

Consider These 'Four Faces' of Prophecy

This article is from the "Edifying the Body" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's website, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of Sept. 9, 2017. A version of the article was published in *The Journal*, issue No. 198.

By Dave Havir

BIG SANDY, Texas—While I believe that the study of prophecy has great value, I conclude that most people who are interested in prophecy (including many prophecy presenters) derive little of the intended value.

Too many religious people have the following views about prophecy.

■ "Nah, nah, nah, nah, *nahhhh*, nah. I know more than you do."

Pride. Artificial means of self-worth.

■ "When this prophecy comes true, I am going to be protected in one special physical location called a 'place of safety,' which you will discover only if you attend our 'one true church.' "

Fear. Susceptible to being controlled.

■ "When this prophecy comes true, you will get what you have coming to you."

Lack of mercy. A warped view of justice.

Changed behavior

It is my perspective that the value of prophecy is changed behavior, which is often described as repentance.

Consider the Olivet Prophecy of Matthew 24-25.

Matthew 24 includes some comments about timing.

■ Matthew 24:3: "When will these things be?"

■ Matthew 24:15: "When you see . . ."

■ Matthew 24:32-33: "When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near . . . When you see all these things, know that it is near, at the very doors."

Matthew 24 and 25 include encouragement to change behavior.

■ Matthew 24:45-51: Faithful servant and evil servant.

- Matthew 25:1-13: Wise virgins and foolish virgins.
- Matthew 25:14-30: Distribution of talents.
- Matthew 25:34-46: Serving the King.

No visions of the heart

So we recognize that the study of prophecy is meant to bring people value.

People who are familiar with my writing and speaking are probably familiar with my approach to prophecy.

- I am interested in hearing the prophecy interpretations of people.
- I have no interest in hearing the prophecy interpretations of people who claim to speak for God with their dogmatic proclamations.
- At times I am willing to share my interpretations of prophecy, but I have learned to avoid the mistake of being a dogmatic proclaimer. Every dogmatic proclaimer I have heard (including those among the Church of God) has proven to earn the classification of a false prophet.

Instead of overwhelming you with a list of scriptures, let me briefly quote just three scriptures that have influenced my recommended approach.

Jeremiah 23:16—"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD.' "

Jeremiah 23:21—"I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied."

Revelation 22:18-19—"For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

Four faces

This brings me to the purpose of this article. I would like to remind you about some ideas that you could use as a guideline to studying prophecy. I call the approach the "four faces" of prophecy:

- Lesson to the historical audience.
- Lesson to the nation where you live today.
- Lesson to the present Church of God.
- Lesson to you personally.

Highlighted scripture

For the sake of an example, let's use Zephaniah 3:2, which warns people who want to please God.

Zephaniah 3:1-2—"Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city! She has not obeyed His voice, she has not received correction; she has not trusted in the LORD, she has not drawn near to her God."

I recommend that Bible students regularly compare the wording in Bible translations to gain the best lesson possible. In this instance, let's compare the New King James Version and the James Moffatt translation:

- Not obeyed His voice: Deaf to My voice.
- Not received correction: She will take no correction.
- Not trusted in the Lord: She has no faith in the Eternal.
- Not drawn near to her God: She has never gone to her God.

Historical audience

I recommend that a Bible student regularly begin with the historical audience.

Who is the historical audience?

- Zephaniah 1:1: In the days of Josiah, king of Judah.
- Jeremiah 1:1-3: In the days of Josiah, king of Judah.
- Zephaniah 1:4 to 2:3: Judgment on the nation of Judah.
- Zephaniah 2:4-15: Judgment on the nations surrounding Judah.
- Zephaniah 3:1-7: Judgment on the city of Jerusalem.
- 2 Kings 23:4-5: Josiah commanded Hilkiah the high priest to remove the idolatrous priests.
- Jeremiah 22:21: They did not obey His voice.
- Jeremiah 5:3: They refused to receive correction.
- Jeremiah 9:23-24: They trusted in wisdom, might and riches instead of trusting in the Lord.
- Jeremiah 32:33: They turned their back to God.

Nation where you live

Someone could ask: "How can I know if an Old Testament prophecy directly applies to the nation where I live?"

My answer: Instead of wasting your time trying to make an Old Testament prophecy fit directly into your view of a national situation, how about simply finding value from all lessons and warnings of prophecy that can apply?

Consider Zephaniah 3:2 again.

- Zephaniah 1:2-3: Judgment on the whole earth.
- Zephaniah 3:8: Judgment on the whole earth.
- Zephaniah 3:9-13: The promise of conversion.
- Zephaniah 3:14-20: The promise of restoration.

Present Church of God

Someone could ask: "How can I know if an Old Testament prophecy directly applies to the present Church of God?"

My answer: Instead of wasting your time trying to make an Old Testament prophecy fit directly into your perspective of the church landscape, how about simply finding value from all lessons and warnings of prophecy that can apply?

Consider Zephaniah 3:2 again.

- Zephaniah 2:1: Nation not desired.
- Matthew 21:43: The Kingdom of God will be taken and given to a nation (Body of Christ).
- John 17:14-17: Not of this world.
- Galatians 6:16: The Israel of God.
- Ephesians 6:10-12: Spiritual battle.

Personal message

Someone could ask: "How can I know if an Old Testament prophecy directly applies to me?"

My answer: Instead of wasting your time trying to make an Old Testament prophecy fit directly into your modern world, how about simply finding value from all lessons and warnings of prophecy that can apply?

Consider Zephaniah 3:2 again.

- Zephaniah 2:1-3: Hidden.
- Psalm 91:1-16: Under the shadow of the Almighty (protected physically and protected by God's grace).
- Ephesians 6:13-17: Take up the whole armor of God.
- John 10:3-5: The sheep know His voice.
- Hebrews 12:5-11: Do not despise God's correction.
- Luke 22:39-44: He drew near to God; being in agony, He prayed more earnestly.
- 1 Peter 5:6-7: Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God; cast all your cares upon Him; He cares.