Study of Prophecy 1

By Dr. Charles Feinberg

Announcer:

Message by Dr. Charles Lee Feinberg, Dean of Talbot Theological Seminary in La Mirada, California. The title of this message is the study of prophecy. The study of prophecy.

Charles Feinberg:

If you will turn in your Bibles with me to second Peter, Chapter 1, verses 12 to 21. I want to read a very important and basic passage on the entire subject of prophecy. Second Peter one and verse 12 through 21. "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things though you know them and are established in the present truth. Yet I think it fitting as long as I'm in this tabernacle to stir you up by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this my Tabernacle even as our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me. Moreover I will endeavor that you will be able after my disease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But we're eyewitnesses of His Majesty. What he received from God the Father, honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory. This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with him in the holy mount."
We have also a more sure word of prophecy. I do what you do well that you take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place until the day dawn and the day Star arise in your hearts. Knowing this first that no prophecy of the scripture is up to any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not at any time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, that second Peter Chapter 1 versus 12 to 21. I say a fundamental basic passage on the study of prophecy.

Now there are many people who have no good word at all for the Study of prophecy because it seems to have little effect on those who claim to have heard it much or have studied it. And then again it is and has been tremendously surrounded by sensational pronouncements by sensational sermon titles and the like. It must be remembered that it never helps anyone to study prophecy or any other portion of the Word of God from mere curiosity or from a desire to appear more learned than others.

No study of the Word of God in any portion of it will help if carried on from that particular angle. If we want to see what power the study of prophecy has. Let's look to Daniel as an example. In Daniel 9:1 to 3. He understood by the book that the time had come for the end of the Babylonian exile and he was led by that knowledge to pray. Prophecy, the study a prophecy led him to prayer and in Daniel the tenth chapter of the nineteenth verse prophecy strengthened him. He was strengthened by a prophetic revelation from God and then we read also in Chronicles that the men of the tribe of Issaquah had understanding of the times that they might know what Israel ought to do. So, prophecy and its study ought to lead us to prayer, it ought to lead us to action, it ought to provide us with a strengthening that we need to carry on in our Christian life. But
remember the prophetic word must be implicitly believed to have such effects. On the other hand, failure to understand prophecy and the prophetic portions of the word of God. Such failure has worked disaster, not only on a individual scale, but listen to the Apostle Paul as he speaking in the synagogue in Antioch opposite here in Acts the 13th chapter.

You will notice there in verse 27 in his address says the Apostle Paul by the spirit, "For they that dwell at Jerusalem and their rulers because they knew him not their messiah who'd come. Nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day." Very significant, "Nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day they have fulfilled them in condemning him." That's the Lord of life, the Lord Jesus Christ. They do to understand the prophecy that work disaster. Our Lord Jesus himself mentioned that to the disciples on the way to Emmaus in Luke 24. O Fools of slow heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken, but not Christ to have suffered these things and to have entered into his glory.

Now just very pointedly and directly: What use is there in studied prophecy? Well, such a study, friends, has manifold benefits, more than one. For instance. It brings us into an unusual and peculiar intimacy of mind and heart with God himself. You remember, before God blotted out the cities of the plain for their wickedness, for their extreme wickedness, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding ones. You remember before that, God visited in the form of three angels of whom one was the pre-incarnate Christ, the angel of the Lord, visited Abraham and we read in Genesis 18:17, "and the Lord said 'shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?'" Notice prophecy--telling what is yet to come, particularly predictive prophecy in the will of God-brings us nearer to God. And then noticed in John 15, verses 14 and 15, "Ye are my friends if
you do whatever I command you; henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth. But I’ve called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my father I have made known unto you.” Friends are told confidences, not servants. For that reason, Abraham was called the friend of God and God took him into this intimate, closed place where he revealed to him his future plans. Now. In prophecy God invites us into his deepest purposes. Doesn't talking over mutual plans in a home bring the members of it near to one another? I remember being in a city in Texas years ago where the lady with whom I was speaking said she didn't care how her husband got along in business, just so he brought home enough to run the household.

Now wasn't there a loss there? How many wouldn't desire to be invited to the White House to hear one of the reports of one of our ambassadors or, for instance, the report from some of the outer space exploration by our astronauts. Oh yes. Wouldn't it serve to bind together? To be willing to be ignorant of God's revealed prophecies is to spurn close and intimate fellowship with God about his plans. What attitude is that, which cares much for God to provide our daily needs, give us this day our daily bread, and we should ask God for our provision.

