

The Importance of Prophetic Study, and the spirit in which it needs to be conducted; with a general outline of prophetic testimony.

Lecture 1 of 'Eight Lectures on Prophecy' from shorthand notes.

W. Trotter and T.S. (Smith?)

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Preface.

These Lectures were delivered, and are now printed, for the benefit of Christians almost or altogether unacquainted with the subjects of which they treat, hence their strictly elementary character.

The following pages are, to a great extent, a transcript of the reporter's notes. Where, however, a sentiment was not clearly expressed, or where an illustration or argument naturally suggested itself, which had been emitted in delivery, the authors have not scrupled to alter or to add. A few explanatory remarks are prefixed to Lecture 3; and a subject not entered on in the Lectures, because less elementary than they were intended to be, is considered to some extent in an Appendix which closes the work.

The Lord grant that, if he should yet a little longer delay his coming, these pages may be used of him to stir up the hearts of some of his people, and lead them to live and act "like unto men that wait for their Lord."

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The Importance of Prophetic Study,

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Isaiah 6.

Had the subject of this lecture been the importance of prophecy itself, it might have been regarded in a two-fold point of view, as bearing upon the world, and as bearing upon the church. Prophecy itself is, in part, God's testimony to the world — a testimony indeed of warning and of terror, fitly represented by Ezekiel's roll, written within and on the outside, and full of mourning, lamentation, and woe. And, in fact, one of the saddest consequences of the general neglect by Christians of the prophetic word has been that, instead of bearing in the world's ears continually this solemn and mournful testimony as to the world's course and end, we have chimed in with Satan's lullaby of "Peace, peace," by which he soothes this poor guilty world into deeper slumber; while God's judgments, alas! by which it is sure, ere long, to be overtaken, slumber not. The world dreams of a golden age, a period of peace and plenty — of liberty and good government, drawing nigh; and it labours, as it has done for so many ages, to hasten its arrival. God's people, too, as unwatchful virgins, have slept or slumbered, instead of waking the live-long night to meet the Bridegroom at his coming; and they, too, have had their dreams, and have fancied the gradual and peaceful approach of the same blissful period. And while the world has sought to expedite its arrival by all the means and appliances of philosophy and science, and political economy, and a philanthropy having these for its foundation, how many saints of God have added to these the Gospel, and have thought thus to perfect the machinery by which this guilty, miserable world is to be brought back to universal purity and joy. Yes, and if it should be urged, as it doubtless would by some, that Christianity should be placed in the forefront, and all other things be only considered as subsidiary forces in the contest, what have you gained? The world and the church are still joined in one common phalanx, to fight one common battle, animated by one common hope of victory, and ensuring rest and peace and contentment in this

world below. All join in putting far off the evil day, or in denying that there is such a day approaching. Pillows are sewed under all arm-holes — the walls daubed with untempered mortar — the prophets, whether in the world or in the church, agreeing to prophesy smooth things, cry "Peace," when there is no peace. All this is the result of hearkening to the reasonings and speculations of men, instead of the testimony of God's holy Word.

Am I denying, then, that there is a day of universal peace and blessedness yet to dawn upon this oppressed and groaning earth? God forbid! There is a millennium yet to come; a period of universal righteousness and joy, brighter than any that man's hopes have pictured — brighter than any that even Christians themselves have anticipated; a period in which men shall, indeed, "beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;" in which "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more;" but when "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together;" when "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain;" when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." But as to the way in which this period is to be ushered in — as to the means by which it is to be introduced, we do affirm — and we hope that in the course of the present inquiry it will be plainly shown to you from the Word of God — that man's fancies and speculations have been preferred to the solemn teachings of this blessed book. It will be shown to you, from the Word of God, I trust, that it is not by the progress of society, or the march of intellect, or the advancement of science; that it is not by the spread of modern opinions, or the rise and growth of liberal institutions; that it is not by the means of schools, and hospitals, and peace societies, and temperance societies; no, nor even by means of Sunday schools, and tract societies, and missions to the heathen, however good in their places these may be (and we have reason to thank God in many respects for them): It is not by these means that Satan's kingdom will be overthrown — that the world will be delivered from his dire oppression, and the universal reign of righteousness and peace be introduced; but by *the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven*. And this is the one grand event placed before us in the "more sure word of prophecy" — an event which men have contrived, indeed, to put off to an indefinitely distant period, but which in Scripture is ever represented as the one impending event, placed as such before both saints and sinners. It has diverse aspects, I grant you, as to these; to the one light — to the other darkness; to the one joy — to the other sorrow; to the one deliverance, and eternal triumph and blessedness — to the other confusion and everlasting despair. But it is, whether regarded in reference to the one or to the other, the one grand event foretold in the prophetic word; the centre, so to speak, of all God's future dealings with mankind. And it takes place, not, as is commonly supposed, at the end of this period of universal righteousness on the earth, but at its commencement. It precedes that period; it ushers it in; and for anything that any of us can tell to the contrary, it may take place in our own lifetime — within the brief space of our own existence here below.

