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Prophecy and the Prophets (Part 1) (September–October 1974)

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Man's perennial desire to peer into the future has always assured prophetic subjects a fair measure of interest. This popularity has enticed not a few into the dubious practice of fanciful interpretations, unfounded dogmatisms and extravagant date-fixing. The last of these has so consistently misfired that many honest and thoughtful people have been adversely affected and have come to discredit the accuracy of the Scriptures and to treat "prophetic truth" with a measure of disdain.

The words "Prophetic Truth", strictly used, convey the idea of communicating that which is divinely inspired. It encompasses both proclamatory and predictive truth. It is the latter we shall here consider.

First, we should define these terms. Proclamatory truth is the forth-telling of the mind of God, something proclaimed. Predictive truth is the foretelling of the purposes of God before they happen in history. So then, we can say that true predictive prophecy is the fore-telling of future events by virtue of direct communication from God, without which divine revelation the events foretold would not be foreknown.

General Considerations Of The Prophetic Scriptures

The Value of Prophetic Scripture: The import and the imperative of prophetic study can be readily assessed by

the fact that a greater body of Scripture is devoted to prophecy than to any other single subject. Peter wrote, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed” (2 Peter 1:19).

The General Purpose of Prophetic Scripture: This is mainly three-fold. To reveal the existence of an Omniscient God who knows the course of future events in detail, since in fact He has decreed them. “There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets” cried out Nebuchadnezzar, when Daniel revealed to him the meaning of the dream he had and its prophetic significance. Secondly, it is To reveal the purpose and the character of God. The Lord said (Isaiah 46:9-10), “I am God and there is none else. I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done.” Thirdly, to produce a salutory effect in the moral behaviour and spiritual attitudes of the recipients of the prophetic message. “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness” (2 Peter 3:11).

The Nature of Prophetic Scripture: First it is miraculous. Miraculous occurences proceed from divine power. Miraculous utterances proceed from divine wisdom. Every divine prophecy is a miracle. It is also moral. “If that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.” Of course Nineveh is a prime example of this. The powerful effect of Jonah’s prophetic message caused repentance and therefore preserved the city, for that time at least. Prophetic Scripture is however, primarily messianic. That is, relating to the Messiah of Israel. “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of

prophecy" (Revelation 19:10). This will be developed in our study at a later point.

The Effect Of Prophetic Scripture Upon Us Today

As we consider the prophetic Scriptures that have already been fulfilled to the letter, we are strengthened in our faith concerning the future. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in your hearts" (1 Peter 1:19). So a consideration of the prophetic Scriptures strengthens faith in a day of unbelief.

It also promotes stability in a day of upheaval. When old values are cast aside, and patterns and principles that seemed unshakable are being torn down, we are enabled to stand fast in view of soon-to-be-fulfilled promises. "…Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself … therefore… stand fast…" (Philippians 3:20-4:1).

Prophecy provides light in a day of darkness. When heaven seems silent and no special revelations shine upon the path, there is always the sure word of prophecy shining in the dark place. Habakkuk learned this in his dark day. God spoke from heaven and gave him the assurance He was not idle and presented him with a principle that enabled him to write one of the most assuring psalms in all the Bible.

Prophecy also preserves from deception in a day of departure. “But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them” (2 Timothy 3:13-14). Since these and other warnings of coming deceivers are plainly declared in the prophetic Scriptures, we can recognize the dangers and be preserved.

In like manner prophecy permeates peace in a day of crisis. The student of Scripture is rarely taken aback by current events. He is aware of the trend of things and knows where they are heading. So he is able to rest in the sure knowledge that God is but working out His decreed purposes to one glorious end. “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14).

These considerations of the value, purpose, nature and effects of the prophetic Scriptures may call us to a more diligent and balanced study of them.

(To be continued - Next: “What has prophecy to tell us?”)

Prophecy and The Prophets (Part 2) (November–December 1974)

From Ministry in Focus, Vol. 6 No. 6, November–December 1974.

There are four great prophetic themes in Scripture. There is the National. This relates to the nation of Israel. There is the International. This has to do with the Gentile nations. There is the Ecclesiastical. This is with reference to the Church. The Personal has to do with the Messiah.

There are three chief spheres in which prophecy functions. The prophetic Scriptures Illumine the Past. That is, the writing of history, in the light of God and His ways, is very much part of the prophetic message. The historic writers saw that the history of Israel was in fact a revelation of God.

The prophetic Scriptures also Judge the Present. So many times the word of the prophet was directed to the conduct of the people.

Lastly, the prophetic Scriptures Foretell the Future. This is the best known aspect of prophecy and the one that stirs the most interest. The vast amount of prophetic material in Scripture may seem to the student at first like a maze to which there seems little order. But this is not so. Predictive prophecy follows five main movements:

Prophecies that relate to Judgment on Israel for their sins against God; Prophecies that relate to Judgment on Gentile nations for their sins against Israel; Prophecies

that relate to the recovery and future glory of Israel; Prophecies concerning the blessing of the nations; and by far the most important element in predictive prophecy is that which relates to the Messiah, His sufferings and Glory.

Messianic Prophecy

Between the first and the last prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus Christ (Genesis 3:15; Revelation 22:20) there are hundreds of Messianic Prophecies. These fall into two general areas. Peter indicates these in 1:11 of his first letter, “The sufferings of Christ and the Glory that should follow.” The Lord Jesus affirmed that these are to be found in ALL the Old Testament Scriptures, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His Glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:26-27).

However, these two aspects have not always been clearly distinguished. For example, in Isaiah 61, part of that prophecy was fulfilled as recorded in Luke 4:21, but the remainder is not yet fulfilled. So that in our King James version, a single comma in verse 2 of Isaiah 61 represents a time gap of well over two thousand years. The failure to understand this prophetic perspective has led many into strange interpretations and grievous error.

This “gap” or parenthesis was veiled from the Old Testament prophets. That is, the period between the suffering and the Glory was not contemplated by them. So far, it has run into over 1900 years. Paul wrote this to the Ephesian saints, “The mystery of Christ which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men,

as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 3:4b-5). (See also 1 Peter 1:10-11).

These Messianic prophecies were presented by various prophetic devices. There are statements in plain language that predict such things as the birth, sufferings and glory of the Messiah. These prophecies are also presented by distinct prophetic types, such as Jonah, David, etc. Then there are prefigurations in Old Testament Institutions, such as the Passover, the sacrifices, and so on.

This Messianic message that pervades all of Scripture transcends all others, since the other three great prophetic themes are all focused in Christ. It is Christ who regathers Israel (Hosea 2:14-17). It is Christ who destroys her enemies (Revelation 19:11 on). It is Christ who judges the nations (Matthew 25). It is Christ who raptures the Church (1 Thessalonians 4). It is Christ who finally delivers the kingdom to God, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24 on).

After the Messianic message in the Old Testament, four hundred years of silence from God ensued. But God was not indifferent to the inhabitants of this vale of tears. God always moves according to a Divine schedule. Not according to the calendar and the clock, but according to moral and spiritual conditions. So we read, "But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son…" (Galatians 4:4).

Thus came to earth the Greatest Prophet of all. The One who could tell forth the mind and heart and purposes of God as none else could. "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by

the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son …" (Hebrews 1:1-2a).

