

The Purpose of Prophecy

Prophecy: A Covenant of Love

The purpose of prophecy is to prepare the bride for her Bridegroom. It reveals to us where Christ is at each step of His ministry and what He is currently doing to cleanse and purify His bride for the day when He comes to take her home. It's the greatest love story ever told. Not only has He gone away to prepare a mansion for her, but He is also intimately active in cleansing her for the consummation of the wedding. This holy covenant, the marriage vow, assures us that His word will not return unto Him void but it will accomplish that for which it is sent. In Hosea 2:19-20, we read, "And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD." This "knowing" is also referred to as the "at-one-ment" when we have been filled with the fullness of God.

Prophecy has also been given to us that we might receive the promised eyesalve, to recognize the subtle wiles of Satan, the arch-enemy who hates his rival so much that he lives to destroy the bride for whom the Mighty Prince longs. The first prophecy in the scriptures is found in Genesis 3:15, and it reveals this battle for the heart and affection of the woman, the bride. It warns us of the serpent's relentless efforts to destroy the one for whom Christ would give His life. It is here where He first promises to write His love in her heart. Towards the end of this battle, over the heart and mind of the bride, recorded in Revelation 12:17, we see that the dragon, the ancient serpent, makes war with the remnant of her seed. It also reveals that by faithful obedience she has received the mind and heart of Christ and that she has made herself ready for Him.

Additionally, prophecy also gives us perspective and encouragement by letting us know where we are in the scope of time in this great battle. It shows us where we have been, what our present position and work is, and assures us that we will be victors with Christ and will never be separated from Him again. We are privileged in taking part in this great work and hastening this grand union. We also have a solemn obligation to give the trumpet a certain sound and warn our brothers and sisters of the greatest, most significant time in the history of this world—the close of human probation and the judgment of all living.

Twice in scripture we have Christ admonishing us to read, hear and understand the books of Daniel and Revelation (Matthew 24:15; Revelation 1:3). The reason? When the books of Daniel and Revelation are better understood, believers will have an entirely different religious experience. They will be given such glimpses of the open gates of heaven that heart and mind will be impressed with the character that all must develop in order to realize the blessedness which is to be the reward of the pure in heart. This character is none other than the very same Glory that was revealed to Daniel and to John, which was Christ Himself.

Not only do we have the privilege and obligation to warn the inhabitants of the world, but we also have the privilege of making sure Christ's prayer will be answered, that His people might glorify Him and finish the work which He gave them to do. What a wonderful wedding gift for our Heavenly Groom! His gift to us was priceless and it costs Him everything, and our gift to Him will also cost us everything—our entire heart, soul and mind. We will suffer for Christ's sake but "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Romans 8:18.

Christ thought it not a thing to be coveted to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation; and all this for our sake! How very wonderful it will be for this earth to be filled with the glory of God as revealed in His bride, and to witness the whole universe respond at the vindication of Christ and His Father. "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:10, 11.

Prophecy: An Epic Battle Between Two Kingdoms

Within the books of Daniel and Revelation we find the core issues of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Satan's master plan is to set up his kingdom here on the earth as an everlasting kingdom, believing his to be superior to God's. We read of his desire to exalt himself above the throne of God, sitting in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God, and receiving all worship (Isaiah 14:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:4). In Daniel and Revelation, we see the prophetic, panoramic view of the epic battle between two kingdoms, Jerusalem and Babylon—the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. These books lay out for us the principles of both kingdoms. They reveal the temporary ascendancy Satan has gained through his succession of earthly kingdoms, which have adopted his principles of self-exalting, self-serving force. They also reveal the Victor, whose principles of self-lowering, self-sacrificing love will prevail, as demonstrated at the cross and again ultimately through His bride, the church.

Understanding these issues is of eternal consequence, and God has not left us in the dark, but has chosen many ways to reveal His plan to save all that would come unto Him. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing but He revealeth His secrets unto His servants the prophets." Amos 3:7. Especially do the books of Daniel and Revelation reveal the closing scenes of this conflict and should be the study of all who desire to carry the cross of Christ, a burden for souls, and to be victorious in graciously wielding the sword of His Spirit, reflecting His character alone.

The stories, as well as the visions of Daniel prophesy of the closing events that will culminate with Christ's everlasting kingdom being set up on this earth. Daniel 2 portrays this as "the stone cut out of the mountain without hands" "which smote the image upon his feet" and "consumes all these kingdoms." This is another way of saying that the character of God has finally been perfectly reproduced in His people, who go forth both proclaiming and demonstrating the everlasting gospel. This demonstration brings all to a decisive choice as probation closes, a choice that finds them "holy still" or "filthy still" (Revelation 22:11), finally allowing Christ to come and claim His bride.