But what attitude is it that cares so much for God to provide our daily need, but will not listen to him disclose his plans? There's another benefit in the study of prophecy. Why study prophecy? First of all, because it brings us near to God. Secondly, because it gives us a knowledge of world-wide purposes. Think of the vast subjects that are handled. You do not have here much ado about nothing. You do not have here a tempest in a teapot. O what vast, all- comprehensive, all-embracing topics are studied and handled, the greatest in the world.
Why. The destiny of the church. The destiny of Israel, of the nations. The goal of man heaven or hell. The reign of God's own Son on Earth. How uplifting, how transforming it is to be thinking upon such things. What a cure for provincialism, for narrow thinking. What a cure for narrow mindedness, for limited vision. I'm afraid too many Christians have what has been called in the matter of eyesight, physical eyesight. Too many Christians have spiritual tunnel vision. Their vision is very limited and very, very narrow.

Sadly so. Another great benefit of the study of the prophetic word is that it very definitely brightens hope, in Romans the eighth chapter and in the twenty-fourth verse, notice: For we are saved by hope, we are saved by hope.

It brightens hope, this element plays a large part in the believer's life. It has a relation to all he is, all he hopes to be, all he will realize and experience in fulfillment. Take hope from the Christian's life. And from his heart. Will he be enriched? You answer that.

Will he be impoverished, those who are so afraid to allow themselves the study of the prophetic word? Take hope. Take hope from the Christian's experience and you will leave him tremendously impoverished. We all know how hope enlivens every effort. The absence of it disheartened every time, yes. In Colossians three, verses one to four. Notice how the apostle Paul puts hope right in the very center of a number of very practical, as we call them, exhortations.
If ye--this is Colossians three, one to four-- "if ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God; set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For you're dead and your life is hidden with Christ in God." And now notice the future element, "when Christ, who is our life." Why should we have all of our affections, our thoughts centered on things above? Not on the earth? Oh no, we're not to be earthbound, for when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory.

Faith looks up and back. Love looks around and hope looks onward. A Minister, we're told, once went from a little town into the backwoods to preach to the settlers and he had to return at night when it was pitch dark. A backwoods-man provided him with a torch of pitch pine wood.

Minister had never seen anything like it and his immediate reaction was, that's going to burn out in a hurry, it'll soon burn out. The others said, the back woodsman said, "It will light you home, preacher." Well, the preacher remonstrated, "the wind may blow it out." The answer came again, it will light you home. But the fearful preacher asked yet another time, "but what if it should rain?" The answer came yet again, It will light you home. And contrary to his fears, that little torch gave abundant light all the way home.

God's prophetic light may appear insufficient to some, they may downgrade it.

They may think little of it in their own minds and hearts, but God's prophetic light is enough to keep our hope shining bright all the way home to the eternal glory. And then prophecy and study,
prophecy is important because it is the words and speech of God. In Deuteronomy 29, verse twenty nine, we read "the secret things belong unto the Lord our God," the things that it has not pleased God to reveal in his word to any of us, why, they belong to him. That's his province. That's God's bailiwick, the secret things belong unto the Lord our God.

"But those things which are revealed belong unto us." They're properly ours and to our children forever that we may do all the words of this law. God has spoken in prophecy, that's paramount, must never be be-clouded; whenever, wherever, however God speaks, it is our duty to listen and obey. God has spoken. A prophetic word reveals that as much as any other portion of the word of God. And then the study of prophecy has another benefit. It gives us the true perspective of history, the true outlook of history. So much of history seems a downright puzzle.

It seems as if it everything is just absolutely topsy-turvy. There is no rhyme or reason to it. But in the study of the prophetic word, we get the true perspective, we know which way things are going. We know how they're going to turn out. We know how things will eventuate. And it's in Romans eleven, thirty-six, that we have the tremendous passage, that of him, of God as the source, as the Fountainhead, as the cause, as the great, overruling one, for of God and through him as the governor, as the mediator, as the administrator, as the ruler, as the sovereign of God and through God and to him as the goal and end and consummation are all things, all things of the world, of the universe, to whom be glory forever, amen. True perspective of history. Sometimes in the midst of the affairs of life, our vision can get awfully blurred, or out of focus; it's prophecy that gives us the proper perspective of history. You take figures in the foreground or in the background of a picture of art and you'll see what we mean by perspective; only in the
light of prophecy can we know our own day, and that's the reason we read at the beginning of this study from second Peter 1. And verses twelve through twenty-one, and especially, would we have you think again of verse 19. We have also a more sure word of prophecy, the word of prophecy certified, as it were, underscored one more time.

In this case, Peter is talking about the Mount of transfiguration, experience mentioned in the Gospels. We have then, that word of prophecy made more certain, certified again, unto which you do well to keep as unto a light that shineth in a dark place. Oh how a light puts everything in perspective. If you're travelling through a room in the dark, you don't know how close one thing is to another, or how any of them are near you, but when you put the light on, immediately you see things in their proper perspective and place.

