this devastating denunciation is followed by the glorious song of God's deliverance. The enemy,

which had been allowed to devastate Israel, is totally vanquished before the invincible might of God which now sweeps through the land. Israel is restored to the land and showered with everlasting abundance. *“There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in His excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also His heavens shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places”* (Deuteronomy 33: 26-29 KJV).

Thus, Moses becomes the first one to predict Israel’s apostasy and complete recovery. As the type of Christ, the Messiah, he accomplished the deliverance of God’s people from the bondage of Egypt. As the Prophet of God, he was the channel through whom God communicated the entire system of the Law and the sacrifices, which would be the revelation of God’s attitude toward the sin of mankind and His intention to provide complete forgiveness and the recovery of the spirit. In the New Testament books of Galatians and Hebrews, it is abundantly clear that the entire Mosaic system was the forerunner of the recovery through the sacrifice of Christ. The Law was regarded merely as the instrument through which man was brought to the realization of his own inadequacy, and being thus open to the coming of the Holy Spirit as the indwelling agent of the recovery of his spirit. And, in his prophetic office, Moses was also the channel of communication through whom God revealed the future of the earth and its inhabitants. Through the prophecies of Moses, we must conclude that there is both a spiritual and an earthly recovery for mankind.

PROPHETS OF THE DEVELOPING NATION OF ISRAEL

In our discussion of prophecy, we have been endeavoring to bring together all of the diverse elements of the subject throughout the Scriptures. We have defined prophecy as *the process of communication between God and the people of the earth, through specially anointed servants*. We have said the prophetic utterances of the Scripture—both the Old and the New Testaments—had to do with God’s revelation of the entire process of redemption, including the events of the present as well as the future. The redemption of mankind was not merely a single act of sacrifice by Jesus on the cross. The redemption is a succession of events that stretch from the moment of Adam’s transgression to the ultimate glorification at the end of the age. Future predictions are only one part of the prophetic message. It is only as we see the statements regarding the future, interwoven in the great tapestry of the entire process of redemption, that we can see these predictions in their proper perspective.

To specialize in futuristic matters only would be like trying to do research in some scientific field, as for example solar energy, and seeking only to extract predictions about the future of solar energy, without going into the meaning of energy itself. It is impossible to discuss the one without the other, and have anything of significance to say. For this reason we have taken up the subject of prophecy from the first one who was designated in the Bible as a prophet—Abraham. We will be giving ear to the prominent prophets of God throughout the Bible as they speak to us of redemption—past, present and future. In the last issue we considered Abraham and Moses as the major spokesmen for God in a period which saw the emerging of a people of God. Now we are going to consider the prophets who were identified with the developing nation of Israel. The prominent prophets of this period were Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha.

God’s people had been delivered from the bondage of Egypt by the hand of the greatest prophet

of them all—Moses. The Bible describes him thus (Deuteronomy 34:10). At that point they were a very prolific tribal group who were the descendents of Jacob, or Israel as he came to be called. Subsequently they occupied their Promised Land, Canaan, under the leadership of Joshua, as a military commander; and a series of so-called judges, who were, for the most part, a rather nondescript lot, through whom God managed to convey His will to His people. Finally, He raised up for them a true prophet of stature, named Samuel. It was during this time that the tribal group, who were the descendants of Israel, began develop as a national entity.

Samuel

A child of promise and miracle, Samuel's birth was couched in the prophecy of Hannah, his mother. The hymn of thanksgiving which she sang is one of the mountain peaks of redemptive prophetic utterance. Rejoicing in the birth of their son, she catches a glimpse of the salvation of the spirit. Rejoicing in the salvation of the spirit, she sees the physical deliverance of God's people and the establishment of an earthly kingdom ruled over by God's anointed: *The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall He thunder upon them: The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and He shall give strength unto His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed* (I Samuel 2:10, KJV).

This remarkable prophetic utterance by Hannah goes far beyond anything that she could personally conceive regarding the coming Messiah, who was also the Anointed One. God seems to take special delight throughout the Bible in using the simple to confound the wise, and the weak to overcome the strong. The Spirit gives words to this thought through the prophecy of Zechariah: *“Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts”* (Zechariah 4:6 KJV).

The entire prophecy of Hannah is in a form of Hebrew poetry—parallelism—where a thought is given, and then repeated in a slightly different way, but with the same impact. Thus, for example, in the last sentence of the prophecy, she says, *“And He shall give strength unto His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed.”* In Hebrew symbolism, horn refers to power, and parallels the word, strength. So also king and anointed are parallels. And so, in the prophecy of Hannah, who was not a prophet herself, but was used in this majestic moment, we have a perfect illustration of the great prophetic tapestry of redemption, with the blending of present and future elements.

It has become quite evident that God's redemption of mankind includes both the spirit and the body. Paul makes a point of this in the New Testament in his letter to the Romans. *“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”* (Romans 8:22,23 KJV). We are certainly not going to go through eternity as disembodied spirits. Rather we shall receive a glorified body. In addition to the recovery of the body, there is also a recovery of the earth, as is evident both in the Old Testament and New Testament passages. (For further discussion of this point, see “The Messenger” for May, 1980). It is important to note that while Hannah, Samuel's mother, made a most significant statement about the future kingdom, Samuel who was regarded as one of the chief prophets had very little to say about it.

As soon as Samuel had been weaned, Hannah took him to the temple, according to the promise she had made, and gave him to the service of the Lord. His mentor was the priest, Eli, a jaded old has-been, who had two reprobate sons. Through Eli, however, God was able to accomplish

Samuel's apprenticeship in the ways of the temple and the faith of the fathers. Samuel's special service as a prophet, began in a nighttime encounter with God. Samuel's encounter was, in fact, the death-knell for Eli and his two sons. Still bearing the deep sensitivities of his office, Eli received the message as from God, and thus confirmed Samuel's anointing. God further confirmed Samuel's anointing by establishing his credibility, in that all the prophecies Samuel gave were true. In I Samuel 3:19 it says, "*And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.*" The last phrase means that Samuel's utterances were sustained by God, or backed up, as we might say. As a result of this, it says in verse 20, "*And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.*" And in verse 21 it further says, "*The Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the Word of the Lord.*" Thus Samuel's credentials as a prophet were as well established as those of Moses, or Abraham.

Apparently, the most substantial aspect of Samuel's prophetic service was the anointing of Saul and David, two of God's first appointees to the throne of Israel. God did not originally intend for Israel to have a king. He rather wanted to rule them Himself, in a theocratic system. A theocracy is a system where God rules through the agency of earthly representatives, such as judges and priests and prophets. Israel rebelled against this caretaker concept. God granted to them their injudicious desire, and thus launched them upon a path that would lead, inevitably, to their apostasy and final destruction. He knew, but they did not, that they were not capable of coping, unaided, with the pagan society around them, so distorted by the consequences of the Fall, and so irrevocably captive to the cunning and crafty machinations of Satan, its arch-ruler. The desire for a king on the part of Israel was a childish expression of an independence from God, for which they were not qualified. Those in this world who are contemptuous of any kind of assistance, especially from the Deity, and who chide Christians for using God as a crutch, have made just such a childish choice. Thus, Samuel represents to us an aspect of prophetic ministry which is a channel for God's interactions with His people. While He made no direct statements regarding the future of Israel, both of the men whom he anointed, were slated to be progenitors of an everlasting kingdom. Saul fell by the wayside, and was replaced by David. Saul's downfall had come, not by any personal self-indulgences, but by failure to follow, on several occasions, the express instructions of God. David, on the other hand, caught up in the consequences of several personal episodes of indulgence, was nevertheless confirmed as God's choice for the eternal office. During the event of Samuel's search for Saul's successor, as he stood before the sons of Jesse, God spoke to him the words that have made the essential difference in the relationship between God and His creatures: "*Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart*" (I Samuel 16:7 KJV). The actions, which ultimately lost to Saul the eternal kingdom, were performed in the line of duty, but in a private judgment that went counter to the specific instructions of Samuel. Attempting to justify his disobedience as being an effort to honor God with sacrifice, Saul evoked from Samuel, the enduring lines, "*To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken, than the fat of rams*" (I Samuel 15:22 KJV). In another act of disobedience, Saul had been already disqualified from the right to an everlasting kingdom—"And Samuel said to Saul, *thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of thy God, which He commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever*" (I Samuel 13:13 KJV).

After Saul's folly in the matter of the Amalekites, Samuel retired to Ramah and never again came to Saul, officially. Saul's only other encounter with Samuel came after the prophet's death in a most bizarre event at the home of the Witch of Endor. And so ends Samuel's ministry. Although Samuel had anointed David as king, he was not primarily the prophet of David's reign. Whereas the second book of Samuel bears his name, it has not primarily, to do with the prophet himself, but rather with the king whom he had anointed.

Samuel represented the prophetic office as primarily involved in the interactions between God and His people, more present than predictive; and more vital than verbal. That is, he moved among the people of God, acting not as much His spokesman as His agent. He saw Israel through the most crucial turning point in its history, and accomplished the most difficult mission of all—to participate in the reversal of a providential decision amongst a people who had been taught that the Word of God *standeth sure*. The explanation for change in the immutable God, escapes us; nor is it necessary for us to have answers to all of the paradoxes of Providence. It is better to let the enigma go unresolved than to advance supercilious speculations from the temporal sandbox. It could be said that Samuel was the midwife in the birth of the nation of Israel—first in the abortive failure of Saul, and then in the successful fruition under David. The failure of Saul is symbolic of the reality that God’s Kingdom, originally established in righteousness, must yet contend with the evil elements of Satan. At the end of the age, these evil elements will be rooted out. Meanwhile, tares grow with the wheat, and engender the ceaseless conflict that is at once the nemesis of the children of God and the instrument of their growth.

Nathan

The second book of Samuel bears the prophet’s name, but has to do not with Samuel himself, but with David, whom he anointed king of Israel. The official prophet of David’s reign was Nathan. As Israel progressed in its national identity, it had an increasing number of prophets. However, there were certain specially anointed prophets who represented the mainstream of the redemptive revelation of God. In this respect, Nathan was the successor to Samuel. David was, of course, a substantial prophet in his own right, although he was never so designated, officially. Since we have already been dealing comprehensively with David’s prophetic utterances in the Psalms, we will not go into them here (see *David, The Man of the Heart*). While Nathan is not frequently mentioned in the account of David’s reign, he occupies an especially significant place. He was the channel through whom God communicated to David the wonder of his confirmation, as the one whom God would choose to establish the eternal kingdom, and the equal wonder of the favor he had with God, given what God must surely have known, about his impending humiliation. In the services for which David was anointed, as the Shepherd-Prophet, and Soldier-King, he performed mightily. In his private life, he experienced one humiliation after another. The two prominent episodes of Nathan’s prophetic ministry serve to further illustrate the significance of the concept of prophecy as the tool for the weaving of the great tapestry of redemption.

The first episode involved a denial of David’s request to build the temple; a reminder of God’s faithfulness to him and assurance of His continual favor and presence; and a startling prediction about an everlasting kingdom. In all of these matters, Nathan was a faithful representative of God in his communications with David. The disappointing denial of David’s request to build the temple, was just as much a prophetic utterance as the predictive tidings concerning David’s everlasting rule. It is quite evident in God’s communications with His people, from the beginning of time to the present, that God is quite concerned with the proper procedures and methods for accomplishing His purposes. The tabernacle is an excellent example of the attention which God often pays to details. It has never been stated or implied, anywhere in Scripture, that the end justifies the means. We are not given any specific word as to why God wanted Solomon to build the temple instead of David, but that is really unimportant. It is not wise to speculate. There are those who say that David had too much blood on his hands for God to allow him to touch His holy sanctuary, but the battles David fought were, for the most part, directed by God, and for His own sake, and not David’s. If it were a matter of worthiness, who in the world is worthy of anything from God? In almost every way, Solomon was far less worthy than David. It was simply not God’s time to build the

temple, and we must leave it at that. We humans rarely understand the real motives or purposes of God. It is doubtful that we could comprehend them, even if we did know them. The same gap exists, though infinitely greater, between God and ourselves, as exists between parents and children. There are many times when parents cannot give their children adequate reasons, because at their level of experience, the children would not understand, and so must behave simply because they are under submission to the parents.

This is important instruction for the desolate days when God seems totally unresponsive to our cries, and we cannot understand what He is doing. During such times, we are often tempted to precipitate things by taking our own actions, but we had best wait for God's timing. This too, is part of the redemptive process in our spirits. It is essential that we become integrated completely with God's purposes since the whole meaning of our lives is tied up with the Spirit and not the flesh. Our own purposes, and the purposes of those around us, are usually flesh-oriented and not Spirit-oriented. The Spirit of God within us is bringing us to this point of complete identification with the Spirit of Christ, often through circumstances and usually through ways that are beyond our comprehension. As James says, "*Let patience have her perfect work.*" So Nathan's prophetic service to David involved the very personal communications regarding God's dealings with David's spirit.

And then Nathan has the great privilege of announcing to David, God's intention of establishing his descendants as the rulers of an everlasting kingdom. The long gap between the promise and the fulfillment is of consequence only to creatures of time. God saw the matter as fulfilled in the moment of His intentions. It was a thousand years before the light broke through the darkness and a descendant of David—Jesus, Himself, was glorified, and took the everlasting Throne. The Lord's instructions through Habakkuk are most appropriate to recall at this point: "*For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry*" (Habakkuk 2:3 KJV). And this too, is part of the redemptive process: to learn to wait on the Lord.

Nathan's predictive utterance is sweeping in scope, and almost beyond the capacity of a temporal man to receive it. But David went himself to inquire of the Lord, and the Spirit of the Lord expanded his heart to receive it. This intimate interaction between God and His prophet and David, is an exquisite cameo of God's personal dealings with His people. There has not been, in the history of religion, such intimacy of communion in man's own fabrications of deities, as with the God of the Bible. The human mind would not dare to assume that it could possibly have such a closeness to the Deity. Generally speaking, man's concept of deity is that God is God, and man is a worm before Him. Most pagan deities have been worshipped in obsequious fear. The assumption by Christians today that God relates to them in a highly personal way, is borne of the constant testimony from Genesis through Revelation, that contrary to all normal human concepts of a Supreme Being, He has indeed, through the millennia of human history, interacted with man in a highly personal way.

As the first tidings which Nathan had borne to David were majestic in their height, so the next prophetic episode was ignominious in its depth. David had an affair with another man's wife. There is no way to say it graciously. He had yielded to an evil and indulgent impulse within him. It was inevitable that somewhere, sometime, he would succumb to this inner pocket of perversity. It is not inevitable that everyone must yield to such inner impulses, but given David's general temperament, and perhaps a carelessness borne of battlefield bravado, David had a rendezvous with disaster. And David compounded his lechery with murder. He engineered the slaying of the husband on the battlefield in a contemptible conspiracy. There is no way to soften the recounting of this dreadful saga of David's humiliation. The matter, of course, displeased the Lord greatly, and yet, nearly a year had passed before it was exposed. Perhaps God was giving David a chance to deal with the matter himself. He had apparently

buried the guilt under layers of forgetfulness and self-justification. It became Nathan's wretched task to communicate the Divine displeasure. Nathan approached David with the use of an allegory about a rich man's avarice and a poor man's lamb. So hardened had David become to the inner sensitivities, which once had ruled his shepherd's heart, that he did not identify the allegory with himself. In the midst of David's fury at the outrageous behavior of the rich man, Nathan stunned him with the piercing cry—*Thou art the man!* It was not so much that David had desired a beautiful woman, but that he had taken her from another, and compounded his dishonoring of the man by slaying him. It is impossible to conceive of a more reprehensible act of contempt for one's fellow man. This is, after all, the essence of the Ten Commandments. Jesus summarized it in the so-called Golden Rule: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

David was immediately devastated. His heart for God, buried as it was, under layers of human decadence, nevertheless responded to the words of the prophet. In humanly devised moralizing, the condemnation rarely finds its mark, but the test of the divine origin of a prophetic utterance is that it is right on target. David's humiliation was complete and God's grace was abundantly adequate for human failure. Nathan then became the bearer of the glad tidings: *"The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shall not die."* In all the Scriptures, there is no greater, no more comprehensive statement of the meaning of redemption. If the revealing of God's personal interest in the individual was an exquisite cameo, the declaration of His grace was a grand panorama. Lest it be thought that God minimized the heinousness of David's sin, the chastening, as outlined by Nathan, was severe and followed him for the rest of his life. The episode did not modify the depths of human degradation, but magnified the heights of divine forgiveness. And so, Nathan weaves his threads of prediction and precept into the tapestry of redemption.

