Apocalypse Now (Revelation Revisited)
Session 1 / Wednesday, January 13, 2016

JOHN, THE REVELATOR

The Escalating Decline In Civilization

Several years have passed since I taught a major series on prophetic scripture. So much has happened around the world that has caused fear and concern to both nations and individuals. In the United States we face another presidential election this year. The Middle East seems more torn than ever. ISIS is a continuing and growing threat. Church attendance in our country has dropped. False prophets abound. In so many sectors the Gospel of Christ has been poisoned with seeker-sensitive and non-scriptural nonsense. One would face life from a negative position were it not for biblical teachings on the future. The follower of Jesus Christ understands that God is totally in control and the King is coming back.

Prophetic Truth Is Enlightening

Most churches have little to do with education in prophetic scripture. This is caused in many sectors by leaders who have little or no respect for the authority of the Word of God.

At the time of its original writing (by the Holy Spirit through the pens of 40 persons over a 1500 year period of time) about one-fourth to one-third of it was prophetic in content. Both the Old and New Testaments devoted substantially to the subject. And Jesus Himself certainly took note of prophecy as noted at the historic Last Supper:

John 14:1-6

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. [2] In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. [4] And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. [5] Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? [6] Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Jesus believed (believes) that prophecy was important. If the Holy Spirit reserved so much space in scripture for teaching on God's plan for the future, it must be vital to
know. Yet, even at the outset, we are reminded to be careful in our study lest we draw improper conclusions.

GALLOPING ATHENIANISM

There are some real dangers in a study of prophecy. When Paul came into that great metropolis of Athens, which controlled so much of the cultural, intellectual and social life of Greece, he found that “all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.” Acts 17:21 While the Athenians’ culture and civilization have died out, Athenianism never has, for there are always those who delight to hear “some new thing.” Therein lies a danger in the study of prophecy.”

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In a frantic search for “some new thing,” quite a few people miss out on the basics of our faith - the foundations. They try to discover some “new” revelation and sometimes really miss the reality of historic Christianity.

FRACTURED FELLOWSHIP

Quite a few fellowships have spun off our historic faith by those who have “seen some dream” or experienced what they think is a “revelation” of a new truth. Joseph Smith who founded Mormonism would be a classic case in point. Some will take a truth and expand it and expand it beyond the original truth and it thus becomes heresy.

CHRIST MUST BE THE CENTER OF ALL TRUE PROPHECY

Prophecy was given to us to make Christ even more the center of our lives. Jesus is the center core. Some people seem to be more interested in the Antichrist than Christ Himself.

It appears that in the last decade or two there has been an increase in the number of fortune tellers, sooth-sayers, and astrologers. People grow uneasy about the “present” and clamor to know the future, but do to the wrong sources.

THEN WHY STUDY PROPHECY AT ALL?

1. The biblical prophecies that we can all read for ourselves in the Word have come true at a positively supernatural pace. So we can declare safely that fulfilled prophecy proves clearly the divine authority of Scripture.
Are there prophecies in the Koran or Book of Mormon? That depends upon the reader's definition of a prophecy. A biblical prophecy is not a speculation or simple generic observation such one finds in these other "religious" books. The prophecies in the Bible are very specific as we will study as we go along.

If a prophecy is genuinely from God, it will be fulfilled. It will happen. Daniel prophesied hundreds of years before it occurred the time of Jesus birth (Daniel's 70 weeks in chapter 9), Isaiah foretold the virgin birth of Jesus in chapter 7. Micah prophesied the place of Jesus' birth (chapter 5). Psalm 22 gave us a foresight into the life and death of Jesus. One mathematician has figured out there is only one chance in 87 plus 93 zeros that the Bible could be right on the basis of guesswork alone.

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2. A study of prophetic scripture proves once again the majesty, power and control of God, our Father.

My friend, the late song writer Ira Stanphil wrote:

Many things about tomorrow I don't seem to understand /
But I know who holds tomorrow and I know who holds my hand

We stand amazed at the authority of sovereignty of God as we study prophecy.

