
Why Prophecy?

by: Ronald L. Dart

Sometime ago a friend told me a story. It seems he was sitting in his family room one night, reading a book, and looked up and his teenage daughter, was standing in the doorway crying. She came over and sat in his lap and said "Daddy, am I going to have a life?" She had grown up in the church and had heard all the sermons about prophecy and all the stuff out of Daniel and all the stuff out of Revelation, the seven seals and the seven trumpets and the seven plagues. She looked around her and the world looked like a very frightening place and she wondered about those prophecies coming to pass. She had taken them seriously. To her it looked like she would never have a chance at having a life. No home of her own, no husband. no children and no career. The way that prophecy had been presented to her, the future looked terribly bleak and she could really see no hope.

Now somewhat later than that, not all that long ago in fact, someone came to me to offer a bit of constructive criticism. It seems that he had heard others saying that I don't preach much about prophecy. I don't preach very often about it. In fact, there did not seem to be that many sermons by anybody about prophecy these days. Well, I have been thinking about this for a long time and it seems clear to me that we have something wrong in our approach to prophecy and I would like to explain to you today what I think it is that we have wrong.

There is a pervasive belief that God is working to a schedule. That it is all laid out as it were on paper with certain dates and times and places and things that are going to take place. That there are exactly 7000 years, not one year more, not one year less, of human history and the end of that history is going to work out exactly on schedule with a sequence of events. Events that cannot be deterred, cannot be put off, and cannot be avoided. Now why this belief grows out of scripture, when it is not itself scripture, I think is important for us to know. It is the product of a highly complex interpretation of scripture and in this system of interpretation, there are a lot of assumptions. There are points in this whole system, several of them, where we assume that certain things are true. If it turns out that one or more of our assumptions are not true, then we have some really serious, major, big time adjustments to make in the way that we look at prophecy.

Be Careful with your Prophecy Assumptions

Now, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with making assumptions. It is the way that we test the truth. We start out by saying, let's assume for the sake of discussion that... and then we begin to build on that. We develop our facts, we develop our reasoning, we take our if/then sequences,

and we lay them all out and we work our way, we reason our way, upward from the assumptions that we make. The further that we can reason out into the future or above or beyond our assumptions without coming up with inconsistencies or absurdities, the more confident we become in our assumptions. There is also a very large difference between confidence and truth, I hope we all understand that. Just because you think you know something does not mean that what you think you know is correct. We may, in the process of developing this elaborate scheme of prophecy, forget that our assumptions are assumptions. We may be tempted to do like my dad used to do when we were working a jigsaw puzzle. We would work around the table for hours as a family. (This was back in pre-television days.) He would find a piece, the color was right, the shape was right, it belonged as far as he could see in that spot and it would not go, so he reached in his pocket, pulled out his little knife, flipped it up, and joked that he was going to make it fit. While he was just joking, and never really did that, he laid it down and looked for another piece. I am afraid that in our schemes of prophecy that we have actually gotten the knife out and whittled it. We have made things fit, or we have overlooked inconsistencies, and sometimes have even overlooked absurdities.

Just take in the simplest possible way the idea that there are 7000 years exactly, no more, no less of human history. Now where is the scripture that says that? Well, you know, there is none. It is derived from a sequence of things. A day is 1000 years in God's sight. The Sabbath is the 7th day after 6 days of this. We have a whole set of things that we put together that build a circumstantial case for the fact that there are 7000 years of human history. The problem is that when science comes along and tells us, well it looks like there might have been a great flood like Noah's, but it looks like from all that we can see from the evidence in the ground, that it was actually 10,000 years ago. Well, we have to do some serious things with science, at that time, because obviously our idea of the 7000 years of human history could not be wrong.

Now the first problem that you have with this, and you ought to tumble to this immediately when you come across something like this, is that the number 7 in the Bible is often symbolic and not literal. Now you know that, don't you? The truth is that any combination of 3 and 4 in the Bible, these numbers are automatically suspect of being symbolic and not literal. The reason is that the idea is that the numbers 3 and 4 represent the two smallest forms of shapes that can be enclosed by straight lines, the triangle and the square. In other words, they can encompass a hole inside of three sides or inside of four sides. And out of 3 and 4 grows 7, which is $3 + 4$ which elevates this to a higher level of perfection and out of this also grows 12, which is 3×4 . So, whenever you see, 3, 4, 7, 12, or 144,000 it is possible that the number is ideal and not real. When you assume that it is literal, don't make the mistake of concluding that it has to be that way. **YOU HAVE TO LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN.** Maybe you are saying, well, how can you ever know? The answer may be that you won't know until sometime in the future when events take place and things happen. What is important is that you know what the Bible says and that your interpretation of what the Bible says stays in the realm of being your interpretation as opposed to being **FACT**.

