

Prophets Old and New

by: Ronald L. Dart

There are times reading the prophets in the Bible, that I feel like I'm almost reading an article in the paper on current events.

The 83rd Psalm is a classic example, that psalm is uncanny, read in the light of today's world's news. Maybe you didn't realize that many of the Psalms are prophetic, especially when you understand what prophecy is.

What is Prophecy?

Prophecy is not a mere foretelling of future events. You know, you have thirty days and this will happen and in another 18 months that will happen.

That is not what prophecy is. If that's all prophecy were, just telling us what's coming in the future, I can't see God bothering to tell us at all. But if it has to do with the why of future events, then there is every reason for us to know, because if we can change the why then we may be able to avoid the tragedy. You have to understand this too, if you see a prophet walking down the road to your house, you can count on one thing, it's bad news.

God does not send prophets to tell us how well we are doing. If we are doing that, then we are doing what we're supposed to do, and there's no reason for Him to give us a pat on the head.

This might explain another peculiarity of biblical prophecy. It has a way of recurring. Every prophet speaks out of history and to his own generation. But it is eerie how the events described also are directed toward the last days of human history.

As you read you can see how they are talking about their times and their kings and their wives, their sons and their period of history and then they'll go right on and tell you that this is what's going to come to pass in the last days.

Human Nature Doesn't Change

Now, there may be several reasons why this is so. For one thing, human nature doesn't change and we keep on making the same stupid mistakes over and over again. And it is somewhat famously said "Those who cannot learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them."

The other side of this coin is that while human nature doesn't change, neither does the divine nature. If we make the same mistakes that are fathers have made God will respond to us just like He did to them.

Old Prophet Isaiah

Now I think this lies behind something that God told Isaiah long ago.

It came in the middle of a challenge that God was making to Israel and their idols. They had gone into idolatry and God is in one of these moods where He just doesn't quite understand why they're going the way they're going. It's almost like a forehead slapping moment and you say, "Why are you doing this?"

God says in one case, you have to carry these idols around and it never occurs to you that they can't walk. Why in the world do you think they can help you?

In Isaiah the 41st chapter and verse 21 God throws the challenge out. He says, "Produce your cause," saith the Lord, "Bring forth your strong reasons, Let them bring forth the idols, show us what's going to happen: let them show the former things what they be that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them, or declare to us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter that we may know that you are gods; do something, do good, do evil that we may be dismayed and behold it together."

Now, what God is saying here is, if you're going to understand the future fulfillment of prophecy, the first thing you have to understand is what happened before. For it is in examining what happened before, that you will understand the latter end of it all.

Confederacy Against God

Now with that in mind, lets consider the 83rd Psalm – I'm not sure of the time or place when this psalm was written, and maybe that's appropriate, because the psalmist begins by praying: "Keep not thou silence, O God: don't hold your peace, be not still, O God. For, lo, your enemies make a tumult: and they that hate you have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against your people, and consulted against your hidden ones. They have said, Come, let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. For they have consulted together with one consent: they form a confederacy against you."

Now let's consider who these people are and how they're identified. They are enemies and haters of God, they are enemies and haters of God's people. They are in concert to blot out the very name of Israel. Now this was true when this psalm was written and strangely it's true today.

Just look at the news and look around the Middle East, and you have a whole confederacy of people out there gathered together consulting with one consent to destroy Israel. What's

interesting to me in this passage is the equating of the hatred of God with the hatred of Israel. Think about that.

Who are these people? They are named in the Psalm. In verse five, it says, "They have consulted together with one consent: they are Confederate against you, The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; of Moab, and the Hagarenes."

Now at the time of this Psalm, Edom was in the far south of Israel, Moab was in the southeast across the Jordan River. The Ishmaelites were the Arabs and they were further south and east. The Hagarenes were probably in the same area where the other descendents of Ishmael's mother, Hagar was.