Yes, we should take heed to prophecy as unto a light that shineth in a dark place until the day dawns and the day star arise in your hearts. And then not only so, but there is another very, very wonderful purpose in prophecy, a very wonderful objective that is served in the study of prophecy. What's that? It is that prophecy purifies the life, and beloved, if there's any need in the church today that is more urgent than this, I do not know what it would be; namely, that by the Word of God, by these prophetic portions as well as other portions of the word of God, our lives might be kept pure. Notice First Thessalonians 3:11-13, "now God Himself and our father and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way unto you, and the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men even as we do toward you to the end." notice the purpose of all this, "to the end he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."
There you have it friends, the hope that prophecy gives us is to be as a guiding star to purify lives, it is meant to have a tremendous effect and immediate effect on your life and my life.

In second Peter three, again we have the relationship between the study of the prophetic word and living a godly Christian life. In second Peter three, last chapter of Peter's second epistle in the eleventh verse we read, "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved." That's the material universe. "What manner of persons ought you to be in all holy living and godliness?"
Verse 14, "wherefore beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless." he's not talking so much about their being erudite, and trained and conversant and aware in these matters.

Those are important, but once you have that, don't let that be an end in itself. But notice how you ought to be, how you ought to behave yourself, what kind of persons you ought to be in all holy living in godliness, and that you may be found of him in peace without spot and blameless. And then we have John. Not only do we have Paul in First Thessalonians 3, we have Peter in Second Peter three, we have the apostle John in First John three, emphasizing exactly the same truth. In First John 3:1-3 we read "behold, what manner of love The Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God; therefore the world knoweth us not because it knew Him not."

Beloved, now are we the children of God and it does not yet appear what you, what we shall be, we haven't seen anything yet, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for
we shall see him as he is. Well, how does this purify the life? Verse three "and every man that had this hope in him," set on Christ, "purifies himself", that Christian. That believer purifies himself "even as he, Christ, is pure."

Oh my friends, it's a mighty force. The study of prophecy, prophecy itself, believed, assimilated. It's a mighty force to shape the life in conformity with God's will for our sanctification. We're told that it was Chief Sechulme who said to Livingston in Africa, "I wish you would change my heart. Give me medicine to change it, for it's proud, proud and angry, angry always." He wouldn't hear of God's way, but he wanted an outward means. He wanted some kind of a nostrum, some kind of a patent medicine. God has provided cleansing by the blood of Christ its salvation, and through the Christian's experience in life, and the prophetic truth is an aid.

It is one of the aids to this wonderful objective and purpose. And then there is another advantage in the study of prophecy. Because it enables us to speak for God.

It enables us to speak knowingly, intelligently for God. Men want to hear all around about us what God has to say, if they're in dead earnest.

Haven't you, in the midst of this topsy-turvy world in our land and other lands, haven't you heard folks say "now you're a Christian. You go to church. What's it all about? What's all this coming to? Does the Bible say anything about it?" Well, men want to hear what God has to say, if they're dead earnest. To tell them what we say won't take its place. And until we believe the prophetic word, until we know it and believe it and apply it to our own hearts, we can't speak it forth.
We are absolutely shut up in our ignorance and we cannot speak it forth to others. And then we'd like to point out another wonderful advantage of the study of prophecy, and that is that it not only influences our life, but flowing out from that, friends, it definitely influences our service, and oh how eager we should be that our service shall be found acceptable of God. How many pastors yearn and long? They tell me up and down the land, "O, to get my people involved in service for God, to get them off of the easy seat and on to the work seat!"

First Thessalonians 2:19, "For what is our hope, our joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" You see, the whole truth in the Word of God is meant in one way or another to influence, to affect our service. If it does not, or it has not, we have understood, misunderstood it, or it's also possible that we have willfully failed to apply it. If the study of prophecy hasn't and doesn't affect our service for God, we have not felt the full power and force of it. We have not yet permitted it to touch our lives in the way that God intended it to be.

You see, if we are asleep in these areas, we are useless. In our service, we may be working at the wrong thing. You remember how the apostle Paul brings a very, very urgent exhortation to the Saints at Ephesus, and he does it in a way that may at first glance amaze us and surprise us. He says in Ephesians 5:14, wherefore he saith "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee light." [Inaudible] dead all about us, dead in trespasses and sins. And God is asking us, he is exhorting us through the apostle, "awake, thou that sleepest and arise
from the dead!" Did you ever notice the similarity between a dead body and a sleeping person? Yes. Oh, how Satan wants to keep us asleep, to put us to sleep.