I mean there are a lot of ideas that we believe about the Bible, that is fact. We can hang our hat on it. We can stake our lives on it. We can go to the wall on it. I think every church on the face of this earth has a tendency to lose track of the difference between what we know and what we think we know. That is what I am going to talk to you about today. The presentation of history in the Bible in terms of 7000 years, could be, I am not saying it is - I am saying it could be - simply

the Bible's way of talking about the whole of it all. Just like when you come to the book of Revelation and there are 7 churches, that those 7 churches which were real churches on the ground in Asia Minor represented the whole church. Because there were 7, in some configuration, we might be able to study and come to understand.

Now you are certainly free to think of these numbers like 7, 144,000, in literal terms, but you should never lose track of other possibilities. If you do, you are locking up the chance of growth of understanding and of grasping the way these things could be. You might lose track of what is an assumption and what is true, and the difference is important.

Some ministers will say that "prophecy is history written in advance. "You have heard that haven't you, some of you, at least. You may have heard any number of preachers at one time or another make that statement. The question I want to ask you now, Is it true? Or is it an assumption and how would you know the difference?

Is Prophecy History Written in Advance?

Now this idea that "prophecy is history written in advance" is highly problematic and it is important that we know that it is problematic. Implicit in this idea are some assumptions that many people make about prophecy. They are assumptions that have led us to make some egregious (flagrant) mistakes and to undermine our credibility when we speak about prophecy. This is where people go astray so many times. They make these errors because their fundamental philosophy, their fundamental idea about prophecy is wrong. Since their fundamental attitude or philosophy of it is wrong, they go out there and they make stupid mistakes, which lead other people to look at them later and say, well that fool thought the world was coming to an end in, in whatever date you want to hang on it, or when they thought this event was going to happen. People are always getting out there and making predictions that by a certain date, this is going to happen. Always when I hear them, I mutter quietly to myself, well, here comes another fool. I will not call him that to his face, of course.

We have laid out these prophecies. All this stuff is out there, and our children see it, and "A," it doesn't make sense or "B," it doesn't come to pass and the degree of which we make some of these egregious errors gives our own children reason to disbelieve. It is like the kid when he found out there was no Santa Clause and said, Well, I am going to look into this Jesus Christ business too.

If we are so wrong in our prophetic scenarios, why should our children think we know what we are talking about on other matters. I believe that this is important. It is critical for us to understand. These assumptions may also convey a false, even a perverse image, of God, His plan, His purpose and His methods. If God wrote history in advance, then God wrote Hitler into the plan, God wrote Auschwitz into the plan, Birkenau, the Nazis and the S.S. He wrote the Holocaust into history ahead of time if prophecy is history written in advance. Not only that, he wrote the accident that killed your child into the plan if prophecy is history written in advance.

Now I want to ask you something, how could a loving God write a history like the one we are living? Now how many times have you heard that question? From friends, from family, from

people you work with who say, I can't believe a God of love would allow fill in the blank. Has anybody here ever heard that? Nearly everybody has heard it, haven't you? You've heard it and then people come to this conclusion because preachers of one stripe or another, and it is all over the place, have this idea that all of this stuff is somehow running out according to what God wants. That God wanted this to happen. That God wanted this plague to break out. That God had this in mind. You know He wrote all of this down a head of time and how could God allow my wife to grow sick of cancer at such a young age and die and leave me with four beautiful little children. How could God allow that, if He is a God of love?

All right let's see if we can get something straight. The idea that "prophecy is history written in advance" is an assumption. It is a hypothesis. It is a theory. It is not the truth and it is a theory that we can test, that we can check it out and we can say to ourselves, is that the way this world actually works?

Is God a Time Traveler?