Daniel is a book addressing the *literal* battle between *literal* Babylon and *literal* Jerusalem. Revelation is a book revealing a literal *spiritual* battle between *spiritual* Babylon and *spiritual* Jerusalem. The battle is fought over whose principles, God's or Satan's, prove to be just and true. This battle ends with every individual sealed in the forehead, having developed in the mind either the principles of the character of God or of Satan.

In the book of Daniel, the stories of literal events prophetically foretell of spiritual Babylon's false system of worship and doctrines invading spiritual Jerusalem, God's church. God desires to save Babylon as well as His church, and has His faithful saints there demonstrating His character, revealing by example the principles of His kingdom (Revelation 18:4). God warns Babylon of judgment and calls His people out of her. Not all leave, because Babylon has not left their hearts. She is weighed in the balances and found wanting, and finally the judgments of God fall on her and all who will not come out of her. She is left to reap that which she has sown, finally destroyed by the same principles of force by which she lived. "He that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword." Revelation 13:10.

Daniel means *God is judge, or judge of God*. Revelation means *to disclose, take off the cover, or the unveiling*. We will find that a central theme in both books is judgment, so the study of the Hebrew sanctuary system and the day of atonement or the day of judgment, is essential for understanding these prophecies. "Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary." Psalm 77:13, "and the knowledge of the holy [sanctuary] is understanding." Proverbs 9:10. The sanctuary reveals where Christ is in each phase of His ministry of saving souls for His Kingdom.

In the Garden of Eden, the daily communion of God with man was interrupted by sin. Sin conceived with Satan's accusation that God was self-serving and therefore self-exalting. He invited man to do likewise, and exalt himself, by presuming to define the principles of good and evil. Separated by sin from Edenic communion with His creatures, God purposed to draw near to the fearful race. "Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." Exodus 25:8. Here the Shekinah glory would be a perpetual token of His presence. This plan failed because of the hardness of their hearts. Yet again, the Divine Suitor, unveiled a "better covenant" (Hebrews 8:6), that He might draw even nearer to them in human flesh, more fully revealing the principles of His Father's kingdom. "A body hast Thou prepared for Me." Hebrews 10:5. "Emmanuel, God with us." Matthew 1:23.

Rejected and crucified, longing still to restore the broken communion between man and his Maker, He promises to send His Spirit within—Christ in you, the hope of glory—a glory that would reveal His character in yet another body, that of His purified bride, the church. Filling the earth with the love of God, faithfully she would reveal to all that the principles of this unselfish, unconditional love are indeed worthy to rule the universe.

Daniel, the prophet, prophesies of the core issues in this battle over the mind and heart in symbolic language, namely “the daily” (continual), and “the abomination of desolation.” John the Revelator, interprets the “daily” or “continual” as Christ’s ministry to the surrendered heart, which ultimately accomplishes the atonement, the union of Christ and His bride. For example, in Revelation 1:13, we view Christ in “the midst of the seven candlesticks,” which represents His “continual” ministry to His church. In Revelation 5:6 and 4:5, we find Him “a Lamb as it had been slain” in “the midst of the throne” (the table of shewbread) before “the seven lamps of fire,” which bread represents the “continual” nourishment of His Word. Revelation 8:3-4 pictures His “continual” intercession, offering His merits of righteousness along with the prayers of the saints. The abomination, the self-exalting spirit of force, prophesied of in Daniel 3 and revealed in Revelation 13, represents the iniquity, the final rejection of God and the principles of His kingdom. This rejection results in desolation, the eternal separation from the source of life and love, which unfolds in Revelation 16-20.

The final chapters of Revelation, 21 and 22, close with the victorious scenes of the everlasting kingdom being set up on the earth. God again dwells in the midst of His people. The broken union has been restored. Eden lost has been regained. The Groom and His bride have been eternally reunited.

Prophecy: A Contrast Between Two Characters

All prophecy is Christ centered. In other words, Christ is the theme of all prophecy. Prophecy reveals where He is in His stage of ministry. Christ, lived out in human flesh, is the gospel, the plan to save man from sin at any cost, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:8). The prophecies of the Old Testament point to the first and second advents of Christ. The first time He came as a baby and the second time He will come as “King Of Kings” and “Lord Of Lords,” (Revelation 19:16). We find that the Old Testament prophecies speak more of His second coming when probation ends for the human race. This will be a most solemn event and He has not left us in the dark regarding the signs portraying His coming.