Elijah

Time passes; new kings, good and evil, come and go. The kingdom is divided. Many prophets of God, faithful but not illustrious, come and go. The focus of divine communication rests upon the southern kingdom—Judah. Finally, another prophetic luminary arises. Out of the plains of Gilead comes the rugged and redoubtable Elijah. Fiercely faithful to God in a time of great apostasy under the nefarious Ahab and his dissolute queen, Jezebel, Elijah confronted squarely the forces of Satan that had infiltrated the kingdom of God. This was to be Elijah's major prophetic task as the Prophet of God.

As in the famed parable of Jesus, *an enemy had sown tares among the wheat.* Jezebel, and her pagan priests, had conspired to capture the hearts of God's people. Pursued and embattled, Elijah waged a relentless warfare through faith. In a predictive prophecy, he declared to Ahab the coming famine, and then later became the agent of God in the contest with the prophets of Baal, to see which God, Baal or Yahweh, would be able to break the famine and send the rain. Thus Elijah, like Samuel, was as much an instrument of God's power as he was a spokesman. The priests of Baal are humiliated, the power of God prevails, and in an episode of intense intercession, the rain comes in great abundance. The priests of Baal are not only humiliated, but summarily slain on the spot. The entire event has left Elijah completely exhausted, and the human element enters. In utter despair, Elijah goes off into the wilderness to crouch in misery under a juniper tree and wish for death. In another exquisite cameo of the personal care which God exercises over His servants, Elijah is refreshed, and God is revealed to him, not as the thundering despot, but *the still, small voice of the Spirit.* The redoubtable giant had come to his humiliation, and in helpless despair had been lifted by the gentle touch of Yahweh. In this sublime moment, God elected a replacement for Elijah—Elisha.

In the annals of the prophets, there has not been a more courageous or invincible warrior against the forces of Satan, than Elijah. Nor has there been one more devastated in the exercise of his office. But God was with him, both in the storm, and in the stillness of the sorrow. He thus became both messenger and message. Prediction was a minor part of his mission. In the story of redemption, his assignment as prophet was to be the comrade-in-arms of God—the spiritual warrior whose task was to engage the demonic foe. The magnitude of Elijah’s victories was seen in the dramatic climax of his life, as the famed chariot of fire swept him from the earth in a whirlwind.

Elisha

Elisha’s credentials for the prophetic office were outstanding. God had identified him to Elijah, as his successor. Elijah called him from the fields and set forth certain conditions for his accreditation. The final journey of Elijah is recorded in II Kings 2. As Elisha accompanied him, Elijah tested his resolve along the way. Elisha stayed with him to the last dramatic moment, when Elijah was taken up by the chariot of fire. His firm resolve was rewarded with the mantle of Elijah and Elisha went forth to demonstrate to Israel that the power of God remained with His people perpetually, passed on from one prophet to another.

Elijah’s prophetic ministry had been characterized by several great episodes that marked turning points in the history of Israel. His contest with the priests of Baal is one of the most dramatic in the annals of the prophets. And, like Moses and David, he was an important symbol of the coming Messiah and the spiritual restoration of God’s people. Elisha, on the other hand, was far less conspicuous. Nevertheless, his mission was certainly equal in importance. In a number of remarkable episodes, Elisha revealed the power of God, released in the touching of individuals. There was the debt-ridden widow, for whom he brought about a supply of oil that delivered her from her debts. There was the Shunammite, whose divinely-given son was raised again to life. There was Naaman, the leper, captain of the host of Syria, who was cured of his leprosy. There was the floating axe head and the sweetened water and the purified pottage. There was also the deliverance from famine in Samaria, when it was under siege by Syria. There were some predictive elements, but for the most part, Elisha went among the people as the instrument of God, relieving them in their distresses. At the end of his life he anointed Jehu as King of Israel and predicted the death of that archenemy of God and Elijah—Jezebel, the high-priestess of Baal. Ironically, Elisha, who had been responsible for the healing of many, died himself as a result of sickness. One is reminded of the words of Jesus’ revilers: *He saved others, himself he cannot save*. All of the prophets of God throughout the Scriptures, at one time or another, had to run the gauntlet of humiliation. One of the catalogs of their adversities is found in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. It is erroneously assumed by many, that if a servant of God has been faithful over many years, he will be rewarded with a tranquil retirement. The fallacy of this thinking is amply illustrated by such ones as John the Baptist, who wound up in a pit in the fortress of Maheurus; Paul in the Mamertine prison until his beheading; and John, the Apostle, exiled on the Isle of Patmos. The list is endless down through the centuries of the Church.

On his deathbed, Elisha gave several prophetic utterances that were predictions of future victories over Syria, but his primary mission seemed to be the revelation of the power of God, manifested in the lives of His people. The significance of this revelation in the process of redemption is that redemption is not only a matter of salvation from death, it is also salvation unto life. Eternal life begins not at the event of death, but with the new-birth. The Spirit of God is with us now. We can begin now to enjoy the blessings of the Divine Presence within. In His keeping, we are as secure now, as we ever will be in the reaches of eternity. This does not mean that He will sweep away every adversity that comes to us in this life, for the thrust of adversity in the flesh is the molding of the spirit. And that is God’s primary task today—

not to make the earth a comfortable haven, but to equip the spirit to dwell with Him forever in the fathomless reaches of the universe, which He has prepared for us.

Summary

We have surveyed the essential ministry and message of the prophets who were God's agents and channels of communication, during the time when Israel was evolving into a nation. The meaning of their prophetic service was only partially predictive. More than that, they presided over the establishing of the nation, and kept it from losing its identity with God. Even in the times of apostasy, the prophets stood as the anchor point to which God's people returned for renewal again and again. Without them, there is no doubt but that the children of Israel would have early been swallowed up by the pagan societies around them, with which they often were guilty of dalliance.

PROPHETS OF THE APOSTASY

We have been dealing, for some months now, with the subject of prophecy. We have sought to cover the subject in a very broad way, weaving together the elements of both present and predictive communications from God to His people. We have first sought to look at prophecy in its relationship to the entire message of redemption. Under the heading, "Prophecy and the Process of Redemption," we have considered: (1) prophets of the emerging people of God; and (2) prophets of the developing nation of Israel. We have considered the major prophets who were the spokesmen for God to the people—a people who would be His oracles in the communication of His redemptive purpose to the world; and we've considered the prophets who were prominent in the developing of that people as a national entity. We now turn to those prophets who were the chief spokesmen for God in the tragic years of the spiritual disintegration of His people as they turned to the idolatries and pagan customs of the nations that surrounded them.

It was the unhappy lot of these prophets to communicate to the people of God the warnings of coming wrath and judgment from God, if they did not repent and cease from their going astray. It was, on the other hand, their privilege to declare, not only the forgiving grace of God to His own people, but the restoration of the entire world. In their revelations of retribution and restoration, there were predictive elements that had to do with the ultimate recovery of all things in the distant future; and with the nature of God's redemptive purpose, both in the immediate context of Israel, and also spiritual redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus as the Lamb of God. There was also the ultimate restoration of heaven and earth to their originally intended glory. The coming of the Messiah would be relatively soon while the ultimate recovery would be in a far more distant future. The first coming of the Messiah was far more clearly and precisely identified than the second coming was. The obscurity of the second coming was noted by Jesus Himself, who, upon leaving the disciples to ascend to glory, said to them, "*It is not for you to know the times or the seasons.*" He specifically instructed them not to press for these matters, but rather to focus on the power of the Holy Spirit, which they would soon receive, and the employment of that power in the task of declaring to the world the truth and hope of salvation. Much tragic division has occurred in the Church through the insistence upon knowing more precisely the "times and seasons."

Later on in this study of prophecy, we will deal with these matters of the ultimate restoration of the Kingdom, but first of all, we must consider the message of these prophets as it pertains to the process of spiritual redemption. In the arena of apostasy, there were numbers of God's prophets doing battle with the enemy, Satan, for the souls of the people of God. The time

period of this warfare was approximately from 800 B.C. to 400 B.C. It was, incidentally, during this period that Greece was experiencing its so-called Golden Age. Israel was passing through its Dark Age. The consideration of this period of time takes up a fourth of the Old Testament. We will not look at each of the books exhaustively, but rather will seek to determine the mainstream of truth as given by these prophets. In this section we have two groups—the major prophets and the minor prophets. The minor prophets were so called, not because they were of less importance, but because their messages were brief and supplemental in nature. The major prophets gave the more lengthy and thorough revelations. All of them spoke of apostasy and restoration, in one way or another.

One thing is certain; throughout all the prophetic utterances of the Old Testament, the primary emphasis was on spiritual recovery, rather than earthly recovery. Jesus had said to the disciples at one point, *“The Kingdom of God is within you.”* That is not to say that there would not be those vital elements of a literal dwelling place with a visible Christ. It is rather to press the point that divisions within the body of Christ over matters that have to do with material blessings, are unfortunate, when, in fact, the primary emphasis of the Scripture is upon the redeeming of our spirits.

We are going to deal now with the individual prophets of this period. We will seek out the central message of each, and the distinctive contribution that each one has made to the basic message of redemption. Primarily, we will consider the four major prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. We will also give some consideration to the minor prophets, perhaps more as a group.

Isaiah Prophet Of The Devastated And The Deliverer

Isaiah - The Man

Isaiah lived prior to the overthrow of the ten northern tribes of Israel (721 B.C.) and before the captivity of Judah (587 B.C.). Therefore his prophecies were concerned with warnings to God’s people to cease their idolatrous behavior, or face the judgment of God.

The subject of judgment is most difficult for human beings to talk about, since we are all, saint and sinner alike, only able to survive through the grace of God. But for one human being, even as a believer, to sit in judgment on other human beings, is a most precarious position. The prophets were merely spokesmen for God in this matter of judgment, and were not themselves the originators of the devastating revelations. It was, in fact, a very distasteful assignment, and resulted in great persecutions and distresses for the prophets themselves. They certainly did not come to the task with any of the careless air of the modern prophets, who seem so eager to bring to the bar of judgment any who do not conform to their own image of the “favored of God.” Rather, they entered into the task with utmost reluctance and humility. Nor did they erect human structures around their prophetic messages. Nor did they derive from their assignment any personal advantage whatsoever (They did not sell a single book or tape). And they came not with bombast and bravado, but with broken heart.

The message of Divine judgment must be approached with great carefulness, lest, as Jesus himself said, *“You shall root up the wheat with the tares.”* In the case of the Old Testament prophets, both the message and object of that message were quite clearly defined. In the main, their message was to Israel. The major theme was apostasy. While transgressions, or infractions of the Law were recognized and penalized, they were not the object of God’s wrath.

God's judgment was poured out, not on failing, faltering flesh, but on religious "adulterers," who had turned from the true God, to serve pagan idols. To draw any parallel between such apostasy and the careless conduct either of Christians today or the faithless society about them, would be a gross misapplication of the Scripture. God reserves His wrath for those who blatantly oppose Him or oppress His people—not for romping in the cosmic carnival, however, distasteful such conduct may appear to be. To identify, for example, the sins of America, with the apostasy of Israel, or with the blatant idolatry of Sodom and Gomorrah, would be, at once, to grossly misapply the Scriptures, and to trivialize, exceedingly, the nature of the highest offenses of Israel, as well as of Sodom and Gomorrah. Furthermore, to picture God as pouring out all the wrath of celestial judgments on human beings whose major crime is to give vent to the wanton indulgences of a world they never made, nor asked to enter, is to charge God with a kind of injustice and intolerance that we would not accept even from human beings.

The modern day peddler of spectacular prophetic utterances has little in common with the lowly, battered servants of God who wept over the apostasies of His people, in days gone by. There seems today such a competition for constituency, that the sense of being a spokesman for God is lost in the expedience of maintaining an organization for promoting the special programs of the "servant of God."

Isaiah came to his assignment with great reluctance, and only after a devastating personal experience that stripped from him every vestige of self-righteousness and self-importance. Already possessing the office of a prophet, as indicated by the first five chapters of his book, he had yet to possess the true spirit of a prophet. In chapter 6 of his book he gives an accounting of the event which laid bare his soul before God, and prepared him for the awesome task of conveying to Israel the magnitude of her apostasy and the magnitude of her Deliverer. Compelled of God and touched by the Spirit of God, the man and the message became one. From this point on, Isaiah's personal identity would be totally obscured in the grand sweep of the Divine revelation. In the prophetic ministry today two things stand in sharp contrast to Isaiah. There is on the one hand, a conspicuous absence of authority, as each one sounds his own trumpet; and, on the other hand, the conspicuous presence of the prophet, as each one competes for constituency and support. The concern, generally, seems to be not, "How can I be sure I am conveying the true message of God to His people?" but, rather, "How can I convince people that I am right?" If the life of the modern day servant of God would parallel the life of his prophets of old, it would mean complete personal desolation. If the true message of God gets through to His people, there will not be much left of the messenger. Conversely, the more prominent the messenger, the more distorted the message is likely to be. This is a hard road in the modern day, when prestige and promotion seem so essential in the competition. The Isaiahs and Jeremiahs and Ezekiels were reduced to dust, but their message is living and vital to this present day. In chapter 6, Isaiah is reduced to dust and ashes. In chapter 7 he goes forth in the authority and power of God. Where there are no ashes, there is yet too much of the man.

In this section, we have dealt considerably with the prophet himself. In order to do the message full justice, we are going to have to resume the discussion of it for the next issue.

Isaiah – The Message

Of Speculation and Symbolism

"If the trumpet shall give an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself to battle?" (I Corinthians 14:8 KJV). The message of Isaiah was not an obscure, cryptic utterance to be understood only by the initiated, or a highly select few. It thunders through the entire book.

It is only cryptic and obscure when one tries to use symbolisms in order to force the contemporary application. That there were meanings beyond the contemporary scene, and beyond the understanding of the prophet, is undeniable. That we are free to let our imaginations run wild with private interpretations, is irresponsible. As we begin the study of the message of Isaiah, we are immediately confronted with the problem of symbolism. A word on this subject might be helpful.

Symbolism is highly speculative. We are only on safe ground when we use the symbolisms authorized by the Bible itself. Jesus Himself, for instance, gave us the symbolic meaning of many things—vine and branches; seed and sower; tares and wheat; sheep and shepherd; bread and wine. The book of Hebrews gives us a wealth of symbolism with reference to the entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament—with priest and temple; animals and furnishings and rituals. These have all been well established. There is little confusion in the Church regarding the symbols of redemption. The reason is that, for the most part, we have stayed with legitimate symbolism. But when it comes to the predictive elements of prophecy, confusion is rampant. It is not only the practice of imaginative and private interpretations, but the authoritarian insistence on the absolute accuracy of the interpretations, that is troublesome. It is easier to be an authority than to be a guide or teacher. To be an authority requires a magazine article or two, and a large ego. To be a true teacher and guide requires a lifetime of learning and living, and a genuine reluctance to be authoritative. No one can deny the right of another to engage in speculation about the interpretation. It is the attitude with which one approaches the matter that is questionable. The reality is, that when it comes to symbolic interpretation, no one can be authoritative. The appeal to special insights from God is as indefensible as it is presumptuous. To claim that one's own encounter with God is more authentic than another's is insufferable egotism, to say nothing of dangerous and irresponsible pedagogy.

Careless symbolism is often the result of careless claims to private revelations. There is so much in the Bible that can be verified with careful scholarship. Of course, the moment the word scholarship enters, we hear the cry of "foul!" But the tendency to rely on revelational and inspirational claims is often a substitute for the arduous and time-consuming task of mastering the Bible, as a responsible technician. Unfounded symbolisms are often the foundation of misguided movements. The travesty of revelational claims is that there is no way to verify who is right. Most cults have arisen on the basis of some private revelation, that is assumed to supercede all other revelations. The recipient of the revelation often feels very special—more special, in fact, than others of opposing revelations. As we examine the message of Isaiah, and all the prophets, we will stay with those things that can be known with some degree of certainty. Speculation is legitimate, only so long as it is acknowledged as speculation.

Of Certainties and The Central Themes Of Isaiah

While there are a number of difficult passages in Isaiah, in the main its message is quite clear. We will know all that we need to know, if we stay with things that are of more or less certain interpretation. In general, the message of Isaiah includes warnings against apostasy, the inevitability of Divine Judgment, and the equally inevitable restoration of all things. The apostasy that Isaiah dealt with was not the multitude of transgressions that mark the weakness of human flesh. It was the adulterous abandonment of God by Israel, His "wife," in favor of the gross and reprehensible idolatries of neighboring pagan nations. The warnings of coming judgment fell on deaf ears; and given the inexorable process of human decadence, plea became prediction; and prediction—reality. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel all experienced the fulfillment of the prophecy. Happily, the major part of Isaiah deals with restoration—both

spiritual, and earthly—of God’s people, to their intended place of glory. The essential element of the redemptive message is the Messiah—the Anointed of God. On this subject, Isaiah is the undisputed master.