(To be continued - Next: "THE PROPHETS")

Prophecy and the Prophets (Part 3) (January–February 1975)

From Ministry in Focus, Vol. 7 No. 1, January–February 1975.

Prophets In General

A study of the words used in the Old Testament to describe “prophets” will help us in the understanding of their qualifications and ministry.

“NABI”, meaning “to speak”, is a word translated “prophet”. Thus prophets were speakers for God, to men. The Lord said to Moses, “Thou shalt speak all that I command thee” (Ex. 7:2). Jeremiah reports, “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, (Jer. 1:9). David said; “The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue”, (2 Sam. 23:2). So we find in the Old Testament, about 3500 times, (someone has calculated) the words, “thus saith the Lord…”

“ROEH” is another word translated “prophet” and means “a seer”, (1 Sam. 9:9 etc). The prophet not only heard the Word of the Lord, he also saw the Vision of the Lord. The book of Isaiah opens with the words, “The vision of Isaiah...”. In Numbers 12:6 we read, “The Lord said, ‘If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make Myself known unto him in a vision and will speak unto him in a dream”.

This “seeing” is two-fold in its spectrum. It is Supernatural, that is, beyond the limits of natural and

physical vision. In the New Testament we read of the organs of this sight as the “eyes of your heart”. It is also Supra-temporal, that is, when the prophet is transported for the time being, from the sphere of the temporal into the sphere of the eternal, and stands above the human conceptions of time. Thus he can see the future, either as in the past, as in Isa. 53, “He was wounded for our transgressions”, or in the present, as in Isa. 9:6 “For unto us a child is born”, or as in the future, “...and the government shall be upon His shoulder”.

“ZOPHIM” is yet another descriptive word for the prophet. It means “to watch”. So then, prophets are also watchmen. Habakkuk said; “I will enter upon my watch and set myself upon my watchtower and will watch carefully so as to see what He will say unto me”. The Lord says in Jer. 6:17 “Watchmen have I set over you…”. So they addressed themselves to the current situation of their contemporaries and were, warners of the people, the conscience of the community, and shepherds or guardians of the flock. As watchmen, they looked into the future. Isaiah said; “I stand continually upon the watchtower” (21:8).

“HOLY” was another word descriptive of prophets. They were known as “holy men”. “Holy men of God spake as they were moved”. So by reason of their special ministry and dealings with God, they were recognized to be distinct, separate, men with a difference. Yet they were none the less “MEN”. In spite of their heavenly visions, unearthy dreams, and unique dealings with God, they were still “men of like passions”. Their individuality was not set aside. God used their personality. In fact He had made their individual characteristics. The Lord said to Jeremiah, “Before I formed thee…I knew thee…I

sanctified thee…I ordained thee". The Lord didn't need an Elijah at that moment, a man with lightning on his brow and thunder in his voice. He wanted a man who could weep. So He made one…Jeremiah.

Of all the Old Testament Prophets however, one stands out, uniquely, Moses. What made this man superior in the prophetic office? There were three qualities to the prophetic ministry of Moses that made him preeminent above his prophetic peers.

He had Direct Communication from God. The Lord said, "Hear now my words, if there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, I will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house, with him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently and not in dark speeches," (Num. 12:6-8).

He had Common Experience with God. What was exceptional and ecstatic with other prophets, was ordinary and usual with Moses. "And the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend", (Ex. 33:11).

Moses also had a Distinct Revelation of God. "The similitude of the Lord shall he behold" (Num. 12:8). Little wonder then that we read in Deut. 34:10 "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses".

Another Prophet Promised

The hopes of ever seeing another prophet like the great Moses might well be clouded. After all, who could ever be closer to God than was Moses? But the promise was given, "I will raise them up a prophet from among their

brethren like unto thee (Moses) and will put My words in His mouth…," (Deut. 18:18). Who was that Prophet?

After the Lord Jesus performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes, the men said, "This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world", (Jn. 6:14).

After the offer of living water to the thirsty, the people said; "Of a truth this is the Prophet", (Jn. 7:40).

After the healing of the lame man in the temple gate Peter testified; "And He shall send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you:…For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like unto me…", (Acts 3:20, 22).

The Lord Jesus Christ is then this Greatest of all prophets. So does God the Father command us, "Hear ye Him…".

The Greatest Prophet

The Supreme Revealer of God was indeed the Son of God. He told forth the Mind of God and foretold the purposes of God. He excels all other prophets by an infinite measure. He was superior to Moses in His worthiness for Glory. "For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses…", (Heb. 3:3). He was superior to Moses in His Glorious accomplishments. "Moses verily was faithful in all His house", but the Lord Jesus Christ builded and rules over and possesses the house (Heb. 3:5-6). He is transcedent in the Revelation He brought. He brought a new revelation of God as a Father seeking spiritual children as worshippers (Jn. 4:23). He brought the new revelation of the Church as a unity (Matt. 16:18).

He was greater than Moses in the Range of His Prophecy. He Predicted concerning the Kingdom of Heaven, His own sufferings and glory, the Jewish nation, the Church and the present age, judgements to come, the end of the age and the consummation of all things.

Conclusion

From the first uttered prophecy in Genesis 3:15 to the last in Rev. 22:20, the whole sweep of Prophetic Truth and the general witness of the prophets, focuses and indeed is consummated in our Glorious Lord and His purposes of Grace and Glory and Government. “To Him give all the prophets witness that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins”, (Acts 10:43). All who believe on Him, searching the Scriptures, look forward in adoring wonder to that moment when, “…He shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power…” and “…He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God…that God may be all in all”. (1 Cor. 15).

Principles of Interpretation (Part 1) (September–October 1975)

From Ministry in Focus, Vol. 7 No. 5, September–October 1975.

Introduction

Many thinking people today are coming to realize, as they look out on a world reeling from one problem to another, that the human race is being catapulted toward some cataclysmic event. Nations of opposing ideaologies have perfected weapons of mass destruction. The balance of nature is being upset by the careless and selfish misuse of its resources. There is a world-wide disintegration of morals in every level of society. This is inevitably accompanied by disease, drug addiction, and disasters. The forces of law and order, and the institutions of justice, are being scorned and denuded of necessary powers essential to the safety of citizens.

Never has peace been eulogized so articulately, symbolized so frequently, and agonized for so pathetically. Well might these thoughtful people ask, “Where is it all going to end?” Can we know anything with certainty? How, then, can we know?

There is a reliable source of information from which we may discover where we are in history, why we are where we are, and where we are inevitably going. Most importantly, we may also discover from this infallible source how we may prepare for the future, right here and now. That source is the Bible, the Word of God.

Three Evidences

Can we be sure that the Bible in its original form is the Word of God? Yes, we can.

It appears to be by external evidence. Consider its super-natural production. This collection of books was penned by about forty writers, covering a time span of over 1,500 years. The men used to inscribe the words came from all walks of life. Peasants and gardeners, kings and commoners, schooled and unschooled, and in most cases with no knowledge that their writing was ever to be included in a collection of inspired writings. Yet, “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21b). These men of distinct personalities were not used by the Lord as machines, but as the instruments of an orchestra, under the direction of the leader, blend their different sounds into one harmonious symphony, so the Word of the Lord under His direction was made to pass through these various instruments of inspiration to form one Volume, with one Central Theme, and all in concord and harmony. Yes, it certainly seems to be more than just another great book. But more than seeming to be Divine —

It claims to be by internal evidence. In the Pentateuch the words, “The Lord spoke…,” appear about 700 times, and in the books of the prophets, many times we read, “The Lord said” or “Thus saith the Lord.” But there is still a third evidence that the Bible is Divine.