It goes on to say in verse seven, "Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre" are in this confederacy.

Ammon is directly to the east across the Jordan, which is the country today of Jordan. The Amalekites were in the near South to Judah. The Philistines held what is today the Gaza Strip. Tyre was the core city at that time of Lebanon.

Verse 8, "Assyria is also joined with them, they have helped the children of Lot." Now the children of Lot, as you may know, are Moab and Ammon, the nations that are just across the Jordan from Israel.

Now as if all this that we have read above is not enough, the Assyrians get involved in the picture. Assyria was what is now modern day Iraq. It is impossible, I think, to ethnically determine Who's Who in the Middle East, especially since the Arab conquest of the region and all of the intermarriages that have gone on.

But the lands are the same and it is strange to consider an Iraqi power helping the Palestinians again as they did when this psalm was written.

You do remember that Saddam Hussein was paying something like \$25,000 to every Palestinian family of a suicide bomber.

The only power missing in this confederacy is Persia, which is modern-day Iran but they had not come in the picture at that time. Oddly, it was the Persians who supported an Israelite return from Babylon to the Promised Land. Everything changed in Persia, today it is Iran, after the Arab conquest in that part of the world.

Prayer for the Defeat of the Confederacy

So where does the Psalm go from here? Well, it's a prayer and the prayer cries out in Psalm 83 and verse 9, "Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison: Who perished at Endor: they became as dung for the earth."

This is a total defeat for these people. He is praying, "Let them become just like those people like so much dung on the ground."

Verse 11, "Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yes, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna: Who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession. O my God, make them like a dust devil; as the stubble before the wind. As the fire burns of wood, and as the flame sets the mountains on fire; So persecute them with your tempest, and make them afraid with your storm."

Now it is a call for God to do what He has done before to the enemies of Israel, but there is this interesting conclusion to all of this. The prayer continues in verse 16, "Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek your name, O Jehovah. Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish: That men may know that You, alone whose name is JEHOVAH, are the most high over all the earth."

Jehovah is the Only God

Now, mind you, the psalmist is not talking about a generic god. He's talking about a God, who has a name and the name is known. This is crucial. Not only that, he is praying that these people might come to understand and know that Jehovah, not Allah, is the name of the only God.

I used to ponder the closeness of the Hebrew Eloah to the Arabic Allah, considering that maybe the Arabs and Jews were worshipping the same God. But the various words for God in the Hebrew, El, Eloah, Elohim are generic words for God. They apply across the whole spectrum of gods of the Middle East, and which basically means the mighty ones. Elohim might have included Baal, Ashtoreth, Molech and any number of others, just as it was used in the creation account for God Himself.

In other words, you have the word 'God' with a capital 'G,' or 'god' with a small 'g' depending upon who you're talking about. The same thing is true of Eloah, Elohim, or El, or Allah.

So when we look at the enemies of Israel today, the picture looks much the same. People from the same lands hate Israel and hate Israel's God.

And while I haven't been able to confirm it, I seriously doubt that the Arabs believe for a moment that Allah is the same as Israel's God. There just doesn't seem to be any way to explain the animosity that exists there for a people who worship the same God you do.

There was a time when Muslims called Jews and Christians the people of the book. I'm afraid that time is passing or perhaps has already passed.

So perhaps you can see why I say that reading the biblical prophets feels a lot like reading today's news.

Israel's Existence is Precarious

I was frankly stunned when I read through the 83rd Psalm, and really began to focus on what's in it.

I knew that Israel was in a dire circumstance. I knew their existence was precarious, but I didn't realize how precarious, until I heard Dick Morris say something. He said, "One nuclear weapon, one nuclear bomb, could wipe out 80% of the population of Israel." Just one. Now just sit there for a moment and think about that. Think about the implications of it for the government of Israel and the people of Israel. Can they depend on the danger or the threat of retaliation to defend themselves?

