

Prophets And Prophecy (Part 3)

The Axial Period

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Given 13-Dec-03; Sermon #642

We will begin this sermon by turning to Matthew 17:10-13.

Matthew 17:10-13 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed [or desired]. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

We are beginning at the same place where we left off in my previous sermon because I want to put the steps to properly understanding the "John-the Baptist/Elijah" connection as clearly as I can. I am going to go back to Malachi 4:5-6 and read those verses just to remind you what it says.

Malachi 4:5-6 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

We will now go back to Matthew 17, and I want you to think about verse 13 once again.

Matthew 17:13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

I want to draw your attention to this because the verse indicates that the Jews in Jesus' day misunderstood Malachi 4:5-6, even as some of us have in our day. The Jews had many fanciful ideas that included Elijah himself being resurrected. That seemed to be the center of their belief regarding Elijah and the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5. They believed that Elijah himself would be resurrected.

John 1:19-21 And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and

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Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am **not** *the* Christ. [Notice the definite article "the."] And they asked him, What then? Are you Elijah? [Notice that the definite article "the" is left out in verse 21. There is no article.] And he said, **I am not**. Are you **that** prophet? And he answered, No.

Now there is a definite word in there. "Are you **that** prophet? (referring to Deuteronomy 18:15).

Deuteronomy 18:15 The LOORD your God will raise up unto you a Prophet from the midst of you, of your brethren, like unto me; unto him you shall hearken.

Two of those references to beings had the definite article before them—"the" and "that," pointing to a specific individual.

When John replied, he knew in advance what they were thinking, because he knew what the Jews believed in regard to Elijah, and so he answered, "I am not Elijah." In other words, since he was preaching certain things and doing certain things, they expected that he would be Elijah, and so the definite article is left out. "No. I am not Elijah."

The reason he answered that way is because there is a pretty good indication that at this particular time he did not know he was "**the**" Elijah of Malachi 4:5, and so he answered honestly the only way that he could. He answered, "No. I am not Elijah," because he knew what they believed, and so he answered to what they believed. He answered, "No. I am not the resurrected Elijah."

We are going to back again to Matthew 17.

Matthew 17:10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come?

The question is asked by the disciples and it is in regard to what the **scribes** were saying, that Elijah—not **the** Elijah, but Elijah, the resurrected one—must first come. It was what the scribes believed that was under question, not the complete truth at this point in time, not the complete truth regarding Malachi 4:5-6.

Matthew 17:11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things.

Jesus responded to the disciples' question by essentially saying He agreed that the scribes were correct in saying "Elijah must first come *before* the Messiah appears, and before that great and dreadful day."

The word "truly" is important to understanding His agreement with the scribes. He is saying they have correctly understood Malachi 4:5-6 **to this point**—the point being "Elijah must come first." He did not say He agreed with them totally, nor is He indicating that another Elijah is off in the future. Jesus stated verse 13 in the future tense, because that is the tense in which Malachi 4:5-6 is written. It is written in Malachi 4:5-6 as a *promise* to be fulfilled at some point later in time.

He added to that a quote from the prophecy that is given of John. He is beginning to turn our attention away from Elijah to John, and so He quotes the prophecy concerning John in Luke 1:17. I am going to read that to you so you see absolutely that this was tied to John the Baptist.

Luke 1:17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Now why did Jesus refer to that verse in Luke 1:17? He was expanding on John the Baptist's responsibility. He summed it up in Matthew 17:11 by saying "restore all things." What does "all" refer to? It refers to all things necessary to prepare a people for the arrival of the Messiah the first time.

This phrase "restore all things" appears nowhere else in any connection to the work of either Elijah or John the Baptist. What Jesus is doing here is giving us a clear understanding of the mission of John the Baptist. He has turned away from Elijah to John the Baptist. Why? Because He is going to make a connection between the two. John the Baptist's mission is that which he was sent to accomplish in his ministry.

Matthew 17:12 But I say unto you that ***Elijah is come already***, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

It is right here in verse 12 that Jesus' disagreement with the scribes becomes clear. He agreed with them up to a point, and that point was "Elijah must come first." He signaled His disagreement by using the word "but." The word "but" is an adversative conjunction in that it joins two thoughts together, but is adversative in that it creates a difference, an exception. It is a signal that an exception is coming. It is a signal that a different thought is coming. His difference was with the scribes' interpretation. The word "but" means "on the other hand." It means "to the contrary." It means "except that." Its synonym is "however."

