

Bite Size Bible Study

Prophecy Part 1 #260

By Lee Logue

If you are like I was, you probably weren't aware that there are five general types of prophecy.

For those who like big words they are:

1. Predictive Prophecy
2. Topological Prophecy
3. Prophetic Speech
4. Apocalyptic Prophecy
5. Unfulfilled Prophecy

I had always thought prophecy was prophecy and it always predicted something that would happen in the future. As you can see from the above list it is much more.

I was fortunate to receive a paper on this subject, written by Bible Gateway Plus. For the serious Bible student this is a great resource and well worth the subscription cost.

Prophecy serves much more in the scriptures. Things like promises, warnings, hope, telling of truths, symbolism and reports of a future Messiah. This prophecy can carry meanings of historical facts, or it can be symbolic or even have layers to its meaning. It can be very literal or obtuse to the original listener.

Because it has so many nuances, we need to be very careful in our understanding of a particular prophecy and not hold to a ridged explanation of it. Our understanding may need revision as future events or a better understanding of past events may change the meaning that God had intended for us to learn.

Whenever we read a prophecy, we should not assume that we know its meaning:

- First, we need to attempt to understand it in the way the people understood it at the time it was first given.
- Secondly, we need to learn how later scripture used it. Was it fulfilled or fulfilled in type, or are parts still to be fulfilled?
- Thirdly, did Jesus refer to it – fulfill it or even amplify it?

Predictive Prophecy

This is the type that gives a warning and/or a promise.

For most people this is the most familiar. God announces, through the prophet, that something will happen in the future. This often includes coming judgment, exile, restoration, or return. This usually plays out in a before-and-after pattern: God warns through his prophet, the events unfold in history, and later Scripture reflects on what happened.

The prophet Jeremiah was given a prophecy for the people of Judah of a future captivity caused by their lack of faithfulness to their covenant with God.

Seventy Years of Captivity

The word came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. So, Jeremiah the prophet said to all the people of Judah and to all those living in Jerusalem For twenty-three years—from the thirteenth year of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah until this very day—the word of the Lord has come to me and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened.

And though the Lord has sent all his servants the prophets to you again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention. They said, "Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and your evil practices, and you can stay in the land the Lord gave to you and your ancestors for ever and ever. Do not follow other gods to serve and worship them; do not arouse my anger with what your hands have made. Then I will not harm you."

"But you did not listen to me," declares the Lord, "and you have aroused my anger with what your hands have made, and you have brought harm to yourselves."

Therefore, the Lord Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the Lord, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

"But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the Lord, "and will make it desolate forever. I will bring on that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations. They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands."

Jeremiah 25:1-14 NIV

Later after the exile that was earlier promised, Jeremiah receives prophecy of hope for those suffering in exile.

A Letter to the Exiles

This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders

of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the Lord.

*This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. **For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.** Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."*

Jeremiah 29:1-14 NIV

In the first of these passages, we can glean that God, through the prophet Jeremiah warns the people of Israel that if they do not cease from their covenantal rebellion, he will send destruction and desolation upon the land through the Babylonians. Then in the second passage, God promises that He has not abandoned them, but after those 70 years, not only will he punish Babylon, but he will gather Israel back to himself and restore them from the exile.

This second passage contains one of the most famous verses (v.11) in the Bible that states: *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

When we read this verse in context, it reveals that it is not a promise to prosper anyone in particular. Contrary to popular views is not a blanket promise of blessing and prosperity for all of God's people, but it applies to the

exiles in Babylon. (There are other scriptures that tell us of a promise ultimate redemption.) These verses are a record God's divine discipline and judgment, to rectify the errors of Israel's present living practices. To show that He will not abandon them forever.

This verse is often viewed in popular culture as a blanket promise of blessing and prosperity for God's people. This message, however, applies specifically to the exiles in Babylon. God would bless the exiles by bringing them back to the homeland but only after seventy years of divine discipline. The broader principle here is that God's promises are true even in the most difficult times.

Chronicles, written some 270 years after the exile, recalls the horror of the destruction of Jerusalem and living in a Gentile country. But also, of God's favor of rescuing them from that situation and rebuilding the temple.

He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his successors until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah.

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:

"This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

"The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up and may the Lord their God be with them." 2 Chronicles 36:20-23 NIV

Reflection and Application

- What specifically did Jeremiah say would happen?
- Why was it going to happen?
- What do you see in His warning?
- What brings hope to Israel?
- How does the return from exile show God's faithfulness?
- Why is historical context important for predictive prophecy?

Some prophecies really do predict future events, but they usually serve the larger role of revealing God's covenant faithfulness, rather than simply satisfying our curiosity.