The misunderstanding of these prophecies, confusing the first and second advents, led to the rejection of the Messiah. The Jews expected Him to come as a conquering king delivering them from their enemies and set up His kingdom where they would reign with Him. However, instead of coming as a conquering king, He came as a suffering lamb, desiring to save them from their sinful nature. Why did they misinterpret the prophecies? Because of their desires, they had preconceived ideas in regard to the manner and purpose of the coming of the Messiah. They had not studied the Scriptures with a desire to be released from the bondage of sin out of a love for their Saviour, but to satisfy the selfish desire of their hearts, which was only to be released from temporal bondage to Rome. This desire so clouded their perceptions and judgments regarding the character of the promised Messiah that they chose Barabbas, an insurrectionist and a murderer who, as we’ll see, represented Satan, and instead crucified the Lord of Glory.

Could we today be in a similar danger of misunderstanding the time or manner in which Christ will be coming back? Christ realized this and warned us not just once but four times of false prophets prophesying of His coming in Matthew 24 where He tells us of the signs preceding His coming as well as the manner. Of equal importance is knowing His character and how He will deliver His people from their enemies.

We will find that what happened at the trial and crucifixion of Christ 2000 years ago, is a “type” or “parallel” of the testing time for the church and the world in the near future. Just as we find the church appealing to the state to crucify Christ, we will find church and state uniting in the persecution of Christ in His people in the coming climax of this earth’s history.

The people of Israel had made their choice. Pointing to Jesus they had said, “Not this man, but Barabbas.” Barabbas, the robber and murderer, was the representative of Satan. Christ was the representative of God. Christ had been rejected; Barabbas had been chosen. Barabbas they were to have. In making this choice they accepted him who from the beginning was a liar and a murderer (John 8:44). Satan was their leader. As a nation they would

act out his dictation. His works they would do. His rule they must endure. That people who chose Barabbas in the place of Christ were to feel the cruelty of Barabbas as long as time should last.

Now let's look forward to the future events which will compel everyone yet alive on earth, to choose whom they will serve. There can be only two classes. By their response to now intensifying worldwide crises, each party will be distinctly stamped, either with the seal or character of their Saviour, the suffering Lamb, or with the mark or character of the beast (the antichrist or Satan—the insurrectionists against the government of God). Now each son and daughter of Adam is choosing either Christ or Barabbas (Satan's representative) as his general. And all who place themselves on the side of the disloyal are standing under Satan's black banner, and are charged with rejecting and spitefully using Christ. They are charged with deliberately crucifying the Lord of life and glory.

When Christ was upon this earth, the world preferred Barabbas. Barabbas was in prison for rising up against the government and for murder. "And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection." Mark 15:7.

Today the world and many churches are making the same choice. They desire Christ to come as a conquering King and wipe out their enemies and set up His kingdom. Could it be that the desires of their hearts and the preconceived ideas that they hold are preventing them from rightly interpreting the prophecies regarding the manner in which Christ returns to claim His own? Remember that Christ warned them repeatedly that there would be false prophecies regarding His coming. (Matthew 24:4, 5, 11, 24). He has also promised that we need not be deceived nor caught unaware.

"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6.

The scenes of the betrayal, the rejection, and the crucifixion of Christ have been re-enacted, and will again be reenacted on an immense, worldwide scale. Church and state united to crucify Christ and the same thing will happen to Christ's people in the final battle between Christ and antichrist. "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." Matthew 24:9.

People will be filled with the attributes of the enemy, and with them his delusions will have great power. Just to that degree that light is refused will there be misconception and misunderstanding. Those who reject Christ and choose Barabbas work under a ruinous deception. Misrepresentation and false witness will grow to open rebellion. The eye being evil, the whole body will be full of darkness. Those who give their affections to any leader but Christ will find themselves under the control, body, soul, and spirit, of an infatuation that is so entrancing that under its power souls turn away from hearing the truth to believe a lie. They are ensnared and taken, and by their every action they cry, "Release unto us Barabbas, but crucify Christ."

The Scripture reveals that they will be deceived because they had not received a love for the truth. They are attached to their cherished sins and their preconceived ideas and do not want to be separated from them. They see only one way to be rid of their enemies—by force.

"Even him [the antichrist] whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12.

The root words of Barabbas are "bar" (son) and "abba" (father), son of the father. Though included in the Syrian and Armenian versions as well as the New Revised Standard Versions, "Jesus," Barbabbas' first name, was omitted by early church fathers in respect for Jesus Christ. Reported to be a member of Sicarii (a militant Jewish movement who sought freedom from Rome by force), Barabbas was a notable, (well known) prisoner, robber and murderous insurrectionist. (Matthew 27:16; John 18:40; Mark 15:7). He was, in type, a "saviour" for the Jews from the Roman yoke.