SOVEREIGNTY: means God can do anything He chooses, with or to anyone, at any time, at any place that remains consistent with His divine nature.

3. As we study prophecy we comprehend that the history of mankind is not some nonchalant, willy-nilly, meandering of the human race; but instead we are secure in the revelation that God has a purpose for every person and every time. There is a divine plan with a beginning, a middle and an end.

4. Our hearts and minds are comforted as we gain assurance from God's Word that all will be well for those who love Him. John 14:1

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

Prophecy provides peace to the true believer in Christ. The world heard (true or false, who really knows at this point?) recently that North Korea had tested a hydrogen bomb. In order to cope, those outside of Christ rely on booze or drugs to get them through the day. The child of God rests securely in his or her knowledge of biblical truth and can sing, "It is well with my soul!"
5. There is no question that as we study prophecy we are encouraged to live holy and
eupright lives before our Lord. You will note that so many times when the coming of
Jesus is written of in the Word that verses following encourage us to godly living.
2 Peter 3:8-14

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a
thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. [9] The Lord is not slack
concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to
us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.
[10] But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the
heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent
heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. [11] Seeing
then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be
in all holy conversation and godliness, [12] Looking for and hasting unto the coming
of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the
elements shall melt with fervent heat? [13] Nevertheless we, according to his
promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. [14]
Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be
found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

JOHN, the Apostle, and EZEKIEL, the Prophet

Among the biblical writers we will study in this series were John, the youngest of Jesus’
disciples, and Ezekiel, carried into Babylonian captivity about 600 years B.C. by King
Nebuchadnezzar. It is helpful to know something about them in order to comprehend
their incredible prophecies.

John

Most of Jesus’ earthly ministry centered around the Sea of Galilee. It is called a “sea”
though it is really only a “lake.” It is 13 miles long and about 8 miles wide at its widest.
At the north end of the lake were three villages that Jesus knew well: Capernaum where
He made His home the last three years of His life, Chorazin, several miles from the shore,
and Bethsaida on the north end of the water where the Jordan River flows into it.

In Bethsaida lived a man named Zebedee (wife’s name was Salome - not the same one
who danced for Herod Antipas). Zebedee was a commercial fisherman along with his
two sons who became very famous - James and John. They became known as “the sons
of thunder” due to their early easily-provoked tempers. John was the younger, and
doubtless the youngest of the disciples. Although all Jesus’ disciples, including John,
scurried for safety when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, the next morning John had the
courage to actually show up at the cross when Jesus was executed. There, in His last hour or so of earthly life, Jesus committed the care of His beloved mother to young John. Later, when the severe persecution of Christ’s followers began, the Christians were dispersed all over the Roman Empire. John ended up in western Turkey in the great city of Ephesus where he pastored the believers until his death in his mid-90’s. Mary, Jesus’ mother, was buried in Ephesus and tourists can still easily find her traditional tomb.

The Roman Emperor Domitian (one of the very worst of the Caesars) wanted to destroy Christianity. He believed he could do so by killings the movement’s leaders - or at least jailing them. He had John arrested in Ephesus and exiled on the little island of Patmos. There, Jesus appeared to him and gave him the revelation:

Rev. 1:9-20
“I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. [10] I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, [11] Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book (Revelation), and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia (Turkey); unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. [12] And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; [13] And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle (sash). [14] His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; [15] And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. [16] And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. [17] And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: [18] I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

[19] Write the things which thou hast seen, *** and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; [20] The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

*** Paul related to the Corinthians that he, too, had been caught up “into the third heaven”: 2 Cor. 12:4 How that he (Paul himself) was caught up into paradise, and
heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.  It is fascinating to observe that Paul could have seen much of the same vision as John; however, while John was commanded to write it down in a book - scroll - Paul was forbidden to even verbalize the details of it. This is a good lesson for us: Does God give us varied assignments, differing from believer to believer? Yes! We see it here. This is one reason why we dare not compare ourselves with others. We are responsible for what God commanded us - to follow in HIS FOOTSTEPS, not the footsteps of our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

John wrote five of the New Testament books: I, II and III John, the Gospel of John, and the book of Revelation (the Apocalypse - Unveiling). After his release from Patmos, John returned to Ephesus where he ministered and wrote until his death - somewhere in his 90's.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel 1:3  The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was there upon him.