Jesus was in no way saying that there will be a future Elijah beyond John the Baptist. He has simply reiterated what Malachi 4:5 says, adds "restore all things" to it, and then clearly states that this prophecy has already been fulfilled by John. He had already come, and they did not see him. They did not get it. They did to him whatever they wanted. Here they had "**the Elijah**" right in front of them—the fulfillment of prophecy—and they killed him!

Now to take further what Jesus said—because He paraphrased the futuristic tense of Malachi 4:5-6—is to twist and add to what He said. All He said was, "*This is what the prophecy says, and this is My disagreement with what the scribes say it says.*"

John clearly came before "that great and dreadful day." The last biblical day—indeed the "last hour"—was already begun in the 90s AD as I John 2:18 states. Please understand, brethren, God does not perceive time in the way we do, and we are the ones that must adjust our thinking.

II Peter 3:8 But beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

God does not look at time in the way we do. That one verse all by itself shows clearly that God's perception of time is different from ours, so do not be guilty of reading something into the scriptures that is not there.

John restored all things necessary to the fulfilling of his mission, and his mission only. His mission was to prepare the way before the Messiah. His mission parallels Elijah's, and Elijah's mission was to reveal the true God to people who had lost their way. Elijah was a light in his day, and John too was a light, but he was not "**the**" Light. John clearly pointed to Jesus as the Messiah so that they could repent, even as Elijah was used to clearly differentiate the true God from the Baals so those people at **that** time could

repent.

Since John the Baptist's and Jesus' day, **many** have done similar restorative preaching, but not one of them was "**the**" Elijah of Malachi 4:5-6. If somebody in the future does restore his work, he will not be the Elijah either. Nobody ever will, because John the Baptist already filled that, and we have this on the authority of Jesus Christ. You cannot get higher authority than that. Jesus clearly said that John the Baptist was Elijah, and they killed him.

We are going to make a turn from this, and we are going to go to Psalm 22. This is still going to be involving some things regarding prophecy.

Psalm 22:1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

Psalm 22:6-8 But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LOORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

One cannot look at this Psalm without clearly seeing parallels to Christ's crucifixion. This was something that David experienced, and then wrote upon his reflections, which actually became a prophecy of Christ's final hours.

We are going to go to the book of Hosea and look at another one. That prophecy in Psalm 22 was pretty clear, but this one in Hosea is not so clear.

Hosea 11:1-7 When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them. He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return. And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels. And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.

This particular prophecy is much more complex in its application. There is an element of prophecy that one has to be very careful about in attempting to interpret, and that is the principle of duality. Dual application indeed does exist, but at the same time it can be a lure, trapping one into a wrong interpretation, because God never intended every prophecy to have dual application.

This one in Hosea 11:1-7 is one of those that is in some sense vague in its application to us today, but also within it are things said that I think one could very easily apply to certain situations that are extant today. As a matter of fact, verse 1 says, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." Do you know that when Matthew wrote the book of Matthew, he used that verse as a proof that Jesus was the Christ? It is given in Matthew 2:15.

Matthew 2:15 And [Joseph, with Mary and the young child Jesus] was there [in Egypt] until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

It obviously had application in Hosea's day, or for that period of time *after* that as well, but it also had application when Christ was born. Jesus was sent down in Egypt with his parents, Joseph and Mary, because they had to flee from the persecutions of Herod. And so whenever that Herod was dead, and the way was clear, the signal was given, and they came back from Egypt to their ancestral home in Nazareth. God shows a very legal and right scriptural dual application of Hosea 11:1.

But let us expand out on that. He said, "When *Israel* was a child." Not Jesus; Israel. This was a prophecy that was given to the *nation* of Israel, directed at Ephraim, which is usually used as representing *all* of the tribes, but maybe most directly to Ephraim. It describes two very interesting thoughts. The first part of it is really tender, because it talks about God, how as a Father trained Ephraim (or Israel, as it were) from the time he was born. He taught him how to walk. That is what it means. "I took him by the arms and taught him how to walk."