But I will not pursue this theme. It is the definite subject of the next lecture, when the proofs of it will, I trust, through the Lord's help, be placed before you. But I was unwilling to pass on without noticing it thus at the outset. And for this reason, that in nothing has the general neglect of prophecy by Christians had a worse effect than with regard to this event in its bearing upon the world. Instead of testimony to this rapidly approaching and portentous event, Christians have substituted, as a means of acting upon the consciences of the careless, the thought of the uncertainty of their own lives, and the thought of the final day of retribution, at the end of time,

at the dissolution of all things. I am not going to intimate that Scripture is silent as to these. No such thing. It does, in a few places, refer to these subjects. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment." The judgment of the dead before the great white throne is solemnly portrayed in Rev. 20. But this we may with safety affirm, that the great subject of prophetic testimony is neither the uncertainty of our lives, nor the setting of the great white throne at the consummation of all things, but the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ himself in the clouds of heaven, to inflict terrible judgments upon the living inhabitants of the earth — upon those who shall be alive and behold him when he comes. "Behold, he cometh with clouds: and every eye shall see him: they also who pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." The difference, as to the effect upon conscience, between these two sorts of testimony, is immense. It is true that life is uncertain; no one can foretell the hour of his dissolution. But this is an observation so trite, so common-place, so familiar with men's every-day thoughts, that it produces little or no impression. We all see so much almost daily of death and its appendages, that they fail to impress the mind. A grave-digger becomes so familiarized with his mournful employment, that to turn up with his spade the decaying fragments of a human body is no more to him than to turn over a clod or a stone. And so with others. So powerful are the effects of habit, and so habitually are we reminded of the approach of death, and the uncertainty which hangs over the moment of its arrival, that the prospect does not act upon the conscience. Nor is it commonly so employed in Scripture. But let the testimony of God's Word come home to a man; let him be convinced that what is before the world is the coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, not a thousand years hence, but for anything he or any one knows to the contrary, within the period of his own life; let him be convinced that for anything he knows or can know to the contrary, his own eyes may see heaven open, and the Son of Man robed in light and majesty descend, attended by ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment on the ungodly; that unless he embrace the Saviour and believe the Gospel, he may be one of the living objects of his wrath, when that Saviour comes to tread thus "the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" — let him be really convinced of this, I say, and is there not here an object of majesty and terror sufficient to arrest the most careless in his career of folly? And this, my fellow-sinners, is the prospect the Word of God holds out before you. Dream not of the certain intervention of a thousand years. Men have taught you to believe that this event is certainly at the distance of a thousand years. But Christ says, "Of that day and of that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." Before passing on, I speak this word of solemn warning to the unconverted here. Don't be deceived. Don't dream of an intervening millennium. There will be no such thing. The proofs will be given you another evening; but here, at the very outset, I charge and warn you in the sight and presence of God, before whom we shall all stand, don't be deceived by the notions which are abroad. No one can assure you that the day of which we speak is at any great distance. For aught we know, your eyes may behold its terrors. Within the period of your natural life, its thunders may burst upon *your* ears, and its solemnities cause *your* hearts to quake. Unless you embrace the Saviour, who is still presented to you; unless your hearts are opened to believe the tidings of his mercy, and take refuge in his open arms, on you, as yet alive here below, the terrors of the day of God may fall. *You* may be among those who shall be trodden in the wine-press, when HE shall come forth from heaven, who has been rejected and despised on earth. Delay not to flee to Jesus. He is the ark of safety that will outride the coming storm. Oh that you might be led to seek refuge in him! His arms are open to receive you. There is no one here that he would not be glad to receive and welcome to his bosom. Oh that this precious covert might safely enclose you all!