Warnings Against Apostasy

The story of redemption, of necessity, begins with the acknowledgement of failure. Were there no failure, there were no need of redemption. As a prelude to the presentation of the glory of God’s Deliverer, and the totality of His deliverance, Isaiah makes a thorough disclosure of the heinous offenses of Israel toward God, and the inevitable judgments that were to follow the equally inevitable course of idolatry which God’s people had determined for themselves. The magnitude of God’s deliverance is set over against the magnitude of Israel’s offenses. Again, the magnitude of the devastating judgments which are predicted for Israel, is only justified in the thorough understanding of the magnitude of Israel’s apostasy. As noted in the previous installment, the common effort to draw a parallel between the offenses of Israel, and those of the Church in the present age, has only served to trivialize the extent of Israel’s sin. To compare, for instance, Israel’s idolatry, with the tendency of many Christians to put worldly pursuits ahead of Christ, is a gross misapplication of the text. Not that God is pleased with the worldliness of Christians, but worldliness is a vastly different problem, than leaving the true God for the worship of pagan deities, and the practice of religious debauchery. Such careless handling of the text is one of the main reasons for the confusion that exists in the subject of prophecy, today. It is one thing to draw lessons from a narrative; it is quite another to attach arbitrary symbolism. In the matter of apostasy, Isaiah’s primary message was to Israel—a stern rebuke for her idolatry; and a warning of devastating judgments.

It may have been assumed, by some, that the major portion of Isaiah’s prophecy deals with Israel’s apostasy and judgment. Such is not the case. Nearly two-thirds of the book deals with the restoration and deliverance. A number of chapters take up the judgments upon other nations. Only about six deal with Israel’s apostasy. Of these, the most complete and penetrating statement of God’s case against Israel is stated in the first chapter of the book. Isaiah’s prophecy, glorious in its climactic presentation of the Great Deliverance and Deliverer, opens with a scathing denunciation of Israel’s rebellion against God: *“I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.”* In their rebellion, and their turning to other gods, they are charged with adultery: *“How is the faithful city become a harlot!”* (v. 21). In their rebellion, they had become sated with evil: *“Sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward”* (v. 4). Covering their iniquity with a religious facade, they had multiplied the sacrifices and attended assiduously the rituals and feasts. The hypocrisy was a stench in the divine nostrils: *“Bring no more vain oblations; incense is abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting”* (v. 13 KJV).

In another figure the prophet likens God’s people to a vineyard (ch. 5), which had been planted, fenced, and tended with utmost care. But alas, the fruit that it produced was inedible. Thus, God’s people had become utterly worthless in His eyes—suited only to destruction, as the branches in Jesus’ famed parable of the “vine and branches.”

In the redemptive process, it is essential to convince the world of its utter helplessness, before it is ready to reach out for God’s deliverance. Pride is as much a product of the Fall, as self-indulgence. The proud heart likes not to admit its need of help. Jesus said to the Pharisees, *“They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick”* (Matthew 9:12 KJV). It was

the unenviable task of the prophet to reveal this truth to people who did not want to hear it. Had Israel paid attention to the prophet, and seen herself in her decadence, and repented, God would have forgiven her, and spared her from the judgments that inevitably did come. And this, too, is part of the process of redemption—the great hope that God, who is relentless in the exposing of evil, is by the same token limitless in His capacity to forgive. And this must be the focus of the prophet—not the cataloging of catastrophes, but the glad tidings of a Deity truly benevolent toward the people of earth. Deities fashioned by human hands and human minds, turn out to be as intolerant as the humans who fashioned them. The God of Israel, presented by the prophet Isaiah, goes beyond the capacity of the human mind to fabricate, in His expression of grace in spite of the heinousness of the offenses of His people. If it may be granted that a God of justice is not beyond the conception of human minds, a God of love and mercy is something else. To forgive, when there is good reason for it, is hard enough. To forgive when there is no reason to forgive, is a quality rooted in the love of God.

The Judgments

As the exposure of apostasy is a necessary backdrop to the glory of recovery, so the warnings of coming judgment are necessary to display the magnitude of God's deliverance. The judgments in Isaiah are of two kinds—chastenings, which lead to repentance; and irrevocable desolations that expunge from the world, satanic corruption. The judgments upon Israel were of the former kind. God had already promised never to destroy His people. He often had to chasten them, as wayward children. On the other hand, the judgments pronounced upon many of the Gentile nations would eradicate them from the earth. Such complete desolation was, in fact, imposed where demonic forces had so saturated the pagan population as to render them incapable of aught but corruption. The justifying of God's dealings with the world which He created, is beyond the capacity of the human mind. For a human being to attempt to justify God is to put oneself above God, as though one were able to evaluate His works at all.

The judgments pronounced upon Israel were actually a part of the prophecy of redemption. Israel would be sorely tried, but not destroyed. And out of the ashes of her desolation, would arise the Redeemer of all mankind. The discussion of these judgments in terms of future predictions, will be taken up at a later time. Again we must be reminded that the chief task of God's prophets was not to make spectacular predictions about the future, but rather to be the agents of communication between God and His people, concerning their eternal relationship to Him.

The Restoration

The whole of the Divine Revelation was the inevitable result of the disobedience and fall of God's creatures. Thus, the central message of the Bible is the recovery and glorification of mankind. It was always God's intention that His creation would have an eternal place with Him. Every word uttered by every prophet for all time, has its ultimate purpose in this.

And so it is with Isaiah. Two-thirds of his book are given to the restoration and glorification of God's people. As a concentrated presentation of the total recovery of God's creatures, through the Great Deliverer, chapters 40-66 are without equal. The chastening is past; the instruments of God's discipline have been withdrawn, and God overflows in the pouring out of His grace and mercy upon His people: *“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.”* The entire fortieth chapter of Isaiah is a glorious hymn of deliverance, giving not only the promises of future glory, but the absolute power of God to perform what He had promised.

The Deliverance Of Israel Two Aspects—Spiritual And Material

Israel had been established from the beginning as a “holy” nation—a special people. As God’s family, the most essential reality of their being was “spiritual.” That is to say, they were a people who by reason of their identity with God, would find their whole meaning and purpose in the realities of the spirit, rather than the flesh. Jesus made this clear in His conversation with the woman of Samaria: *“God is spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24 KJV). As the destiny of Israel was eternal, so the nature of God’s people must qualify them for such an eternal existence. God had, indeed, promised to Israel an earthly kingdom. Reading the promises made to Abraham, and to Moses, and to David, there could be little question about the literalness of these promises. God had made a magnificent creation. While it was scarred by the Fall, it was by no means irreparably corrupted. There are yet many glorious experiences of sight and sound and sense, abundantly manifested throughout the earth. The earth is indeed a “jewel” in space, where everything else is darkness and light. Pictures taken from the spacecraft have revealed what a magnificent thing the earth is. It is true, that the earth is to be made new, as is heaven, but it is more obviously a “renewal.” There is no indication that the earth will be utterly decimated (The words “earth” and “land” are sometimes confused, in translating. Parts of the earth may be destroyed). And so, we will simply note here that there is scattered throughout the prophecies, abundant reference to an earthly kingdom which God’s people are to inherit. This, however, is a topic which will be dealt with later. Our present concern is with the prophecy of redemption—that is, with “spiritual” recovery. Throughout this treatise, we are making the point that prophecy has to do with the total communication of God to His people regarding His recovery of them, and His eternal relationship to them. To see prophecy merely in the light of future predictions is to miss its most essential element.

In the New Testament sense, the gift of prophecy came through the Holy Spirit, as one of the major gifts to His Church. Peter quotes Joel, in declaring that, as a result of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the sons and daughters of God’s people would all prophesy. Paul makes it clear in I Corinthians 14, that prophecy was a general gift used in the edifying of the Body. On a number of occasions, it was predictive, in special revelations, but as practiced generally in the Church, it was a matter of the believers ministering to one another in edification, even though they may not see themselves as specially gifted. Any word given in the assembly for the edification of the Body, by a believer, insofar as it ministers blessing, can be regarded as a word of prophecy. There was no doubt, in addition to this, a very special gift of prophecy, as exercised by those who were specifically designated as “prophets.” But the assuming of such a role must be done with great care, because as a prophet, one bears the responsibility in a very serious way, for the welfare of the people to whom one ministers. If one regards oneself as a prophet, one is also subject to the possibility of being a “false prophet,” against whom judgment is severe.

The discussion of the word “prophecy” as used in the New Testament, was a corroboration of the point that prophecy is far more than prediction. Isaiah, more than any other prophet in the Bible, emerges as the great “Prophet of Redemption.” The pivotal passage of his redemptive message is Isaiah 53. To bring redemption into reality, there had to be a redeemer. Otherwise redemption would remain merely an esoteric abstraction—a religious concept relegated to the pages of books. The actual living presence of Jesus upon the earth, authenticated by His numerous miracles, slain in the climactic expression of human decadence; and raised again in demonstration of His power over death, riveted redemption to the realities of the real world. By and large, even the great religious writings of the world are couched in celestial concepts—unverifiable, unfalsifiable. They cannot be proven to be false

inasmuch as they cannot be proven to be true. That goodness and love exist; that kindness is preferable to cruelty; that the fortunes of earth's creatures are bound up in their mutual and ecological interaction—these are the stock in trade of the ethereal religionist. Jesus did not say, "Believe me because I am good, and I come with visions and revelations," but rather, "Believe me because of my 'works'."

Isaiah has, as it were, "blooded" the concept of redemption, by giving it a focus in a real person—the Messiah, the "Anointed" of God. The truth of Isaiah's prophecy hangs on one main premise—that the sinners of the world—the victims of the Fall—must cast themselves upon the Messiah—God's Redeemer. Deliverance will come, and peace with God. The proof is in the person—not the philosophy. Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled all the conditions set forth by Isaiah, in His role of the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. To know the person of Jesus, is to know the presence of God among His people.

The clear promise of God to His people was spiritual recovery: "*And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and forever. Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, . . . so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations*" (Isaiah 59: 20, 21; 60:1; 61:11 KJV). The prophecy of Isaiah is replete with such verses. Whatsoever shall be the material state of God's people in the eternities of God, is of secondary importance. The only way that earthlings may participate in God's eternal glory, is by the total renewal of the spirit.

God sent forth a Redeemer—His own Son—and the recovery of His people, as well as His creatures and creation in general, is assured. Whatsoever sorrows and tragedies have befallen God's creatures in their earthly corruption, the eternal glory which God had prepared for them, is beyond human eyes to see, and human minds to comprehend. This is the prophecy of redemption.

Jeremiah - Prophet Of Sorrow

Under the reign of the godless King Ahaz (735 B.C.), the abominations of idolatry had come to the full in Judah. But in his successor, Hezekiah, God had found a man through whom He was able to bring revival and restoration to His people. Isaiah had been the prophet, elected of God, to join with Hezekiah, in this formidable task. They had been a team equal to the challenge, and the forces of Satan had been fought to a standstill. The tide of evil had been assuaged, and the Assyrian army, God's instrument of chastening, had been devastated by a divine stroke at the very gates of Jerusalem.

But the tide had only been temporarily stayed. The respite was short-lived. Under Hezekiah's successors, Manasseh and Amon, idolatry and its reprehensible practices once again flourished in Judah.

And again, in His infinite mercy, God raised up yet another God-fearing pair—Josiah and Jeremiah—in one last effort to check His people in their mad rush to destruction.

Jeremiah's regal colleague—Josiah—was but eight years old when he began to reign. He could not have been born in circumstances less conducive to the development of a heart for God. Of this period of time, the writer of the Chronicles says, "*So Manasseh made Judah and the*

inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel" (II Chronicles 33:9 KJV). Somehow, the Spirit of God had touched this lad, so that even as a youth, he sought after God: *"For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images"* (II Chronicles 34:3 KJV). In the midst of this heroic crusade, God raised up Jeremiah, also a youth, to share the burden with him.

Jeremiah - The Man

The absurdity of his youthfulness was keenly felt by Jeremiah, himself. At the time of his remarkable encounter with God, Jeremiah protested, *"Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child"* (Jeremiah 1:6 KJV). The position of the prophet was not something sought after by Jeremiah. It was not, in those days, in fact, sought out by anyone in his right mind. In today's world the "servant of God" has been lifted to an all-time high of popularity, along with people in the fields of entertainment and politics. Generally speaking, there has been a national acceptance of the role of spiritual leader. In some respects, this has been most advantageous in the expansion of Christianity. In other respects, however, the popularity of the office has often dulled the keen edge of the suffering and sacrifice which were the hallmark of God's early spokesmen, and the instrumentation through which their spirits were shaped . . . and shattered. In the shattering they became the ignoble vessels of clay necessary for the proper display of divine glory. *"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us"* (II Corinthians 4:6,7 KJV). The apostle Paul, the New Testament counterpart to the Jeremiahs of old, saw his life in this perspective. Immediately following the statement about the earthen vessels, he said, *"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, yet not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh"* (II Corinthians 4:8-11 KJV). The more conspicuous the vessel, the less conspicuous the contents. When God dispatched Ananias, to confer upon him His anointing, He instructed Ananias to show Paul *"how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."*

In Jeremiah, we confront once again a prophet of God, whose chief credential seemed to be his total inadequacy for the task, and whose chief preparation seemed to be the total disintegration of self and circumstance. In this he joined the long procession of God's messengers through the ages.

The Spirit of God had touched Jeremiah before he ever left the womb. According to the text in Jeremiah 1, Jeremiah was formed by God, and before he was formed, had already been set apart, as a prophet to God's people. In God's forming of Jeremiah, He had endowed him with the special gifts that would be needed to endure a life that was beyond all human endurance. In a certain sense, Jeremiah's spirit had already been designated for the task. It was necessary that the flesh be disintegrated in order that the spirit might be free to fulfill its assignment. *"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations"* (Jeremiah 1:5 KJV).

The implications of this text are momentous. Hebrews 12:9 speaks of God as the "Father of spirits." Taken in connection with this passage from Jeremiah, it suggests that God, Himself,

has been the originator of spirits whom He has sent into the world, brought to birth by natural processes, and offered to the world as His special gifts. The whole issue of the origin of spirits, is not something we can speak of with certainty. There does seem to be evidence, however, that the birth of certain ones, at least, is not all that accidental. Not a few of God's prophets and servants and saints through the ages have expressed a certain distress over their having been born into the world. Jeremiah, for example, lamented his birth with the woeful cry, "*Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, a man-child is born unto thee; making him very glad*" (Jeremiah 20:14,15 KJV). This, of course, was spoken in the flesh, at a time of great distress.

There has probably not been a prophet on earth, who has not, at one time or another, felt the same way. As previously stated, the role of the true prophet of God, is not an enviable one. In fact, any servant of God, who takes his work seriously, must go through much agony and discouragement, in working with human souls, so often fickle, reckless and faulty. And God seemed often unconcerned with comfortable circumstances for His prophets. Apparently, He expected a measure of indifference to earthly things from those whose message was preeminently directed toward the things of the spirit.

But, if it is true, that God Himself, originated the spirits of those whom He has given as special gifts to the world, it is a noble thing, indeed, for such ones to have been given birth, and the attitude must be that of the Apostle Paul—"*For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you*" (Philippians 1:23,24 KJV). In the Old Testament, with the more limited knowledge of the implications of the Holy Spirit, the pessimism on the part of the prophets was certainly more to be expected. In the New Testament, however, where the Spirit of Christ has come to dwell within us in a more personal and permanent way, the prevailing realities of the "spirit-focus" should evolve a perspective that accepts life as a mandate from God, with an earthly mission of some kind. Life, therefore, however distressing its circumstances, is not to be mourned as an unwelcome accident, but rather accepted, as an expression of Divine purpose. What makes it bearable is the realization that all the circumstances of the flesh are transitory and illusory. That is, they are inevitably passing, and are, for the most part, governed more by fancy than by fact. The mind has an uncanny capacity to clothe realities with cloaks, which are fabricated in misconceptions and false expectations. It is the spirit that is enduring and real. This was the substantial centerpiece of Jesus' own view of life: "*It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. My words are spirit and life.*" Isaiah expressed it eight centuries before Christ: "*All flesh is grass, . . . the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the Word of our God shall stand forever*" (Isaiah 40:6-8 KJV).