He is giving a very vague broad description of how He kept supplying whatever was needed for Israel in order to bring them to the greatness of a nation, and to grow from just a few people to a couple of million in Egypt, and who knows how many in the home of their ancestry in the land of Canaan. They then of course turned bad on Him, and they went into captivity.

But we know what happened in between their captivity, and today Israel is once again

formed. As a nation we do not know who we are, but at the same time I think that we would have to agree that once again God did His thing. He provided everything that was needed by the Israelitish people to once again walk as great among the nations. He has given the Israelitish people power over much of the earth.

Once again we look at how history is repeating itself, and that is that Israel has gone bad. Now is verse 5 going to come to pass once again—"the Assyrian shall be his king"? It is very interesting to consider that. Is there dual application of this verse? We may readily agree. Maybe there is dual application, because we can see things at least vaguely forming, but we are not really sure about some of these things.

Hosea wrote this about 40 years before Israel went into captivity to Assyria. So how much of this does apply to *modern* Israel, and to *modern* Assyria? Is Germany truly modern Assyria? There are some people with Church of God connections researching into this very thing, and are finding things that leads them to believe that Germany is actually part of the Ten Lost Tribes. Even back when Evelyn and I came into the church it was commonly talked of, that there was a very large percentage of Israelites in Germany, especially in the northern part of Germany. That was already clear even then.

But how far can we go in the making of dual applications? I bring these questions up because I do want us to be cautious. I do agree thoroughly that there are dual applications that can be made, and that they can be true. The one thing I know for sure, that even though prophecy has many purposes to it, it was never intended by God to open the future just to idle curiosity. He has a much higher purpose in furnishing guidance to the heirs of salvation in giving comfort, hope, and encouragement, to instill confidence and a sense of urgency in them in the troublous times that they live in.

In Amos 3 there is a prophecy that most of us are pretty familiar with. When I say "prophecy," I am not talking just about the one that is here in Amos 3. We are fairly familiar with Amos, because I will tell you, it is directed at modern Israel if there ever was a prophecy that was.

Amos 3:1-7 Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. Can two walk together, except they be agreed? Will a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den if he have taken nothing? Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth where no gin is for him? Shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all? Shall a trumpet be blown in

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the city and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city and the LORD has not done it? Surely the Lord GOOD will do nothing but he reveals his secret unto his servants the prophets.

Prophecy is both practical and positive. It is not all gloom and doom. Most prophecy begins negatively, but it ends positively because God is confident that what He has prophesied is going to accomplish His end, and that is always good.

Much of the thrust of the whole book of Amos is an education for catastrophe. Amos followed Elijah by about 90 or 100 years. During that period of time Israel's sins had continued to mount horribly. Israel had become very wealthy. They became self-indulgent, even oppressively so, and they are still trying to walk a tightrope between God and Baal. They are behaving and worshipping like a Baal worshiper, but doing it in the name of the Lord. Does that **not** sound familiar to a modern observer of the American scene? "We all worship the same God," our president says. "The god of Islam and the God of Christianity are one and the same."

Amos begins by showing two things that provide a basis for what he eventually says:

(1) God and Israel have a special relationship. This appears in Amos 3:3. No other nation is therefore as responsible as Israel. "You only have I known," God says. This declaration indicates a very close relationship such as one would have in a marriage, and from that ensues the sharing of experiences together. God and Israel shared them together.

(2) Amos wanted to establish that his words carried authority, and that they had better heed, because his words are not idle. He establishes it through a series of illustrations that are also challenging questions that can logically be answered only one way. He does this to awaken them from their spiritual lethargy to that of responsibility. It is as though he is saying, "Think about the ramifications of this, Israelites." What follows is a general pattern of God's operation in His peoples' behalf.

His first illustration is that people traveling in the same direction toward exactly the same destination would hardly meet except by appointment. What this means is, "Israel, God has called you and I together." Amos was sent by appointment and He did not speak promiscuously. "It is no accident that I am here." Amos is telling them, "My utterances began with God." He is saying, "You and I did not meet by accident."

His second illustration is that lions do not roar unless they have taken prey. The reason

they do not roar is because they do not want to scare away their intended prey. Israel is God's prey, as it were, and to this point He is not roaring yet, meaning He *is* stalking them. Their punishment, their judgment, is about to fall, and Amos is saying, "Israel, take warning, because the margin of safety is very slim."