As a young man, Ezekiel was to have been a priest of God in the great Temple in Jerusalem. However, that was made impossible with the second attack on Jerusalem by the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar. In the first attack in 606 B.C., Daniel was taken captive; in 597 B.C. they attacked again when Johoiachin was King of Judah (in Jerusalem) and Ezekiel was taken captive. He was shunted off to Babylon some 500 miles east of Jerusalem. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah - although Jeremiah was an old man by this time and Ezekiel was still in his 20's.

It is interesting how God uses people with a different mind set. The Jews were so terribly despondent upon their arrival in Babylon (Iraq). Note their pitiful cry in Psalm 137:1-2  By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. [2] We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. Now notice Ezekiel's perspective: Ezekiel 1:1  Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

We can deduce from the last scripture that Ezekiel began his ministry in Babylon five years after he was taken captive - in his 30th year. There were false prophets at that time (they are usually around somewhere....!) who were declaring that their people, the Jews, would shortly return to Jerusalem and that all would be well. They were saying this ten
years before the Babylonian army returned to Jerusalem (586 BC) for the third time, only
time they utterly destroyed the Temple and the entire Holy City. So for ten years these
false prophets in the captivity said they would return to Jerusalem and the city would not
be destroyed. But the true prophets of God instead warned the people to quit their
idolatry and get right with God. They reported that the divine judgment was just
beginning. Ezekiel’s prophecies are stunning, as we shall see.

We will also spend several sessions in DANIEL in this series and I will discuss this
great man as we begin that segment.

WHAT WE SHOULD BE LOOKING FOR NOW!

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18  New American Standard

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep,
that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. [14] For if we believe that
Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen
asleep in Jesus. [15] For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are
alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have
fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with
the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall
rise first. [17] Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with
them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the
Lord. [18] Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Let me give you a brief outline of what I believe scripture teaches about what lies ahead
prophetically:

1. The Rapture (the catching away) of the followers of Christ

   Now with the Lord in resurrected and redeemed bodies we will have a period of time
   (I believe 7 years) in which we go through the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3).
   Only the saved, the born-again, the true followers of Jesus will be there. We have not
   come to this throne room to be judged as to whether we are saved or not; no, we are there
   to see if we have any rewards or not. There will be degrees of reward in Heaven just as
   there will be degrees of punishment in Hell.

   Then with rewards in hand (if, indeed, we have any) we will be escorted into the
   Marriage Supper of the Lamb to celebrate with Jesus. Much more about that as we go
   along. This banquet will end when we “mount up” and return to Earth in our glorified
bodies along with King Jesus for the Millennium on Earth.

2. The Tribulation of seven years on Earth after Christ’s followers have been taken. Antichrist will lead this onslaught as part of the Trinity from Hell:
   Satan, the father
   Antichrist, the son
   The False Prophet, the unholy spirit

In my last series (What The Bible Says About....) I taught that I believe the one Islam awaits - their false Messiah the Mahdi - is actually the Antichrist taught in Scripture. While the Muslims believe this Mahdi will bring about utopia on earth, we know from Scripture he will tear the world apart. It will be such devastation on earth that if God didn’t end it (with the second coming of Christ) there would be nothing left of this planet except smoldering disaster.