It proves to be by human experience. Prophecies recorded in it have been fulfilled in detail. Promises made have been realized. Guidance given has proven to be accurate. The most telling experience is, of course,

that of salvation made real in the hearts and lives of those who have believed the Gospel contained within the sacred page. Students and scholars who comb the Scriptures daily cannot help but be amazed at the beauty of its language, the symmetry of its design, the clear logic of its arguments, and the powerful authority of its declarations.

While it must be acknowledged that there are areas in the Bible which are difficult to understand, yet the sweep of its truth, the broad avenues of its doctrines, and the clarity of its Gospel are not beyond the ordinary man in the street, when enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

Any intelligent and fruitful examination of this Book demands at least three things. (1) Divine inspiration—it must be accepted unquestioningly by the student as the inspired Word of God. (2) Accurate interpretation—it must be interpreted by set principles. (3) Personal application— it must be examined with a view to obedience.

This series of studies will consider the second of these, that is, accurate interpretation according to set principles.

Five Fundamentals

As we approach a study of the Bible, certain facts must be acknowledged. First, since these writings are “God-breathed,” we know that the spiritual truths they contain cannot be discerned by the unaided natural mind (see 1 Corinthians 2:14). Secondly, since the student is dependent on the Holy Spirit to enlighten and instruct him, then He must not be grieved, and sins against Him, like all other sins, must be confessed.

Thirdly, there is no class monopoly on knowledge of the Word, since the Holy Spirit indwells every believer. All have the capacity to discover truths from the Word. There are some, of course, to whom the Holy Spirit gives special gifts for the work of studying the Word and expounding it.

Fourthly, while intellectual capacity and academic discipline may be sanctified to the Lord for the study of the Word, the knowledge of God is not dependent on these things. The knowledge of God comes by revelation. While some of us have not had the privilege of college or university training, we must not use this as an excuse for lazy and careless study. Conversely, many among us today are college graduates, but this, even though it be a Bible college, does not assume the knowledge of God. A technical knowledge of the Bible as to its structure and doctrines is not the same as the apprehension of God Himself in and through His Word. Some of the richest ministry I have ever had the privilege of hearing has come through the instrumentality of Scottish coal miners and fishermen. They were profound students of the Word; men who truly knew God.

Fifthly, God does use consecrated capacities and abilities. Therefore, it is our responsibility to develop by discipline and maintain by constant application those faculties which God has given to us. For instance, when we read Peter’s letters, we are encouraged that God could take a rough Galilean fisherman and inspire and instruct him to such a degree as to pen the words we find there.

It is an interesting sidelight that in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, each man was given a talent, or

talents, “according to his several ability.” God, who formed us to begin with, harmonizes our spiritual gift with our natural abilities, though the one must not be mistaken for the other.

A bricklayer I once knew, when he became a Christian and had an exercise to minister God’s Word, went to night school to learn English grammar better, since he felt that the ministry of the Word demanded the finest form of expression.

In the accurate interpretation of Scripture, certain factors must be considered. As in God’s Work in creation there are set laws in the universe, so too in His work of revelation there are laws or principles, that when recognized and used, unlock a rich storehouse of truth to the student. For instance, there is the law of first mention. That is, we are to take special note of the first time a thing occurs in Scripture. This is fundamental and introductory, and it often proves a key to the whole teaching of the matter. As a case in point, Genesis 3:15 is the fountainhead of prophetic truth from which the ever growing stream of prophecy flows, until it pours at last into the river of life on the one hand and the lake of fire on the other. Likewise, Matthew 16:18 can be considered the fountainhead of Church truth in the New Testament, pouring into the tumultous rapids of the book of Acts and on into the deep waters of the epistles.

There is, however, a human element to the study of Scripture. That is the interpretation of its truths. This may be influenced by our environment, our early training, or our personal preferences. It is such differences of interpretation that divide schools of thought between, for instance, the millenialist and the

amillennialist, the rapturists and the selective rapturists, and so on. We can see, then, that it is essential that we settle our minds on a proper set of interpretive principles and apply them consistently in our study.

It is a lack of this that has spawned the various heresies and cults on every hand, and indeed the many divisions which, sadly enough, exist among the people of God.

In our next study we shall endeavor to consider some of these principles.

Principles of Interpretation (Part 2) (January–February 1976)

From Ministry in Focus, Vol. 8 No. 1, January–February 1976.

In our previous study, we saw that any intelligent approach to the study of the Scriptures must acknowledge certain fundamentals. Since the Scriptures are “God-breathed” then we cannot discern them by the unaided natural mind. God has given to the believer the Holy Spirit to lead him into all truth. Since then we are all thus dependent on the Holy Spirit, He must not be grieved by unconfessed sin nor unworthy attitudes in the study of the Scriptures. Since the Holy Spirit indwells every believer, there is no class monopoly on the discovery of Divine truths. While it is recognized that some have been especially gifted to be teachers, all may learn directly from the Holy Spirit. Since the knowledge of God comes by revelation, academic training and high intellectual capacity are not essentials for Bible study. However, the lack of these are not to be made an excuse for sloth nor indolence in study. All capacities and learning are to be consecrated to the Lord, and to be maintained at the peak of efficiency for God. Certain factors are also to be considered. As in God’s great work in creation, so too, in the word of Revelation, there are set laws which must be accepted. However, we recognize that there is the human element to consider, that of interpretation. This may be coloured by training, environment or preferences of a purely personal nature. Thus we see the vital importance of

having set principles of interpretation that will be applied consistently in all study of the Bible.

As we approach the Scriptures certain facts are to be recognized. First, God has a program for His creation. Nebuchadnezzar made that discovery: “He doeth according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?” (Daniel 4:35). Since God loves His creatures and has included them in His plans, He is pleased to reveal that program to them. On one occasion He said to the House of Jacob, “I have declared the former things from the beginning;… (Isaiah 48:3a).

God has voluntarily chosen to limit the vehicle of that revelation to terms of reference that are intelligible to His creatures. In Numbers 12:6 we read, “If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him…” God has also given today in this age the capacity to receive Divine revelation from the Word. This capacity is first, eternal life. This is the means whereby we may know God. Then it is the “spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (Ephesians 1:16). This revelation, however, is not simply to satisfy our curiosity, nor to make us “prophetic experts,” but to adjust behaviour, inspire loving and acceptable service, and to encourage hope.

Since our previous studies in this series considered the prophets and prophecy, we shall look at the interpretation of the prophetic Scriptures. It will be profitable to consider three important principles.

1. The Principle of Prophetic Perspective.

2. The Principle of Prophetic Chronology.

3. The Principle of Prophetic Terminology.

A great deal of confusion exists today, which need not, if only the first principle were observed. Prophetic perspective must be taken into account because, in the realm of eternal things, time and space are not governed as on the earth. Therefore, it is not surprising to find prophetic events presented on the same visual and temporal plane, yet historically separated, sometimes by thousands of years. This can be illustrated by the stars. While to the earthbound viewer, there are stars that appear near to one another, yet they are separated by deep space, millions of light years in scope.