Now I asked the question on the Born to Win program this way. I asked: Is God a time traveler? Does God run forward into the future and see what is going to happen and then come back and tell us or tell a prophet to tell us what is going to happen to us in the future? Does He come and tell us what we are going to decide next month or next year about the various things that we are going to have? What city we are going to go to, what job we are going to take, where we are going to college, all of those things. Does God run forward into the future and come back, send a prophet and say, here is what you are going to do in the months, and so forth, that are ahead? Or is it like a video tape, that God fast forwards the tape, sees the decisions we are going to make and then tells us what they are going to be. Now there is a question in here, if you think about it for very long, you will come to it. What possible use is merely knowing what is going to happen, knowing what decisions you are going to make and so forth in the future, of what value is it? Now you can probably think you are finding a value, but we are not through talking about this yet. The fact is, before I go on with this one step further, I want to warn you. I am going to challenge a lot of what you think you know about biblical prophecy today and it may be a little disorienting because you are not aware of a lot of the assumptions that you have and the way that you think about the Bible, about God and about prophecy and about the future. So, as I say, you may find yourself a little disoriented and all I can say is, - Prove all things and hold fast to that which is good. (1 Thes. 5:21.) The truth is time travel is not possible. Time is a one-way street and the future does not exist. The future is being created moment by moment by the decisions you make and more important by the decisions that God makes. And a lot of the decisions that God makes are based upon the decisions that you make. Do you understand this? Tomorrow will be determined by the decisions and the choices that are made by all of us today. It doesn't exist otherwise. Tomorrow will be different if you choose different on the things that you are going to do today. The future does not exist. You can fast forward the tape if you want to, but after this moment in time, it is blank. It is like slapping a brand-new video tape in the side of your camcorder and recording what is going on right here, but if you stop the tape, forward it, press play, the tape here is blank. It cannot be put on there until it actually happens. The future is predictable, but it is not knowable and that is something you are going to have to wrestle with. The future again grows out of the decisions that we and God are making today.

The Prophet Jonah

Now the proof of what I am saying lies in an obscure Old Testament book that does not really seem to have a lot of reason for being in the Bible beyond demonstrating the point that I am going to be making to you right now. The book is the book of the prophet Jonah. It is almost as though the events of the Book of Jonah are put here as an exercise in prophecy, as an illustration of what is supposed to happen when a prophecy is delivered. Now I would say that there is, and I am sure there is not a person here, who has not heard of Jonah and the whale or if you prefer, Jonah and the big fish, right. This is probably one of the more familiar stories in the Bible. Every kid who has gone very far in Sunday School has heard that story and we all know the story. We know how Jonah was given a message by God for some reason that is not really explained. Jonah says, I don't want to do this, and he took off in the opposite direction. There were great storms on the sea and the ship was about to sink. Jonah warned them, "Well, I was fleeing from God and it scared them all to death. So, he told them finally, throw me over the side and God will make the seas calm and you will survive. Well, they didn't want to do that, and they tried their best to make it, but when they saw they couldn't, they threw him over the side. And God had prepared a great fish that ate him up, carried him over and he prayed to God from the fish's belly and repented of his attitudes and the fish vomited him up on the shore and Jonah went to Nineveh. That is the story that all of us find so fascinating. But the real story of Jonah only begins now.

At that point, when the whale vomits him up on the shore, he gets to Nineveh and starts walking into the city. The word of the Lord, Jonah 3 verse 1, "came to Jonah the second time saying, Get up. Go to Nineveh, that great city and you preach unto it the preaching that I tell you." You go tell them. You tell them what I tell you to tell them. You got it straight. Jonah had it straight this time. So, Jonah got up and he went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was a great city, about three days journey, and he entered into the city a day's journey and he cried. You all know the cry, don't you? "And yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" He takes a few more steps down the street and he says, (yelling) "And Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

Now would we all agree that is what God told him to say. It seems logical. Go tell them. You tell them what I tell you and let's get it done. I want us to get a few things clear about this prophecy before we go a step further. I want you to answer me on this, okay? Is this a prophecy? Yes. Okay. Did it come from God? YES. Okay. Is the prophecy true? No. Uh oh... Now you don't think that God would give a prophecy that wasn't true, do you? Is somebody out here thinking that God would give Jonah a prophecy that was not true? No. Was Jonah a false prophet? No. All right. Is the prophecy true? Yes. Did the prophecy come to pass? No. You got it right. Now do you see our problem? There is a giant problem in the middle of all of this and you stumbled over it. I thought you would stumble over it on the fourth question. You stumbled over it on the third question, because you could see it coming. You read Jonah and you kind of know the story. You know what happened.