During these seven years, as John saw in Revelation, there will be a series of three divine judgments on Christ-rejecting mankind:
   1. The Seal Judgements – Revelation 4 - 6:1 - 8:5
   2. The Trumpet Judgments - Revelation 8:6 -
   3. The Vial Judgments - Revelation 16 - 18

3. The Second Coming of Christ to this earth and the beginning of His thousand year reign. The world capital will be Jerusalem.

Rev. 19:11-16

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

[12] His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. [13] And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. [14] And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. [15] And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. [16] And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

4. During the thousand year reign, Satan will be bound in Hell. But he will be unleashed for a short time for mortals born during the Millennium to decide to follow him or Jesus. Rev. 20:7-9 And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, [8] And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the
four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. [9] And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

5. Following the thousand year reign of Christ, sinners will be finally judged at the Great White Throne Judgment. God will create a new heaven and a new earth and time will be no more. Eternity will have begun.

The Catching Away - The Rapture

In John 14, Jesus reported that in His Father’s house were many mansion. Probably most Christians have deduced that they will have one of those mansions. Not necessarily so. Here is Dr. D.D. Pentecost’s commentary on John 14:

The Lord had in mind an Oriental dwelling when He used this figure to teach the disciples concerning their future abode. In the society in which Christ lived, the houses were built in the form of a hollow square around a large open patio. Normally the walls were built without any opening in them, with the exception of a large main door or gate which opened into the patio and could be barred for protection. (It is in keeping with this imagery that Christ could say, “I am the door” and “I am the way....”) When one entered the door or gate into the patio, he would find a number of rooms which opened off the central court. They did not have interior hallways off which numerous doors would open, but all rooms would open off the central square. When a father would take a bride for his son, he would simply go to an unused portion of that enclosure and would wall off another room or two and that would become the habitation of the son and his bride. As the family increased, another wall would be put up and the living quarters would expand. When we read, “In my Father’s house are many mansions,” it usually brings to mind a beautiful, earthly edifice, polished and adorned with gold or silver. But that is not the picture the Lord has in view at all. Rather He is saying that in the enclosure called the Father’s house, there will be many apartments or dwelling places. This emphasizes the fact of the unity of the family - united one with another and with the Father.

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In that delightful John 14 prophecy by Jesus, He never identified the time or the how of His taking us to be with Him. But that information was given to the Apostle Paul, and we get it in I Corinthians 15. There are two major sections to that chapter: 1) Paul teaches about the death and resurrection of Christ. And 2) he unfolds much more about the Rapture: 1 Cor. 15:51-58 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep,
but we shall all be changed, [52] In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. [53] For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. [54] So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. [55] O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? [56] The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. [57] But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. [58] Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoving, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

The “mystery” of which Paul wrote (verse 52 on page 9, line 40) was not a “who-dunnit.” The word mystery generally in scripture has to do with a previously unknown or unexplained vital truth of eternity. So Paul was writing: “Here’s something you don’t know! We shall not all sleep (die)!” The Holy Ghost was saying through the Apostle Paul that one day an ENTIRE GENERATION of followers of Christ will not die. So what will happen to them? They will be caught up in the air with Christ - in a split second, quicker than the eye can see! But not with these mortal bodies which age and hurt and fall apart. Oh no! Just as Jesus came out of the grave with a transformed, resurrected and glorified body, SO SHALL WE BE GLORIFIED into Christ’s presence – along with those who have already died in the faith (have been saved). Isaiah 26:19 Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

1 Thes. 4:13-18

But I would not have you to be ignorant (uninformed), brethren, concerning them which are asleep (followers of Christ who have died), that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. [14] For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. [15] For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. [16] For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: [17] Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. [18] Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

SO SHALL WE EVER BE WITH THE LORD! What comfort, indeed! What a blessed
hope. But what are we going to do in eternity? What will our lives be like with no time or space dimension? No aging? No parting? No sorrow? Can we even imagine it?

No, we can’t.

But....we can search the scriptures and learn what God says about it.

NEXT WEEK: THE PROPHECY THAT MAY BE THE MOST AMAZING IN ALL THE BIBLE!