A few examples of this principle can easily be demonstrated. Isaiah 61:1-3 presents a prophetic revelation seemingly all on the same plane of time, yet, in the fulfilment of it, we know that well over 1900 years have already come between the first part, fulfilled in Luke 4:18 on, and the latter part, “the day of vengeance…,” which is not yet. In the King James Version all those centuries are represented by a single comma. The prophetic dream of the image in chapter 2 of Daniel was presented as one, yet many centuries were represented by the kingdoms spoken of there. The prophetic truths in Micah 5 appear as one consecutive program, yet they actually sweep from the incarnation to the kingdom.

Some modern song writers seem particularly prone to this confusion. Such thrilling melodies as “The King is Coming” is a hodge-podge of prophetic confusion which fails to recognize the difference between the coming of the Lord for the Church and the coming of the King with the Church and the armies of Heaven.

The Principle of Prophetic Chronology must be applied if we are to apprehend just what God is saying. In the prophetic Scriptures we read of “hours,” “days,” “times,” “ages,” “now” either in the simple form or qualified, such as “the ages… to come.” The Lord Jesus spoke of “His hour,” clearly that time when the work of redemption would be carried out, not just a period of sixty minutes. It speaks of a rather brief yet important period of great significance either for good or evil. “This is your hour and the power of darkness,” the Lord said to the leaders of the people in Gethsemane.

The Day of Christ is used with reference to Christ and His Church in the heavens, while the Day of the Lord is always used with regards to judgment (see Zephaniah 1:14-18). The Day of God is the eternal day when the present universe has been dissolved and a new system inaugurated wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Peter 3:12). The “last day” is not a day of twenty-four hours absolutely at the end of everything. It is the great closing period in which God will make manifest the result of Satan’s wiles, man’s works and His own ways. “Man’s day” is the long period in which man has sought to rule his own affairs according to his own thoughts, his own will, and his own ends. The “Day of Salvation,” is that period from the advent of the Saviour till the rapture of the Church. While many will be saved out of the time of tribulation, salvation will not be the character of those days.

“Times,” are also spoken of variously. There is reference to “these last times” in 1 Peter 1:20. That is the period of uncertain duration that followed all the “times” previous to the coming to earth of the Lord Jesus. The “latter times” in 1 Timothy 4:1 is a period within the last

time. It is in contrast to “earlier” times, as the latter rains were in contrast to the earlier rains, and came just before the harvest. “The last time” in a more specific way is that time when the antichrist will be personified in an individual, the context bearing out whether the expression is used generally, or specifically.

To Be Continued

Principles of Interpretation (Part 3) (March–April 1976)

From Ministry in Focus, Vol. 8 No. 2, March–April 1976.

This is the third article in J. Boyd Nicholson's series on Principles of Interpretation. In it he deals instructively with the dispensations. The next installment in brother Nicholson's helpful series will be on "The Principles of Prophetic Terminology."

There is another word often used in prophetic discourses. It is "dispensation." Some have called this word "a prickly irritant," no doubt because of its careless and extravagant use by others. Augustine, the great theologian, said: "Distinguish the ages and the Scriptures are plain. An apprehension of the dispensations is vital to a clear grasp of God's Word. Where these dispensations are not distinguished, there is only confusion in very important areas of God's revelation.

However, this system of interpretation which has been called "Dispensationalism," has had, and still has, some bitter opponents. Phillip Mauro called it "the leaven of dispensationalism" and stated that it "is modernistic in the strictest sense." Daniel Fuller says dispensationalism is "inconsistent and unable to harmonize itself with Biblical data." Many others have attached both it and the men who have held this view.

We can see that it is important then to settle in our minds the validity of this approach to the Scriptures. What then is a "dispensation"? The word appears in some form in the New Testament about 19 times and is

variously translated, “stewardship,” “dispensation,” “chamberlain,” “governors.” The word itself, “oikonomia,” is a compound word from “oikos,” a house, and “nomos,” a law, and conveys the idea of the administration of a household on behalf of the owner. So the word “stewardship” readily comes to mind, and indeed in the A.V. the word is related to stewardship 11 times. What then are the characteristics of this arrangement?

There are two parties. One who delegates and one who discharges the responsibilities. There are specific responsibilities. There is a definite accountability as to how the duties were discharged. Changes may be made if there is unfaithfulness, and a stewardship may be ended by the owner, or changed.

We Might say, then, that a dispensation, in Scripture, is a Divinely established stewardship of a particular revelation of God’s mind and will, in which, those delegated are accountable to respond to God, during that period in which that stewardship is in force. A dispensation is not simply a time period, though of course it will be operative within certain bounds of time.

Can we then distinguish such dispensations in the Bible? Obviously, there are two main parts to the Bible, the Old and New Testament, or Covenant. These two covenants are in marked contrast. There are two distinct partnerships. In the Old, it is a Nation. In the New, it is the Church. There are two differing progeny. In the Old it is earthly, springing from Abraham. In the New, it is heavenly, proceeding from Christ. There are two diverse principles. In the Old, it is Law. In the New, it is Grace (John 1:17).

We can thus see from a superficial view of Scripture that there are at least two dispensations. However, a careful study will show that God dealt with men differently at different times and expected a specific response according to the stewardship of specific revelations of Himself.

The first, we notice, is that God dealt with man in INNOCENCY, and was given the stewardship, as regent, of “every living thing” (Genesis 1:28). He was accountable to God to rule and tend his charge with but one restriction. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not to be eaten of. So long as this stewardship was discharged faithfully, there was open communion with God. The rest we know.

After the “fall” (the spirit of man fell into the realm of the soul and became subject to its emotions; the soul fell under the domination of the body and its lusts; the body fell under the dominion of sin and its laws in the members; so the “fall” was complete), came exclusion from God and a new way of approach based on blood sacrifice and a new stewardship of MORAL RESPONSIBILITY. This dispensation climaxed in unrestrained evil (Genesis 6:5), which God dealt with by the judgement of the flood.

After the “flood,” God placed a new stewardship on man, that of HUMAN GOVERNMENT. The previous restraint had been internal; now came an added restraint, external civil government. This dispensation culminated in Babel and the scattering of the race, (Genesis 11).

After the “failure” of man to Govern under God, God did a new thing and began to form a nation through which He would bless the race. He called Abraham to father

this nation and gave him an unconditional promise. Thus was entered upon the dispensation of PROMISE.

After the “forming” of the nation, the dispensation of Promise was superceded by the giving of the LAW at Sinai. However, this only added to man’s responsibility. It did not abrogate the principles of government: Conscience, that is restraint from within, or self-government; Human Government, that is restraint from without, that is Civil Government; Law, that is restraint from above, or Divine Government, all laid a burden of responsibility on man.

The history of Israel, as we know is a record of the continual violation of the law. They utterly failed to see that the law was not given to MAKE man righteous, but to show that man was unrighteous and to manifest the righteousness of God.

After the “futility” of the law to impart righteousness was demonstrated, God sent His own Son. “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His Own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3).