They actually heard Jonah, heard what his prophecy was, and they were sorry. They repented. The king heard it and said "Hold it. Everybody fast. Make the animals fast. No food, no water for

anybody, no animals, nothing. Put on sack cloth. Oh, by the way, put sack cloth on the cows. Throw dirt on them. Let them cry and moan for water and let us all cry and moan before God because the end of us is right at hand!" and God looked down and said, "Well, look at that. Look at that." Well, forty days came, and forty days went, and Nineveh was not overthrown. Now if prophecy is history written in advance and if God is a time traveler and ran forward and saw what was going to happen and came back and told them or if He ran the video tape forward to see how the movie ended and came back and told them, we have a problem.

Because the actual events that played out were these. Jonah came to town saying, "And Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." The people of Nineveh repented, God changed His mind and did not destroy the city. Now was that or was that not the future? Then why didn't Jonah come into town saying, "Well, God was going to destroy the city, but I know you guys are going to repent and it won't happen." Because if he was going to give... Tell them what the future was, then the future was already determined, and they had no choice, but to repent. But you see, if Jonah had come in there with that message, what would the response have been? Huh, Well, nothing is going to happen. I don't need to change my life and of course, once they didn't change their life and continued on their wickedness, what would have happened? In forty days, Nineveh would have been overthrown.

Now I don't know if we are quite ready to get our minds around this yet, but what we have just seen in Jonah, and if you want to study it, I hope you will. I hope you will read all the way through this chapter and acknowledge this passage here, and get it clear in your mind, that the future of Nineveh was still open when Jonah walked into that city. If it was not, we have run into a terrible paradox.

The Time Travel Paradox

Have any of you ever heard of the time paradox, or time travel paradox. The time travel paradox involves a theory whereby a man travels back in time and by some means, accident, whatever, it doesn't matter, he kills his father before he is begotten of his father. That means that he was never born and never existed in the future in order to come back and kill his father. This is the time travel paradox. It is simply not possible. Now anybody with three brain cells in a row really ought to know that time travel is not possible any way. It is an interesting fiction that people put together for science fiction reasons in order to develop certain themes which makes a story. The stories are often useful and interesting and bring things home to us that we otherwise might not know. But never lose track of what is fact and what is fiction. Time travel is fiction! It cannot happen! So, God doesn't go forward in time and come back. He doesn't even fast forward the video tape.

How can God Foretell the Future?

You know how God can tell the future when He does? Because He can make it happen. It is that simple. If I was able to make it happen, I could tell you what is going to happen tomorrow. But since I can't even be absolutely sure that I will get out of bed in the morning, I cannot tell you what is going to happen tomorrow. Not even the little things that I myself might have been able to do.

What Jonah has done is to present us with a prophecy paradox. If you come in and you tell people what is going to happen, and they repent, it does not happen at all. Do you remember... Didn't Paul say something strange about this in the New Testament? Didn't he say, whether there be prophecies, they shall fail? (1 Corinthians 13:8)

How does a prophecy fail? Well, because people change things. People do things differently and when people do things differently the outcome is different. Choices are being made by thousands of people all the time and many of them effect your life and you don't even know it. You won't know it until tomorrow.

Now, if the future can be known then the future already exists. If you can foretell the future, then you cannot change it. Do you understand that? If it can be foretold, it cannot be changed. Therefore, there is no point in knowing the future at all. Now does all of this sound confusing to you? I expect it does. Don't be embarrassed to admit that it sounds confusing to you. It sounds confusing, because the whole thing is based on wrong premises and wrong assumptions. What we are trying to do is reason from an assumption and the assumption is wrong. When we get out there on a limb somewhere, it either becomes inconsistent or it becomes entirely absurd and the whole idea that prophecy is history written in advance falls into absurdity if you carry it very far at all.

Now let me tell you the truth about prophecy. The future does not exist. It grows daily out of the decisions we make and more importantly out of the decisions that God makes. God is able to foretell the future, because He is able to make it happen. He is God and that means He can decide what does not happen, as well as, what happens. Just because He tells you it is going to happen; doesn't mean He can't change His mind. I don't know how we get the God in our minds that we have there. I don't know how we come to the place where we create all of these images of God and what God is like. You know. Well, God you said this. "You can't ever do anything any different." He says, "Oh yes I can. I am God. I can do whatever I want to do." So, He can decide on one occasion to destroy a city and then He can decide not to do it.