Prophecy itself we thus perceive to be important to all; but when we come to speak of the importance of prophetic *study*, and the spirit in which it needs to be conducted, it is clearly to Christians that we have to address ourselves. It is not that we are not anxious about others. My heart would not let me say a word to Christians, till I had first warned and entreated the unconverted here to flee to Christ for refuge. But, dear friends, the subject for this evening is clearly one in which Christians alone are interested. Christians alone possess two blessings which are indispensable prerequisites to the study of prophecy. One is, the assurance of salvation; the other, the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. Without the assurance of salvation, how can we contemplate with calmness and self-possession the solemn events which fill the future, as portrayed by the pen of prophecy? If we regard the judgments by which a guilty world is to be overwhelmed, how can I calmly think of these judgments, if I have the least lingering misgiving in my heart as to whether they may not fall on myself? If, on the other hand, we look at the glory in which they who are Christ's will be revealed with him when he comes — the glory of which all believers are co-heirs with him — how can I, with any measure of personal interest, contemplate such a subject, if I have any doubts as to whether I am one of those to whom that glory through grace belongs? No, the study of prophecy supposes the previous reception of the gospel; such a reception of it as has given perfect peace. Yes, my brethren, it is to you who know that, "being justified by faith, you have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," that I address myself, in urging upon you the study of the prophetic word. Sheltered in such a hiding-place, assured of the Saviour's mercy, and of the Father's love, you can afford to look abroad on all that the pen of prophecy depicts. Yea, you could witness the scenes themselves — not only read of them, but witness them — the shaking heavens and the dissolving earth — the glories of that day when heaven shall open, and the rider upon the white horse come forth, conquering and to conquer; and, knowing in whom you have believed, your hearts be unshaken amid the terrors of the scene. Did I say you *could* witness? My brethren, we *shall* witness these events — not as spectators merely, but as actors in the scene. All the glory of the opening heavens, and the unnumbered hosts issuing thence in the train of Jesus, the King of kings, and Lord of lords — is a glory which will ere that day have become our home and dwelling-place. "When HE appears, we *shall* appear with him in glory." (Col. 3: 4.) And the heart needs the calm and peaceful assurance of this to look onward to those scenes.

Then besides, none but Christians are indwelt by the Holy Ghost; and it is he, the promised Comforter, who was to "show us things to come." They are things that happen, indeed, to men upon this earth. But still they are the things of God. They are the unfolding of his purposes, and the development of his ways. "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." What he alone knows, he alone can *teach*. And how blessed are the words which follow those just cited: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." Yes, beloved brethren, it is to you who have passed from death unto life — who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, who possess this inestimable gift of the Holy Ghost, sent by the Father, in Christ's name, to lead us into *all* truth — to take of that which is Christ's and show it to us — to show us things to come; it is to you that I would affectionately address myself on the importance of that much-neglected study — the study of the prophetic portions of God's holy Word.

One consideration that can hardly fail to have weight with those who really value God's Word, is the very large proportion of it which is occupied with prophetic subjects. From Isaiah to Malachi, all is prophecy; to say nothing of a great deal in preceding portions, such as Jacob's prophecy in Genesis — those of Moses in Leviticus and Deuteronomy — as well as numerous passages in the books of Samuel, the Kings, and the Chronicles. A great part of the Psalms, too, are prophetic in their character. You say, perhaps, "This is all the Old Testament." But what, I ask, is the instruction of the New Testament as to the use and object of these prophecies in the Old? Let me refer you to Peter's words, which are very full on this point: "Unto whom it was revealed that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you, by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." (1 Peter 1: 12.) Has the preaching of the gospel by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven superseded the Old Testament prophecies? No. The things reported to us by the one are the things testified of in the other. And the testimony was borne, not for the sake of those who bore it, but for our sakes, to whom the testimony has descended, "that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister." Then, as to the New Testament itself, one entire book — the closing one — is prophecy. We have prophecies in the epistles of Jude, James, and Peter. Paul's notable prophecy in his second epistle to the Thessalonians is well known, besides others in his other epistles. And as to the gospels, which of them is there that contains no prophecy? Matt. 13, 24, and 25; Mark 13; Luke 21; and John 14 - 16, are the chief prophecies of the great prophet, our Lord Jesus Christ himself. And do we well to turn aside from these, as from writings of little (if any) interest or moment to us? Should we deem such conduct in a child commendable, or the reverse? Suppose he should receive a long letter from an absent parent, a great part of which is devoted to the child's instruction on a certain class of subjects, what should we think of his conduct, if he hastily passed over the whole of this, scarcely reading it at all, to pay exclusive attention to some parts of the letter, which, for some reason or other, he preferred? Would he be honouring his father by such a course? And are we honouring our Father, who has graciously caused the Holy Scriptures to be written, by neglecting, as Christians so generally do, the prophetic portions of them?

Then besides, there is a certain character attaching to the prophetic portions of scripture, which gives them an inexpressibly tender and affecting claim upon our attention. I grant you freely, that a great part of prophecy is occupied with the fortunes of other persons than ourselves. It particularly unfolds the dealings of God with his earthly people, and with the Gentiles, in order to the introduction of the kingdom of the Son of Man; in which kingdom our place is not that of subjects to be ruled over, but of joint-heirs to reign with him. It is thus quite true that the greater part of prophetic details do not apply to us personally. But is that a reason for neglecting prophecy? What! Has God brought us so near to himself — has he admitted us to such close and tender relationships to himself as to entrust us with his secrets, making us his confidants, as it were — hiding nothing from us! And shall we requite such love as this by utter and manifest indifference to what he has been pleased to communicate? Why was it that God told Abraham what was coming upon Sodom? Was it in order to his escape therefrom, or that it in any way personally affected himself? Not at all. Abraham's faithfulness to God had kept him apart from Sodom; his heavenly spirit and walk had kept him away from the scene on which the judgments of God were about to descend. On what ground was it, then, that he received intelligence from God of the doom of Sodom? "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (Gen. 18: 17.) Abraham was so dear to God, he was brought so entirely into the place of