How God is going to deal with man in GRACE. That is; apart from man’s vaunted merits or multiplied demerits, God is going to provide freely for man what no other system could provide, and that is, a complete salvation from sin, and unhindered entrance into the Holy Presence of God, and the realization of the fulness of life and the fulfilment of the purpose of existence.

This dispensation of the grace of God is where we are now, historically. God is calling a people out of all nations. These are known as the “ekklesia,” the “called out ones” or the “assembly,” commonly called “the

Church." The stewardship to which men are now responsible is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This age and dispensation will be brought to a close by a series of prophetic events beginning with the catching up of the Church. The raising of those "that sleep in Jesus" will unite, visibly, the whole Body for the first time in history.

This will bring about the onset of a series of events which will culminate in the "Day of the Lord" — namely the appearing of the Lord in power and glory to set up His rule on the earth and thus usher in the dispensation of THE KINGDOM. This will be the final stewardship of men on earth, when man at last will be given the privilege of perfect government and all its attendant benefits. Even in this, man will reveal the utter depravity of the human heart by rebellion under the leadership of Satan, for a brief spell. This glorious kingdom will ultimately be delivered up to God even the Father… that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). This is called "the end" in verse 24. Not the "finish," but the ultimate goal, the consummation.

To fail to distinguish the difference in the dispensations, and God's dealings with men in these various stewardships, is to confuse Law and Grace, Israel and the Church, the Coming of Christ for the Church and the Appearing of the Lord with the Church in power and great glory.

Sound principles of interpretation will enable the student to move from the Scriptures to his beliefs and convictions and not run into the folly of the reverse by moving from our convictions to the Scriptures, making them fit our pre-concieved notions.

Next - the Principles of Prophetic Terminology.

Principles of Interpretation (Part 4) (May–June 1976)

From Ministry in Focus, Vol. 8 No. 3, May–June 1976.

Terminology

Since the Bible is a revelation of God, Who is infinite, and deals with eternal and spiritual things, it is easy to see that the vast scope of such things goes far beyond the limits of plain language. God has thus been pleased to use various literary devices to convey His revelation to the sons of men. All resources of language are pressed into service to make things clear to the human mind and spirit, and to more fully convey truth that otherwise could not be readily discerned.

Of these many forms and styles, there are certain main ones. These are: Typology, Symbolism, Parable, Allegory and, of course, Plain Language.

Typology

Because of some extravagant claims and fanciful interpretations on the part of some with regard to types, this form of presentation has fallen into disrepute in certain areas. However, it must be established that typology is a valid means of Biblical interpretation.

Types are God’s “object lessons” whereby He makes clear His profound ideas and “deep things.”

What then is a type? An examination of the New Testament usage of this word will give us some help. The word tupos is translated in nine ways: “ensample,

example, fashion, figure, form, manner, pattern, print, type."

Certain happenings are types, as "samples." We see this from 1 Corinthians 10:11: "Now all these things happened unto them for examples (types), and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come."

Certain people are types as "patterns" to follow. This is seen from 1 Peter 5:3. There, elders are exhorted to be "ensamples" to the flock.

Certain objects can be types, insofar as they represent visible what is invisible. An illustration of this is found in Acts 7:43: "… the tabernacle of Molech, and the star of your god, Rephan, figures (types) which ye made to worship …."

The whole body of doctrine is a type of God, being a revealed impression of the invisible God. "… ye have obeyed from the heart that form (type) of doctrine which was delivered you."

If we may try to define a true Biblical type, perhaps we might say: A true Biblical type is a person, event, or institution which has a designed correspondence with its antitype, and by which we more clearly apprehend the truth concerning the latter.

A word of caution is necessary in the use of typology to interpret Scripture. The type must have more than a resemblance or suggestion; it must have been designed to typify. For example, hymnology has formed ideas that are sometimes hard to shake. Canaan is frequently sung of as Heaven. Yet, for Israel, there was conflict with

more enemies in Canaan than there ever was in the wilderness. No, in Heaven, the enemy will not be there.

Symbolism

Many kinds of symbols are used. Certain persons, offices, events, actions and things are seen to be symbols. The names of the symbols are to be understood literally, and from this their first import is to be sought. The nature of the symbol is to be appreciated as well. For instance, the nature of a lion as a symbol is clearly distinct from that of a lamb.

There are at least three things to which we should pay particular attention with respect to a symbol. First, resemblance. There is some resemblance between the symbol and what it symbolizes. For example, Jezebel and the false church. Second, references. Other references to the same symbol should be examined, since generally each symbol has one significance throughout the entire Bible. Third, revelation. We are not left to our own imagination nor ingenuity in the interpretation of symbols. Usually, if not in every case, the meaning of the symbol is found somewhere in the Word of God.

Parable and Allegory

Since these are almost interchangeable terms, let’s consider them together for the present. The object of each is similar. Each is a narrative constructed or related to convey spiritual truth. Many false notions have been hatched by misinterpreted parables, forcing them to mean what the Lord never intended. Details are pressed into prominence to vindicate a subjective opinion. This is very dangerous ground. Interpretation of parables should be consistent with certain principles.

Every parable is used to communicate one central truth. All details are to be considered subservient and consistent to that. The details, while interesting and sometimes very suggestive, must not be pressed to mean more than was intended.

Parables have two senses: the literal and the spiritual. To understand the latter the first must be explained. Furthermore, parables have three parts: the external, the explanation, and the extent. Parables are windows to the structure of truth in order to let in light, not footings on which to base doctrine.

Allegory is “saying something otherwise.” It is a narrative which to its literal meaning a more spiritual one is added. A difference must be noted between plainly interpreting a Scriptural allegory and the error of allegorizing plain Scripture. The great dangers of the allegorical method of interpretation are numerous. This method speculates; it does not elucidate. It makes the interpreter his own rule of what is .truth, throwing him back on his own ingenuity and not upon the Holy Spirit.

Plain Language

Since the Bible is a revelation, then we can be sure that God intended us to discover its meaning. Therefore, we can be confident that wherever Types, Symbols, Parables and Allegories are used they will never contradict that which is stated in plain language in other places throughout the Scriptures.

The Mystery of Affliction (Part 1) (January–February 1978)

From Ministry in Focus, Vol. 10 No. 1, January–February 1978.

It is an alarming fact of our day that among believers there is hardly a life that is not touched by affliction in some form. There is hardly a home that has not known some crushing blow of the enemy. Perhaps as never before has Satan attacked the saints so persistently, so methodically, so mercilessly. Many cry out of anguished and sometimes perplexed hearts, “Will the sun ever shine again?” There are many questions, but not always answers, so there is the danger of giving up, just fainting under it all.

While none of us have ever been called to suffer as did Job, yet an examination of his experience can be a help and a cheer to many a suffering saint.

Lest some untried and unscarred believer, setting out in life, think that such a study of grief and sorrow be somewhat gloomy or irrelevant, may it be said that every child of God sooner or later will bury a tear-stained face in the bosom of the Father and sob, “Why, oh why, oh why?”

The book of Job is unsurpassed as a piece of literature for its eloquence of language and poetic style. But more, it is a living, throbbing masterpiece on human experience, divine faithfulness, and satanic activity.

It is a treatise on “the mystery of affliction”. By this book out of the far distant past, God draws aside the veil

between time and eternity. He permits us to view the royal court of heaven in session, the mighty power of Satan in action, and the whole gamut of human emotion, as a suffering man reacts to the deepest experiences of life.