His third illustration is that one cannot snare a bird unless a trap is set, and then something has to cause the trap to spring. This illustration is declaring a cause and effect relationship, meaning "Israel, you are already in the trap! Your sins brought you this warning, and punishment will follow if you continue sinning. You are going to spring the trap, Israel."

The fourth illustration is that the alarms go off, and people take notice. Amos is declaring that God is involved in His creation. He has not gone way off somewhere. He is directly managing His creation. He is governing it. This warning of the impending calamity would not come if they were not deserving of it. God, through Amos, is warning them. God is sovereign, and they have no one to blame but themselves. "No justifications, Israel. You are guilty, but God is giving you a chance to repent."

The fifth illustration is that it is illogical to think that God would punish without first warning His people. It is an aspect of His mercy. Amos was **caused** to speak by God, and that is where the authority for his words come from. Amos' words are the warning: **"Israel, listen up!"**

An overall message from the book of Amos is that great privileges must not be abused, or they will bring great penalties. "You only have I known, Israel." To whom much is given, much is required.

Israel's sin was her departing from God, which in turn produced great moral corruption and covetousness, called "fornication" in other books of the Bible. These in turn produced careless disregard of the simple duties we owe our neighbors, and oppression of the weak. Amos speaks **strongly** of public and private indifference toward the keeping of the second of the Two Great Commandments. He is truly a prophet for our time when public morality has fallen so low.

Brethren, if there ever was a book of prophecy written for end-time Israel, it is the book of Amos. He is describing modern America, especially, and Britain to a tee.

In a more general sense, the Bible shows that prophets tend to arise in a time of crisis. But God is no longer using prophets as He did before the establishment of the New Testament Church. Instead, He has given us an understanding of the dual application of

what has already been written. God has given these prophecies so that we can be prepared spiritually for the crisis at the close of the age and also do whatever work of witnessing of Christ's gospel that Christ requires.

The Bible's prophets, with few exceptions, have come in bunches. Most of them appeared in about a 250 year period, beginning about 800 BC, and included a remarkable range of personalities like the missionary Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, the ethical Amos, and Hosea, and the outstanding Jeremiah, who seems to be the one who was in the middle of everything that was going on.

We are going to deal with about a 130 to 150 year period that began about 620 BC, and contained Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, and possibly Obadiah and Zephaniah. Their lives and service preceded and spanned the most tumultuous period in man's history till now. It is called "The Axial Period" by some historians, because history shows the rise and fall of nations as events created flip-flops in terms of power and influence. New nations rose to dominating power. Older nations fell, never to rise again, and some nations disappeared from view altogether.

The word "axial" means, "having the characteristics of an axis." An axis is a line or a shaft. It can be an event, or even a thought on which something rotates. Rightly applying what happened immediately preceding and during the Sixth Century BC is greater insight to history, and because of the duality principle, it is what is happening right now.

The Sovereign God was very much involved, as shown through the writings of His prophets to Israel. Having discernment of this period of time from a biblical, as well as a secular viewpoint, is very important to us, because it is a **type** of what **we** are living in and through.

The source of the quotes that I am going to give you from a secular point are from a history book authored by Swiss historian Karl Jaspers. It is titled *The Origin and Goal of History*. It is the German edition published in 1949.

It would seem that the axis of history is to be found in a period around 500 BC in the spiritual process that occurred between 800 and 200 BC. It is there, about 500 BC, that we meet with the most deep-cut dividing line in history. Man, as we know him today [mankind and his present civilization] came into being. For short, we may style this the axial period. (*The Origin and Goal of History*, 1)

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It might seem as though I were out to prove the events of the axial period as a direct intervention on the part of the Deity without openly saying so. (*The Origin and Goal of History*, 18)

This is particularly interesting, because Jaspers was an agnostic. The fact is that there **was** intervention on the part of the Deity. The historical evidence, when combined with belief in the Bible, is so overwhelming that even Jaspers, the agnostic, had to mention the obvious appearance of supernatural involvement. What he is saying is that things **this big** do not happen in that short of a period of time.