As we reflect on the scene, where Jesus Barabbas, “son of the father” is chosen “in the place of” Jesus Christ, the true “Son of the Father,” we see the marked contrast of satanic force with the self-lowering, self-sacrificing, harmless characteristics of the true “Son of the Father.” This contrast is being revealed with increasing clarity in our day, as each makes a final choice between the self-exalting, forceful characteristics of the antichrists, who would prefer to have their enemies destroyed, or Christ and His children who would prefer to die for their enemies.

In Luke 9:51-56, we find a picture of the posture Christ had toward His enemies as well as His purpose for coming to this world. “And it came to pass, when the time was come that He should be received up, He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, And sent messengers before His face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for Him. And they did not receive Him, because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But He turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.”

Pilate was deeply moved by the uncomplaining patience of the Saviour. He sent for Barabbas to be brought into the court; then he presented the two prisoners side by side. Pointing to the Saviour, he said in a voice of solemn entreaty, “Behold the man.” “I bring Him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in Him.” John 19:5, 4.

There stood the Son of God, wearing the robe of mockery and the crown of thorns. Stripped to the waist, His back showed the long, cruel stripes from which the blood flowed freely. His face was stained with blood, and bore the marks of exhaustion and pain; but never had it appeared more beautiful. Every feature expressed gentleness and resignation, and the tenderest pity for His cruel foes.

In striking contrast was the prisoner at His side. Every line of the countenance of Barabbas showed him to be the hardened ruffian that he was. As the acts of Christ’s torturers degraded them below humanity, into the likeness of Satan, so did the meekness and patience of Jesus exalt Him above humanity, and prove His kinship to God.

The people of the world are so engrossed in temporal affairs that eternal realities seem of subordinate importance to them. They cannot distinguish truth from error. In spirit and in practice they are repeating the history of the Jews, and in these last days the chosen of God who keep His commandments will be objects of contempt, both to those in high position and those in the common walks of life.

We are repeating the history of the Jewish people. Their selfish desires and preconceived ideas regarding the manner in which Christ would deliver them from their enemies affected the way they interpreted Scripture, and ultimately found them not only choosing Barabbas in the place of Christ, but possessed with satanic hatred. The revelation of unexplainable, self-sacrificing love is what destroyed Satan, Christ’s arch enemy. “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” Hebrews 2:14.

How did Christ destroy His enemy Satan? By the greatest demonstration of love and humility.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Philippians 2: 5-8.

It was this that caused the watching universe to be fully convinced of Satan’s deceptive, destroying character. Will humanity, not yet convinced of the harmless nature of God, discover in God’s people what the angels and unfallen worlds perceived at the cross? We can take part in reflecting that glory. “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee.” Isaiah 60:1, 2.

Scripture defines a class that will be in harmony with Barabbas and the Jewish nation in that they, the religious world, will desire divinely ordained destruction of their enemies, some of whom are the righteous. “They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.” John 16: 2-3.

“And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, [legislative laws] and cause [enforce laws] that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.” Revelation 13: 15-17.

1 John 2:18 tells us that there are many antichrists, and that they existed in John’s day as well. “Anti” means not only “against” but “in the place of” as characterized in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, “Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.” Christ was opposed and Barabbas chosen “in the place of” the Son of God. We often look outside of ourselves for the antichrist. Could it be that the desires of our heart have deceived us regarding the true nature of antichrist? If we have any of the characteristics of self-exaltation, which would include self-indulgence, self-serving, self-promoting, self-preferring, self-defending, self-admiration, self-justification, self-made success, self-salvation, then we have the attributes of antichrist.

Do we prefer resolving issues in the meek, gentle, harmless ways of Christ or by the forceful nature of Barabbas in the spirit of antichrist? Do we desire the death of our enemies or are we willing to die for them? While we may not be ruffians, robbers or murderers, do we manifest a forceful nature in denying others the liberty of choice Christ died to defend? “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” 2 Corinthians 3:17. Do we maneuver for advantage or control in the home, business, church, nation, or world?

We may regard it unthinkable that we would ever be filled with satanic rage and cry, “Release unto us Barabbas, but crucify Christ,” but if we cherish anger, which Christ termed murder; if we resent the disagreement of others or how they “make” us feel about ourselves, or if we find satisfaction in our securities and comforts more than in relieving others’ suffering, then incredible as it may seem, these selfish traits are the spirit of antichrist, and we will be found in that class whose self-exaltation ironically brings self-destruction.