It is not our purpose in this article to spend time critically examining this exquisite piece of ancient literature to discover who exactly Job was, nor when exactly he lived, nor who was the scribe inspired to pen the words. It is sufficient for the present purpose to affirm that Job was a real man. He was a man who lived and breathed, a man who passed through the mystifying experience of deep and seemingly unanswerable suffering.

It can also be affirmed that every saint whether now suffering, presently going to suffer, or who has gone through deep waters, may derive comfort for the soul, assurance for the mind, and revival for the heart by an examination of what God has revealed in this ancient book. It is, in fact, as up-to-date as tomorrow's newspaper.

The book opens significantly and simply with the statement, "There was a man." A simple division of it may present Job in four ways: JOB the MAN, JOB and his ENEMY, JOB and his FRIENDS, Job and his GOD.

Job The Man

As we read this book, we get to change the emphasis of the opening words. As we begin, we tend to stress the word "was". There WAS a man…" But as we get into the book and come to its victorious conclusion, we find it better to put the stress on the first and the last words,

“THERE was a MAN…” If ever there was a real man, it was Job. He surely was an outstanding specimen.

MORALLY, he was a man of INTEGRITY. These words are God’s testimony to his character. In relation to himself, Job was “perfect”. That does not mean at all that he was without sin. Only one man was ever impeccable — our beloved Lord Jesus. It simply means mature, fully developed, not only physically, but intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. He was, we might say, a well-rounded personality. In relation to other people, it is said that he was “upright”; that simply means that in all his dealings he was straight up and down. In relation to God, he “feared God”, a much needed emotion in our day, when men are seeking to humanize God and deify man, a day when familiarities are thrown at the Almighty as though He was but a man. We need a fresh view of the majesty and immensity of the God of the Bible.

The argument for familiarity is that we in this dispensation have an intimacy with God as a Father, and therefore can be more free with Him. It is doubtful if that reasoning would have impressed Saul of Tarsus as he lay blinded by glory on the Damascus turnpike, or old John, prostrate as dead on the Patmos rocks. No, the men who knew God as none of us have ever known Him — Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, and others — knew what the fear of God was. F.W. Faber wrote about it well:

My God, how wonderful Thou art,
Thy majesty how bright!
How beautiful Thy mercy seat,
In depths of burning light!
How dread are Thine eternal years,

O everlasting Lord,
By prostrate spirits day and night
Incessantly adored!
O how I fear Thee, living God,
With deepest, tend'rest fears,
And worship Thee with trembling hope,
And penitential tears!

In relation to the world around him, he "shunned evil". His whole life was in balance. His relationships were right and mature.

MATERIALLY, he was a man of WEALTH. His treasures included a happy family, for God had given him seven sons and three daughters. Seven times a year they feasted, likely a kind of celebration on the birthday of each of the sons. Their closeness as a family is seen in that they never failed to invite their sisters. A close and happy family is great wealth indeed. He had also material wealth; sheep, camels, oxen, and asses in great numbers represented his worth. To administer and care for all this, he had a staff of servants — "a very great household."

SOCIALLY, he was a man of RANK, "the greatest of all the men of the east." SPIRITUALLY, he was a man of GOD. He sanctified his family. They all respected him, for when he sent to do this, they did not mock him nor scorn his spiritual exercise. He sacrificed for them; he interposed continually and realistically for them. He honestly recognized the possibility of their hearts. He had no blind infatuation for his family; he deeply loved them.

Now this was the man who came under such trial and perplexity, not because of his wealth, his standing, nor

his lovely family. It was because of his spiritual character.

It becomes clear as we read this book that there is a lesson for us. If we seek to live for God, to have our lives developed and brought to maturity, if we endeavor to be righteous before men and shun that which is evil, then we virtually attract the attention of the enemy, and will come under attack in some way.

Job And His Enemy

At the very opening of this ancient book, we have seen a real man brought before us, “There was a man…” Now in verse six of chapter one we read, “There was a day…” What a significant day that was in the life of this man, but he did not know it then. We do, because God here draws aside the veil between time and eternity. We are permitted to view a session of the royal court of heaven.

Representatives of the angelic corps of ministering spirits present themselves before their Sovereign. It would appear that these angelic beings, “the sons of God,” have some sort of ministry relative to the human race and that they must give account of their activities.

In the midst of these appears a sinister figure, Satan himself. The words “in the midst” seem to imply or suggest concealment. But God knows he is there and calls him forth to answer some questions.

All unknown to Job, he became the battle ground between God and Satan that day. It is one thing to be IN the battle. But it is quite another to BE the battle. So God singles Satan out and challenges him with respect to Job. “Hast thou considered my servant Job …?” is the question. Now this “considering” is not simply a passing

glance. It is a deep word with some feeling. “Hast thou watched him, examined him, walked around him, set thy heart on him?” What a picture of the adversary as a slavering lion, walking round the intended victim, seeking for an opening.

Some time ago, representatives of the World Council of Churches met in Florida. It was reported in the secular press that a poll had been taken of these religionists on certain Biblical matters. One question posed these people was, “Do you believe in a personal devil?” Over 80 per cent denied the reality of Satan. The reporter then went out on the streets of the city to ask the public the same questions. Overwhelmingly, the people acknowledged belief in the real personal presence and activity of Satan. The reported concluded that he had found more faith on the sidewalks of the city than in the representatives of the W.C.C. It is only half a step from denying the existence of Satan to denying the existence of God. It is the same volume that informs us of both.

Here is one man who had no doubts about the wiles and reality of Satan. While Job did not know at the time why he was suffering, God has revealed to us all that went on behind the scenes.

The Enemy

This is no mere influence, but a being with all the attributes of real personality. He is evil. Satan is no joking matter. He is no cartoon figure, dressed in red tights with pointed ears and a black mustache. He is mighty. Make no mistake about it. Satan is still the mightiest created being. Thank God, he is not almighty, but none-the-less he is invested with powers far beyond human capacities either to apprehend or overcome by

ourselves. Even Michael, that great angel, would not bring a railing accusation against this evil one but said, “The Lord rebuke thee.” (Jude 9).

He is pictured in various ways in Scripture. At the beginning, we see him as a serpent, beguiling and defiling with the poison of sin. As a lion, he is frightening and devouring, walking about and roaring. As a wolf, he is scattering and destroying. But his most frightening and most dangerous aspect is as an angel of light, diverting and deceiving.

Satan has certain prerogatives still. He can enter the presence of God to rail against the saints. He attacks the people of God personally and directly or through his minions. He denies the proclamations of God. He still says today as he did at the beginning, “Yea, hath God said?”

As to his program, it is one of constant activity. His response to God’s first question was, “…going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it.” A spirit being alone does not walk, having by itself no body and therefore no legs. How then does he move? He “goes” as a spirit being and he “walks” in the bodies of all who are under his dominion and directives. His program is also one of cruel malignity. As an adversary, he speaks against the Lord’s own. Slander and lies and calumny are his stock in trade. Innuendo and gossip and clandestine and he operates mostly under a cloke of concealed identity. When the servant who escaped the fire that consumed the sheep and the other servants reported to Job, he called it “the fire of God… fallen from heaven.” But it was not divine, it was Satanic. So we should not be surprised in our day of unusual

manifestations to hear again the ecstatic cry of some who are void of spiritual discernment, “the fire of God is fallen from heaven” when, if the truth were known, not all fire is of God and not all that is in the heavenlies is heavenly in character (Ephesians 6:12).