The axial period is in the nature of a miracle insofar as no really adequate explanation of it [that is, no human explanation] is possible within the limits of our present knowledge. (*The Origin and Goal of History*, 18)

Brethren, there is an explanation, because God was involved, and He left a record in the Bible—His record of that same period of time. Notice that Jaspers said it was between 800 BC and 200 BC. That period encompasses the writings of every one of the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi. Everyone of them! The Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. It just does not include the prophets that appeared in the books of the law, in I and II Kings, and in I and II Chronicles. But from Isaiah on, every one of them operated in behalf of God during that period of time.

Isaiah 10:5-7 O Assyrian, the rod of my anger, and the staff in their hand is my indignation. I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he means not so, neither does his heart think so: but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few.

Isaiah is the key prophet at the beginning of this period, and he is very interested in a dominating Gentile power—the Assyrians. Now when Isaiah is beginning, is the trumpet a warning to Israel and to Judah of the times of the Gentiles? Assyria is the first great Gentile power, but it is not the most influential. It is Jeremiah, to a greater extent, and Daniel to a lesser, who are the key prophets during the midst of this period during the Sixth Century BC time element. Do not be overly concerned about the exact date.

Jeremiah actually began prophesying at the end of the Seventh Century BC, and

continued on well into the Sixth Century BC. Turn with me to Jeremiah 1. Remember, Isaiah began this.

Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed you in the belly, I knew you; and before you came forth out of the womb, I sanctified you, and I ordained you a prophet unto the nations.

I read this verse because I want you to see how far ahead God was planning. The key prophet during this whole time-spread is Jeremiah. God designed this man right from his conception.

Jeremiah 1:6-10 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOOD! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the LOORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for you shall go to all that I shall send you, and whatsoever I command you shall speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with you to deliver you, says the LOORD. Then the LOORD put forth his hand and touched my mouth. And the LOORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

Jeremiah, above all others, is the "axial" man prepared by God. God told Jeremiah, who was a prophet not only to Israel and Judah, but to *the nations and kingdoms*, to root out, to pull down, to destroy, to throw down, to build, and to plant.

For those of us who are familiar with our Worldwide Church of God understanding, it is almost automatically engrained within us that we would think immediately of *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*. We would think of this verse being used in reference to Jeremiah's influence on the destruction of Israel and Judah, but mostly of Judah, and the replanting of things to build in the northwest, in England. But let us read some other place in the book of Jeremiah, and see that his responsibility was far greater than Israel and Judah.

Jeremiah 25:15-29 For thus says the LOORD God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations to whom I send you, to drink it. And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them. Then took I the cup at the LOORD's hand, and made all the nations to drink unto whom the LOORD had sent me: To wit, Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, and the

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princes thereof, to make them a desolation [to tear down, to destroy], an astonishment, an hissing, and a curse; as it is this day; Pharaoh king of Egypt, [we are beyond Israel now] and his servants, and his princes, and all his people; and all the mingled people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, and Ashkelon, and Azzah, and Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod, Edom, and Moab, and the children of Ammon, and all the kings of Tyrus, and all the kings of Zidon, and the kings of the isles which are beyond the sea, Dedan, and Tema, and Buz, and all that are in the utmost corners, and all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mingled people that dwell in the desert, and all the kings of Zimri, and all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes, and all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another, and all the kingdoms of the world which are upon the face of the earth: and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them. Therefore you shall say unto them, Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Drink you, and be drunken, and spue, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you. And it shall be if they refuse to take the cup at your hand to drink, then shall you say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; You shall certainly drink. For lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by my name [meaning Jerusalem], and should you be utterly unpunished? You shall not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, says the LORD of hosts.

A pretty big job, is it not? Was God involved during this tumultuous period of time, most of which took place in the Sixth Century BC? A man like Karl Jaspers, who had no belief in God, says it looks miraculous that so much could happen in such a short period of time.

Nations that had existed for perhaps a millennia of time just suddenly disappeared, and others that did not even exist rose up to take their place. Who rules this earth anyway? When God wants to make a change, it is dramatic, and it is of a magnitude that fits His sovereign authority.

Jaspers makes an interesting comment for what happened during this period.

It was an age of simultaneous destruction and creation. (*The Origin and Goal of History*, 5)

That agrees exactly with Jeremiah's commission in Jeremiah 1:10. He adds the

following:

The thousands-of-years-old ancient civilizations are everywhere brought to an end by the axial period which melts them down, assimilates them, or causes them to sink from view. (*The Origin and Goal of History*, 6)

Where did they go? They virtually disappeared, because God set Jeremiah over those nations to pronounce His judgments on them: the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Hittites, Elamites, Midianites, Phoenicians, Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites. Nations dissolved from view, and new nations rose to take their place. Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, China, India, Europe, and Russia began their ascent to greatness.

