

Understanding Prophecy, Part I

Lesson One Lecture

Lesson Title: The Foundation

Last week we noted that we must study God's Word the way in which He gave it. And what better person to hear from as to HOW TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND Scripture, than Jesus Himself, the very One about Whom the Word is written!

As Jesus walked the Emmaus Road with the two disciples He taught them how *to know and understand His Word*...Luke tells us very clearly that He BEGAN with Moses, and then went to the PROPHETS, explaining to them ABOUT HIMSELF in all of Scripture. And this process caused their hearts to burn within them. It was Jesus' Own stated way of *opening their minds to understand Scripture*. And if that is the way HE said it should be done, then I think that is THE way it should be done! Oh! How often that gets overlooked!

We also made note last week, that as we begin with Moses (Gen. 1), we can see a foundation laid out for us, upon which the remainder of Scripture rests. (And we are going to look at that today in much more detail.)

Foundational things must be studied first! Obviously, the foundation of anything is what needs to be laid out first, and then building can take place from there. Right? And if the laying of the foundation is flawed, then the building upon that foundation will also be flawed. Right?

So we can know that God's Word is perfect, and very specific! He laid it out in a particular way. He could have begun with information about eternity past, with a plethora of details concerning

- the creation of the Universe, how it was all shaped and formed, and
- the creation of the Angels to rule over the various provinces in God's creation, and
- the subsequent fall of Satan, and how his sanctuaries came into ruin.

These details would certainly satisfy our curiosity, wouldn't it?

But instead of giving us details about all of this, (things that took place in eternity past, He omnisciently gave us EXACTLY the details He wanted us to begin with!

In fact, while we are at this pint, let's talk about our understanding of the English word "eternity" or "eternal" for a moment. Please bear with me, I think you will see the reason for spending time on this.

The Bible has been written using two *divinely chosen* languages! The OT is written in Hebrew, and the NT is written in Greek. And in God's sovereignty, NEITHER language has a word within its respective scope that is equivalent to either of our English word *eternal* and *eternity*. Interesting, isn't it?

For very specific reasons, the Bible deals with "long periods of time" or "ages" rather than with the way the western world would view "eternity." And I believe that we can safely say that God knew what He was doing when He chose two languages that didn't contain the equivalent to either word — *eternal* or *eternity* — within them.

Now, to be sure, there is "eternity" on either side of "time" as we know it. Something we would refer to as "eternity." But we need to know that there was one point in eternity past wherein "the ages" began. And it seems that from that point forward, God wants us to see all of eternity within the scope of ages, or long periods (plural) of time, rather than the way we are given to think of it...ongoing time with no beginnings and no endings.

Let's begin to see these things by looking at this verse:

I Corinthians 2

7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden [wisdom,] which God predestined before the ages to our glory...

It's that phrase "before the ages" that we want to take note of here!

Actually, this somewhat allows Genesis 1:1 to make more sense. "**In the Beginning** God created the heavens and the earth..." And that which existed prior to *this beginning* could be seen as Eternity Past. But at this beginning point, apparently ages began. And apparently from this point forward (at least with respect to the heavens and the earth), ages will be the way to account for ongoing time even into what we would think of as eternity future.

And concerning PROPHECY, we need to see these things correctly, if we are to understand future events correctly!

So there was a point in ETERNITY PAST that the ages began. Let's set aside the past for a moment and look at the way the future should be looked upon. Paul makes mention of this in his letter to the Church at Ephesus.

Ephesians 2

7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Apparently then there are *unending ages* in the future, which we western-minded people might be tempted to lump these ages together and think of this as Eternity Future, in the sense of one unending period with no separate beginnings and endings.

But should we? Perhaps we should rethink our concept of ongoing time, that we call ETERNITY FUTURE...

Perhaps we need to see things really within the scope of how the Scriptures presents the matter — that of AGES future — *unending periods of undisclosed amounts of time*, each of which has *a beginning and an ending*, rather than seeing one single long period of “time”, even with some sort of beginning to eternity future, but no ending.