Jeremiah, at the behest of God, endured great suffering in the flesh. Even the message had little comfort in it. For while God, in His mercy, made yet another offer of deliverance to His people, Jeremiah knew, as God knew, that they would not accept. Jeremiah thus became a type of Christ, who wept at the grave of Lazarus, and wept again over Jerusalem. The most solemn words he ever uttered came as he sat looking over the Holy City: "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*" (Matthew 23:37 KJV). And this was Jeremiah's message—"*Ye would not.*" Judah's doom was sealed. The most she could hope for was leniency from Nebuchadnezzar, if she would accept her fate, and be submissive to the yoke of chastening which God had given her. For such counsel, Jeremiah was branded a traitor, and cast into a miry pit, where he nearly lost his life.

Jeremiah was a vessel, formed and fortified by the Spirit of God, for the thankless task of

presenting a message that would go unheeded. He accepted the task with great reluctance, protested his total inadequacy, but persevered to the end, with the spirit which had been formed by God and sanctified for the mission. God knew from the beginning that Jeremiah would not falter. He did not appoint Jeremiah because of his qualifications, He gave him the qualifications because He had appointed him.

Both Jeremiah and Josiah were faithful to their charge, but they were not successful in their charge, as men count success. With all the reforms that Josiah initiated in restoring the proper worship of Yahweh, the effects were only superficial, and did nothing to turn the heart of the people to God. In fact, he died prematurely, in a futile attempt to turn back Pharaoh Neccho of Egypt, who had gone up against the Assyrians. Perhaps God, in His mercy, decided that Josiah had enough.

And Jeremiah, for all his suffering and sorrow, went completely unheeded, and saw his people in chains. But the blessed reality of the matter was that God was satisfied. He asked only that the prophet give the Word, and do His Will. The results were not the province of the prophet. Do you not hear, in this, a song of solace—struggling servant of God?

What God knew about Jeremiah, and had in mind for him, had to be communicated effectively, to a very young man, who had no apparent predilection to be a prophet. God did not address him in response to some fervent pursuit of faith. Nor was Jeremiah particularly bleeding over the plight of his people, at the time God called him. His was not a zealous response to some “missionary challenge.” He seemed not even privileged to make a choice, as with Isaiah, who had been given the opportunity to volunteer.

It would have been, it would seem, an awesome and humbling experience, to have from God a revelation that He had, Himself, formed one in the womb, and set one apart for a special task. In today’s “spiritual wilderness” such a revelation would have been regarded as a quite spectacular event, and would have been heralded widely (with appropriate promotions). Jeremiah’s response was a masterpiece of tactless and impious frankness. He did not want the job. This straightforward reporting is itself, one of the evidences confirming the validity of the Bible. No effort is made to cover up the flaws of its heroes. When God called him, Jeremiah saw nothing but his own inadequacy, and dared to refuse the “honor.” *“Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child.”* God ignored the protest as childish prattle, and proceeded to commission him, anyway. “You will go, and you will speak what I tell you! Don’t be afraid, for I am with you.”

How could God be so sure Jeremiah would be able to handle the assignment? Simply because when God gives a task, He gives the power to do it. *“Then the Lord put forth His hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant”* (Jeremiah 1:9,10 KJV). God gives the power to do the task He assigns—no more and no less (If one is serving God and seems not to be effective—perhaps one is going beyond one’s assignment). Paul urges the Christian *“not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith”* (Romans 12:3 KJV).

So, in the call of Jeremiah, we have the following obvious truths:

1. God formed Jeremiah, and appointed him in the womb.
2. God ignored Jeremiah’s negative attitude, and commissioned him, anyway.
3. God promised to give him the words to speak.
4. God touched him, and conveyed to him His power.

5. God promised him victory over His enemies.

Jeremiah - The Message

Jeremiah flows with the stream of God's prophetic message of redemption, as it has been told from the beginning. The Creator has not left to chance, the ultimate outcome of His creation. In the process of plumbing the depths of the human soul, and wringing out every vestige of evil, there has had to be a process on earth where iniquity must come to the full. There has had to be an opportunity for the creature—created with a free will—to taste to the full the consequences of the misuse of that freedom and, ultimately, to be totally committed to the desire to make all choices in concert with the will of the Creator. This is the essence of the process of redemption. It has never been simply a matter of divine forgiveness. It has been a concerted effort of God's part, working with the creature, to purify and restore the creature to an unblemished and unalloyed virtue.

The children of Israel have been God's living example of this process. They have gone through the years of human degradation and apostasy, as their souls were searched out, and their iniquity expressed in full measure. They would then taste the chastening of God, and the consequences of their infidelity. Finally, their spirits would be restored, and brought again into harmony with God. The righteousness thus acquired will be their eternal heritage and they will walk with God in everlasting peace.

This process of redemption is universally applied, including, ultimately, the Gentiles. But Jeremiah's message is primarily to Israel.

As in the case of the entire stream of prophets, Jeremiah foretells a two-fold recovery—spiritual and material. The prophecies regarding the future restoration of the earthly kingdom, are bold and specific—so specific, in fact, that any attempt to spiritualize them would distort the impact of the entire Bible, and relegate the interpretation of it to a hopeless state of uncertainty. But these material aspects of the prophecies must be dealt with at a later date. We are now dealing with prophecy as it relates to the process of redemption—the recovery of the spirit. Here, Jeremiah is very positive and specific.

We must point out again, that the story of redemption must begin with the need. The spiritual state of God's people had so far deteriorated that there was no hope whatever of forestalling the inevitable judgments proclaimed by Isaiah. This is the intense frustration of Jeremiah, who knew, as God knew, that the people would not respond. He watched in agony, as God's people forged the chains of their captivity in a willful disregard of God's message to them. Whereas less than one-third of Isaiah's prophecy had to do with Israel's apostasy and sin, at least three-fourths of Jeremiah's message is on this depressing theme. The degradation of God's people was complete. Sin had been manifested in all of its ugly ramifications. There was no hope of ever effecting their own salvation.

Into this wretched scene, Jeremiah sends a shaft of brilliant light. While Israel had failed miserably in keeping the law, and must bear the divine chastening in consequence, God had not abandoned His people, and promises a complete recovery. If she could not master her own obstinate heart, God will give her a new one. If her natural self led her into an adulterous relationship with pagan deities, He will place His own Spirit within her. And, throughout eternity, "He will be their God, and they will be His people." *"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I*

will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34 KJV).

The land and the kingdom will, indeed, be restored to Israel, but in the light of the glorious restoration of fellowship and favor with God, the recovery of land is of secondary importance, indeed. In this regard, the constant focus, today, on the material aspects, both of the kingdom of Israel, and the heavenly “mansions,” seems a slighting of the glorious prospect of being with Christ, in person, throughout eternity (whatever the circumstances), as well as the incredible reality of the presence of His Holy Spirit within us, now.

Perhaps the most vital and uplifting message of Jeremiah for the Church today is not the warning that apostasy brings retribution, but rather that no matter how great the iniquity of man, the grace and power of God is greater. Paul makes this point specifically in addressing the people at Rome, in regard to Israel. *“For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!”* (Romans 11:32,33 KJV). And, referring to the inadequacy of the law, he said, *“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 5:20,21 KJV).

And so Jeremiah, “the weeping prophet,” bathing in tears over the utter hopelessness and helplessness of people who were saturated with sin, and unchecked in their rush to destruction, becomes a beacon light to all who languish helplessly in the darkness of human inadequacy.

WHERE SIN ABOUNDED, GRACE DID MUCH MORE ABOUND.

ARMCHAIR CHATS WITH THE EDITOR

(Reprint from the “The Harvester Mission Messenger” series from 1982 to 1984.)

About The Middle East

We hear so much about the Middle East these days, both in the news and from the pulpit, that it's hard to put it all together. And there are so many conflicting reports and views that it's hard to know what, or who to believe. Can we discuss it?

Certainly. But the subject is pretty large. Where do you want to start?

Well, first of all, just how much should a Christian know, and how much can one know for sure?

Obviously these are two different questions. As to how much a Christian should know, it depends upon one's purpose for knowing.

If one is in a position of leadership, it is quite important to know as much as one can. If it is just a matter of interest in keeping up with world affairs, then it depends on time and priorities. It is difficult enough for the State Department to keep up with events. The average citizen is pretty well swamped. Properly speaking one should read from a number of different sources to get various sides of the question. But this takes time and could interfere with more important concerns.

But aren't Christians supposed to be informed so they can watch for the coming of Christ?

Well, in the first place, the coming of Christ for His Bride, the Church, is not particularly tied to world events. And in the second place, the interpretation of prophetic passages in terms of world affairs has been equally unreliable in every age since the apostles. If you don't believe that, try reading the books that came out around World War II (Remember Hitler and Mussolini—both candidates for the Antichrist). The truth of the matter is that the coming of Christ for His Church does not depend on the progress of world events. It can be at any time.

But doesn't Jesus tell His disciples, "When you see these things begin to come to pass, look up, for your redemption draweth nigh?"

That's in Matthew 24 and refers, primarily, to the events surrounding the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. In the first place, if we bring the Church as such—the “bride,” or “body,” of Christ—into it, we confuse the issue. In the second place, the events Christ describes have been taking place for centuries. In fact, there have been many antichrists (Greek: Christos, Hebrew: Messiah), or false Messiahs. Jesus was not referring to false “Jesuses” but false Messiahs. There have been many false Messiahs throughout history, but not many serious false “Jesuses.” Some of the false Messiahs were authentic enough to deceive many Jewish scholars, even. Those who have been imposters of Jesus have been only fringe types. Paul says, in II Thessalonians, that the real Antichrist will be revealed only after the Holy Spirit (“hindering spirit”) is taken out of the way. Of course, if the Holy Spirit leaves, so also will His Church.

Now, the things I have said are certainly not the final word on the subject, but I am illustrating the point that following the news is no guarantee that we are in a position to put together the many diverse pieces of the “prophecy puzzle.” In the matter of Christ's coming

for the Church, He can come at any time, no matter what the condition of world affairs. In the matter of the restoration of Israel, there is a certain sequence of events to be observed. Now, whether or not these events will take place prior to the rapture of the Church is a matter of speculation. The fact of the matter is that the errors in speculation, made by self-styled “prophets” over the centuries do not give much confidence in predictions. The “track record” is not reassuring.

Then, are you saying that Christians should not study prophecy, or keep up with world affairs?

By no means. They can study all they wish. I am only saying that the uncertainties in both the matter of prophecy and the observing of world affairs make them subjects which should be handled with extreme caution, and, because of their complexity, cannot possibly be “required reading” for all believers. Furthermore, any pronouncements about either subject should be made (and received) with equal caution. No matter how “spiritual” one’s claims, or how “glorious” the alleged revelations, all such revelations and insights in the passing parade of prophets and pundits have been made with equal fervor, and equal fallibility (not to say fallacy).

Well then, are you saying that people shouldn’t make predictions?

Not at all. I am only saying that those who make predictions ought to use more reserve and humility, and above all should not deceive the people with claims to special “revelations.” In many cases, the impression is left that to doubt the particular “prophet” is to doubt the possibility of revelations, or the power of the Holy Spirit. Anyone is entitled to speculations, of course, but it must always be carefully noted that such speculations, and interpretations of Scripture as well, are subject to human fallibility.

The tendency today to seize upon current conflicts and tie them into prophecy is risky. It not only paves the way for disillusionment, but also tends to take the focus away from the more vital issues of the life with Christ, and involves people in the game-playing of putting the puzzle together. It further tends to minimize the need for facing life’s problems by the assumption that they will soon all be solved by the return of Christ.

None of the above comments is intended to take away from the glory of Christ’s coming, but to inject a note of caution in the approach to the extremely complex issues of the nature of His coming. Far too much presumption and misconception (to say nothing of absolutism and arrogance) have accompanied the sacred responsibility of being a spokesman for God, and an interpreter of His Word.

So you are saying, if I’ve understood you, that the study of prophecy is all right but that it is not a priority, and should be approached with caution?

You have understood me correctly. That’s what I’ve been saying. If the message is important, God makes it clear. The fact that there is so much controversy in the Church over the issues of prophecy shows that God has not made it clear, and hence does not see it as a priority item. In fact, He specifically told the apostles in response to their direct question—*“It is not for you to know the times or seasons, which the Father has in His own hand”* (Acts 1:7).

The study of prophecy is legitimate, where it contributes, not to the satisfying of curiosity, but the strengthening of faith. When so handled, it will be a source of blessing—not anxiety and controversy. Any message from a shepherd of God which does not lead to blessing and peace is suspect.

But what about the matter of keeping up with world affairs?

That's quite a different matter. We have shown that, given the complexity and uncertainty of prophetic matters, the study of prophecy is not a priority. By the same token, keeping up with world affairs is not a priority item. There is certainly nothing wrong with the study of these matters, however. The problem is, of course, how much do you have to study to be confident you are getting the truth. If there is so much controversy in matters that are supposed to come from God, how much more uncertainty is there in matters of human origin? What source can you trust? Who can you believe?

Well then, we might as well never read a newspaper or magazine.

That's a bit extreme. I'm not saying you can't ever know the truth, but rather that you can't ever be that sure that you are getting all the facts.

But there are quite a few periodicals that claim to have access to the inside story, and are giving unbiased accounts.

In the first place, there is, of course, a great difference between the claim and the reality. In the second place, no one is really all that unbiased, especially in secular issues, where one is not relying on the Spirit of God for help. It is interesting how much discrepancy there is in the many "inside stories" of the same event, or issue.

Then it's futile to try to keep up with the news, isn't it?

Not really, but it can't be done by a glance at the daily newspaper. You have to examine a number of different sources, and even then you have to be reserved in your judgment. There seems to be an inverse ratio between the degree of knowledge one has, and the certainty of their views. In other words, the less one knows, the more certain one is that he is right, and the more eager to express his views.

In general, one can know a certain amount about what's going on in the world, and in the multitude of voices, sift out some elements of truth, but, as in matters of prophecy, it's a matter of being cautious and reserved.

So you don't really encourage too much focus on prophecy and world affairs.

That is true, but only because I don't like to see the sheep burdened and anxious, unnecessarily. I have been a student of the Bible for about 40 years, having taken my first course in New Testament Greek in 1942. About the same time I became involved in the study of world affairs. I was president of the International Relations Club in college, and also wrote a column on international relations for the newspaper. I have taught both Greek and the social sciences, including world history and world affairs for many years and at different levels, including graduate school. So I have been deeply involved in the pursuit of knowledge in both the Bible and world affairs for four decades. So, you see, I'm not speaking out of ignorance, nor with a bias against education and knowledge.

It is my very familiarity with the subjects we are talking about that leads me to the conclusions I have shared with you. Remember, there is nothing wrong with pursuing prophecy and world affairs, but only with being too much absorbed by them, and putting too much dependence on the reliability of human efforts to find the truth. Once you get outside the plain teachings of the simple truths of the Bible, you are in a vast and turbulent sea of human misconceptions, misinformation and misleading. So watch your step and ask the Lord

to help you know and understand what He wants you to know and understand.

Maybe now my question about the Middle East is not all that important.

On the contrary, it is very important. If you don't get help from a shepherd, where will you get it? There is certainly a natural and legitimate desire to know what is going on. My major points were that it is difficult to find reliable sources, and the task of finding truth can be formidable.

But many claim that they don't need to study much because the Lord gives them the truth.

The fascinating thing about such claims is that there are so many different points of view, all supposed to be from the Lord. It would seem we have a "multi-headed" Christ.

I see the point. But now, without being disrespectful, on what basis can I trust what you say?

An excellent question, and one I am glad to answer. You can't trust what any human being would say, except as that one gives evidence of being adequately equipped ("thoroughly furnished," as Paul said), and as one can sense something of the Spirit of Christ coming through. I think that certainly the same criteria must be applied to my teaching as to any other. If you can't sense the Spirit coming through my ministry, then you shouldn't be listening to it.

Does that mean that everything you say is from the Lord?

By no means. That would be the height of presumption. The things that I say, relative to world affairs, ought to make sense, but are certainly not inspired. I have done my best to be equipped and informed to handle the matters of the contemporary world, but where I am dealing with matters outside the Bible, the human element must always be considered. The best we can hope for is reliability.

As far as the matters of the Bible are concerned, we have a different situation. Once again, I have done my best to be equipped and informed, but there is also the help of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit, nothing that I say is of consequence. With the Holy Spirit, and my own diligence, what I say ought to be reliable, though not inspired in the sense the Bible is inspired. If the Spirit is with me, it should come through in the ministry. The sheep should hear the voice of the shepherd coming through the fallible human vessel.