Those of you who maybe went to school when I did when they were really teaching English may have been taught things about this time in history. Do you know that right within the Sixth Century range the following men lived? Pythagoras, Confucius, Lucian, Buddha, Zoroaster, Numa in Rome, Vales in Greece. A little bit later Herodotus, the so-called father of history, and Hippocrates, the father of medicine, all lived. Great men all in terms of the contribution they made during that period of time.

Mighty empires, made by conquest, arose almost simultaneously in China, in India, and in the West. [The following statement is really significant.] Everywhere the first outcome of the collapse of the ancient order was an order of technological and organizational planning. (*The Origin and Goal of History*, 5)

In other words, the new cultures that arose had a different system at their foundation. "A new order," he says. Now what was taking place? We will let Jaspers begin to answer that.

In this age were born the fundamental categories **within which we still think today**, and the beginnings of the world religion by which humans still live were created. The step into universality [that is, One-Worldism, Catholicism] was taken in every sense. (*The Origin and Goal of History*, 2)

If the axial period gains an importance with the degree to which we immerse ourselves in it, the question arises: Is this period [the 6th century BC] or its creation, a yardstick for all that follows? (*The Origin and Goal of History*, 18)

Jaspers comes to the conclusion that it is, but he uses only secular sources. We can use the Bible.

Daniel 2:31-38 You, O king, saw, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before you; and the form thereof was terrible [or awesome]. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. You saw till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors: and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. This is the dream: and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. You, O king, are a king of kings: for the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven has he given into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all. You are this head of gold.

The answer to Jaspers' conclusion is "Yes." This period of time *is* the yardstick—the standard for all that follows. The prophet Daniel leaves us with no doubt Babylon became the head of gold. It was the fountainhead influencing the rest of the new civilization. The "image of the beast" arose. Those who have a grasp of biblical prophecy see its reflection in all of history. Right here, brethren, is the beginning of *our world*. It is a re-shaped world. It is our world!

This present world's standards socially, politically, economically, philosophically, and theologically came into being. It was certainly modified somewhat through time, and certainly modified somewhat by the different races and cultures. The New Testament confirms that it exists to this day by calling our present civilization "**MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT.**"

Babylon still exists. It is not "Mystery, Assyria." It is not "Mystery, Persia," or "Mystery, Greece" or "Mystery, Rome," or "Mystery, Israel." Babylon is the fountain and the yardstick even in Israel, or this world, and God's prophets were trumpeting its birth long before it occurred, and it was born.

Luke 21:24 And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led

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away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

In the 6th century BC a new world—"the times of the Gentiles"—was ushered in. The Babylonian image has influenced the world since the 6th century BC.

Daniel 4:23 And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him.

Daniel 4:26 And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; your kingdom shall be sure unto you, after that you shall have known that the heavens do rule.

This is something man has not learned yet—that the heavens do rule.

Babylon has influenced and has given its character to the times. We have to understand that it has not always been the Gentiles who have dominated. The last 200 years has seen the rise and domination of the Israelitish people, with their syncretism of Christian and Babylonian concepts.

God is preparing the world for the time of the end and the return of Jesus Christ, and it is a possibility that the "seven times" ended in 1982. It is a possibility. The "seven times" are found by comparing the sum of the numerical value of "the handwriting on the wall" in Daniel 5. I will not go into that. The sum of those figures times the number of days in 7 prophetic years will give you 2520.

The number of years from 539 BC (when Babylon was defeated—the tree was cut down, the band was put on, but it continued to live because the roots were still in the ground) till 1982 is 2520. The iron band is then broken, and this confused system's focus in the Israelitish nations has risen to dominate to an extent no other nation has ever dominated during the largely Babylonian way.

Habakkuk 1:5 Behold you among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days which you will not believe,

though it be told you.

I want you to think now what he is talking about here. Secular historians think that what happened in the 6th century BC is almost marvelous beyond belief. Things of that magnitude do not happen that fast in such a short period of time. But we have seen evidence in God's word of what happened and why it happened that way. God Himself did it to bring about a radical change in the history of man. Being that God did it, it was part of His purpose that it occur.