Satan’s prelude to the attack is first to malign Job’s motives. He insinuates that Job’s piety is dependent on his profit and his spirituality is bound up with his substance. Never-the less he acknowledges God’s protective barrier around His servant. He calls it a hedge. The word is a primitive one — to entwine, to fence in. Job uses it to describe his body as it hedges in his inner man (ch. 10:11). None can penetrate into the person within, and the man cannot, at will, step out beyond that fence. Now God gives Satan permission to attack all that surrounds Job, but “himself,” the person within, was to be preserved.

The First Attack

Satan begins by attacking Job’s source of commerce, his oxen and his asses. Thus he sought to ruin Job FINANCIALLY. Next Satan attacks Job’s source of comfort, his sheep, from which he derived both warmth and food. Thus he sought to distress Job MATERIALLY. The attack was on Job’s source of conveyance, his camels. He sought to isolate Job COMMERCIALLY. Next it was Job’s source of cooperation, his servants, that was destroyed. Now Satan seeks to disturb him DOMESTICALLY. Then the most cruel of all blows, Satan attacked Job’s source of consolation, his family. Now Satan seeks to wreck him EMOTIONALLY.

All that on one day! Little wonder that we read, “There was a day”! What a day! Job would never forget it as

long as he lived. First in chapter one, the veil is withdrawn, then the hedge is withdrawn, then the blessings are withdrawn. Poor Job! What a sight that day as the sun went down; there is Job prostrate on the ground, head shaven and garment rent. Now surely Satan's aim will be realized. What was that? The destruction of a man? No, more than that; it was to bring God under the curse of a man. It was really to rob God of praise and worship and the honor due to His holy name. Satan doesn't mind what means he uses to gain his end, to rob God of His glory. He doesn't mind how many humans suffer, nor how deeply they are brought into anguish, if only they will blaspheme God. Every attack on a child of God is really an attack against his God.

What then is Job's initial response in that dark day of sorrow? How beautiful! "(he) fell down upon the ground and worshipped … blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor attributed folly to God" (margin). Satan said he would curse God. But in Job's heart there was humiliation, in his spirit worship, and on his lips blessing. Now we see the proper emphasis of verse one, "THERE was a MAN".

"In all this…" — all this financial ruin, all this material loss, all this personal grief — "Job sinned not".

So the initial attack failed. But the enemy does not give up easily. So we read in chapter 2:1, "Again there was a day…", another day of challenge. This was not Satan challenging God, but God challenging Satan. God challenges Satan as to Job's integrity (2:3), Now Satan responds by challenging God as to Job's intentions.

Questions: Lotteries and Sweepstakes (January–February 1978)

From Ministry in Focus, Vol. 10 No. 1, January–February 1978.

Question: What should the Christian's attitude be to lotteries, sweepstakes, etc.?

Answer: In Scripture we read of various ways of being enriched materially.

1. INHERITANCE: where one benefits from the material possessions of another. Here, the death of the testator is involved (Psalm 49:10; Hebrews 9:16).

2. INVESTMENT: where money, instead of labour is put to work and various measures of appreciation are enjoyed (Matthew 25:14-18 etc.) Here stewardship is involved.

3. GIFTS: where a benefit is freely received from another (Philippians 4: 16-17; James 1:17). Here simple faith to receive is involved.

4. REWARD: in recognition of services rendered (Matthew 10:41). Here an evaluation is involved.

5. PRIZE: won in contest with others (1 Corinthians 9:24). Here strenuous effort or skill developed by discipline is involved.

6. WAGES: earned by honest toil (Luke 3:14). Here labour is involved.

7. BENEFICENCE: where one simply enjoys certain benefits of ones circumstances (Ruth 2:1,10; 4:13; also Luke 15:31, etc.). Here it is relationship that is involved.

Nowhere does the Word of God condone or even consider “chance” as a means of approved enrichment. In Ecclesiastes 9:11 (A.V.) we do read that “time and chance happeneth to… all.” The word translated “chance” here is the word “pega.” This Hebrew word means “impact,” or an unexpected occurence. It has no connotation of luck.”

There is an interesting verse in Jeremiah 17:11 (A.V. marg.). “As the partridge gathereth young which she hath not brought forth, so is he that getteth riches and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.”

Gambling, games of chance, and lotteries have ruined many a life, destroyed many a home and corrupted even nations. In Britain today, football pools, lotteries, sweepstakes, and bingo have eroded the work ethic from the masses. Canada and the U.S. are on the same slippery path.

The questioner may also have in mind the casting of lots in the Bible. How this worked we are not clear. When the ephod was used, with its breastplate, David Baron suggests that the Lord illuminated certain letters of the alphabet from the names inscribed there, to spell out answers. However, we have no certain knowledge of this. It did seem to work however (1 Samuel 14:41; Jonah 1:7, etc.).

One thing we do know is that God sovereignly overruled, and no “luck” was involved. “The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord” (Proverbs 16:33).

If not the “million dollar draw,” what about the small lotteries at every shopping centre? The two dollar bet, the lucky draw for a car or groceries?

If a principle pertains for a million dollars, then it persists for a bag of groceries. Only the degree differs, the principle abides.

Scripture teaches that the Christian is to “provide things honest in the sight of all men” (Romans 12:17). He is to “labour, working with his hands the things which is good, that he may have to give him that needeth” (Ephesians 4:28). He is to ever seek the enrichment of others and not personal gain (1 Corinthians 10:24). He is to recognize the sovereignty of God in his circumstances, station in life, in poverty, provision or plenty (Ecclesiastes 5:19; Deuteronomy 8:18)

He is to place the emphasis on spiritual enrichment and leave the Lord to add to him what He deems best (Matthew 6:19-21, vv. 30-34). He is to be diligent in his secular employment, not lazy nor slothful, but doing his job as unto the Lord, and for this he will be rewarded as though it had been a spiritual service (Colossians 3:22-24). The Principle of his life is to be “faith” (Romans 1:17), not “fortune.”

When large sums of money are involved, as in national lotteries or sweepstakes, the “winner’s” sudden change of fortune and wealth has proven for many to be devastating (Proverbs 19:4). The writer knows personally of one case where a believer “won” a sweepstake prize, and sometime later committed suicide.

The Worchester Gazette of September 29th, 1977, carried a report on the million dollar winners of the Massachusets State Lottery. An M.I.T. professor had made a study of their lives since “winning.” It was a sad record of once-happy homes, now broken, divorces and social pressures, punctuated by appeals for help from relatives, strangers, organizations, etc.

“He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent” (Proverbs 28: 20).

— J. Boyd Nicholson

The Mystery of Affliction (Part 2) (May–June 1978)

From Ministry in Focus, Vol. 10 No. 3, May–June 1978.

Mr. J. Boyd Nicholson, Sr., makes his home in St. Catharines, Ontario. This article is the second of a three-part series on Job.