All right, that makes sense. But now, having settled the matters of communication, what about the Middle East?

I will be glad to share my views with you as an informed observer, if you will understand that I am not claiming to be the final word in the matter.

First of all, what I have to say is the result of reading from a number of sources, travels in the Middle East, and a rather extensive study of the Bible. Now, what do you want to know?

Well, first of all, is there anything we can know for sure about the situation?

Yes, there are some things that are obvious. These are the things we should start with. I will list these things for you, and then we can take them up in detail later.

1. The Arabs and the Israeli both claim the right to Palestine—both on right of inheritance.

2. The Arabs, no matter what they say, cannot recognize the right of Israel to exist, without denying the basic teaching of the Koran.
3. The interest of the Palestinians in the “West bank” is for no other reason than to keep a toe hold on the land, and therefore maintain the claim that Israel is an intruder. The area under consideration is a barren region that the Palestinians never developed as long as they had it.
4. Ultimately God has guaranteed the land to Israel.
5. Currently, while Israel is back in the land, it does not recognize God as responsible for this. Aside from the observance of religious traditions, as a cultural matter, the Israeli pay very little attention to God.
6. Since they do not recognize God’s assistance, they may be in the land prematurely. There could be a considerable sequence of events, before the conditions exist that the prophets describe as recovery. The descriptions by the prophets of the restoration of the land to Israel, all include a spiritual recovery in connection with the recovery of the land. From my own observations, in Jerusalem, spiritual recovery would seem to be a long way off. There were no signs whatsoever.
7. Probably Israel will retain the land, since there is not enough strength in any single Arab state to challenge her right to exist, and not enough unity in the Arab world to mount a joint effort.
8. The PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) has no diplomatic standing whatever. It is not a state and does not officially represent the Palestinians. It is an independent organization operating on principals of force, to achieve a power base with which to drive out Israel, and assume control of the Palestinian state that would be set up.
9. For all the cries of “foul,” Israel did the Middle East (if not the world) a favor by pulling the stinger from the PLO.
10. The reason I call this a fact we know for sure, is that none of the Arab countries want anything to do with them. And, of course, none went to their aid, except Syria, who wanted to protect its own interests. That fact is certain, because Syria now wants nothing to do with the PLO.
11. The statistics used by the media to portray the massive slaughterings by Israel, were furnished by the PLO. Later figures were much modified. Of course, the PLO had set up its defenses among the residents of Beirut, and thus were hiding behind women and children.
12. Israel does not want to occupy Lebanon, or govern it. She only wants to guarantee her own security—an understandable point, since she is surrounded by millions of Moslems who want to “push her into the sea.” Remember—NO ARAB STATE ACCEPTS THE RIGHT OF ISRAEL TO PALESTINE (If they did, they would be at odds with the Koran).

I would like a lot more discussion of those points. Maybe we can pursue them next time. But can you give me a quick word about where we are in terms of Bible prophecy?

Well, I would certainly be a fool to try to handle the subject “with a quick word.” I will say

this much, however. The only certainty we have in connecting present events to biblical prophecy is that Israel is “back in the land.” As to the alignment of nations, and the effort to identify the Western world with prophetic statements, it must all be speculation at this point. That is, of course, anyone’s right, but one may be risking one’s credibility at best, and misleading the sheep at worst.

Where we can take the prophetic statements literally, with reference to specific nations, we have much to consider with a measure of safety. And this we will do in subsequent discussions. Much confusion and error exists today, in the effort to identify the Western world symbolically with Middle Eastern prophecies. It is strange that the prophets should be so clear in predicting, by name, or by very specific identifications, nations of the Middle East, and yet be so obscure and secretive about the Western world. The thing that has given credibility to the Bible is the precision of its predictions. Anyone can make predictions that are too obscure to pin down. But this we must take up later.

But what about now? What shall we do?

First, don’t be alarmed by the doomsayers. Their track record is not that good.

Second, don’t be misled by “inside stories” or “revelations” about the future. There are too many claimants to both, with too many diverse views.

Third, don’t feel guilty about not “keeping up” with world affairs. Even the State Department can’t get its stories straight.

Fourth, trust in the overall power and purpose of God. In the end, it will all work out according to His infinite wisdom and grace, no matter how it may now appear to finite human minds. It will also go according to His plan whether you keep up with it, or not.

Fifth, focus on Christ. Whatever happens, here or hereafter, Christ is our light and life. All else is temporary, transient, and illusory. Earthly things are never what they seem. Only Christ and His Kingdom in the Spirit is real and eternal.

In our last conversation, we began talking about the Middle East. I would like to continue that, if we may.

Certainly. But first, we should clarify just what our interest in the Middle East is. There are a lot of countries and a lot of barren land. Why should it be so important?

I guess it’s where a lot of the events of the last days will take place. Everyone has their focus on it.

That is true, of course, but don’t forget, that it was also the cradle of civilization—where it all began. The Garden of Eden was located in the Mesopotamian Valley—the site of present-day Iraq, as a matter of fact (and, of course, ancient Babylon). It might, very likely, have taken in most of what we call the “Fertile Crescent.”

And what is the Fertile Crescent?

The Fertile Crescent is a strip of land that follows the valley between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. It runs in an arc, from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea.

It was the route traveled by Abraham to Palestine about 2000 years before Christ. At that

time it was the only way you could get across to the Mediterranean Sea. That is the way all of the Eastern kings marched their armies to battle with Egypt. They had to go up the Mesopotamian Valley to Syria and down through Palestine. There was no way they could cross the great Arabian desert.

But has that all been desert from the beginning?

Probably not. It probably became barren after the Fall.

But why so much interest in an arid wasteland when so much of the world is full of rivers and lakes and luxuriant vegetation?

You must understand that the Middle East is the great stage on which God is enacting the drama of “redemption.” It is an object lesson to the world—a lesson in the consequences of ignoring God, or of turning from Him to serve pagan deities, as His own people did. It is also an object lesson of the power of God—to preserve, or to destroy; to bring down in death, or to make alive.

Would you care to elaborate?

Certainly. In the first place, God made a magnificent world. It is not hard to imagine how magnificent when we see the many spectacular wonders of nature all around us. But the Garden of Eden became a barren wasteland because of the process of disobedience. Out of the wasteland, God raised up a special people—sort of “pious” family if you will. Through them, He would reveal Himself to the rest of mankind. As long as they remained faithful to Him, He blessed them abundantly and preserved them from their enemies. But when they turned from Him, He took away the protective shield, so to speak, and allowed their enemies to overrun them. In themselves they had very little power against the mighty nations around them.

Time after time the same scenario was enacted. Israel would become very independent; begin to worship pagan deities; be oppressed by their enemies; repent; be restored; forget God; be vanquished again, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

But what exactly was God trying to reveal to the world through Israel—that He was a God of wrath and justice?

Quite the contrary. He was showing His grace and love. It was essential that they not stray from Him and go after pagan deities. To do so was certain destruction.

But then He destroyed them. What was the difference?

The difference was that whereas He might allow their bodies to be destroyed, going after false gods would mean the destruction of their souls. We have a New Testament counterpart in a statement by Paul who was dealing with the case of one who was engaging in immoralities and was unrepentant. He delivered him up to Satan for the destruction of his body “that his spirit might be saved.” God simply was not going to let Satan have His people, even if it meant destroying the whole nation.

But I still don't understand. If God has to destroy everyone, what was the good of making the world in the first place?

Now you've hit a very complex question. But, in the end, understanding the answer to this question will help us to put the whole issue of the Middle East in focus.

There is only one way to make sense out of the whole issue of creation—to see it from the perspective of the spirit.

You mean everyone ought to be spiritual?

No, I do not mean that at all.

I mean that God intended His creation to partake of His own nature, which is not primarily of flesh and blood, but of spirit. That is, it is not confined to time and space—it is not composed of material elements.

But what does all of that have to do with the Middle Eastern crisis?

Patience! Just stay with me. You have to follow closely. You cannot separate the Middle Eastern crisis from the overall purposes of God; and you cannot separate the overall purposes of God from the meaning of the spirit.

The Middle East is the focal point, or material manifestation of the great war between God and Satan. Phalanges, or fingers, of that war have reached out to many parts of the earth, but the Middle East is the “epicenter,” so to speak. You see, from God’s point of view, the whole of the universe is divided, not between material and spiritual, but between that which is submissive to Himself, and that which is not—that which is of His kingdom and that which is of Satan’s.

But I thought that all the things that were spiritual were of God, and all material things were of Satan’s world.

No, indeed. That is where many people are deceived. Just because something is “supernatural” doesn’t mean it is of God. Remember, the “beast” of Revelation 13 does miracles and everyone “wonders” after him.

I’ve always heard the word “spiritual” used in connection with being very godly or holy.

That is actually a misapplication of the word. It rather has to do with that which pertains to the things of the spirit. All believers are thus “spiritual” because they possess the spirit of God. Without that they would not be saved. Paul tells the Corinthians that they know things that only “spiritual ones” can know (I Corinthians 2:8). This in spite of the fact that there were many things the Corinthian people were doing, that were “fleshly” (carnal).

Now I’m lost, again. What does all this have to do with the Middle East?

Well, we’re trying to establish the point that the world must be seen as divided between that which is part of God’s kingdom and that which is of Satan’s kingdom. I have said that the real battle is going on in the unseen domain of the spirit—both of God and of Satan. I have said that there are satanic elements in the spirit world—“spiritual wickedness in high places,” as Paul calls it.

God’s original intention in creation was to replicate beings like Himself (though not gods) able to function in the spirit realm for eternity. The disobedience of His creatures interrupted this process. From that moment to the present time, God has been engaged in the recovery, or redemption, of His creatures.

At the same time, Satan, who entered the conflict with the first disobedience, is doing everything within his power to frustrate God's efforts.

But how much power does Satan really have? Can He hinder God's purpose?

Not ultimately. But apparently He has enough power to present a real obstacle to God's people. God allows him certain latitude, as in the case of Job. There is also a passage in Daniel that is very illuminating in this regard. It is found in Daniel 10. Daniel has had some astounding revelations from God through His messengers, regarding the future of Israel. So astonished is he, that he becomes ill, desperately desiring to know the meaning of the visions. God has sent an angel to give the interpretation, but the angel was hindered from coming by the "Prince of Persia." So powerful was this Prince of Persia, that he was successful in stopping God's messenger until finally Michael, the archangel, came to assist the other angel.

Not only is the power of this "agent of Satan" revealing, but also the very title—"Prince of Persia." This designation is used for other rulers in the Middle East, such as "Prince of Tyre." In fact, so closely does the description of these princes fit Satan, himself, that we are almost forced to the conclusion that Satan is, in fact, the one in view. In reality, these are agents of Satan. In fact, in Ezekiel 31, these rulers are referred to as "trees" which had been in the "Garden of Eden" (See Ezekiel 28, 31). Remember, it was a "tree" that was the downfall of Adam and Eve in the beginning. Obviously, there is much symbolism here, but the great impact of these passages is that the rulers of the Middle East are especially involved in the great conflict between God and Satan.

In the New Testament, Paul makes reference to this concept in Ephesians 6:10-12 (translated from the Greek text)—"Our war is not with blood and flesh, but with princes, with authorities, with cosmic powers of this darkness, with spiritual forces of evil in the "supra-heavenlies" (that which is beyond the heavens). This "spiritual evil" does not refer to trouble in the Church or the ecclesiastical hierarchy, because we are dealing with a Greek word which means "supra-heavenlies," or a realm other than the material heavens of the universe.

Now I am lost. I hope you bring it all together.

Well, the main thrust of what we are saying here is that you have, in the Middle East, a very special arena of conflict—not like the wars of the Western world.

David was the great warrior of God, bringing into focus this conflict. His battles were not the usual territorial aggressions. From the moment of his encounter with Goliath, He was God's champion, battling the forces of Satan. The Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, Philistines, all had a history of defiance of God. If we don't see this, we miss the whole typology of David, whose life in the Spirit, as reflected in the Psalms a thousand years before Pentecost, became the centerpiece of Peter's message at the coming of the Holy Spirit.

In a very special way—unusual for his times, David had a keen sense of workings of the Spirit of God. Thus, the Psalms are today an amazing expression of the personal relationship between the individual and God. The depth of the relationship between David and God was probably unmatched by any of his contemporaries.

The battles David fought were not expressions of personal aggression, nor political opportunism—the thirst for power. They were rather fought under God's direction, as earthly manifestations of the conflict between God and Satan.

Similarly, the incarnation of Christ in the body of Jesus was more than a revelation of the

person of God, it was an earthly manifestation of the conflict between God and Satan. The conflict reached its climax in the crucifixion. At that point, the doom of Satan was sealed as to its ultimate outcome. However, the battle is now extended to God's people (both Jewish and Christian). God's glory and power is magnified in this conflict, as the presence of His Spirit within the saints gives them the power to stand secure in the spirit, though the flesh be battered and sorely tried. Unlike Adam and Eve who succumbed in the temptation, the Church—the body of Christ—will stand fast because of the Spirit within.

Furthermore, God will ultimately triumph even in the restoring of the earthly kingdom to Israel. Satan's agents, the rulers and powers of the gentile nations around Israel, who have been allowed in the past to chasten Israel for her adulterous affiliation with pagan deities and her continuous indifference to God's effort at reconciliation, will one day be totally vanquished, and the kingdom of God on earth, represented by Israel, will be completely restored. Today these enemies are represented by the Arab and Moslem populations around her, who do not wish to recognize Israel's status as a sovereign state.

But I thought all they wanted was a homeland for the Palestinians.

So they would have us believe. They have persuaded the nations and the media that this is their goal. The Palestinians are really pawns in a larger game.

The Palestinians are refugees by choice. The history of wars is not a pleasant one. No people want to live under the rule of conquering powers. When the Americans were victorious over the British, not all the inhabitants of the colonies were happy to live under American rule. They were free to either settle in America and accept the new government, or go back to England, or go elsewhere. But it was never argued that they should be given a separate homeland in America.

But weren't the Jews actually intruders?

Israel has recovered a land that was hers before it was overrun by foreign powers. She was granted a charter by the United Nations, to establish a sovereign state. She had to win the right to establish a nation by fighting the Arabs. This she did, successfully. The Arabs have never accepted this victory.

But didn't the land belong to the Arabs?

Well, now you've opened up a subject that could occupy our entire time. But maybe we have to plunge in and clarify some things before we proceed.

The northern part of Palestine was occupied by the ten northern tribes known as Israel. The southern part was occupied by the two remaining tribes—Judah and Benjamin, and were called, collectively, Judah. The ten northern tribes occupied the regions known as Samaria and Galilee. In 721 B.C., Samaria, the capital of the northern tribes, was conquered by the Assyrians, and all the inhabitants were taken into captivity. The whole region was repopulated with people from other areas.

What happened to the ten northern tribes?

They have been lost to history—absorbed into other nations. There have been many efforts to identify them, but the evidence is pretty flimsy.

Will they be recovered?

According to the plain teaching of Scripture, they are included in the recovery (see Revelation 7, e.g. and all of Micah). God knows who and where they are.

Judah occupied the region of Jerusalem. In 587 B.C. the city was captured by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia and the majority of the inhabitants carried away to Babylon. Seventy years later they were allowed to return and rebuild the walls and the temple (Zerubbabel's). Shortly thereafter, the area was taken over by Alexander the Great. Upon his untimely death (323 B.C.), Alexander's kingdom was divided between four of his generals, with the Ptolemies ruling Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria. Palestine came under the Ptolemies, until they were overcome by the Seleucids, one of whom was the infamous Antiochus Epiphanes (c. 175 B.C.).

Under Antiochus Epiphanes, a massive persecution of the Jews took place, as he sought to stamp out the Jewish religion. This occasioned both an eschatological hope for the future restoration of the land and also an inevitable revolt led by the Hasmoneans (Maccabees), a priestly dynasty. Under the Hasmoneans the land of Israel came again under Jewish rule.

In the First Century B.C., the Romans swept the area, and Israel became a tributary of Rome. Herod was installed as a puppet king and engaged in an ambitious building program throughout the land. This included the great new temple in Jerusalem, as well as the fortress of Masada in the Negev, Caesaria in the North as well as other fortresses and palaces. Under his rule, Israel rose to a certain secular significance. Thus, Israel today can look back on a substantial heritage of a country that was theirs, if, nevertheless, a tributary of Rome.