Now here we are in Habakkuk, and He is talking about a work that He is going to do that He says is so amazing, that He says to Habakkuk (meaning in his days), "If I told you what I am going to do, you would not believe it." Do you know what it is? God is going to turn the world upside down again, only this time He is going to replace the nations with the Kingdom of God.

Habakkuk 1:5-7 Behold you among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days, which you will not believe though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful:

God is weaving together what He did then with what He is going to do very shortly here. This is why we have to be so careful with prophecies with dual application.

Habakkuk 1:8-11 Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hastens to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them; they shall deride every stronghold: for they shall heap dust, and take it. Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, ***imputing this his power unto his god.***

What an insult to the real God!

Habakkuk 3:3 God came from Teman [this is talking about the Son of God],

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and the Holy One from mount Paran [talking about His return from Mount Paran]. Selah [Think on this. He is setting the time that this is going to occur]. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

In an overall sense, these prophecies here in Habakkuk speak of the economic, political, and military machinations that occur as the end approaches, but it ends with the return of Christ.

Parallel prophecies are fulfilled through the same time period. This is in other places, and the parallel of what is spoken here is the appearance of the Two Witnesses doing their work—that part of the work God says He is going to do that nobody would believe, even if He told them. That is part of it. For even God says that what He is going to bring to pass is astounding, partly because it runs counter to what most could believe is going to happen even if it were told them.

The Two Witnesses will be warning the world that a new axial period is being ushered in. Christ is going to return and usher in this new revolution in history. The Babylonian image, which has governed and influenced the world since the 6th century BC, will be replaced by the Kingdom of God. That is why it says, "I have heard of your speech [your fame]." This is probably a reflection on Israel's release from Egypt, because they are in captivity again. Egypt is just a type.

I want to go now to Isaiah 29:14. I hope you understand that in an effort to squeeze this into one sermon I have leaped over a lot of prophecies that are going to be fulfilled during this period of time, and just hit on the ones that seem to encompass everything.

Isaiah 29:14 Therefore behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.

That is what has happened right now. We as a nation have lost our wisdom. We have lost what little connection we had with God. He is telling us here that the work of the Two Witnesses is not going to be believed, by Israel largely. It will not be believed. "The understanding of their prudent men shall be hid." But whether men see it or not, a marvelous work of God *is* going on as He maneuvers the nations into their end-time position.

We get a little bit more insight in Revelation 18, because it shows that the commercial and the material success has **blinded** men, and they weep at the loss of the material aspects of Babylon without even realizing that it has no real spiritual vitality. People are so absorbed with getting that they never see the impending judgment of God, even though they will be shown. It is just like the people did not get what Amos told them. They did not get what Hosea told them. They did not get what Jesus told them, because people are so absorbed in getting that they overlook the impending judgment of God, thinking that they are all right. Even though they are shown, they will not respond, because "they are drunk with the wrath of her fornication." Because of their spiritual drunkenness they do not grasp what is going on.

Brethren, do not get caught up in this attitude. This is something that is being generated by Babylon to keep us blind. A person could be word-perfect in his response to questions about doctrine. He might habitually attend services, but if he makes little or no use of the relationship between what is heard at services and personal Bible study, and the business of life...until God becomes personal, church is merely a ritual.

Peter is the speaker in Acts 3.

Acts 3:19-21 Repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord: **[THAT IS RIGHT NOW!]** And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you. Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

Here is a minister of God—an apostle acting as a prophet—and he has a message for us today, for those of us living just prior to Christ's return, just prior to the restitution of all things. He is the voice of God proclaiming and expounding the coming axial period, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. A further new birth is awaiting the world.

Overall, God makes little use of prophets under the New Covenant. The office seems to be absorbed into the apostolic office which is listed first by Paul in I Corinthians 12. However, in Revelation 11:10, the Two Witnesses are described as prophets, and so with them the office will make a re-appearance as they fulfill their mission.

Revelation 11:10 And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two **prophets** tormented them that dwelt on the earth.

Babylon has a little longer to exist until the turning of the axis of history occurs again. So now is not a time for wild-eyed fanaticism, but a steady sense of urgency given over to preparation, resolving personal spiritual and moral problems.