You know, for a generation, we in this country depended upon mutually assured destruction. We had the deterrence to keep the Russians from attacking us because they could not win with a first strike in a nuclear war with us. They could not avoid the strike coming back.

Now Israel is in a situation where her enemies don't really care and Israel cannot survive a first strike. The implications of that are staring us in the face. Israel cannot wait to retaliate. They have no choice, no moral choice, no political choice, but to preempt any anticipated nuclear strike. The only question is how soon and how strong?

Any thinking person can look at the world situation and see massive loss of life just over the horizon.

I was watching a television program and they were talking about the stock market. One of gentlemen on the program was predicting four dollar a gallon gasoline in 2007. Why? Because he said that Israel could not sit still and allow Iran to get the bomb, so they would strike and the resulting confusion of it would drive the oil prices up, and we would be paying four dollars a gallon or more for gasoline. In fact, I think we have come to where four dollars looks cheap for gasoline.

A New Prophet

Now what's interesting about this is, that at about the same time, Pat Robertson, you know him through the 700 club and he ran for president once. He said that God spoke to him when he was on a prayer retreat and said that a terrorist event would lead to a massive loss of life in the United States late in 2007 sometime after the September 11 anniversary.

I don't know Pat Robertson, and I've never followed the 700 Club, and so I don't know what to make of him. But his predictions, you can look them up on the Internet and you can see the several things that he has predicted over the last several years, have a Jean Dixon quality to them. Speaking of his record in making predictions, he said himself, "I have a relatively good track record. Sometimes I miss."

Well, Robertson's predictions, really cannot be called prophecies in the biblical sense, even though he claims God told him. Why? God doesn't miss! So he has to be placed in the category of psychics like Jean Dixon. They make a lot of predictions and if some of their predictions come true, well they look like they really do have another world connection. I looked but I could not find a transcript of what Robertson said. What troubled me the most about the reports from Associated Press and others was that there appeared to be no strong moral teaching accompanying his prediction.

Prophets Tell Why Bad Things Are Coming

Now you should know this about prophecy in the Bible. In the Bible prophecy is not like that. The prophets just didn't tell men that bad things were coming. They told them why they were coming.

You can take Jonah as a case in point. Here comes Jonah wandering through the streets of the great city of Nineveh preaching, "Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Now we know that's not all that he said. We know this because of what the king of Nineveh said in response to Jonah's message.

Jonah had wandered into the city preaching his sermon wherever he went and word came to the King of Nineveh. Something really unusual happened, he got up from his throne, laid off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in ashes. He caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh." I can visualize this king sitting in the ashes clothed in sackcloth and giving dictation to his nobles. "Have it published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king saying that neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water. That man and beast be covered with sackcloth and cry mightily to God."

I can visualize cows in the field not having been fed, not having been watered, with sackcloth thrown over them, sitting out there crying mightily to God. "Yea, he said, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not."

Violence

This is really fascinating, because if you'll recall, one of the complaints that God had about the world that led to the destruction in the days of Noah, in the great flood, was that violence had increased mightily throughout the land.

Also one of the reasons why Sodom and Gomorrah were burned, was because of the violence that was a part of their way of life.

And here again violence is involved.

You know, I thought about that and I thought about Iraq, and the incredible violence in that country. Now we see what's going on there right now, we see the fighting between the Shiites and the Sunni and it is not a civil war, it is more like a religious gang war that's going on. These people are violent. But It hasn't come about merely as a result of the war of the United States invading Iraq.

These violent people invaded Kuwait, remember? The violence they perpetrated on the poor people of Kuwait is just astonishing with the things that they did. I don't know if you realize this or not but they went to war against Iran, and I read something that 1 million people died in that war. Violence is just a way of life and violence is a part of everyday life in Iraq right now, today, and those people would like to be perpetrating that violence on you and me.