After Herod's death, ensuing power struggles brought about a more direct control by Rome which, under different Roman rulers, became oppressive. This led to a revolt by the Jews and the ultimate crushing of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

So Rome then was completely dominant over a desolate land. Further desolation was wrought after an ill-conceived and unsuccessful revolt by Bar Kochba in 135 A.D. Nevertheless, while under Roman domination, it was still the land of the Jews—"Eretz Israel"—and they were allowed, finally, to continue their traditional life under the leadership of the Sanhedrin, for several hundred years. The degree of restriction varied considerably, depending on the stability of the Roman empire and the current regime.

The emergence of Christianity also had its effect upon the status of the "Eretz Israel." For a brief period, the Byzantine empire ruled Israel, after the dividing of the Roman Empire under Constantine. Constantine had made Christianity the state religion and established the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Then came the Arabs, toward the end of Mohammed's life. They took over from the Byzantines and held the land for about 400 years. During this time, large numbers of Arabs moved into Palestine. It was at this time that the Moslem religion became a dominant factor.

In 1070, the Seljuk Turks ended Arab rule. As of this time, the population was a mixture of Jews, Arabs and Christians.

Next came the Crusaders, under an edict from Pope (Urban II) in 1095, to deliver Jerusalem from the Turks. Jerusalem was taken in 1099, and the "Christian" Crusaders occupied the land for two centuries. A large number of structures—fortresses, castles, churches—remain throughout the land today, from Acre in the north to the Negev in the south—remnants of the Crusader occupation.

In Egypt, about 1250, another power began to emerge as a threat to Israel—the Mameluks. In 1290, Acre, the center of the Crusaders' kingdom, fell to the Mameluks—a Moslem power. The Mameluks destroyed a number of cities to minimize the possibilities of retaliation by the Crusaders.

In 1517, the Ottoman Turks, under Suleiman the Magnificent, succeeded in overthrowing the Mameluks. In 1548, he rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. These walls remain to this day. The Ottoman rule continued until World War I, when Palestine came under British control as a result of the settlement of the issues of the war. But I see that our time is running out, and we'll have to continue the discussion next time.

This has all been very informative, but could you just sum up the implications of what you have been saying?

Well, of course, this has been so very sketchy. It was a tremendous amount of history to cover in such a short amount of time. But I felt that we had to have some historical footing to continue the discussion.

You remember that we were trying to establish the import of the Middle East as the great arena of the conflict between God and Satan. We have said that the ancient powers, such as Assyria and Persia were under the dominance of Satan and his "princes." Then we said that many of the modern nations in the Middle East were extensions of that power—the agents of Satan in conflict with the forces of God.

Well, does that mean that what Israel is doing is of God and everything else is of Satan?

By no means. It would be idiotic to think that. Much of what is happening today must be sorted out. In fact, I specifically said that Israel is ignoring God and may be back in power prematurely. That remains to be seen.

But what we have been doing in this historical sketch is to determine the legitimacy of the claims to Palestine from an historical perspective. It is nonsense for the Palestinians to claim that they have been dispossessed of a homeland. Jews, Christians, and Moslems have all occupied the land in various degrees at various times. A Palestinian is merely one who resided in Palestine. But Palestine has been under many different rulers over the centuries. The Palestinians who did not want to be ruled by Israel fled, of their own volition.

Then what is the basis for the claims?

Basically, the claims are religious. The Koran gives Palestine to the Arabs. The Bible gives Palestine to the Jews. The United Nations gave the Jews a charter to establish a nation where there was only a Protectorate. The Arabs objected. The Jews fought the Arabs and won. The Arabs have resisted their rule ever since.

There can never be any negotiated settlement in Israel as long as the Arabs dispute their claim to the land. The Arabs cannot accept their claim to the land as long as they accept the Koran. The only true settlement will be by the exercise of force: Who has the power to hold the land will keep it.

Now, you must forgive me for such hasty comments. We'll have to review the situation from 1917 on in the next issue, and tie together a great number of loose ends.

In our last discussion, you were reviewing the history of Palestine. As I recall, you stopped at

1917 and promised to continue. What happened after 1917?

Well, let me review, for a moment, what we were trying to do. Remember that we were trying to put the whole Palestinian question into perspective by reviewing the legitimacy of the claims of both sides—the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Yes, I believe you made the point that since the land had been occupied by a number of different groups over the centuries, no one group had a greater claim than another.

Well, I said that the basic claim was really religious. The Koran gives the land to the Arabs; the Bible gives the land to the Jews. This is probably the reason the Arabs accepted the Koran so readily.

From a historical-political point of view, the land really belongs to whoever occupies it. No one ever suggested that the Turks, for example, should give the Arabs a separate “homeland.” It is a strange phenomenon that only the Jews must be governed by pre-established limits. Rome took over from the Jews; the Byzantines took over from Rome. Then came the Arabs, the Turks, the Crusaders, the Mamelukes, the Ottoma Turks, and finally the British. No one ever challenged the right of the conqueror to occupy the land. By the standards applied to the Jews, the Americans should have given the land back to the Indians, or at least given them a separate homeland within the continent. Castro should have been asked to give all the Cubans who objected to his rule, a sector of their own.

The history of the world has been written in territorial claims and counter-claims. Largely, these claims have been settled by conflict, on a survival-of-the-fittest basis. It is certainly abhorrent to think that human beings cannot resolve their differences short of aggression, but that is, unfortunately, the reality of life.

But after World War II, America gave up its claims as a conqueror and restored the independence of Japan, didn't she?

Well, America is an anomaly in the world. Despite the constant charges of imperialism, history proves that time after time, America has not taken advantage of its power. The most obvious example is World War II. After the war, we were the undisputed leaders of the world. No one had the power to challenge our right to Japan, for example or parts of Germany. Whatever Russia says about American imperialism, they kept all the lands they occupied during the war, and we gave ours back. But, we did not insist that Russia should give back the countries, as we did. That was not out of fear of Russian might. Russia was flat on her back, as were all the other countries of the world. We had the chance, more than any nation in history, to rule the world. I can only assume that we were motivated by a far deeper commitment to faith and ethics than most people give us credit for.

But isn't that why we have pressed Israel to be considerate of the rights of the Palestinians?

That is no doubt there, but we are asking Israel to adopt our principles—principles which, incidentally, have caused us much difficulty. Building Russia up, after the war, for example, was certainly a humanitarian gesture, but has been a major cause of the present world tragedy, because they took advantage of our idealism. Israel has certainly seen the tragic consequences of American idealism, and cannot afford to make the same mistakes. The PLO has never retracted its vow to push Israel into the sea. In the natural sense, Israel's only hope for existence is not the idealism of treaties and promises, but the realism of power and territorial security. It is absolutely essential that Israel have boundaries that are militarily defensible and not merely politically expedient.

Is that why they want to keep the left bank?

Yes, indeed. The Jordan makes a natural boundary. It would be difficult to defend Jerusalem against an enemy almost at the foot of the hill.

But if they give the Palestinians a homeland, won't that really settle the major issue?

By no means. If the Palestinians set up a state, the PLO will be in charge. Make no mistakes about that. The Israelis want ultimate jurisdiction over any kind of Palestinian entity, so that they can control the military activity. They simply cannot and will not trust treaty agreements, no matter who makes them. They must retain a position of power.

How do they stand now as to military power?

They are superior by far to any single country in the Middle East. And the Arabs demonstrated, unmistakably, that they do not want a military solution. It is only the PLO and other extremists that have pressed for violence.

Well, then, will there ever be peace in the Middle East?

Not in the normally accepted idea of peace. There may be a cessation of military conflict and uneasy truce, for a great many years, but no one is strong enough to engage in anything more than terrorist attacks, which will, of course, gain nothing. The Jewish people have demonstrated over and over again, their tenacity and determination when confronted with force.

But what about the major powers? Won't they line up with the Arabs against Israel?

Not with the risk of going to war against the United States.

I thought the Russians were in a strong position, militarily. Everyone says they are superior to us.

They may be in some ways, but not in the ways that count. We are far superior in technological capability. As fast as they steal our technical advances, we are working on new ones. We are far superior in trained personnel to handle the high tech equipment. It takes a tremendous economic backup to build the equipment, maintain it, practice with it, and train the personnel to use it. The Russians cannot afford even the maneuvers necessary to keep their personnel at the ready.

What about their navy? I heard they have far more ships than we.

Again, it's a matter of the nature and quality of the equipment. For example, we have thirteen aircraft carriers to their one. These aircraft carriers are miniature fortresses, and are deployed in strategic locations around the world. Moreover, we have the economic strength to maintain and operate them. Of course, they also make prime targets. I only use them to indicate that the analysis of military power is a highly technical matter, and that surface observations are likely to be quite misleading. I am not trying to give a rundown on statistics, but only to show that at the least, we are in a position of general parity (equal strength) in the military power, and substantially stronger in the economic capability of handling a war. It is very unlikely that the Soviet Union wants a confrontation with the United States at this time.

But, doesn't that attitude tend to make us complacent, and hinder us from military preparedness?

In the first place, I don't think our military establishment is all that unaware of its responsibility, that the layman needs to be in a panic. There are certainly many areas in which the Pentagon would like to shore up our military, but we will probably not ever again be in the position we were in Pearl Harbor in 1941.

But, in the second place, and more importantly, I think the destiny of America is in the hands of God. That doesn't mean that we should ignore the military and sit back and wait for the enemy, but it certainly means that we should not be in a frenetic race with Russia. There is a reasonable middle ground.

After Pearl Harbor, America staged a brilliant recovery, nor can the heroism of our fighting men be underestimated, but I am firmly convinced that God had His hand in the matter, both in the Pacific and European theatres of battle. In Europe, for example, the decision by Germany to turn from the "Battle of Britain" and go after Russia was the most crucial decision of the war and ultimately led to Germany's defeat. I attribute that decision to God's intervention. Dunkirk was another miraculous intervention. And I could name scores of such episodes. If you are interested in pursuing the details, read the history of that war.

So, you are saying that military preparedness is not that crucial.

I am saying that there is a reasonable middle ground, and that our ultimate hope is really in God. I don't think there is any real profit for the student of prophecy to spend much time weighing relative military strength. Probably America will not be spared as much by power as by prayer.

But doesn't America need to repent, before she can call upon God for deliverance?

You keep opening up these loaded issues. There is no evidence in the Bible whatever, that God deals with modern nations as He dealt with His people, Israel. That is, you have no options offered. Whatever nations are represented in Revelation, for example, are nowhere told that if they would repent they would be spared, nationally. After Pentecost, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, God deals with individuals and with His Church, but not with nations, on the same basis as He dealt with Israel.

But what about II Chronicles 7:14—"If my people, which are called by my name, will humble themselves, seek my face and turn from their sin, then will I hear from heaven and will hear their prayer and seek their land."?

Yes, I'm well familiar with that text, and familiar with the gross misapplication of it, as well.

Don't you think the principle in that text could be applied to any nation?

It doesn't say "any nation." It says, "My people, which are called by my name." That can only be one nation—Israel. The name, Israel, has God's name in it—El. America does not have God's name in it, nor did God ever call them, "my people." Probably no nation on earth has deeper ties to God than the United States, but still, that does not make them, as a nation, "The people of God."

There were never any promises in the New Testament, on a national level, that put national

survival on the basis of repentance.

Then are you saying that it's futile to pray for peace?

No, I am certainly not saying that. Paul tells Timothy, very specifically, to pray for peace, and for the government of a nation. As a matter of fact, he was saying that at the height of Roman power. But he never once suggested that if Rome would repent, God would spare it. A few centuries later, Rome did collapse, but it was never suggested by Paul, or anyone else, that Rome's collapse would be tied to her Godless behavior. History might record that Rome's demise came, in part, as a result of the etching away of her moral fiber but God never said that.

So you don't think America needs to repent?

I never said that, either. I am sure there are many areas where America needs to re-establish its value system. On the other hand, national polls estimate that ninety-five percent of the population of America has a belief in God. That, of course, does not mean "Christians," but it certainly is a far cry from the Rome of Paul's day. Still, many polls put the number of "born again Christians" at forty percent. That certainly should be significant even in God's eyes, who was willing to spare the entire city of Sodom for ten righteous souls.

Well, then, is God going to spare America, or isn't He?

I don't know. He never told me privately, and He doesn't say anything in the Bible about it. I, personally, think that He will. Not because we are righteous, but because we are the greatest source of evangelization in the world; we are the greatest haven for His people, the Jews; and we are, more than any nation on earth, champions of the principles Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

What do you mean by that? America is full of sex and violence.

Unfortunately, you are right, and we have much to repent of, but I am referring to the more essential aspect of Jesus' teaching, which was regard for one's fellow man—even one's enemies. Again, I know of no nation on earth that tries harder, or puts itself more in jeopardy for the sake of humanitarian ideals than the United States. Obviously, we are not free from ulterior motives; obviously we have our pockets of avarice and self-interest but the grassroots American cares about the human race. We have shown it in countless ways, domestically and internationally. We have almost lost our nation over concern for human rights—even to the protecting of the enemies of society. Our concern may be naive and ill-advised at times, but it is irrepressibly a part of the fabric of the American society.

You paint a pretty rosy picture of America.

Yes, and I make no apology for it. I am not unaware of our faults, but I find to be totally unrealistic, the monstrous image we are being given by other nations, and by well-meaning but ill-advised members of the Church who join the satanically-orchestrated chant. Remember, Satan is the "arch-accuser." He would like nothing better than to bring America down by the insidious undercutting of confidence, which rather produces enervating discouragement, than productive reform. Remember, even Jesus was mercilessly accused by the Pharisees. America will never be righteous enough for some.

But, aren't we in the same danger of idolatry that Israel was?

What idolatry?

Well, the idolatry of materialism and pleasure seeking. We make gold our idol, and earthly comfort.

Nonsense. In today's economy, I would imagine at least ninety percent struggle to pay their bills. Only a very few have the luxury of making gold their idol. If the absorbing problem of feeding one's family is idolatry, then I guess God will just have to be merciful to us.

But don't you think Americans spend far too much time and money on recreation and self-indulgence?

Probably so, but that's kid stuff, compared to Israel's dalliance with pagan idols. Israel was not only rejecting God in favor of pagan deities, but in the worship of them, was flaunting God's laws, engaging in debauchery as a part of false religious rituals, and even offering her children as sacrifices to these abhorrent deities. In short, they were making a total mockery of God and His Laws. They were, in every sense, religious adulterers, and were so described by the prophets. In fact, Jerusalem itself may be the great whore of Revelation 17. Under the Antichrist (false Messiah) Jerusalem could become a great religious and commercial center, fitting the descriptions of Revelation 17 and 18. She alone, in fact, deserves the title of "whore" or adulteress, because she alone was the true "wife" of God, who left Him to follow false gods. No other nation can be properly called an "adulteress" because no other nation ever belonged to God in the first place. This is the plain teaching of Hosea, who took a whore for a wife.

What you're saying is pretty radical.

You're right, of course, but let me hasten to add that it is only speculation. It makes a lot of sense to me, but as yet I wouldn't "go to the stake" for it. The only reason I got into it, at all, is that it illustrates the difference between the so-called "idolatries" of America, and the idolatries of ancient Israel (not modern Israel). In comparison to the pagan idolatries of ancient Israel, America is making mischief in a sandbox. That is not to condone America's sins, but rather to show the difference between the position of America today, and that of Israel. It was the idolatry, and not immoralities, as such, that brought about the downfall of Israel. To classify America's faults with such idolatry, is to trivialize the magnitude of Israel's dishonoring of God.

One thing you must keep in mind. The Church, the bride of Christ, has never replaced Christ with another deity. She has not always given Christ His proper place; she has questioned His deity and power; she has unduly venerated others, but she has never set Christ aside, and replaced Him with another deity. Today, Christ is the undisputed Head of the Church, His Body. I am, of course, excluding religious groups which call themselves churches, but have never identified with Christ.

But, I'm afraid, now, that we have wandered far afield. We're off in the brush, for sure.

Can we ever get back?

Oh yes, we're not that far off the track. In fact, I think this detour was of vital importance. Unfortunately, we've used up the time and will have to postpone other topics.

Well, can you tie it all together, and bring us back to the main theme of our discussion about the Middle East?

Yes, I think I can do that. We got into this whole discussion about America, in trying to separate America's future security from national repentance. I was saying that I believe America will be spared, not because she is righteous, but for other reasons, having to do with her position in the world as a haven for the Jews, a champion of humanitarian values, and a powerful resource of worldwide evangelism.

Then, of course, you brought up the issue of national repentance, and I was trying to show that the celebrated text in II Chronicles 7:14 does not apply to modern nations, but only specifically to the people of God—the Jews.