Please understand what I am saying here. We do have eternity past! God has always existed. He has never not existed. But at some point, He began what He wants us to see and “the ages.” And while we exist in TIME right now, and while there will be some beginning to eternity future, He wants us to see everything from the beginning of the ages in the light of AGES, and not in the sense of ETERNITY, with no separation of ages.

And again, there is good reason for this.

So, what we have seen in these two verses is that in looking back on things, we can see a phrase used “before the ages”; and in looking forward on things, we see the phrase used “in the ages to come”.

All of which begs the questions:

- Are these distinctions important; and if they are,
- why are they important?”

One reason is very simple. These distinctions are important because these are distinctions that are made in Scripture. And if Scripture makes these distinctions, then there is good reason for it.

In brief, this is something we need to grasp before we continue to study prophecy; otherwise we may miss something very important. It is this:

With respect to everything after “the beginning” of creation evidently God wants us to view “time” (if we can call it that) as specified or unspecified periods (plural) which have beginnings and endings. In the OT, the Hebrew word is *olam*, which means *a long period of time*; and in the NT, the Greek word is *aion* which means *an age*.

This is *not to say that God never* wants us to see things with respect to ETERNITY. In certain instances, He does! But He chose two languages that would make the distinctions very clear.

When necessary, the Hebrew authors could write in such a way so as to show the plural form of the word *Olam*, and the Greek authors could also. But this would be specific and obvious in the respective languages.

Problems exist in our understanding when the English words used to translate theses distinctions seem to do away the distinctions, often implying one long, ongoing period or

age with no beginnings and endings, when the original language would clearly imply a singular long period or a singular age, with a beginning and an ending. Again, this is all done on purpose by God and with evident reason.

One specific age that you and I are most intimately acquainted with is this present age. And in this age, there is a specified accounting of time, the beginning and ending of which can be easily known!

TIME as we know it today is calculated on the SOLAR CALENDAR 24/7/365.25 (the leap years allowing for the .25). But God saw fit to use the LUNAR calendar which is 24/7/360. There are 360 days a year in the Hebrew calendar, which would be 30 days a month, 12 months a year.

When did *this accounting of time* begin? Evidently in Genesis 1:3, when God said “Let there be light...”, He begins counting DAYS! “Evening and morning the first day...evening and morning the second day...” etc., etc., until 6 days are counted off, and finally a 7th day, which is set aside as holy! Set apart from the previous 6 days.

And from Scripture’s perspective, this method of accounting time is the foundation for the accounting of time leading up to and including in the age to come. These are foundational things, which definitely need to be understood in order to correctly understand prophecy as it is given in Scripture.

So let’s see this all laid out on the time line.

Prior to Gen. 1:3 we have “ages”...We saw that in the passage in I Corinthians. God predestined something “before the ages...” And these ages had a beginning, as stated in Gen. 1:1, which was when God created the heavens and the earth.

We have
Eternity Past , then
the Beginning, then
an age or ages, then
the beginning of time 24/7 (beginning with “And God said...”)

This “time” makes up this Present Age

Present age, (specified in duration, which we will talk about later)

But then what?

Let’s go beyond TIME (24/7) and see that we have ages future. The Ages to come. Our Eph. 2 passages revealed that there are ages to come. Now let’s look at some of the passages which deal with these future ongoing ages. And in doing this I will want to make a point, if you will allow.

Let's look at a verse in Galatians:

Galatians 1

3 ... the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom [be] the glory forevermore. Amen.

Something similar to this translation would be seen in most of our English translations (the NKJV has "forever and ever")

What would that word "forevermore" or the words "forever and ever" imply? With our western-thinking minds, we might think of one long continuous time with only one beginning and no ending, but is that the way God stated it???

Let's look at it in a literal translation (YOUNG'S LITERAL translation) so that we can see the term in a literal translation of the original language:

Galatians 1

5 to whom [be] the glory forevermore. Amen. (NASB)

Galatians 1:5 to whom is the glory to the ages of the ages. Amen.

Do see the different understanding there?

Let's look at several verses where the translation may lead us into this same wrong understanding. I will read the YLT, but we will also see how the words are translated in the NASB and NKJV:

Philippians 4:20 and to God, even our Father, is the glory--to the ages of the ages. Amen.