being the friend of God, that God would keep no secrets from his friend. It would have been a sorry recompense for love like this, had Abraham said, "It is a matter with which I have nothing to do; I have no connection with Sodom and its judgments, and feel no interest in the subject." And when Christ says to us, beloved, "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth, but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15: 15), what is the only suited response from our hearts? What but the most reverent and adoring attention, while he, in the love that has thus admitted us to be his friends, unfolds to us what he has heard of the Father? If some secretary of state, some chief person in her majesty's government, was about to entrust you with some secret as to the administration of affairs, with what attention would you listen! Suppose he said, "You are such a bosom-friend, so dear to me, that I can keep nothing from you;" with what riveted attention would you hear the communications which he had prefaced thus. But here we have God himself, the great Governor of all things, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the one appointed to administer his government in the age to come, admitting us as "friends" to hear what is to take place, not in the government of a province, or a nation, but in that mighty change, which is to transfer the administration of power and authority from the hands of all to whom it has been delegated, and who have proved unfaithful to the trust, to his hands, who humbled himself to become the faithful servant, and who has had given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things celestial, things terrestrial, and things infernal; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. And has God told us of this, my brethren, and of the way in which he will bring it about, and the blessed results which are to flow from it, to all in heaven and all on earth, and shall we not be interested in hearkening to the information he communicates?

Should it be said, "Yes, but this word in John 15: 15, was spoken to the disciples of our Lord, and applies to none else;" turn to Eph. 1: 8-10, where, addressing the whole church, and having spoken of the riches of God's grace, the apostle says, "Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself; that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in him." It was not merely that the twelve apostles, or the disciples of Jesus, during his life-time here below, were admitted to this place of intimacy and confidence, but the whole church is that to which God has abounded in all wisdom and prudence, in making known the mystery of his will. And shall we despise this blessed place, and neglect the communications which, by reason of it, we are privileged to receive?

Further, the practical bearing and effect of the study of prophecy, rightly conducted, is a powerful consideration to commend it to our souls. I know that it is often objected to the study of prophecy that it is speculative, and people say they prefer what is practical. *Nothing can be more practical.* Let me ask you, how is Christian practice — Christian conduct — produced? Not by mere ordinance or precept. The law indeed said, Thou shalt do this, and Thou shalt not do that, and knew no language but that of stern authority and requirement. But while the law in itself was "holy, just, and good," we all know that it "was weak through the flesh," and could not secure from sinners such as we are the fulfilment of its holy demands. The gospel proceeds on an entirely different principle. It addresses us as lost, and reveals to us the fulness of God's grace, and shows how that grace has found for itself, in the redemption by Christ Jesus, a channel in

which it can holily and righteously flow, in streams of pardoning, healing, life-giving mercy, to the vilest and the worst. It causes us to behold how " God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." They who hear the gospel with believing hearts, in hearing it thus, receive eternal life. Their chains fall off, and their bondage to sin is at an end. The heart is set free in the knowledge of God's love; and the Holy Spirit, who has applied the gospel thus with quickening power to the soul, comes and dwells within, as a Spirit of adoption, crying, Abba, Father. This of itself produces, to some considerable extent, Christian practice. The man who is born of God, who knows the grace of Christ and the Father's love, by the testimony of the indwelling Spirit of God, is sure to act, in a certain measure, as becomes a Christian. The peace which dwells within, the joy that fills his heart, the love to God and affection for the Saviour which the Holy Ghost has produced, cannot but express themselves in tempers and conduct corresponding thereto, more or less. But more than this becomes necessary as he advances. An infant may have the life, the relationships to his parents, and the affections of a child; and these may spontaneously express themselves to some extent: but as he grows up from childhood to man's estate, he needs to have his character formed, his mind furnished, his temper moulded and subdued, and his affections called forth and regulated in intercourse with his father, and by means of all the positive instructions the father is pleased to communicate. Especially does he need his father's instructions as to the future; and in fact, the child is educated and trained according to the future of his father's intentions, and of his own hopes. Just so as to the Christian. Each believer is a child of God. Each has the life of a child — the relationships of a child — the affections of a child. And all these spontaneously express themselves, more or less, in every child of God. But as we advance, we need all the light that the Father has given in his Word, and we need to have this brought home to the heart and conscience by the Holy Spirit, the blessed teacher to whose training we are confided, to form the character and mould the ways according to our Father's will.

And be it remembered, that it is to intelligent obedience and service like this that we are called. "Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." (Eph. 5: 17.) A servant may hear his master say, Do this, or, Don't do that, and have no fellowship with his master's motives for either the one or the other. But the child, while under tenfold obligations to absolute implicit obedience, obeys after another sort. He is expected, from acquaintance with his father's character and habits, as well as from familiarity with his father's purposes and plans, to have an intuitive perception of what will be pleasing to his father, of what will give his father joy. And how are we thus to serve our Father, if we neglect the greater part of that Word in which he has condescended to untold to us his thoughts, open out to us his plans, and instruct us as to the way in which he intends to glorify himself in Christ, thus shedding his own light upon the whole scene that surrounds us — a scene which constitutes the sphere in which we are called to walk so as to please and glorify God? Nothing can be more practical than the study of prophecy.

