

## The Importance of Prophecy

### 2 Thessalonians 1:6—10

As we work our way through first and second Thessalonians, we find many references to end-time events. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul lays out the future hope of the Church, the Body of Christ contained in the Rapture, while in chapter 5, he contrasts the Rapture with the Second Coming. Each chapter in 1 Thessalonians contains some reference to future events.

This continues in 2 Thessalonians with Paul emphasizing future events, to set aright wrong doctrine they were following concerning the Tribulation and Second Coming. They mistakenly thought they were in the Tribulation, so Paul wrote his second letter to the Thessalonians to reassure them that they did not miss the Rapture. It was important for them to understand which future events belonged to them under the Mystery and which ones were for Israel under prophecy. Those who understand prophecy, rightly divided, will more clearly understand the distinct nature of Paul's writings and the importance they hold for the church today.

#### **Paul treated prophecy as important**

Many people enjoy studying prophecy, trying to figure out what the future holds. When the book of Revelation is studied, it always seems to attract a multitude of people, even those who usually find Bible study boring. Putting Bible prophecy alongside today's events is even more exciting since it appears we are watching prophecy being fulfilled right before our very eyes. Some of these people spend hour after hour trying to fit current events into the Biblical narrative.

On the other hand, others see prophecy as a waste of time. They may understand how prophetic events tie together but see no practical application for it in their lives. They look at the study of prophecy as a mental exercise, but fail to understand the relationship to the here and now. These future events seem to be too far removed from real life to be of any real value.

However, the Apostle Paul thought it was very important for believers to know what they can expect in the future. Perhaps one of the first books Paul wrote was the letter to the Galatians. This book was written to defend the gospel that he was preaching and counter those who were preaching another gospel other than the one he was preaching (Galatians 1:6—9). This is foundational information for all believers.

Following the writing of Galatians, Paul probably wrote 1 & 2 Thessalonians and then 1 & 2 Corinthians. The books written to the Thessalonians, and to a lesser extent the Corinthians, are filled with information of the end times, both for the Church, the Body of Christ and for the Kingdom church. Paul treated this information as critical for the spiritual growth of the believer.

#### **The hope of the future**

Imagine if we knew nothing at all about what happens after we die. This is one of the big questions in life. People want to know what happens after death. Mankind has been trying to discover what happens by conjuring up dead spirits, reaching out to them to find out what the future holds. Others have had near-death experiences, assuming these experiences have given them special knowledge into what it is like to go to heaven or hell. People have purchased millions of books promising insight into the realm of the dead.

The only accurate source of information concerning the afterlife is found in Scripture. God is the only person who has this knowledge because He determines what the afterlife will entail. People who claim they had experienced death are either liars, or they have been deceived.

There have been several people in the Bible who have come back from the grave and none of them wrote a detailed account of their experience. Jonah went down to his watery grave but came back to evangelize Nineveh (Jonah 2; Matthew 12:40). There are no additional details of

his death. Samuel was allowed by God to come back from the tomb, through the witch of Endor, by King Saul's request (1 Samuel 28:7—19). He spoke words of judgment upon the King but gave no details of the afterlife.

Moses and Elijah are also brought back from the dead to speak with Peter, James and John, on a high mountain, in what is commonly called the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1—8). These two witnesses (perhaps) of Revelation 11 meet with those who were to be leading the Little Flock through the coming Tribulation. Again, instead of telling Peter, James and John all about the glory of heaven, it was more of a meet-and-greet, preparing them for the coming Tribulation.

Finally, the Apostle Paul was (probably) stoned to death and was caught up into the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1—6, see also Acts 14:19). He was specifically told not to reveal anything he saw while in Paradise. This experience was, I believe, necessary so that Paul would be able to serve the Lord properly. Paul's vision of his future home, and his love for Christ, propelled him to rejoice in the terrible mistreatment he suffered throughout his ministry of preaching the Gospel of the Grace of God to the Gentiles. Instead of coming back and writing a book of his experience, Paul was told to remain silent, sealing forever the experience he had in heaven.

The common thread through these recorded experiences is that we learn little to nothing about what will happen to us after the body separates from the soul and spirit (death). However, one very obvious and important piece of information is that there is life after death. While there are also some details about what happens after we die given to us by the writers of Scripture, we must be careful to separate the fate of believers in this Dispensation of Grace and in other dispensations. Our information is contained in Paul's 13 books written to the Church, the Body of Christ, and nowhere else. If we take Israel's program as if written to us, we will be following the wrong set of instructions.

Having established that there is life after death, we then naturally wonder about our destination, our existence and our duties. What will it look like and what will we be doing for all eternity? Although we really don't have a lot of information outlining the details of our future existence, we do know that we will be with Christ and ruling over angels (2 Corinthians 5:3—8; 1 Corinthians 6:3). This gives us a hope for a future. It helps us raise our sights up and beyond the cares of this world to our hope of our eternal state. We know life will continue and there will be a purpose waiting for us on the other side.

### **Misunderstanding prophecy stunts spiritual growth**

One of the big issues with the Thessalonians is that they embraced Paul's teaching concerning the end times, but shortly abandoned that because they were experiencing persecution that they interpreted as the seven-year Tribulation. Because they had thrown out God's Word and trusted their experience, they were now primed to believe a letter, supposedly penned by the Apostle Paul, telling them they missed the Rapture. They reinterpreted Paul's words in light of what they were experiencing. If they had retained his teaching about the end times and put what they learned into practice, they would have continued to grow in their faith. Instead, they lost the hope they had in the Rapture, which would have eventually led them to stunted spiritual growth. Understanding the differences between Israel's prophetic program and the Church's Mystery program would have saved them from wavering.

We can also suffer spiritual damage by following the wrong doctrine. Paul clearly warns that we are to follow his teaching exclusively and not to follow another (Galatians 1:6—9). I believe this "other" gospel in view here was the Gospel of the Kingdom. Verse 8 states we must not follow any other "good news" other than what Paul is preaching. That is about as clear as it can be stated, making it obvious that all those who deviate from Paul's gospel are accursed.

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