Now there is a fascinating example of this in the book of Jeremiah, the 18th chapter and I want to take you back there, because in this short segment is really the fundamental statement about prophecy and the conditions of prophecy in the Bible. If you don't understand this point there is no way you are ever going to understand prophecy at all. If you don't grasp, first of all, the events of Jonah, because there is something you should know, also, about Jonah. Jonah was one of the very early prophets, and what gets worked out when he goes to Nineveh and Nineveh repents and the thing doesn't happen is an object lesson for the entire world, so that Israel down through the remainder of their history ought to know that when a Prophet comes and says, "God is coming and He is mad, He is going to destroy this place." They should have known, based upon the example of Nineveh, that that could be changed.

The Lesson of the Potter

All right. Now that was the example and here is the instruction. Jeremiah 18 verse 1. "The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying: Get up and go down to the potter's house. I want to show you something." So, said Jeremiah, "I went down to the potter's house." Which is

always a good idea when God tells you to go there. "When I got there, he was working making a new vessel on the wheels." If you can have your image in your mind of the spinning potters wheel and the clay that is on it and he is beginning to shape it with his hands and form it into, maybe with a little stick on the side to put a groove in it and so forth. He is actually making a new vessel on the wheels. "As I watched, the pot he was making was marred under his hand. " Sometimes stuff happens. You know, there may be a lump in the clay. Things are not quite right and all of a sudden, the thing got out of alignment and he said, "Oh, no, this won't do." So, he stopped the wheel, mashed the clay back into a blob again, added some water to it and started the wheel one more time and began to reshape the pot that he was working on. And here is Jeremiah standing here watching this saying, "What am I here for?"

So, God then said to Jeremiah, "Oh, House of Israel, can I not do with you exactly like this potter? Can't I decide that you have become a marred vessel in my hand and pound you down into a lump of clay and start over and make you into something totally different from what I was doing before. As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hands, O' Israel." It is like God is sending out an early warning. If I am not satisfied with you Israel, I can start all over, you know. I can do this a different way. I mean that even has overtones of the teachings of Jesus, who came down and said, "God is not satisfied with you and He has decided to reject you and go to a people that show forth the fruits that He is looking for." God is going to stop doing it over here. He is going to do it a totally new way. You may want to talk about the new covenant, old covenant and all kinds of the arguments that go raging back and forth between us, but the fact of the matter is that Israel was a colossal failure. A colossal failure at what God intended for them to be and what God intended for them to do. Do you remember the blessing of Abraham that said, "In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 18:18) Abraham's seed was to have a positive effect on the nations of the earth but Israel closed themselves up into an exclusive, tight community and refused to be that blessing to the world.

Then along comes the Son of God and He tells His disciples, you probably never realized this... what it says in Matthew 28:19. "He said, All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Go you therefore and make disciples of all the Gentiles. Baptizing them. Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." Oh, yeah, that is the word. The word for nations in that passage of scripture is the same word translated Gentiles nearly everywhere else. And the whole point of it is, we've done it with Israel. We have gone through all of this rigmarole with Israel. Some of the Jews are going to believe, most of them are not. I want you to go and make disciples of the Gentiles. I am going to do this a different way. I mean here is a prophecy all the way back in Jeremiah that tells us, it is coming. It is going to happen this way, if you people cannot get your act together, and they never really did.

All Prophecy is Conditional

God then says, If at any time I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck it up and pull it down and destroy it. If that nation against whom I have pronounced turned from their evil, I will turn and repent of the evil that I thought to do to them. Now how hard is this folks? You pay attention, you got this. How hard is this? You are doing bad things. I send a prophet to you and I say, "stop doing those bad things and you start doing right. If you don't do that, if you don't stop doing the bad things, I am going to whack you. Right? But if you will

repent, then I will repent and the prophecy I gave, won't come to pass." Now what is interesting about this, this particular passage of scripture contains Dart's first law of understanding prophecy. Dart's first law of understanding prophecy is: "All prophecy is conditional." And this is my proof. Where God says, Hey, this is what I am going to do. You can change it, if you repent, it won't happen that way.

In one instant, I shall speak concerning a nation, concerning a kingdom to tear it down, to build and to plant it. If they then begin to do evil, I can make all kinds of promises. I am going to do good stuff for you people, and then if you turn around and you begin to do evil, He says, I will repent of the good that I was going to do you and I will turn around and I will do the opposite. The prophecies that I give you, about where you are going and what you are going to do, they are conditional.