And what do we behold around us as the actual result among Christians of the neglect of prophecy? Do we not often witness such a case as this? A man is arrested by conviction in the midst of his worldliness and sin. While the force of conviction lasts, and he lives in daily fear of the eternal condemnation he has deserved, his very fears and anxieties make him less solicitous about the world than he has been wont to be. The time and energy he has been accustomed to devote to worldliness, he now devotes to prayer, and reading of the Scriptures, and seeking by

every means he can think of to get peace to his troubled conscience. In a while, he is brought to understand and believe the Gospel, and he sees how all that he is vainly striving to do for himself, Christ did for him eighteen hundred years ago, when he died on the cross, thus making peace by the shedding of his blood. The effect of this on the person's soul we all know. His anxieties and fears are at an end. He has "joy and peace in believing." All that has pressed upon him like a burden intolerable, giving him an utter distaste for the world and its objects and pursuits, is now removed. His soul is happy — his heart is free. And what is it that ensues? Alas! one's heart sickens to complete the picture. But how common in such a case for the heart set free by redeeming mercy and pardoning love, to return to the worldly habits and earthly pursuits from which conviction of sin had for a season drawn it away: just as though Christ had set it free for worldliness and gain. There may be some slight differences between the way in which the world is now pursued, and the way in which it was pursued before the person was arrested by conviction at all. There may be more of conscience as to the methods employed; and there may be the consecration to Christ, as it is supposed, of some considerable portion of worldly substance. But still as to the general drift and design of life, it is manifestly the same as before conversion — the same as that of the busy world around. How is this? And how is it that it is such a common case? Ah, the solution is here. *People learn what they are saved from, without going on to learn what they are saved for.* They learn whom they are saved by, without learning that to hope and wait for his coming again, is as much our place, as to trust in what he has accomplished. The heart must have an object: man cannot but act for the future. If we have not before us the object that God presents to us, we shall surely have some other. If we are not instructed as to the future from God's Word, and so led to act in view of the future thus understood, we shall have it filled with visions of our own imaginations, or with those supplied to us by the speculations of others. And according to the actual future of our hopes must be the tenor and drift of our lives. How immensely important then, and how eminently practical, the study of prophecy!

Some of the common objections to this study made by Christians may for a moment be examined. Some say that it is not essential to salvation. But is it enough to know that we are saved? Do we owe nothing to him who has saved us? Is it of no importance that we should know how he intends to glorify himself in Jesus, and thus learn how we may glorify him while here below? Alas! that man has good reason to doubt his own salvation, who cares for nothing beyond the mere knowledge that he is saved.

Some say that the study of prophecy is merely speculative. But this has been answered already. All anticipations of the future drawn from any other source are mere speculations. Those actually drawn from the prophetic Word of God are sober realities, certain facts. As to its not being practical, as some allege, we have considered this already. There is nothing more so. The gospel supplies the motives to Christian conduct. The Holy Ghost begetting in us by the gospel a new life, and dwelling in us to sustain and guide it, is the power for Christian conduct. Prophecy reveals the object of Christian conduct, and gives us most exactly God's judgment of the whole sphere around us, in which this conduct is to be exemplified. It shows us that just as Christ arose from the dead, not at once to ascend an earthly throne and rule an earthly people, but (after remaining long enough to verify to his disciples the fact of his resurrection) to ascend to the right hand of God; so we, freed by his death from guilt and condemnation, risen with him as partakers of his life, are not left here to pursue the objects and unite in the course of a world lying in the

wicked one, and about to be desolated by God's judgments at the return of the despised and rejected Jesus; but after witnessing a while that Christ is really risen, we are to be caught up to meet him at his coming; and meanwhile, as strangers and pilgrims here in holy separateness from the world, we are to seek those things which are above, where Christ, who is our life, sitteth at the right hand of God. And lest our hearts should be attracted by the false beauty and splendour of the scene around us, prophecy reveals God's judgment of its moral character and condition; unfolds to us the ripened iniquity to which its course is tending; and foretells the solemn judgments by which it will be finally visited, in order to the establishment in it of the peaceful reign of Jesus and his saints. Could anything be more practical than this?