Now, Jonah, sorry to say, was more concerned about the accuracy of his prophecy than he was in achieving the result that God had in mind, which was repentance. I can say after reading Jonah, never sell short a national day of prayer.

We haven't gotten to the place of calling for a fast with sackcloth and ashes, but it may come to that.

Old Prophet Jonah

The way this prophecy, sort of, arises in the Bible can be illustrated by the way it came to Jonah. Jonah 1 verse one, "Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it;" why? "Because their wickedness is come up before me. "

Now this isn't guesswork, God really did speak to Jonah.

When Pat Robertson tells me that God spoke to him, it doesn't carry the same weight somehow, that it does coming from Jonah. Again, I don't know the man. I don't know what the rest of his message was, maybe somewhere I'll find the transcript.

Now I am going to tell you frankly, God has never spoken to me personally. The only way that the word of the Lord has spoken to me is from the pages of the Bible. And since Isaiah exhorts us to consider the former things what they are, so we can understand the latter end thereof, then I feel justified in reading the 83rd Psalm in the light of history and with the view to what may yet happen again.

Now while a reasonable man may conclude that there may be massive loss of life in this country, it seems much more likely based upon history, that there'll be a terrible loss of life in the Middle East.

I don't doubt for a moment that there are devout Jews in Israel who pray the prayer of the 83rd Psalm almost every day of their lives.

Let's continue in Psalms 83 and verse 13, "Oh my God, make them like a whirlwind, like the stubble before the wind. As a fire burns the wood, and the flames sets the mountains on fire, so persecute them with your Tempest and make them afraid with your storm."

No one then had ever seen a firestorm and the whirlwind that it can create with incredible destruction, but it's implicit in God's firestorm. Someone said that if Israel today was hit by one nuclear weapon, twenty Arab cities will go down the same day. You would think, knowing that, would deter Iran or any other Middle East power from hitting Israel with a weapon of mass destruction, but you'd be wrong. These are people who love death and who embrace it like he would hold your sucking child.

The Word of the Lord Came to Me

The formula. "The word of Jehovah came to me," is a common introduction to prophecy in the Bible and the words are recorded. What words? The words that God spoke, something that Pat Robertson as far as I can tell, has not done on this occasion.

Here's the way it was in the book of Jeremiah, chapter 1, verse 11, he said, "The word the Lord came to me saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" I said, "I see a rod of an almond tree." Then said the Lord to me, "You have seen well I'm going to hasten my word to perform it." And the word of the Lord came to me the second time, saying and "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a seething pot in the face toward the North," and he said, "Out of the North the evil shall break forth upon the inhabitants of the land."

What follows in the book of Jeremiah is an indictment against Israel, an indictment against their sins, their corruption that has led directly toward the calamity that is going to fall upon them.

Why I Have No Interest in Being a Prophet

Now let me explain to you why I have no interest in being a prophet. I don't mind at all telling you what Jeremiah said, but there's no way I want to sit here and tell you that God told me what is coming, and here's why, and here is why Pat Robertson should be wary.

In Deuteronomy 13, and verse one, "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spoke to you, saying, let's go after other gods, which you have not known, and let us serve them." Don't listen! And that's not all. He goes on to say, "That prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death because he has spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God."

Later in Deuteronomy 18 verse 18, God says, "The time is coming when I will raise up a prophet from among their brethren, I'm going to put my words into his mouth, he shall speak

to them all that I shall command him. It shall come to pass, that whosoever will not listen to my words, which he speaks in my name, I'll require of him." Then comes this warning, "But the prophet, which shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, how shall we know what God has spoken, and what he is not?"

Now there comes an important question, because the truth is, we're told, even in the New Testament to try the spirits and not believe just every spirit. But he says this, "When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if he says, God spoke to me and He told me this, when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, then you can be sure that God has not spoken, but the prophet has spoken it presumptuously and you are not to be afraid of him."

It is serious business being a prophet. If they don't speak according to the written word of God, forget it!

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