O friends, prophecy will energize us. It will not enervate, it will not exhaust us. It will energize us unto every good word and work. In this realm of truth as in all biblical truth, it's happy [inaudible], if knowing these things, you do them. O My friend. I plead with you that God's plans reach your heart and life. If there is one listening who does not know Christ, then the important issue is to receive him and to get into God's marvelous, saving plan. He has one. You may be sure.

Now we have been speaking on the positive line in the matter of the study of prophecy, of any benefits in the study of prophecy. I'd like for us now to turn to a negative side of this matter. Of prophecy and it's study. What peril? What danger would there be if we left it off? What peril would there be in neglecting prophecy? Now you know as well as I do that our day places less and less store by these prophetic portions of the scriptures. Liberals claim it's meaningless, it makes fanatics. And of course, they hold the same position on the preaching of the cross. Uninformed Conservatives ask "wouldn't we be better off, wouldn't our preaching be more beneficial, more down to earth? More relevant, that much overworked word, wouldn't it be more relevant, more applicable if prophecy were not mentioned? Are there not enough other truths in our Bible without it? Can't we emphasize more practical truths that touch daily living? Isn't it, after all, let's be fair with one another. Let's be frank and earnest, isn't it just a lot of speculation anyhow since there's so many diverse views?"
O remember friends, if you've studied church history, there are many views on the death of Christ too, would you say that's unnecessary or surrounded by speculation? And I've noticed this through the years too, friends, that those folk who are the first to minimize and to downgrade prophecy and the prophetic word, the study of prophecy, I find that they're the very same folks, sadly enough, who make very little of other truths of the Bible that we call "fundamental truths of the word of God." Well, if that's what they're thinking on, if that's what they claim, if we are going to learn in this instance from what they've already done in the other instances, we must not follow their erroneous views and their erroneous advice.

My friends, I just want to ask one question of these folk: if prophecy is so useless, if it's so profitless, even if, they make it even harmful, if it's that impractical, did God make a mistake in including so much of it in the word, in the Bible? When written, realize it, when written, almost one quarter, one fourth of the whole Bible was prophetic. And do you know who the first prophet in the Bible was and is? God. Genesis 3:15 shows God was the first prophet. He is the one that talked about the hatred between Satan and the woman, and her seed and his seed and what the conflict would finally come to. That the seed of the woman, thank God, would bruise the serpent's head, crush it. Squash that head, put him out of business altogether, whereas the serpent would bruise the woman's seed at the heel. Oh yes.

Prophecy is eminently practical because one fourth of the scriptures are included here. In Romans eleven, verse twenty five, "For I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery lest you should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." My friends, if that verse tells us anything, it
tells us that the Apostle Paul did not want the Roman believers, the believers at the Church of Rome to be ignorant of something, lest it have very serious spiritual results in their lives. He didn't want them to be ignorant of prophetic truth lest they be wise in their own conceits. It's a very sane, sobering thing to study the prophetic scriptures.

It keeps us well balanced. Yes. And second Peter 3:8. We read how practical prophecy can be; "but beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day as with the Lord is a thousand years, and a thousand years is one day," doesn't it. Doesn't that bring things into a different light and show that God is working out his plan exactly as he intended it? It shows us how God can look at time, how God can view the historic world scene. Now, to neglect Bible prophecy results, first of all, in disobedience to the Lord's will.

To neglect prophecy is to neglect large segments of the word of God. We said, at the time spoken, practically one-fourth of the Bible. Well, to neglect prophecy, then, is to neglect large portions of the Word of God. And we're commanded to preach and to teach in its entirety the whole word of God, the entire council of God. Listen to Paul's word to Timothy, "I charge thee, therefore, before God," Second Timothy 4, “Charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ who shall judge the living and the dead and is appearing in his kingdom, preach the word. Be diligent in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine, for the time would come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but act to their own lusts. Shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall return unto fables." O, to neglect prophecy is to be disobedient to the Lord's will. In preaching Christ we must preach prophecy. Revelation nineteen tells us that the
testimony that goes out to Jesus is the spirit, it's the motivating force in prophecy. Do you want to tell about Christ? Then how can you miss it? After all, he was foretold, he was promised, he was prophesied before he came.

You can't just disregard that. We must preach prophecy, of course. Prophetic truth throws light on all the other doctrines of the faith. Prophecy is part of the ministry of warning, and we're told to warn. Yes. Second Timothy 3:15, the apostle Paul himself said, beginning with verse thirteen, "evil men and seducers shall become worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them. And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Yes, there is no, there is no evading this direct truth. This direct word from God, that it is a disobedience, nothing less, nothing more, it is a disobedience not to engage ourselves with the prophetic word.