There are two objections, however, on which it may be well to bestow a little more attention. One is, the extravagancies into which, as it is alleged, many have been led by directing their attention to unfulfilled prophecy. We are told of the Anabaptists and Fifth Monarchy-men of a bygone age: we are told of Southcote, of Irving, and of the Mormonites of the present day. We are told of these, and warned against all attempts to study prophecy, by the example of the fearful errors into which these parties have fallen. But let us look at this objection. It proves too much. If it proves anything at all, it proves too much. We are not to study prophecy, we are told, because fanatical misguided men have made bad use of it. But if the abuse of anything be a good sound argument against the use of it, it is not from prophetic Scripture alone that we must turn aside, but from the whole Word of God. What Scripture is there that has not been perverted by misguided men, or wilful deceivers, to purposes of evil? Then, besides, all or nearly all those who are held up as beacons to warn us against the study of prophecy pretended to have received new revelations themselves. *They set up to be prophets*. It is not the sober, serious, patient, prayerful study of what is already revealed in God's Word that characterizes fanatical teachers on prophecy; but the pretension to having themselves received new revelations. My brethren, it is not that I wish you to be prophets, or wish you to receive anything that any one pretending to be a prophet would teach you. It is to guard you against all such delusions that I invite you to render your most serious attention to the teaching of the prophetic pages of God's holy Word. And the fact is, that the objection we are considering, not only proves too much for the objectors, but also proves the very opposite of what it is brought to prove. Instead of proving that prophecy should be neglected, it proves that it should be studied; calmly indeed, with prayer — in entire dependence upon the Spirit of God, but still studied. What is it that gives such deceivers as have been referred to the fearful power they possess? It is the ignorance — the wide-spread ignorance — of Christians on the subjects those deceivers dilate upon. Where is it that a man is most liable to be led astray? In the path he continually treads — a path with every step of which he is as familiar as with his own fireside? No; the night may be very dark, and the path very intricate; but he knows it too well to be in it led astray. It is in some unknown region, where every path and every lane is new to him, and where darkness moreover settles and broods over the entire scene. It is there that the *ignis fatuus* leads the traveller into a bog, or the false treacherous guide conducts him, through winding paths, into a den of thieves. And so with the Word of God. It is not by means of those parts with which we are best acquainted, that Satan and his emissaries succeed in leading us astray. But if there be any large field of truth with which Christians are not conversant; some large tract of Scripture consigned, as the prophetic parts are by Christians generally, to oblivion and neglect; there it is that the tempter puts forth his skill. By calling attention to some striking part of these neglected portions, he arouses the attention of Christians, and makes them feel how ignorant they have been; and they do actually come to see some truths

which they have not seen before. But alas! it is only that these truths are used by Satan as his gilded bait to disguise the concealed hook of some deadly error, which he contrives to hide amid the long neglected and now apparently recovered truth. My brethren, it is the neglect of the Word of God that throws the door open to the enemy. It is the neglect of the prophetic Word that makes Christians the easy prey of any deceiver who pretends to prophetic light. The Lord grant us to take warning by the past. Having our loins girt about with truth, and taking the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, may we be kept from all the wiles of the devil; may we be enabled to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, may we stand.

But there is another objection more subtle, and perhaps with a certain class of Christians more influential than the one we have been considering. It is this. It is alleged that the *chief*, if not the *only*, use of prophecy is after the event, to demonstrate the truth of God, and evince his faithfulness in fulfilling his word. It is said, "Ah, but you cannot understand prophecy till after the occurrence of the event it foretells. This is the only key by which it can be unlocked, and then it will be seen how God has spoken, and has fulfilled his word. But it is of no use examining prophecy till then." Such is the objection. That fulfilled prophecy has the use affirmed, one would not, of course, think of denying. Fulfilled prophecy has this use undoubtedly. But to say of *unfulfilled* prophecy, that its chief use is after the event is to go directly in the face of the plainest declarations of God's word. See 2 Peter 1: 19: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed." When? When the events have been accomplished, and the light thus shed upon the prophecy makes plain that God has spoken the truth? Is that the time? No; "whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, *as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, UNTIL the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.*"* The use of prophecy is that of a lamp, to light the traveller's feet along the dark and dreary path. It is not intended for a candle to be held up to the sun, to make it manifest that the sun shines at noonday. As some one has, in substance, remarked, if the chief use of unfulfilled prophecy be after the event, it must be either to the righteous or to the wicked that it is thus useful. It cannot be to the wicked; it is too late to be of use to them, when its predictions have been accomplished in their destruction. The flood proved the truth of God's word by Noah; but it was too late to be of any advantage to the guilty world, who perished for not having heeded the warning before. And as to the righteous, surely they don't need the fulfilment of prophecy to satisfy them that God speaks the truth. *We are not Christians, unless we do believe this.* No, my brethren, we do not need prophecy to be fulfilled, in order to certify us of the truth of God. But we do need all the light it sheds upon our present path, and upon the whole scene around, to guide us through its intricate mazes to that city of habitation which it reveals to us as the home of our weary hearts, and our eternal dwelling-place of joy.

*[What is urged before and after is sound and true; but not in virtue of this scripture, which insists on the value of the prophetic lamp till daylight dawn, and the day star, Christ, our heavenly hope, arise in the heart — not till prophecy is accomplished. — Ed.]

