

## KEYS TO INTERPRETING THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

Text: 2 Peter 1:20-21

INTRO: In our day many speak of “the rapture,” the millennial reign of Christ, the rebuilding of the Jewish temple & a reinstatement of the Levitical sacrifices. Many of these false theories are based, at least partly, on a misunderstanding of the Old Testament prophets.

For our own understanding & so that we might be able to help others understand God’s word better, it is needful for us to better equip ourselves to study & properly interpret the writings of the Old Testament prophets. Such will also help us immensely in our own study of the New Testament book of Revelation.

In this lesson we will suggest three basic keys to help in understanding the Old Testament prophetic books.

### I. WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND **HOW** THE O.T. IS ARRANGED

A. Historical section first. All of O.T. history is recorded in the books of Genesis through Nehemiah & Esther.

B. Next comes the poetical section.

1. The book of Job has its time setting somewhere around Gen. 12

2. Most of the Psalms were written by David during the historical period covered in 1 & 2 Samuel.

3. Proverbs, Ecclesiastics, & Song of Solomon were written during the time period covered in 1 Kings & 1 Chronicles.

C. The last section of the O.T. is made up of the writings of the prophets. All the prophetic books were written during the time period covered between 2 Kings and the book of Nehemiah.

1. There are a few of the prophets whose dates cannot be determined with certainty, but most of them can be easily set within a few years by internal evidence.

2. It can be extremely helpful in reading & studying

the writings of the prophets, to go back & re-read the historical account of the times in which they lived and preached and wrote.

## II. WE NEED TO HAVE A BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY.

A. Most of the OT prophets prophesied during the period of the divided kingdom. Hosea was from the northern Kingdom of Israel. The others were from the southern Kingdom of Judah, although some of their prophecies were directed toward the northern kingdom.

Most of them foretold the exiles to come (Assyria for Israel, Babylon for Judah). They then foretold the physical restoration of a righteous remnant to the land of promise, which was fulfilled as recorded in the book of Ezra. And finally, they foretold of the spiritual restoration under the reign of Jesus Christ.

B. Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel & probably Obadiah, prophesied during the time of the Babylonian exile.

C. Only 3 prophets prophesied after the exile: Haggai, Zechariah, & Malachi.

D. An understanding of OT history, & where these prophets fit into that history, will be extremely helpful in understanding the fulfillment of their prophecies.

## III. WE NEED TO MAKE OURSELVES AWARE OF THE EXPLANATIONS GIVEN IN THE BIBLE ITSELF TO MANY OF THE PROPHECIES.

A. Ezra explained the fulfillment of Jeremiah's restoration prophecies, Ezra 1:1-3. Since this restoration fulfilled the prophecies of Jeremiah, it is logical that it also fulfilled the restoration prophecies of other prophets who had written even earlier than Jeremiah.

B. Many OT prophecies are explained in the New Testament.

1. Joel 2:28-32 is quoted & explained in Acts 2:16-21.

2. Amos 9:11-15 is applied to the NT age,  
Acts 15:14-18

3. Such prophecies as Ezek. 37:24-28 are fulfilled in  
the NT with Jesus as King & the church as  
God's dwelling place (temple), 2 Cor. 6:14-18.

C. Remember that many of the OT prophecies were couched  
in figurative language & explained spiritually in the  
NT.

1. The temple=the church, 1 Cor. 3:17.

NOTE: Modern preachers talk about the Jews  
rebuilding the temple. The Bible says the Lord  
would build the temple, Zech. 6:12-13; Psa.  
127:1; MT 16:18.

2. Israel=NT Christians, Gal. 3:26-29; Rom 9:6-8

3. Mt. Zion, New Jerusalem=church, Heb 12:22-23

4. Passages about beating swords into plowshares,  
lions lying down with lambs, etc., foretell the  
peaceful nature of Christ's kingdom. They do  
not promise peace in the **world**, but peace in  
the hearts & lives that are ruled by Jesus Christ.

La Porte, TX, March 29, 1981

Exton, PA, June 9, 1985

Shiloh, Mexia, TX, January 29, 1992 (class)

Susquehanna, Marietta, PA, March 18, 2001

Dexter, ME, September 27, 2003 (meeting)

Susquehanna, Marietta, PA, October 18, 2003