Now what is interesting about all of this is that God's prophecies, in the sense that His purpose will be accomplished, but you may not have any part in it. That is what He is telling him. I am going to do what I am going to do. The question is: Do you want to have a part in it? Or do you want to get left behind somehow in the dust?

Now Jeremiah, "You go down there, and you tell them. Thus, saith the Lord, Behold, I frame evil against you. I am making plans against you. Return you everyone from his evil way and make your dealings good." You turn this thing around you people, so Jeremiah, the good prophet, went down there, and told them. But they said, No, there is no hope. We will walk after our own plans and we will just do what we can figure out, the best way we can do it out of our own minds and out of our own reason and out of our own hearts. Now Jeremiah's account of this was abbreviated and elliptical but it underscores a curious thing about us human beings. It is almost as though we would prefer our prophecy without hope. Do you follow me? The way we like to construct prophecy is kind of like a railroad. I mean, once the train gets going down that track, there is no stopping it and there is no turning it around. It is just going to go roaring right straight on through, whatever it runs through on the way. That is what prophecy is like, and it is almost as though, that is the way we want it. Because we continually seem to structure it that way in our mind, our sermons, our studies and our thoughts on this matter.

Now why would we do that? I will tell you the reason. I think I understand to a limited degree at least. It is because, understanding prophecy the way it is intended to be understood, requires a superhuman effort to turn your life around. And we have so much spiritual inertia that we just really would rather believe that we have no hope than to put our shoulder to the wheel and drive, drive, drive on through to what we have to do. You don't suppose that's possible, do you? That we could be that spiritually lazy. Oh, I think people can be very diligent physically in their life and be really hard workers, but I think lots of times, all that hard work is an escape from having to face up to some of the things that they need to stop and think about in their life.

I heard something that was fascinating to me. They said that President Roosevelt back prior to World War II had to get away from Washington. He went away for a 10-day fishing trip because he said he could not think clearly in that environment. So, he went away on a fishing trip and he came back with Lend-Lease, one of the most important steps that he made leading up to World

War II and the eventual defeat of Hitler and Nazi Germany. If it were not for the leadership of a few men in this world, we all probably would be speaking German by now.

Anyway, there is a kind of inertia of the spirit and we need to face up to this. We need to deal with it. If we allow the structuring of prophecy and our studies of prophecy to have this approach, that prophecy is like a railroad and it is going straight to its destination no matter what, come hell or high water, then we are going to miss something very important along the way. We can throw the switch, but we have to get off our backside. We have to get up and go do it, that seems to be for us the hard part.

Repentance can cause Prophecy to Fail

It is important to understand that Israel should have known better than to say, there is no hope. That is why God gave them Jonah and Nineveh and ran that exercise, so that no one would ever be able to say honestly there is no hope. Nineveh repented, and evil did not come. Well, the evil did not come on Nineveh in forty days. Nineveh eventually fell any way, but this little time table that God gave them did not take place. Now in spite of this example, there are people who will spend hours, days, months and I don't know maybe years drawing up prophetic charts with 1260 days, and 1490 days and 3-1/2 years and 42 months and all that kind of stuff. Every prophetic scenario that you can design and chart, every one of them can be thrown off by a single act of repentance. How do I know that? I got Jonah, right? I mean we don't just use part of the Bible, we try to use the whole thing and we realize that here is a place where there is an absolute, and "Thus saith the Lord." I mean how clear does God have to be, "And Yet, forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." A simple act of repentance shut it down and you can't help but to wonder sometimes, where, you know, how things could be in our own future.

Why Prophecy?

Now at the beginning I asked the question: "why would God tell us anything at all about the future?" Why should He? Why should God come down here and say, Hey, Joe, this is going to happen and lay it out before you. Why would He tell you that? Now I can think of a few reasons why you and I might like to have knowledge of the future. Knowledge of what horse was going to win each race tomorrow might be of some financial value to us. Knowing a few things like that could be helpful to us, but that's, our reasons and God's reasons might be very different. Why should God come to tell you the future? I think it is really for two reasons: (1). He tells you what the future is going to be, so you can do something about it. Right? (2). He tells you what the future is going to be, so that when the future comes to pass you will understand it, and you will know that it is His hand. In Ezekiel again and again, and again, you find this formula. When it comes to pass, they will know (Ezek. 33:33.) When it comes to pass, they will know. Who will know? Well only the people who knew the prophecy will know. They will see God's hand in what He is doing.