As to "the spirit in which prophetic study needs to be conducted," a few words must suffice. Isaiah 6 affords full and blessed instruction as to this. We have there Isaiah's preparation to *be* a prophet. The needed preparation for the study of prophecy is surely of the same character morally. It is not intellectual power, natural quickness of apprehension, or precision of judgment. Where God is the teacher, and sinners saved by grace the learners, the preparatory process is

moral and spiritual. Prophecy is not designed to furnish food for curious imaginations, or a field for the exercise of intellectual power. It is addressed to faith, to be by it simply received as God's word, and thus to become incorporated with the very existence of the inner man, humbling us at God's feet, 'Weaning its from the world, enabling us alike to despise its attractions, and to be quiet and peaceful amid its convulsions and its overturns, knowing beforehand what will be the end of its vaunting, proud career, and how God has prepared for the safety and blessing of his own — some *above* and others amid the widespread, general crash. What can enable us aright to pursue the study of a subject like this, but a process somewhat similar to that through which the prophet passed? Let us consider it for a moment.

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts. the whole earth is full of his glory," is the cry which bursts from the lips of the prostrate seraphim. What effect has this vision of glory on the prophet? It withers all the pride and beauty of the flesh. In the presence of this glory the prophet has the deepest discernment of his own sinful, abject condition, and of that of his people, among whom he dwells. "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." This is needful for us, as well as for the prophet. It is this withering of the flesh of all self-confidence and self-importance; this discovery to us of what we are as sinners in the presence of a holy God; it is this we need, to traverse safely the scenes unfolded to us in prophecy. They are scenes of judgment, of desolation, of succeeding brightness and glory; but we could not pass and repass through them, and be instructed as to them, without being puffed up by increasing knowledge, unless our hearts learn these things in the presence of the brightness of the glory of God. This is a brightness which we discern by faith; to the prophet it was revealed to sight. Oh! we need this discovery of ourselves, of our deep sinfulness, so as to loathe and abhor ourselves; or our vain, proud hearts would turn our very acquaintance with prophecy into a means of exalting ourselves above our brethren. Isaiah takes his place as identified with his nation. He owns not only that he is a man of unclean lips, but that he dwells in the midst of a people of unclean lips. The Lord grant us, in the presence of his glory, this true brokenness of heart.

But the prophet is not left here. Grace is ministered to him. He is made to know that his iniquity is taken away, and his sin purged. And so with us; when a broken heart is combined with the knowledge of the grace which has bound it up; when we not only see "the King, the Lord of hosts," but see how he stooped to the manger, to the garden, to the cross; when we see him there, and read full forgiveness in his open side, and hear it in his expiring cry; then it is, the heart made free and happy in God's love, yet thoroughly broken and abased, we can bear to study the prophetic word, and look onwards to those scenes of judgment which tell of what we had deserved, and must surely have endured, had grace not interposed.

But an inquiry is now instituted: "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" "Here am I, send me," is the prophet's ready response. The humbleness, self-loathing, and self-distrust, which nothing can produce but the beholding (by faith in our case — by sight in that of the prophet) the glory of the Lord; the simple blessed assurance of iniquity purged and sin removed, which the gospel brings; and the readiness to run on any errand, and enter on any service which it may please our forgiving Lord to appoint; these

three traits mark the grand moral preparation of the heart by the Spirit of God, for the study of prophecy. And it is surely just in proportion as these dispositions continue to be wrought in us and cherished by us, that we shall receive to profit these communications of God's mind as to the future, of which the prophetic word is the medium.

As to a general outline of prophetic testimony, it must be exceedingly brief. One cardinal truth must be borne in mind from the outset. God is his own end or object. It is for his own glory, and for no lower end, that he acts. In whatever sphere he operates, and in whatever way, this is always true." Of him, and through him, and to him are all things; to whom be glory for ever." Then further, as Christ is God manifest in the flesh, the incarnate, as well as the eternal Word, by whom and for whom all things were made, and all things subsist; he, Christ, is the one in whom all God's glory is accomplished and displayed. Now, it is to him that the Holy Ghost bears testimony." He shall glorify me," said our blessed Lord. *Christ is the centre and object of all the counsels, and of all the ways and acts of God.* And accordingly, which brings us at once to the subject before us, the whole prophetic testimony is thus summed up by the Apostle Peter. Speaking of the Old Testament prophets, he represents them "as searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories (see the Greek) that should follow." Those prophecies which relate to the sufferings of Christ have, of course, been fulfilled; and, so far as his personal glory in his resurrection from the dead, and his session at the right hand of God is concerned, the predictions as to these events have been accomplished too. But the manifestation of his glories to the world is altogether future. The world has never seen him since he was taken down from the cross, and laid in the rich man's sepulchre. For anything the world believes or cares, he might be there still. But there are those who have been separated from the world by the tidings of his death and resurrection, and of the salvation which has been thus wrought out. These are now sharing the fellowship of his sufferings, and being made conformable to his death. His word assures us, that "if we suffer we shall also reign with him." "If so be we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together." This takes place when he comes again. This may be at any moment. Whenever that moment does arrive, "the Lord Jesus shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." The next lecture will exhibit the proofs from Scripture, that this is prior to the millennium, and introductory to it. I believe myself that there are *distinct stages* in the coming of Christ: one coming, but having distinct and successive stages in its accomplishment.