The Second Attack

“Again there was a day” (Job 2:1). The enemy pressed the attack now in an endeavour to capture the inner citadel of the man himself. He had challenged Job’s integrity. Now he challenged his intentions. For his life, Satan believed Job would give up all that he had. What did he have left? He still had his life, his health, his wife, his brothers and sisters, acquaintances and friends (see Job 42:10-11).

First, Satan attacked Job’s body with a loathsome disease. Some have tried to diagnose just what it was. Lionitis, eliphantiasis and black leprosy have all been suggested. In any case, the symptoms were most severe. Throughout the book we can discover eight distinct symptoms. Skin eruptions, severe itch, pain in the bones, muscular cramps, the blackening of the skin, organic disorders, and sleeplessness punctuated with terrifying nightmares. Poor Job! What a sight he must have been.

Next the enemy attacked the feelings of his heart. The beloved of his bosom cried out to him to curse God and commit suicide. “Curse God!” That was what Satan really wanted. He cared little for Job; he was just one

man. The attack was really against God. To dishonor Him has always been the Satanic resolve. He cares nothing for human anguish or love or loyalties. Now Job's wife gave her tongue to Satan. What a solemn responsibility! It is sadly possible that even today we may give our members to Satan to use. But have pity on Mrs. Job! Remember, it was also her children, whom she had borne and nursed, that perished so tragically in one day. It was her beloved upon whom she looked, covered with sores, disfigured by disease, scraping himself with a potsherd and sitting on the garbage dump. There is a peculiar pain between love-partners when one has to see the other suffer intensely. Her mind gave way and Job's last human support was taken away.

Now Satan attacked Job's mind by being misjudged by his friends. Consider the force of the attack that had been mounted against this man. From the south came the Sabeans; from above came the fire; from the east came the Chaldeans; and from all quarters came the wind. Within he was afflicted with a raging disease; his wife at his side and his friends before him were all raised against him. But for all these things, Satan's second attack failed. We hear Job say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15).

Job And His Friends

While Job called them "miserable comforters" — and they certainly did give Job a hard time — we must give them their due for two reasons. They came, when brothers, sisters and acquaintances who had eaten bread in his house never looked near. They came. They didn't just send him a card or its equivalent in those days. They didn't just sigh between cups of tea, "Ah,

poor Job!" No, they heard the news and made an appointment to come together both to empathize with him and to comfort him.

It was good that they came to visit him in his grief and pain. It was good, too, that they had sense enough to keep silent in the presence of such sorrow for seven days. It was good that they spoke to Job face to face about what they had in mind and not behind his back.

When we too take our place before this sorrowing man, Job, we are reminded that every righteous sorrowing man in the Bible is in some way a picture of the Man of Sorrows, our beloved Lord. When we hear Eliphaz say to Job, "Remember I pray thee, who ever suffered being innocent?" we can only look by faith to Calvary and See One, the Only Innocent, dying in deepest anguish for the guilty.

There was no hedge about Him to preserve Him. He was rich! And how very rich! He willingly gave all that we, so poor, might be made rich. He suffered in His heart. "My heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels." He suffered in His emotions. "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." He suffered in His body. "They pierced my hands and my feet." He suffered in His spirit. "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani!"

Our Lord and Saviour could not say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." He was the Redeemer, paying the price. Job's life was spared by the command of God; the Saviour's life was yielded up under the judgment of God.

As we look away to that lonely hill and view that Suffering Man, well might we take the words from the book of Job, "And there was a Man …" What a Man, the

Man of Sorrows. “And there was a day …” What a day! A day that will never be forgotten through endless ages.

Well may we sing:

“Man of Sorrows,” what a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

The Mystery of Affliction (Part 3) (July–August 1978)

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Job And His Friends

Though with a common interest, Job's three friends were quite different in their makeup. Eliphaz was the philosopher, the man of reason. Bildad was the theologian, the man of tradition. Zophar was the moralist, the man of ethics. Their approach was necessarily different, but their premise was the same — namely, that all suffering is the result of personal sin. Without going into the details of their individual arguments, we might summarize them by noting that they have two movements. They accused Job of wickedness. "The wicked suffer," they said. They admonished him regarding the divine justice. And they advised him to seek God and put things right. All they succeeded in doing, however, was to plunge Job into despair, provoke him to self-righteous vindication, and to produce in him a longing for pity.

In chapter 19 Job begins to climb out of the dark, when he took that wonderful look away from himself and his sorrow, and said: "I know that my Redeemer liveth," or as the word is, "my Vindicator." Then God intervenes from chapter 32 on, first by the approach of Elihu, whose name means, "God Himself."

Job And His God

Elihu was prepared by God for this ministry. “The Spirit of God hath made me,” he could say. He was sent by God, for when God took up the discussion with Job, He continued without rebuking Elihu. He spoke for God and stated that he was “in God’s stead.” He was a man of discernment, a man with a sense of divine call, and a man with a desire to help Job. How wonderful in such grief to receive such a visitor as this.

At last God spoke! The long silence was broken, but not with words of explanation. It was with words of revelation, the revelation of Jehovah Himself. God spoke out of the whirlwind, out of seeming confusion, and He asked a series of rhetorical questions that teach lessons of assurance and comfort.

The first brought to Job a revelation of God’s eternity (38:4), and the lesson was, there is a divine point of view with implications beyond the present moment. The next was a question about His authority (38:11). The lesson here is that there are divine limits beyond which grief and trial cannot go. There follows next a question about God’s sufficiency (38:22-23), teaching us that there are divine resources beyond the demands of the conflict. Next, there comes a question about God’s power and wisdom (38:31-32), wonderfully assuring us that there is a divine control over every influence and power. Then in chapters 39-41 there is presented a series of questions regarding God’s provision. And that provision extends from the needs of a hungry lion to the cry of a baby raven for food. In this is still another wonderful lesson that there is a divine supply for every exigency.

Job's Response

First, Job recognized before God that behind all the sorrow and pain and trial he could see God in his circumstance (42:5). He then recognized his sin before God (42:6b). The test is over and now the Lord takes up His gracious ministry of recovery and restoration.

Job's Restoration

Job's restoration was complete. His capacity had been enlarged by suffering, and both his priestly ministry and personal liberty were restored (42:7-8, 10). He had been a captive of his sickness, sorrow and circumstance, but now God set him free. Further, his previous hospitality was restored (42:11). One cannot help but wonder where that crowd of fair-weather friends and relatives were when Job so sorely needed them. Finally, his personal prosperity was restored, but note that it was doubled (42:12).

The Lord gave Job three beautiful daughters. He named them in such a way that they would be constant reminders before his eyes, and the eyes of all, that God is the God of restoration. Thus he gave each of them a beautiful name.

The first he called Jemima, which means dove, the bird associated with mourning and peace. Had he known the Scripture, Job might have said under his breath as he saw her move around the house, "The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." The second daughter he named Keziah, whose name means cassia. This sweet fragrance is obtained by stripping the bark from the tree. She was a witness that once Job had been stripped of everything, but now his life would produce a sweet

fragrance for the comfort of many sufferers down through the ages. Again, had he known the verse, he might have said to himself as he saw Keziah, “The oil of joy for mourning.” The last daughter was named Kerenhappuch, meaning a vial of cosmetics. Her name would witness to all that out of the secret place of dealings in the purposes of God there comes forth that which beautifies, and so he might have concluded, “Beauty for ashes.”

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