But, going back, further, we got into the subject of the United States, in terms of its relationship to prophecy, especially with reference to its involvement with the Soviet Union. I was trying to allay the anxieties of people who are afraid that the Soviet Union is poised and ready to wipe out America. I said that the Bible does not indicate such a thing, and that from a political and military point of view, the Soviet Union is not at the present time ready for a confrontation with America.

Well, now for the sixty-four dollar question—what about Armageddon?

I presume you are asking whether or not the current crisis is the prelude to the great conflict of Ezekiel 38. We're getting off the track here, but possibly we should give some attention to the question, since the purposes of God really supercede all other considerations. After all, it really doesn't matter what the world at large thinks about Israel's claim to the land. The Bible is quite clear about the fact that God has ordained Israel's position. I do, however, want to finish out our review of history, but I will take a few moments on Armageddon. Later on, we will discuss it more thoroughly, in connection with a broader consideration of the scenario of the end times.

Everyone seems to be talking about Armageddon these days. Just how much do we really know?

Well, first of all, it might surprise you to know that there is only one verse in the Bible that mentions Armageddon (Rev. 16:16). There has to be a lot of speculation about it. In the second place, there is a considerable amount of obscurity about the time factor.

If you connect Armageddon with Ezekiel 38, it would seem to be after the Millennium. The battle in Ezekiel 38, involving Gog and Magog, comes after a period of peace that is so extended as to cause Jerusalem to have done away with its defenses. Then you go to Revelation 20:8, where the same battle, with Gog and Magog seems to be in view, and that is specifically identified as post-millennial.

In the third place, the battle of Armageddon is not an extended affair, involving modern weapons, but a very brief encounter, involving horses and ancient weapons—an encounter which God immediately crushes, not by nuclear weapons, but by His power.

Well, then what is the great holocaust that causes the people of Jerusalem to flee?

That is the battle referred to in Zechariah 14 and Revelation 19 where Christ comes back to deliver His people from the Antichrist. Jerusalem has been taken over by a false Messiah. This is not a false Jesus Christ, but a false claimant to the title of Messiah. His name would not probably be Jesus. The Jews had already rejected Jesus, because He did not come to restore an earthly kingdom. They will accept this one, because he will come worshipping "the God of forces," as Daniel says (11:38). He will promise to deliver Israel from its enemies, and

re-establish her former glory.

But doesn't the Antichrist come out of Rome? Isn't he going to deceive the Western world as well?

Not likely—to either question! He has to be a Jew—he will have left “the God of his fathers.”

The Christians will already be out, so the Western world will have little interest in Jesus Christ.

But I thought the Antichrist would claim to be Jesus, who is coming back to deliver mankind, and that he would try to deceive the “saints,” or “the elect.”

II Thessalonians 2 specifically states that the Holy Spirit will be “out of the way,” and that the Antichrist will not be revealed until after that. Of course, if the Holy Spirit is gone, so will be the Church, as well. Remember, the words “elect” and “saint” can be used of God’s people Israel, as well as the Church.

Well, then, you don't think the Church will go through the tribulation?

That’s a very big question, which requires more of a discussion than I can get into now. But, basically, Revelation 4 and 5 show the Church in heaven, and so does Revelation 14, where the second 144,000 is definitely the bride of Christ. The Antichrist comes after this, as we indicated previously. And so also the gathering together of the nations, unto the great battle, or a great battle.

You mean that there is more than one battle?

Apparently, the coming of Christ to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14) is for the deliverance of Jerusalem, then comes the millennium, apparently.

You keep saying, “apparently.” A lot of Bible teachers are pretty certain about it.

Well, I’ve spent too many years studying the Bible to be that certain. Usually, the more you know about a subject, the more complexities you see in it. I’ve seen too many predictions go awry.

A lot of teachers claim God has given them special visions and revelations.

I’ve seen enough “visions” and “revelations” go awry to make me quite skeptical. I think it’s pretty presumptuous to make such claims, but I’m not the judge. It’s tempting to substitute “inspiration” for “perspiration,” but it’s pretty risky, as well as presumptuous. I’m afraid many teachers have spent more time reading books than they have actually digging into the text itself. What God wants us to know is all there, but it takes a lot of painstaking research to dig it out. There is no way, for example, that you can understand the meaning of the 144,000 in Revelation 14, without a thorough knowledge of the Greek text. If God gives a man the gift of teaching, He always prepares him with the necessary tools. The one who says he doesn’t need the tools is really saying he is more spiritual, or special, and doesn’t have to do the spade work of preparation. In reality, eliminating the step of preparation eliminates an important step in personal growth.

Teaching is a special gift that requires adequate training. It’s pretty presumptuous for one to claim that he doesn’t need the training. Today, you have a large number of people attempting

to be authorities on the Bible because God gives them direct revelations, or because they've taken a few courses in Bible school. This is one reason there is so much division and confusion in the Church—too many teachers. Paul faced the same problem. There are, of course, many avenues of service that do not require special training. If God calls a man to teach, He will see that he gets the training for it, without shortcuts. It's somewhat like the medical profession, but more crucial. Paramedics should not try to be surgeons, but there is a place for both.

How did we get off on this subject? I thought we were talking about Armageddon.

The matter came up over the issue of the many differences of opinion in the teaching of prophecy. Whom can we believe? Of course, scholars also differ, so it takes both scholarship and the Spirit. But what I was pointing out was that the more one knows about a subject, the more reluctant one is to make absolute judgments, or statements.

But, I must say, the issue is of grave importance. If there were not so much confusion, one would not have to be concerned. The problem is that many Christians are needlessly anxious. Many seem to think that the whole world is going to blow up any minute, or that the Russians are poised to "wipe out" America. Such feelings are promoted by teachers who are inadequately equipped to be speaking with such authority. I don't like to see the sheep hurt by such carelessness. If the sheep were not being hurt, I wouldn't say anything. Remember, I am not saying one should not minister without a given amount of training. I am only saying one should not pose as an authority without the qualifications for it, any more than one should practice medicine without proper qualifications. Much of today's "doom saying" prophecy is based on inadequate knowledge, both of the Word, and of the world.

Can we get back to Armageddon now?

Yes, by all means. You'll have to forgive me for sounding off on a pet peeve of mine. Unfortunately, though, the Church has damaged its credibility considerably by an irresponsible attitude toward the Bible. It seems everybody is an expert. It really shows up glaringly in the discussions of prophecy.

Now, as to the issue of Armageddon, we're going to deal with it in greater detail later, but for now, let's avoid the temptation to label every conflict as a prelude to Armageddon.

Are you saying the present conflict has no bearing on the future events of prophecy?

Certainly not. Everything that happens in the Middle East has implications for the future. But, by the same token, the battles of history have had an interlocking effect upon future conflicts. For example, the so-called "glorious revolution" of England in 1689 had an effect on the American Revolution in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789. The question is one of timing. That a great conflict will take place, settling at last God's purposes for Israel and the world, is obvious. When it will take place, and what its scope will be are very involved questions. We do intend, however, to deal with them. We do not promise to resolve them.

We must stop here, but I urge you to read Ezekiel 26:7,38,39; I Thessalonians 2; and Revelation 4,5,11,14,16,19 and 20. That will help prepare you for our discussion next time.

Last time we talked, you gave me some Scripture texts to read, that you said would help in our next discussion.

And did you read them?

Yes, and I found them most interesting and a little confusing. I'm anxious to know just how you tend to deal with them.

In due course. But first, let me complete a previous promise to sketch the history of Israel and Palestine after World War I (1917).

Yes, and I believe we were attempting to establish legitimate claims to the area.

As you will recall, the Ottoman Turks had been in power since about 1453. During World War I, the Turks had entered the war on the side of Germany and the "Central Powers." In the course of the conflict, the Turks were defeated, and Palestine put under a British mandate by order of the Versailles Peace Conference.

What do you mean by a "mandate"?

Well, the British governed the area, but did not lay territorial claims to it. This mandate remained in force till 1947, when the United Nations granted to Israel a charter, authorizing the establishment of an independent state. Of course, we have passed over an infinite number of details, but we are merely trying to establish a continuity of legitimacy.

How do the Arabs figure in this?

This is quite a complex question, but essential to the discussion. First of all, the Jews had banked heavily on a commitment to them, which the British made in 1917—to aid the Jews in establishing a homeland. This commitment was in the form of a document known as the "Balfour Declaration," framed by Arthur Balfour, Foreign Minister of Great Britain, and a former Prime Minister. On the other hand, the Arabs had counted on the so-called "McMahon Pledge," also made by the British, agreeing to help them establish a homeland, in exchange for entering the war against the Turks.

Then the Arabs were also under Turkish rule?

Yes, indeed, but they had not fared well, and welcomed the opportunity to revolt.

Then the Arabs do have some legitimacy to their claim?

Well, yes and no. In the first place, the "Pledge" was an informal agreement, and not a binding contract. The failure to honor it might call in question the trustworthiness of the British "word," but certainly was not legally binding.

Wasn't that also true of the Balfour Declaration?

Certainly, but in the case of the Jews, the United Nations had subsequently issued a charter, which was binding.

Well, then, didn't that settle the issue?

By no means. In the first place, the Arabs did not accept the United Nations charter. (Of course, in all matters of international law, there is the problem of enforcement). So Israel had to establish her position in hand-to-hand combat with the Arabs. In this, she was victorious.

But, in the second place, the charter limited her occupation to certain sections of Jerusalem,

excluding the “sacred Temple Mount” and the “Wailing Wall,” as well as the so-called “West Bank” of the Jordan River.

In 1967, Israel was attacked by Egypt and was victorious. She not only took Egyptian-held areas of the Sinai, but also the whole of Jerusalem, and the West Bank. From that date to this, the Arabs have sought to retrieve these areas.

Where do the Palestinians come in?

Not wishing to remain under Jewish rule, large numbers of Palestinians preferred refugee camps in Jordan, and have sought a land of their own ever since. The self-appointed (and apparently accepted) representative of these displaced persons is Yasser Arafat, head of the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization). Of course, this matter of a homeland for the Palestinians is a major road block in the Middle Eastern peace negotiations. The United States refuses to accept Arafat as the bargaining agent for the Palestinians. The reason for this is that the PLO has consistently denied the right of Israel to exist as a State at all. In fact, the apparent willingness of Arafat, at last, to talk with Israel on a different basis, has produced a serious revolt within the PLO ranks.

But if Israel won this area in a fair fight, why should she be expected to relinquish it?

That is one of the mysteries of modern diplomacy. Russia has never been pressed to restore Czechoslovakia or Hungary, or East Germany, or Poland to its original independence. It is amazing how much outcry there is over any aggressive maneuver on the part of Israel, and yet everyone accepts the blatant invasions of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, for example, with little concern. The same duality exists with reference to the United States. Any action on the part of America, to assist beleaguered nations, is received with great outcry, while the Soviet Union gets very little “press” for the most aggressive behavior. We may, of course, be ill-advised in many of our actions, but never has there been a spirit of imperialism, but rather defense of areas which we deem to be necessary for the security of the United States. We have no territorial intentions, with reference to Central America, for example. Russia, on the other hand, clearly wants to “take over” Afghanistan. And, with reference to Cuba, the Soviet Union clearly wanted an offensive position against the United States, since Cuba had no relevance whatsoever to Russia’s own security.

It is unfortunate, as I have said in previous discussions, that the fortunes of the world are so integrally involved in aggressive behavior toward one another. However, in the practical realities of things, it is true internationally, that “survival of the fittest” seems to be the essence of national relationships. It is only fair that Israel be judged on the same standard as any other nation—the Soviet Union, for example.

Israel had no real territorial interests in Lebanon, but was justly concerned about the constant incursions by the PLO terrorists, who were based in Lebanon. For this reason, she acted aggressively to counteract the threat. Even though the PLO had been responsible for the massacring of many, both Israeli and Lebanese, as she sought to establish her base, world opinion seemed to turn in favor of the PLO, and against Israel. The actions of the PLO were constantly downplayed, and every aggression of the Israelis magnified. World opinion has been, generally speaking, against Israel. Now, we’re back at square one, with the PLO and Syria engaging in a buildup of forces, and refusing to leave, even in the face of an agreement between Lebanon and Israel, that the Israeli troops would withdraw. It’s the same old story that has been reenacted through the ages—everything the Jews do is wrong, and everything the Gentiles do is right.

Isn't that also true of the United States? Aren't we always the "dirty dogs"?

Yes, of course. In spite of our apparent materialism and immoralities, I have established the point, in past discussions, that we are nevertheless very much a "Christian" nation. We are also, then, a portion of "God's people" (Not in the same sense as Israel, however). It is for this reason, I believe, that we are always under attack by the world at large, which is generally under Satan's rule. I think it is not a myth, therefore, to say that there exists something of a "satanic syndrome." Satan is the great "accuser." Since America remains the last true bastion of the defense of the faith, and the main supporter of missionary enterprise, Satan would like nothing better than to destroy us. Part of his method is to turn the world against us, and leave us isolated.

Are you saying, then, that all of the actions of both Israel and the United States are condoned by God?

By no means. That would be a completely absurd notion. However, I do believe that God has, in general, certain purposes for both the United States and Israel, and that Satan is aware of this, and that he is using every possible instrument to frustrate these purposes.

Could you summarize the situation in the Middle East, at the present time?

While there are many unknown factors in the present situation, there are some well established fundamental facts to be considered. I might list these facts as follows:

1. Israelis have no intention of giving up their sovereignty over the West Bank, even though they have agreed to certain possibilities for self-rule among the Palestinians.
2. The chief aim of the PLO, is not so much sympathy for a homeland for the Palestinians, as it is to deny Israel their right to occupy the land. Their avowed purpose is still, as openly stated, to drive Israel into the sea.
3. The claims to Palestine are still, fundamentally, religious. The Arabs claim the land through Ishmael, and the Jews claim the land through Isaac. This will never change. However the Moslems may speak openly of peace, any follower of the Koran must accept the right of the descendants of Ishmael to the land.
4. At present, Syria is under the strong influence of the Soviet Union, and is, of course, being armed by her. As long as she has this kind of support, Syria is able to remain quite inflexible. What is not known, for sure, is whether or not Assad will remain under the Soviet yoke, or could possibly decide to throw it off, as did Anwar Sadat, in Egypt. As you recall, he did this just prior to his peace overtures with Jerusalem.
5. There will never be peace in the situation until the Syrians decide to back down. Here again, it is not certain whether or not Israel would risk another military solution to the problem. Generally the mood of the Knesset in Jerusalem is not in favor of that. But, the actions of the Israeli have been often unpredictable. It is certainly not without strong possibility.

What do you think is going to happen?

That is a big question, and I am quite reluctant to speculate. I rather think that the time is not right for a major confrontation. The Syrians have tried twice, in the recent past, to go against Israel, and have been badly defeated. I am sure she would not try it again without

very strong Soviet support—stronger than the last confrontation. On the other hand, I doubt if the Soviet Union is ready to risk a major confrontation with the United States. Outwardly, the USSR has encouraged the Syrians to settle the matter. Given the vacillating attitude of the United States in recent months, the Soviet Union might be willing to gamble, but I doubt it. I could be wrong, but I think that there will exist a very uneasy truce in the Middle East for some time to come. The Arab world is certainly not united enough to establish its claims against Israel. The PLO has virtually been eliminated as a military threat, and the Syrians are still a rather undependable ally for the Soviet Union.

It is quite possible that Israel may try another military effort against the Syrians. If they do, I think the Syrians will retreat, and that the Soviet Union will not try to press its advantage. For one thing, the matter of Afghanistan still remains a very troublesome issue to the Soviet Union, and Andropov has yet to fully establish his position in the Soviet Union. Afghanistan is a thorny problem, and an abortive effort in Syria would be a definite mark against him.

Then you do not think that we are ready for major war in the Middle East?

I do not think so. Of course, that is purely speculation. I have no “revelations” from God in the matter.

Well, that brings us back again to the ultimate question of what the Bible has to say about it. You were going to refer to those passages of Scripture that you had me read.