Both NASB and NKJV: "forever and ever"

I Timothy 1:17 and to the King of the ages, the incorruptible, invisible, only wise God, is honour and glory--to the ages of the ages! Amen.

Both NASB and NKJV: "forever and ever"

II Timothy 4:18 and the Lord shall free me from every evil work, and shall save me --to his heavenly kingdom; to whom is the glory to the ages of the ages! Amen.

Both NASB and NKJV: "forever and ever"

Hebrews 13:21 make you perfect in every good work to do His will, doing in you that which is well-pleasing before Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory--to the ages of the ages! Amen.

Both NASB and NKJV: "forever and ever"

I Peter 4:11 if any one doth speak--`as oracles of God;' if any one doth minister--`as of the ability which God doth supply; that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the power--to the ages of the ages. Amen.

Both NASB and NKJV: “forever and ever”

Then 13 verse from the Book of Revelation:

Revelation 1:6 and did make us kings and priests to his God and Father, to him is the glory and the power to the ages of the ages! Amen.

Both NASB and NKJV: “forever and ever”

Revelation 1:18 and he who is living, and I did become dead, and, lo, I am living to the ages of the ages. Amen! and I have the keys of the hades and of the death.

Both NASB and NKJV: “forevermore”

Revelation 4:9 and when the living creatures do give glory, and honour, and thanks, to Him who is sitting upon the throne, who is living to the ages of the ages,

Both NASB and NKJV: “forever and ever”

Revelation 4:10 fall down do the twenty and four elders before Him who is sitting upon the throne, and bow before Him who is living to the ages of the ages...

Both NASB and NKJV: “forever and ever”

We could read 8 or 9 more verses in the Book of Revelation...but I think you get the idea. Right? So let's ask ourselves:

Does this idea of “the ages of the ages” differ from the western idea of “eternity” —one long period of unending time? And is it important?

We would have to say “yes” and “yes.” The fact is that “the ages of the ages” relates the idea of *unending ages* (meaning no end to the ages), though unspecified in duration, implying a variety of beginnings and endings. This would be different than the idea of one long period of time, beginning at the return of Christ with no ending.

So why the emphasis here?

Because without this emphasis, we miss something very important! We miss a *future AGE*, that has a specific beginning and a specific ending, which is most frequently lumped together with “eternity future” due to the English translators missing the distinctions made in the original languages

Actually TIME (as we know it 24/7) covers TWO AGES. This PRESENT AGE, and the COMING AGE or the Age to come (add small line as well

And just as the present age has a beginning point (And God said, Let there be light,...and there was evening and morning the first day), so will there be an ending point of this Present Age. And yes, this present age ends with a culminating of many, many prophecies coming to pass, not the least of which is Jesus' return to the earth.

Here are a few passages that reveal that this age has having a point. Jesus speaks of the end of this age in the parables that He gave in Matthew 13 (again we'll use Young's Literal translation for the sake of continuity):

Matthew 13:39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is a full end of the age, and the reapers are messengers.

NASB: "the end of the age"

NKJV: "the end of the age"

Matthew 13:49 so shall it be in the full end of the age, the messengers shall come forth and separate the evil out of the midst of the righteous...

NASB: "the end of the age"

NKJV: "the end of the age"

Then we also see His disciples asking about the end of this age:

Matthew 24:3 And when he is sitting on the mount of the Olives, the disciples came near to him by himself, saying, 'Tell us, when shall these be? and what is the sign of thy presence, and of the full end of the age?''

NASB: "the end of the age"

NKJV: "the end of the age"

Then just prior to Jesus ascending, after His post resurrection ministry, He commanded His disciples:

Matthew 28:20 teaching them to observe all, whatever I did command you, and lo, I am with you all the days--till the full end of the age.'