Let me explain by a familiar illustration. As in the coming of the judges to the assize of a city, suppose the municipal authorities go out to meet them; if they should halt where the two processions meet, and even if they should tarry there and confer with each other; and if after that the judges should come onward, now accompanied by those who went out to meet them, it would be but one coming of the judges, though thus divided into distinct stages. Now I believe that Scripture thus represents the coming of our Lord. He descends into the air, and the church is glorified and caught up to meet him there. The marriage of the Lamb, we are told, takes place in heaven. Then he comes, attended or followed by the church — by his risen and glorified saints — to execute judgment on the wicked here below.

But between these two stages of our Lord's return, there is an interval long enough, not only for the marriage of the Lamb in heaven, but also for the preparation of affairs on the earth below, to be visited by him in judgment. As soon as the church is taken up to meet the Lord in the air, God begins to work amongst his earthly people, the Jews. A portion of them return to their land, and are found there, still in a state of unbelief. A remnant from amongst them have their hearts turned to the Lord, and they repent deeply of all their national and individual wickedness.

The Gentile nations, given up to delusion, at least those included within the precincts of the fourth great empire, that of Rome, having been long accustomed to the form of godliness without the power, now — the true church being gone to heaven — throw aside the very name of Christ, and receive in his stead that great enemy, that proud and self-willed defier of God, "the man of sin," "antichrist," "the son of perdition," who compels, or seeks to compel, all to worship him, and receive a mark in their foreheads and in their hands. Those who refuse, he slays; those who worship him, have to drink of the wine of the wrath of God without mixture. Certainly, amongst the Jews, and probably amongst the Gentiles, there will be some, but among the Jews many, whose hearts God will have so touched, that they will steadily refuse to worship the Beast or his image, and many of them will be by him destroyed. Others will, through attention to our Lord's warning in Matt. 24: 15, etc., flee when they see the sign there spoken of, and will escape. It will be a time of tribulation, such as there never was from the beginning of the world, nor ever will be afterwards. Eventually, the Jews being trodden down and oppressed in Jerusalem and Judea, all nations being gathered against Jerusalem to battle, in the very utmost extremity of their distress, when there seems no hope, but that they will be completely swallowed up, suddenly "as lightning," the Son of Man will appear, attended by all his saints; the man of sin will be destroyed by the brightness of his appearing; the armies assembled around Jerusalem will be cut off, and the poor oppressed Jews will be delivered out of the hand of their enemies.

Terrible judgments will be inflicted on all the surrounding nations, and indeed on all the nations of the earth; varying, however, in severity, according to the degree of light they have abused. Those Jews who had not returned to their own land previously will be brought back in triumph. The ten tribes, long lost, will be found, and brought back by the hand of God himself to their own land. Jerusalem thus restored will become the throne of the Lord as to the earth. From the scene where God's judgments and the presence of the Lord will have been specially displayed, will messengers be despatched to all the spared and far off nations of the earth. When God's judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants will learn righteousness. All the obstinately wicked will be cut off; the rest will be converted, and the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth; Satan will be bound in the bottomless pit, so that he can deceive the nations no more for a thousand years.

Christ and his glorified saints shall then reign in full blessing over all the earth; their own distinct place of blessing and joy being in heaven. Creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God. The world, freed from the yoke of Satan, and happy under the reign of Christ and his saints, shall reap the answer to that prayer which has been so many thousand times pronounced by so many thousand lips: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." All this continues for a thousand years. Then shall Satan be loosed for a little season, and go out once again and deceive the nations. Fire from God will come down out of heaven on those whom he assembles. Then the

great white throne will be set. The wicked dead, who had not been raised at the beginning of the millennium, will be brought forth out of their graves for judgment. All who are not found written in the Lamb's book of life will be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death. Heaven and earth will flee away. Christ will deliver up the kingdom to the Father. New heavens and a new earth, in which there shall be no sea, will be created. Into this new earth, the New Jerusalem, the glorified church, will descend, and God will be all in all.

Such is the barest possible outline of this most important subject. For all the details as to these several points, as well as for Scripture proofs of what has been affirmed, I can only refer you to the Word of God, and to such portions of it particularly as we may be enabled to bring forward in the succeeding lectures. The object of this statement is simply to give you a general idea of what those lectures are designed to illustrate and prove. The Lord grant his blessing. Amen. W. T.