Now I am going to give you a very short proposition. I want you to think deeply and carefully about this proposition. God tells us the future so that we can change the future. Think about that, because in fact, He told Nineveh the future and Nineveh changed it. I don't know if you understand how important that is, how critical that is and how far reaching it is. You know, in

response to the criticism, that people have not been hearing many sermons about prophecy, Steve Sanders (Who spoke here earlier at the Feast in Destin, Florida) gave what I think is one of the most purely prophetic sermons I have heard in a long time, and I am not sure that everybody here, when they heard it, understood that they were hearing a sermon about prophecy. Because the sermon was not about prophecy, the sermon was prophetic, and there is a huge difference. The sermon was about lying. The sermon was about the fact that truth matters. It was about telling the truth and, in this sermon, time after time after time, he told us what the prophets tell us are the consequences of our current actions and what we are doing right now. Do you realize that is what most prophecy is? Most prophecy is not merely outlining a series of events that is going to happen somewhere out there. It is talking about what is happening right now, and what the consequences of what is happening right now are.

Now the question is, Do you want to hear a sermon about prophecy or do you want to hear prophecy? Prophecy is about what is happening now, and where it is taking us and that is important, because you can do something about that. Hearing some outline about sequence of future events out there, that are inexorable like a train going down a track about which you cannot do absolutely nothing, is not terribly useful.

You know, I think what really has caused me to wonder is whether or not people really know and understand prophecy when they see it. I have done a series of 12 radio programs on the real prophets, 12 weeks in a row. The real prophets as opposed to the other kind. I have a series of 28 programs, it was the first series I ran on the radio doing the book of Revelation, verse by verse. What do you want? You know. Where are you going to go for prophecy? And nearly every special program I do is prophetic in nature along the same lines of what Steve told us was prophetic in his sermon.

Now I am not a prophet. You can write that down that I told you. I am not a prophet. But I am beginning to wonder if people will even recognize a prophet when one finally does show up, because they are looking for something entirely different.

To all the young people in the church who wonder if they will get a chance to have a life, for the most part it depends on you. It depends on the choices that you are making every day of your life, because the choices that you make today will change what is going to happen to you tomorrow. It will change the direction your life is going to go.

God tells us the future so that we can change the future. Think about that because, in fact, He told Nineveh the future and Nineveh changed it. I don't know if you understand how important that is, how critical that is and how far reaching it is. In Nineveh's case, they were lucky. The king said, And We will repent. He said, you will repent whether you like it or not. You don't eat. You don't drink. Your dogs don't eat. Your cattle don't drink. Nothing eats, nothing drinks. Put dust on everybody. Put sack cloth on the cows. The king, the leader said, we are repenting around here. And God saw it and saved a whole city/state of Nineveh.

Prophecy should give us Hope

Do you realize that this is the message of every prophet in the Bible? You people will turn your lives around, if you will change, you can be spared. Now I will admit this. There is a broad overall outline of prophecy that is going to come rolling down on us eventually. I will also admit that there is a point of no return in prophecy. Some of the prophets do talk about that. Jeremiah himself came around talking about it later on. However even there, there was hope. For as you work your way through these prophets, they will go through all of these terrible and dire things and then say, but then God's heart will turn to His people and He will go, and He will search them out, wherever they are, and He will bring them back out of captivity. He will lead them gently and those that are with young will have plenty of time to walk along. He will carry the little ones in his arms like a lamb and He will bring them all gently home. In the end, there is hope. And you know something, I think it is a sin to preach prophecy without including hope. Because in the end, we are all Born to Win.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. What past prophecy assumptions turned out to be totally false?
2. How has wrong prophecies affected your life or the lives of someone you know?
3. Is prophecy set in stone?
4. What is the appeal to try to figure out when the world is going to come to an end? Christ stated that He didn't even know.
5. How have wrong prophecies hurt Christianity?
6. What are your thoughts about Mr. Dart's reasoning about why prophecy is not "history written in advance"?
7. How would you answer his question: "Is God a time traveler?"
8. What are your thoughts about Mr. Dart's statement that the "future is predictable, but it is not knowable"?
9. Does the idea that "the future doesn't exist," therefore, everything that happens are based on our decisions we make right now and the decisions God makes right now, change how you look at prophecy?

10. Have you ever wondered if everyone would repent and return to God that He would stop 'Armageddon' from happening?