NASB: "the end of the age"

NKJV: "the end of the age"

And the contexts in which these passages are taken, give us quite a bit of detail as to what will happen at the end of this age. Scripture reveals that many things will be accomplished at this time. Two of which are:

- the Return of the Lord, and
- the Judgment of all saved people, (judgment of unsaved will be at another point in time) and

But it is not this event (the return of Christ) that ushers in eternity future! But rather, He ushers in a particular age, that must take place in TIME (as we know time — 24/7)! And this is referred to in Scripture as the COMING AGE.

But in our English translations (when we see the words “forever” or “eternal,” we may miss the point altogether that the Scriptures deal very specifically with the “COMING AGE”. When we read passages that deal with this coming singular age by referring to it as “FOREVER,” we immediately flip it to one long period of time, with no ending i.e., eternity, which would be the wrong way to look at this coming age for several reasons.

If for no other reason (and there are other reasons), we need to realize that this coming age has a beginning and an ending, and that it STILL EXISTS IN TIME AND SPACE — as we know it today. The coming age has to do with this present earth within this present solar system, and the accounting of TIME AND SPACE with respect to this solar system. In other words, the coming age lasts for a specified period of time; it lasts for 24/7/360/1000. 24 hours a day; 7 days a week, 360 days a year, 1000 years. And we can know that by comparing Scripture with Scripture! Knowing and understanding by seeing it line upon line, precepts upon precept, a little from here a little from there, as we study (not one man for interpretation of these things) but the divinely-chosen men (plural) who were carried along by God’s Holy Spirit, who spoke from God.

The point is that God evidently wants us to see certain historical and future events in terms of AGES, and not in the western way of thinking of one long linear chronology with no beginning and no ending. Otherwise, He certainly could have chosen Scriptural languages that have the word ETERNAL or ETERNITY in it. As it was, not even one of the two languages.

Again, this is *not to say that God never* wants us to see things with respect to ETERNITY. In certain instances, He does! But He chose two languages that would make the distinctions very clear.

And with that, then there is something else that is important to be noticed if we are to understand prophecy correctly. It must be seen that this coming age is divinely *sancctified*. It seems that God wants us to see this as the CLIMACTIC AGE of all the ages. And we can see this in either of the testaments. Let’s view a New Testament passage:

Look what it says in Eph 3:20, 21 (we’ll look at it first in the NASB version:

Ephesians 3

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him [be] the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (which is the same as in the NKJV)

KJV has v. 21: Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

All three of these translations lose the very important implication here. But if understood in the language that God gave it, it gives a more correct connotation. Let's look what it says, when it is translated literally:

Ephesians 3:21 to Him is the glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus, to all the generations of the age [singular] of the ages [plural]. Amen. (YLT)

Exactly translated: the age of the ages.

We now get a different type of thought, don't we? Paul was dealing with a specific age, and an age set apart from all the others ages! The age of the ages. And that throws a completely different light on this period, doesn't it?

It's a bit like the terms:

- “*the King* of kings,” or
- *the Lord* of lords,”
- “*the holy* of holies,” or
- *the Song* of songs.”

What would this phrase imply?

This is *the AGE* of the Ages! Something set apart from the rest!

Again, we might want to ask ourselves the question:

WHY is this so important to understand?

Because the coming age is to be seen as distinct from all the other ages, just like the King of kings would be distinct, and the Lord of lords would be distinct, and the holy of holies would be distinct, and the Song of songs...

The coming age is the age of the ages. It is *the AGE* of the ages. (Not my words, but God's Word.)

And we can see, that in the type/antitype structure of Scripture, God has seen fit to provide this information at the very beginning of His Word, with obvious emphasis on the 7th day, which is set aside as holy.

In our homework this week, you began to look at the things at the beginning. And putting all of this together we see God beginning His Word at a point in time, where evidently the AGES began:

Genesis 1

1 In the beginning God created [Heb: bara] the heavens and the earth.

Simple enough! The ages (at least with respect to earth began). And later in Scripture, as we saw in the last lecture, Paul tells us more information about this. Paul gives us the information of what God created *in* the heavens and earth:

Colossians 1

16 For by Him all things were created, [both] in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created by Him and for Him.

In His creation of the heavens and the earth, He created rulers to rule over the earth. The originally created rulers over the earth were Lucifer (bright one) and his host of angels.