I see, unfortunately, that we have once again come to the end of our time. I felt that I had to go back and finish out our historical summary. I will, however, refer briefly to these passages, and then take them up next time. I certainly do not intend to continue a limitless discussion of the Middle East. There are many other areas that we ought to look at. I think we can wrap up the matter in a couple more discussions. I must come back to an original statement regarding prophecy, that Satan would like nothing better than to get us involved in the intricacies of prophetic predictions, and turn our attention away from the more pressing need of understanding our vital relationship to Christ. Remember Jesus’ attitude toward these matters. In Matthew 24, in response to the questions of the disciples regarding the temple, Jesus gave a number of indications relative to that point. But this entire chapter has to do with the establishment of the kingdom in Israel, and much of it was quite strikingly fulfilled in the siege of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D. One sentence is very instructive as a clue to the time frame of these events. Jesus quoted the passage in Daniel 11, relative to the “abomination of desolation in the Holy Place.” While this prophecy was again strikingly fulfilled by Antiochus Epiphanes, who ran pigs through the temple, it does seem to present a future reenactment of such an event. Jesus’ words would seem to indicate that. However, it must also be noted that there must be another temple in Jerusalem for this to be fulfilled. The expression “Holy Place” is a technical reference to the main structure of the temple. That, to me, is a strong indication that the events of Matthew 24—something of a reenactment of Daniel 11—does pertain to the reestablishment of the future kingdom of Israel and not to the “rapture of the Church.” However, I am really not making an absolute statement, here, but rather showing that there are other options in terms of our consideration of future events. There is still very little certainty, except that the major piece of the puzzle—the establishment of the nation of Israel—does give us an anchor point.

But what about the coming of Christ for His bride?

That is an entirely different matter than the establishment of the earthly kingdom Israel. Jesus’ statement to the disciples on the occasion of His return to glory, as well as Paul’s various references to this event, in such passages as I Thessalonians 4, and I Corinthians 15,

indicate that this “rapture” could take place at any time, quite apart from the fulfillment of events surrounding the establishment of Israel’s earthly kingdom. Both, of course, are part of the ultimate subject of the “consummation of the ages.” There could be, however, quite a large time lapse between the appearance of Christ for His Church, and the ultimate reestablishment of the kingdom of Israel on earth. If we confuse Matthew 24 with I Thessalonians 4, we get into a good deal of confusion.

But what about the wars, and the natural catastrophes mentioned in Matthew 24?

I would like to deal with the entire chapter in greater detail in our next discussion. Right now I have only wanted to establish the point that there must be a temple in Jerusalem, reconstructed, before the statement of Jesus regarding the “Holy Place” can be fulfilled. There have actually been two major events that could readily be identified with this prediction made both by Daniel and Jesus. The siege of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C. was a rather exact fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy, while the siege of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D. was quite precisely in keeping with Jesus’ prophecy. Probably there will be a third major event, which will be the ultimate fulfillment, of which the other two were something of prototypes. But we will defer this whole matter till next time.

And what about the other passages that we were considering?

Again, I would like to defer until next time. However, I will say that one of the main reasons for my selecting those passages was because they give us some rather specific clues that cannot be overlooked. Ezekiel 26:7, for example, makes a definite reference to the King of Babylon, as the King of the North. This is important, because it is not necessary to go beyond the Caucasus Mountains to find the needed reference point for all the predictions in the prophets. If we keep these predictions within the arena of the Middle East, we do not have to engage in much speculation and symbolism. The countries are already in place, that are predominantly mentioned in these prophecies. When we get into the Western world to find fulfillment, we get into a great maze of confusion. One of the great problems is that in the Western world we only have a few kings, as such, left to identify a rather broad diversity of rulers, which are not kings. There is very little problem with this in the Middle Eastern world. So, this passage in Ezekiel 26 gives us a clue. Another clue is to be found in Ezekiel 38. In the course of that chapter, we are told that the great gathering together against Jerusalem comes at a time when it has given up all its defenses. This obviously suggests that there has been a time of peace long enough to make the prospect of war quite unthinkable. The statement in Revelation 20 is that this gathering together of Gog and Magog takes place after the Millennium.

But it certainly seems that events are shaping up quite rapidly to bring about this gathering of nations.

Well, it is always tempting to tie these events to biblical prophecy. It is understandable, also, in view of our anxious awaiting of the Lord’s return. Like one who is waiting for the return of a loved one, we scan the horizon for the first speck that might indicate the arrival of the ship or the jet. But, we must be careful here, and not overlook some of the important clues that I have given you. My own thinking is (and I readily admit that it is only speculation) that the pieces are simply not in place at this time to link them with the specific biblical prophecies. Of course, world events have a way of gaining momentum and becoming cataclysmic in very short order.

In our next discussion we will deal more particularly with the passages that I suggested as well as some others. One thing I would like to throw out for your consideration before we

conclude is that while we have been accustomed to thinking of Rome as the successor to the Kingdom of Alexander the Great, in Daniel's prophecies, it must be remembered that this kingdom was divided in two. Traditionally, scholars have tended to regard the Western sector of Rome as the important branch. This was no doubt due to the fact that when the scholars were beginning to earnestly examine prophecy, the Roman Church was in prominence in the Western world, and seemed to answer a great number of the requirements. However, we might be better advised to shift our attention to the Eastern sector of the Roman Empire—beginning with Constantine in 316 A.D. I will explore that concept in more detail next time we come together. Meanwhile, I suggest a rereading of Ezekiel 38 and 39, as well as the passages in Revelation. We will look at them again next time.

Everything about the Middle East and the prophecies concerning it are so confusing. It's hard to keep up with it all. We had started talking about the history of Israel, last time, and then we got on to a sidetrack about the credibility of teachers, and then about Armageddon. Can you pull things together?

Well, I can try. We are talking about some very complex things. I doubt if we humans can ever really provide absolute answers, except in certain areas made clear enough to limit debate.

Are there really any areas like that?

Oh, I think so. But they are so clearly stated in Scripture that all who regard the Bible as inspired would agree on them.

And what would those areas be?

Well, for one thing, the existence of God as a Spirit Being, integrally involved in the creation of the world, and viably interested in His creatures. For another thing, the predicament into which God's creatures have fallen, and the necessity of a divinely authored process of recovery. And, of course, the principal agent and effector of that redemption—Jesus Christ.

What about the Holy Spirit? That seems to me to be a very basic area, and yet there is so much difference of opinion in the Church.

Not as much as you may think. The differences are really surface.

But I thought some believe in the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" and some don't.

That just isn't so. It's a matter of timing. That is, some believe you receive the Holy Spirit fully when you are saved. Others believe there is a second experience, when you receive the Holy Spirit in a more complete sense. Actually, you could not be saved apart from the coming of the Holy Spirit into the heart, or human spirit.

But some believers are very adamant in insisting that if you haven't had a special experience, such as speaking in tongues, you have not been truly baptized in the Spirit, or filled with the Spirit.

Well, this is not the place to get involved in a discussion about speaking in tongues. Let me just say this. I have traveled among believers of all kinds for over fifty years (beginning as a child). I have observed literally thousands of them at fairly close range, both in meetings and privately. My conclusion is that they are all about alike. They have the same problems, failures, and inadequacies of frail human flesh. And they have the same faith, hope and perseverance of spirits sustained by Christ.

But some seem more dedicated and diligent than others—perhaps more “on top of things.”

Oh yes, but that is true of every group I’ve ever been in, and true of believers who were addressed in the New Testament—the people of Corinth, for example. Incidentally, the people of Corinth were the only ones with whom Paul ever discussed the matter of tongues, and they had more problems than the other churches.

To paraphrase the psalmist, “I have been young, and now am old,” and I have known many dedicated and Christ-honoring people in all varieties of Christian groups. People have to relate to Christ in whatever way suits their personalities and needs. Some need more outward expression and evidences, as Thomas did. Some need dynamic encounters as Paul did. Some seem to move easily into the faith as the guileless Nathaniel, and the physician, Luke. We’re like members of a family. We’re all different, and we relate to Christ and to one another in as many different ways as children relate to parents and to one another.

But aren’t there some specific instructions about how we should function as Christians?

There are many guidelines about how we ought to treat one another, but very few about the nature of our personal devotion to Christ.

Well, I’ve encountered many different groups that have a very highly regulated system for achieving spirituality. They all seem to believe that their method is biblical.

Usually these so-called “methods” are supported by scattered texts—often taken out of context. You will look in vain for such carefully defined “systems” in the Bible. If a given system were the right one, why didn’t Paul devote a chapter or two at least, and give us as plain an outline as we find in the “manuals.” The truth of the matter is that the Lord was not interested in turning out Christians like gum drops—everyone alike. We have different gifts and different personalities. We each have our individual contributions to make. No one is better than another—no matter how dynamic, or expressive. Paul said,—“*Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive [as a gift]?*” (I Corinthians 4:7 KJV).

Then you are saying that all of these groups with their systems are off base?

No, I’m not really saying that. If that is the way they function best, then that is what they have to do. The problem comes only when one attempts to impose such systems on another. For one believer to regard another as inferior because of different expressions or experiences of Christianity, is contrary to the spirit of the Bible.

It looks like we’re off on a sidetrack again. I guess I’m responsible for that.

You don’t need to apologize. It often happens in the Bible studies we have. Many times these so-called “sidetracks” have proven to be extremely helpful to someone in the group. After all, we’re not in any race with time. It really isn’t profitable to study the Bible merely as a textbook, with neat outlines and canned resumes. “*The Word of God is living and energizing,*” as Hebrews tells us. To approach it on an academic basis would be like gathering the family together for fellowship and reading a sociology text. No. We want to interact with the Word on a vital and practical level, to meet the personal needs of the believers. It is more important for them to find a vital link with life, than to become walking encyclopedias of Bible knowledge.

I fear that many Bible study groups have produced amateur theologians who fall into the same trap as the college freshman who, after a year of “Introduction to Psychology,” goes about analyzing all his friends. It is a universal truism that the less one knows, the more certain one is about his answers.

It is a good thing for believers to come together just to fellowship in the Word—not to become specialists, but to be nourished and guided in their daily lives. For this reason, I never try just to “get through” a book. I allow questions freely, and sometimes will take the entire time to answer one, if I think it is of enough general interest. Knowledge leads to pride. Instruction in life leads to openness and sensitivity to Christ.

So then you don't object to this sidetrack?

No, indeed. I rather welcome it, because it gives opportunity to explore wider areas of consideration. When I started this column, I decided to use a format that would allow for this sort of thing.

The subject matter we've been dealing with is highly controversial. It is not my intention to divide the body, but to present materials that will help people to understand both the Bible and the world we must live in. The things I say are not intended to be the final word, but suggestions and thought stimulators.

Then you don't think it's necessary for the church to be divided over these issues?

Not at all. I think it's tragic. Many statements in the Bible are not that definite. On the other hand, to go by supposed “revelations” is pretty risky, as I've said before. What gives one the right to say that he is more accurate than another because he is “closer to God” or has revelations and visions? All we can do is study the Bible diligently and pray for help. Even then, we must be cautious, lest we mislead others.

Then is there no certainty?

As I said before, there are many areas of certainty, about which all can agree, who hold the Bible to be inspired. But many things in the Bible are less definitive. In these areas, we must be humble and charitable. Prophecy is, of course, one of these areas.

I think it is high time the Church quit the egotistical absolutism that says, “I am closer to God,” or “I am holier,” or “I get revelations.” Satan has used this “elitism” to shatter the body of Christ.

Well, what do you suggest?

First of all we must face up to the realities of human limitations in the declaration of truth. It certainly ought to be obvious by now, after hundreds of centuries of disagreement in the Church, that there is a gap between the absolute truth of Christ in our spirits, and the functional expression of that truth. It is somewhat like the reproduction of music. No matter how perfect the tones, and superb the performance, it will come through to the listener with no greater quality than the equipment and technicians used in the reproduction. We possess the Spirit of Christ in our spirits. Since Christ declares Himself to be the truth, we conclude that our spirits possess His truth. The problem comes in relaying that truth through limited human vessels. It is no good to say, “My vessel is better than your vessel.” We're all limited in one way or another.

God uses the vessels as He will. The problem comes when we use the vessel for the wrong purpose, or put too much confidence in the capacity of the vessel. Thus, for example, if we use a dictaphone, which is quite adequate for simple voice reproduction, to reproduce concert music, we will be quite disappointed. If, on the other hand, we purchase expensive stereophonic equipment for dictation, we will be wasting our money. The Lord has given to each one gifts as it has pleased Him. Problems in the communication of truth come when one goes beyond his gift or when we assume a level of perfection unwarranted by the human vessel. It is not that absolute truth does not exist; it is that the capacity of human instrument to express it is limited. The ultimate importance of this concept is that believers ought to be more open to one another, and charitable toward alternate views, in view of the difficulties in coming to truth.

We must learn to accept “functional” truth, rather than absolute truth, as we must do in other areas of experience. Absolute truth implies complete knowledge, without possibility of error. For instance, in the field of electromagnetism, whereas the Creator knows the absolute truth about it, we only know enough to function in the world. And, there are various levels of functional truth. The homeowner knows enough to operate electronic equipment; the builder knows enough to wire a house; the astrophysicist knows enough to send a spacecraft to the moon. These are all levels of functional truth, but no one knows enough to claim absolute truth. There are, in fact, many differences of opinion among physicists as to the ultimate principles upon which their experiments are based.

In the realm of the knowledge of God, we are even more limited, since we must go quite beyond the normal range of intellect. We will simply have to exercise greater humility in the face of our human inadequacy. The spirit within us, possessed by the Spirit of Christ, knows things that our minds have difficulty articulating. To put it another way, the Holy Spirit functions within us in ways that our minds simply cannot participate in nor adequately express. When we do attempt to channel such divine truth through the mind, the words beggar the reality.

Well then, if the mind is so inadequate what value does it have?

Oh, much value. We couldn't function at all without it. I'm not saying it isn't useful. I'm only saying it has its limitations in communicating truths that pertain to the spirit realm. Of course, it is a necessary vehicle for interaction between one human and another. My point is that we can't put too much weight on it, when it comes to conflicts over truth.

Our security, as far as redemption is concerned, is in the actual working of the Holy Spirit within our spirits and not in our ability to understand or articulate the truth of God.

And what other suggestion do you have?

I think we ought to be more respectful of the grave responsibility of assuming the role of teacher. There is so much careless teaching today. Everyone gets into the act. It is like people with a first aid course going out to practice medicine. I would think one would be reluctant to assume the responsibility for another's spiritual welfare. Words can leave an indelible impression on the mind. They can produce guilt trips, discouragement, illusions, and even suicide. People somehow think that conducting Bible class is like having a social—a nice thing to do to get people together. The truth is, that it is a life and death matter. A person's entire life can be affected by concepts picked up in a Bible class.

An inadequately trained teacher can cause great harm—in some cases I have known even suicide. And it isn't enough merely to say, “Oh, I pray about my lessons.” Even the Pharisees prayed. It is a matter of showing enough respect for the Word of God and the souls of others

not to play religious games. If God has given one the gift of teaching, He will give him opportunity for adequate preparation. There ought to be as much concern for training to be a teacher of the soul, as to be a physician of the body. Anything less is a dishonor to God and His Word.

Some may feel I am depriving them of the opportunity of fulfilling themselves. The concern ought not to be the fulfillment of self, but the welfare of others. I am afraid the great host of amateur teachers has been one of the reasons for the divisions and confusions of the Church today.

Nor am I denying the usefulness of the lay person. There are many marvelous ministries the lay person performs. I only ask that one recognize one's limitations.

That seems reasonable enough. Any other suggestions?

Yes, one more thing. Those who do have the gift of teaching should pay the price to prepare themselves adequately for the task. There is too much reliance on speculations and private revelations. However spiritual one may consider oneself to be, supposed "revelations" must be regarded with suspicion, especially when they present views in conflict with the other supposed "revelations." The guidance of the Spirit in the work of Bible interpretation is essential, but should be in conjunction with diligent study. Moreover, that study should be a thorough mastery of the text, and not merely the reading of books. I fear that much preaching on the subject of prophecy is merely the rehashing of other men's books. The average pastor is so busy with the details of the pastorate that he has little time for in-depth study of the Word. And, many lay teachers lack the equipment to do the kind of research necessary.

Well, now we have used up all our time on the sidetrack. I guess I'm responsible.

Never mind. I think these things had to be said before we pursue further these controversial matters of prophecy. I would like to make it clear again, before we part, that I am not interested in pushing any private ideas of my own. I am deeply concerned about the unfortunate strife and divisions in the Church over many areas of theology—not only prophecy. I deeply believe that these divisions are the result both of putting too much confidence in our human capacities, as well as the inadequate use of the capacities we have. It has not been my intention to offend anyone, but only to urge a spirit of charity and humility in the grave task of guiding the people of God in their search for truth.

Next time we'll get on with the subject of the Middle East. Meanwhile, let us pray for special help from the Holy Spirit. I make no special claims to piety, or revelations. I am merely a student of the Word, employing the equipment God has been pleased to give me, and praying for His guidance. If a few of His sheep have been guided and comforted in the course of this ministry, I am glad.