Ezekiel 28

14 "You were the anointed cherub who covers, And I placed you [there.] You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked in the midst of the stones of fire. 15 You were blameless in your ways From the day you were created, Until unrighteousness was found in you.

As we can see from what Paul writes, these invisible thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities are in the heavens.

And we can know that when God creates something He does it in total and absolute perfection. We know that He created the earth perfectly! He created the angels perfectly. He created man perfectly. There is no flaw in anything He does in any part of His creation or in anything subsequent to that. He is PERFECT in all His ways.

But we can also know that in these areas of His creation, a subsequent ruin takes place.

At some point, in an age past, Satan and a third of his angels rebelled against God. And in their rebellion the sanctuaries over which Satan and his angels were placed, also fell into ruin.

**Ezekiel 28:17 "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor...
... 18 "By the multitude of your iniquities, In the unrighteousness of your trade, You profaned [or desecrated] your sanctuaries.**

And so we see the condition of the fallen earth as described in the second verse of the whole of Scripture:

Genesis 1

2 And the earth was formless [Heb: tohu] and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

The description here is that the earth was in an absolutely chaotic state, indescribably so. But to see that earth *had not been originally* created in this formless and void state, we only need to turn to the Prophet Isaiah:

Isa 45:18 For thus says the LORD, who created [Heb: bara] the heavens — He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create [Heb: bara] it a waste [Heb: tohu] place, But formed it to be inhabited— "I am the LORD, and there is none else.

And so we see that at the beginning of this present age, God forming the earth in the sense of restoring the earth (this earth which at the beginning of the ages, He had previously created perfectly, but which had fallen into a waste place, due to Satan's rebellion. And in Genesis chapter one, He formed it to be inhabited.

But why "inhabited"?

Well, Genesis 1:3-31 gives the details of what God wants us to know concerning these things. And this is the very reason God begins with these specific details and not the things that took place at the beginning of the ages, in the creation of the whole universe and the all the hosts of angels. He uses the information that in His Omniscience He lays out as the FOUNDATION upon which the whole of Scripture is to be built.

And all of this is with specific purpose.

Let's look at it:

Genesis 1

3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

Day One: Light separated from darkness

Day Two: Waters separated; expanse place between the waters above from the waters below

Day Three: Waters separated from dry ground; ground yields its fruit

Day Four: Lights in the expanse

Day Five: Waters teamed with living creatures; Birds fly in the air

Day Six: Land animals, and finally, "Let Us created man in Our image...and let them rule!

Here it is. *The earth was formed to be inhabited by a new creation.* A creature made in the image and likeness of God. Man was to rule over the earth, because in a past age, the originally created rulers had disqualified themselves to continue to rule through their rebellion against their Creator. And God was not going to allow rebellious angels to rule over His creation.

And now we can go back to something we read by Paul in Colossians. We have seen:

Colossians 1

16 For by Him all things were created, [both] in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created by Him and for Him.

He had created the angels to rule in the heavenlies, they fell, desecrated their sanctuaries (the heavens and the earth) disqualifying themselves for ongoing rulership, and the God created man to rule from the earth (initially), and man fell, disqualifying himself to rule. BUT...look what the remainder of this passage is:

....19 For it was the [Father's] good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, [I say,] whether things on earth or things in heaven.

And so we see the need for not just the visible places of government on the earth to be reconciled due to man's disobedience in the Garden, but we see also see the need for the invisible places of government in the heavens to be reconciled.

He lays out a complete period of time in Gen. 1:3-2:3 (6 days/7th day REST) and using this as the foundational reference point, pointing to the fact that the Lord has promised HIS RETURN, in order for a SABBATH REST to ensue that is yet for the people of God, God has set His RETURN based upon this foundation! Which is the reason that Peter tells us not to forget that with the Lord, a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as a day! And this is what the mockers will mock in the last days, saying "Where is the promise of His coming...maintaining that all things continue as they have since the beginning..."

And THAT, my dear people, is what PROPHECY is all about!

That is why we read in the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, that the TESTIMONY OF THE JESUS IS THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY