

Volume 2: The Kingdom is Coming



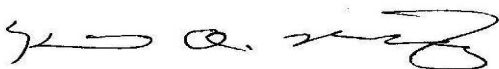
Things to Come
and Why They Matter
An Introductory Study in Prophecy

Prophecy Series Sermons

Our sermon series for the summer of 2014 investigated the subject of prophecy. The response by the congregation at Vistoso Community Church was so encouraging, that we are publishing each of the sermons both in booklet form and online on our web site.

These first five sermons are being released in booklet form together with the final five sermons in the series to be added in 2015:

- Volume 1: Two Kinds of Wisdom
 - **Volume 2: The Kingdom is Coming**
 - Volume 3: The Second Coming of Christ
 - Volume 4: The Tribulation
 - Volume 5: The Believing Will Be Leaving, Part 1
- In His grace,



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Volume 2: The Kingdom Is Coming

An Introduction

Message Review. Let me begin by summarizing some of the things we learned in our first study.

- **Two Approaches.** When it comes to getting an understanding of both reality and truth, there are always two approaches: God's proclamations of truth and man's. These two are always in contrast to, and conflict with, one another.
- **Hierarchy of Approaches.** Not only can God's ways and man's ways be contrasted, there is also a sorting out and a hierarchy between them. And God's ways are infinitely higher than man's. This is another way of saying that God's ways define reality and truth, while man's ways have missed the mark. In fact, this contrast is so great, and so consistently observed, that man's ways can be said to be foolishness in contrast to God's. (1 Corinthians 3:19)

I realize that man, in general, chafes at this kind of evaluation of his wisdom—perhaps it even bothers you.

Nonetheless, I think you would agree with me that the two approaches to life are very different, and mutually exclusive. On the one hand, the wisdom of this world says, "You only go around once in life, grab for all the gusto you can!" On the other hand, one of God's saints once said, "Only one life, will soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last!"

Reasons to study. As stated, there is no debate that these two world views are diametrically opposed to one another. However, is one really better, or higher, than the other? Well, that depends upon what the future really does hold—and that's the reason we are studying what the Scriptures have to say about the future.

We have developed a number of reasons to study prophecy, including: the promise of blessing for doing so (Revelation 1:3), because it is such a large portion of the Bible, and because it is such a significant part of the legacy preserved for us. We also



learned that although the timing of many events may be uncertain, God has already prepared us to expect a literal fulfillment once events in His keeping do unfold.

Expected Outcomes. Finally, what kind of outcomes are we looking for? It is my intent that this study will do the following:

- Instill hope

Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. I Peter 1:13

- Prompt godliness and give us confidence that every aspect of the future remains under God's sovereign control:

I foretold the former things long ago, My mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.” Isaiah 48:3

I hope some or all of these things occur as the result of each lesson we study, and you can say things like the following to yourself as you reflect upon the content:

- My hope has been multiplied. In light of what is to come, I need to purify such and such part of my life.
- I am at peace in turbulent times because God has things completely under control.

Starting in the Book of Daniel

So let's see if we can begin to develop these outcomes by turning to the book of Daniel. We will find the book of Daniel to be a great launching point for our study of prophecy. I especially like it because, although it has much to say about events far in the future at the time they were written, it also contains a great deal of very practical application. I know that you are very familiar with much of the narrative, but I think you will be surprised at some of the additional things we discover.

Let's begin with our first point of prophecy in Daniel:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles in the treasure house of his god. Daniel 1:1-2

Now, I know what you are thinking, "That's not prophecy—it has already happened!" My point exactly! It was prophesied in Scripture to happen, and the predictions of God's Word always come to pass—and they do so literally.

Let me document this for you.

“Hear the Word of the Lord of hosts: Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon ... And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you ... and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”

Isaiah 39:5-7

Isaiah made this statement to King Hezekiah approximately 100 years before it came to pass, and before Babylon had become a regional power. Not surprisingly, it was fulfilled literally, and with most of the principal players completely unaware of the role they were playing in its fulfillment. But that's not all. If we didn't know the history of Israel, we might be tempted to think, “That's the end of the southern kingdom of Judah.” Here is what God has to say about that:

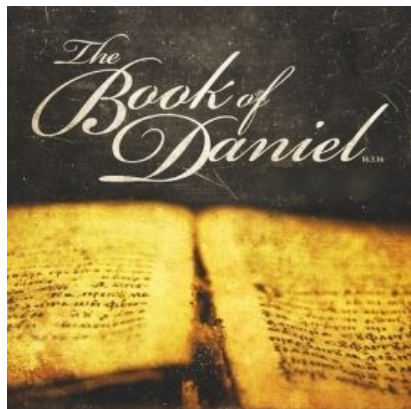
For thus says the Lord: “After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place.”

Jeremiah 29:10

Once their discipline is complete, God is going to bring the Jews back to their Land. The book of Daniel takes place during this 70-year period of exile.

... the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia ... “All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem.”

Ezra 1:1-2



Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

Ezra 6:15

This is the year 516 BC—70 years to the year from the final destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. This is an absolutely amazing illustration of many of the things we have been discussing:

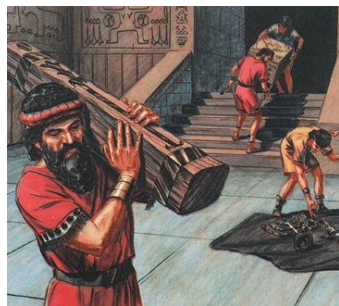
- **God's ways.** He tells the Jews, if you sin in idolatry, I will disperse you among the nations, but then I will show you mercy by bringing you back. God then goes so far as to name the number of years the Jews will be in exile and to name the king who will open the door for the Jews to return to their land.
- **Man's ways.** Man's thinking was that God would never allow His holy temple to be destroyed (it was razed to the ground). Man's thinking speculates that Cyrus's name must have been added later—for how could Isaiah have known it well over 100 years in advance? (*I make known . . . from ancient times what is yet to come.* Isaiah 46:10). God has been telling us, but we have not been listening!

Do you see, all of this worked out exactly as God said it would. Remember what we learned in our first study: Issues of *truth* and *reality* are fundamentally the domain of God. As such, they do not originate with man; they are not subject to alternative interpretation; and they are not open to negotiation. So, as we come to understand God's plans for the future, it should give us confidence and an incentive to live uprightly. I have begun with an example of prophecy that has already been fulfilled so that we would understand that God has been operating this way all along; and it can be to our great blessing to get *in tune* with what God is doing.

Stated another way, the consistent fulfillment of prophecy in the past should give us confidence that God is going to continue to operate the same way in the future. In other words, he is going to literally fulfill all that He has promised in His Word.

As we introduce ourselves to the book of Daniel, here is a second thing I want to bring to your attention. The book of Daniel is *chock full* of the very tension we have been talking about—specifically, that which exists between man's ways and God's ways. Let me show you how this tension plays out in the affairs of men.

First, did you notice how the Babylonians brought select articles from the temple of God into the house of their god? (Daniel 1:2) In the ancient world, when one nation defeated another, it was assumed it was because the gods of the victor were more powerful than those of the



loser. The Babylonians were bringing the spoils of war, specifically the articles of the weaker god, into the temple of their more powerful god. However, as noted above—the real reason for the defeat of Israel was their rebellion against God. It is a sovereign act by God in which He uses Babylon as an instrument of His discipline. Do you see the contrasting viewpoints?

Second, let's consider another example—the brainwashing process for captives that showed promise for government service described in Daniel 1:3-7. Notice how there is not the least interest regarding what the people of God might bring to service. Rather, the whole process is about bringing them into the Chaldean system.

Isn't this exactly what we see in our day? Secular man has his theories, belief systems, and so on, and has absolutely no interest in the Christian perspective or what the Word of God has to say on any particular subject. Nonetheless, as we are finding out, ignoring the truth neither makes it go away or any less the truth.

Consider the intent behind the changing of the names of the four young Hebrew men who have a prominent role in the book of Daniel.

Hebrew name-meaning	Babylonian name-meaning
Daniel: God is my judge	Belteshazzar: Bel protect the king
Hananiah: the Lord is gracious	Shadrach: command of Aku
Mishaël: who is like the Lord	Meshach: who is what Aku is?
Azariah: the Lord is my helper	Abed-nego: servant of Nebo

Do you see what the Chaldeans are trying to do? As you read down through the first chapter of Daniel, you will see that Daniel and his three compatriots resist their indoctrination into the occult, despite what must have been tremendous pressures to conform. In essence, they are maintaining their connection with God's ways while rejecting the ways of man even if it threatens their human survival. In Verse 19 of the first chapter, we find these men excelling in every way and entering the king of Babylon's service. However the struggle between the call of God and of man is just beginning.

In order to be prepared for the discussion that follows, please read the 2nd chapter of Daniel.

As you can see, sometime after Daniel and his friends enter the king's service, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream. The dream has a dramatic and ongoing effect on Nebuchadnezzar and leads him to make a very unreasonable demand of his wise men. Specifically, not only did he ask his wise men to interpret the dream, he first demanded that they tell him the contents of the dream.

Since the wise men were unable to meet his request, Nebuchadnezzar decrees their death. So we find Daniel and his friends facing execution at the point of Verse 12. Daniel's response to pending death is poised and measured, and he does the only thing available to him—he asks for time to seek the Lord. What a marvelous response in the face of imminent death. God reveals the dream and its interpretation in a vision. Once again, we can learn much about Daniel in his prayer of response in Daniel 2:20-23:

Daniel answered and said:

**“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
For wisdom and might are His.
And He changes the times and the seasons;
He removes kings and raises up kings;
He gives wisdom to the wise
And knowledge to those who have understanding.
He reveals deep and secret things;
He knows what *is* in the darkness,
And light dwells with Him.**

**²³ “I thank You and praise You,
O God of my fathers;
You have given me wisdom and might,
And have now made known to me
what we asked of You,
For You have made known to us
the king's demand.”**

As we continue in Verse 26 to the close of the chapter, we can note the following:

- Daniel begins by bearing clear witness to the elevated status and capability of the “God of heaven”, that is, the God whom the Jews worship in contrast to the gods of Babylon.
- Read carefully the dream and its interpretation found in Daniel 2:31-45. These verses are particularly noteworthy to our discussion. I have provided excerpts from that passage below:

“You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces.” Daniel 2:34

“And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.” Daniel 2:35b

“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed ... and it shall stand forever.” Daniel 2:44



The term “mountain” was very commonly applied to a kingdom—especially in the Babylonian culture. So the stone that was cut without hands—a reference to the work of God and not man—became a great kingdom. Notice its qualities: ruled the entire earth, never to be destroyed, destined to stand forever more.

Now there is a parallel vision in Daniel Chapter 7. You will find this fascinating reading—I am going to reproduce just a small portion, in which we should be able to see the similarities to the dream of Chapter 2.

“In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream ...”

Daniel 7:1

“I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated. . .”

Daniel 7:9

“ . . .and behold one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.”

Daniel 7:13-14



Do you see the connection between the two passages? Daniel 2 describes the Kingdom that is coming and Daniel 7 describes the King of that coming kingdom. So before even opening the New Testament, I want you to realize that God has made very clear, from long ago, that an eternal kingdom is coming over which will reign an eternal king. This is God's plan and He has a timetable for bringing it to fruition.

Making Application

The coming of this King of kings will be the principle focus of our next lesson, but having established its prophetic nature from long ago, let's make some *application*:

Interpretation. The narrative within the book of Daniel is not meant to be understood in terms of Jew versus Babylonian, as if it were describing *good guys* versus *bad guys*! For the kings of each of these nations are both bad.

Furthermore, consider the two peoples in view: one pagan, involved in the occult and gross idolatry; the other, the people of God who have lost their way and are under heavy discipline. How did they get there? They dabbled in the same idolatry of which the Babylonians were guilty—in other words, they forsook the Lord for things made by the hand of man!

Examples. The book contrasts exactly the kinds of things we have been talking about; that is, man's ways versus God's ways and the wisdom of God and the foolishness of man. Man says, "The Jews lost a siege and were conquered by a superior military force." God says, "The Jews are in exile because they are under discipline from My hand—the moment I relent and allow them to return you will see a secular king open his mouth and decree it to be so."

Even the Jews got caught up in man's ways, for they said, "God will never allow anything bad to happen to His people" all the while turning their back upon His teachings for their lives. God says, "I will not share my glory with another! When my people disobey I will judge them and the righteous may suffer right along with them. But I am still able to preserve and restore them."

And let's make no mistake, Daniel did suffer. He was dragged away from home at a young age, castrated as part of being forced into service, and exposed to all the occult practices of the Babylonians.

Also consider the contrast in gods. The Babylonian's claim, "Our gods are stronger than yours—we have despoiled your temple and placed its articles in the temple of our gods." God says, "I will give you a dream you cannot decipher apart from My revelation. My Kingdom and my King will supplant not only your kingdom, but every kingdom!"

Two Questions. The book of Daniel is framed as an answer to two questions: 1) God, are you still in charge? 2) In the face of these circumstances, what now is my purpose, destiny and future?



Aren't these the questions on all of our minds when trials come into our lives? We sing praises to God when things go well. But what is our response when carried off as a captive, forced to learn pagan ways, with no hope of a legacy and a bleak future? This causes all of us to ask these two important questions.

God's Answer. So then, what did Daniel understand God's answer to be? Or, as an alternative, how might a lesser man see things?

Let's deal with the lesser man first. He would likely hunker down, *circle the wagons*, and adopt the mindset: "We just need to survive. We have to blend in and assimilate, go with the flow." Or he might just indulge in self-pity as did Elijah, the prophet:

"Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me." Romans 11:3

Now how did Daniel see things? He already understood the perspective contained in God's answer to Elijah's lament—here is the rest of the verse:

"I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. So too, at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace." Romans 11:54

Do you see it? Daniel recognized that God was in charge. He recognized that God would always preserve a remnant unto Himself, and so Daniel's purpose, or calling, was to be a part of that faithful remnant. This gave him and his three friends great boldness to stand for God in very difficult circumstances. Why? Because God was going to preserve them—even in the midst of bleak times, and no human king could overcome the preserving hand of God.

This is the reason Daniel was able to play the role he did in interpreting the king's dream, as well as the many other instances of his bold and upright stand recorded within the book of Daniel.

Consider just a few examples of Daniel's steadfastness:

- Daniel boldly took the message of a coming, and greater, King and Kingdom to the one who was at that time the greatest power on earth; that is, Nebuchadnezzar.
- When that "head of gold" singled Daniel out for blessing, Daniel petitioned on behalf of his three friends. (Daniel 2:49)
- When Belshazzar offered him great riches, Daniel told the king to: "Keep your gifts for yourself, for you have been 'weighed and found wanting' and your



kingdom will be taken from you." (Daniel 5:17-31)

- When the ranking administrators in the kingdom looked for fault in the life of Daniel, they found no fault personally or professionally. (Daniel 6:1-5)

Are you putting this together? The prophecy revealed through Daniel directly answered the most pressing questions on his mind. He became absolutely convinced that God was still in charge and it gave him great spiritual backbone! As a captive foreigner with no hope of a family or legacy of his own, his purpose was to be God's remnant in a foreign land, and he knew someday he would be part of the great host of resurrected saints (Daniel 12:1-2) This led to a life of purity and faithfulness such that the angel Gabriel in Daniel Chapter 9 referred to Daniel as the one "greatly loved" by God!

Application for Today. Now for perhaps our most important point of application—what does this have to do with us as the people of God during the timeframe of the church?

First, I see a strong parallel in the way the Israelites of Daniel's day had turned from God, and the way we, too, as a nation have done so. For, after founding this nation on Biblical principles, we have turned our backs on the One who providentially founded us and have engaged in a multitude of our own idolatries. Furthermore, God's agent, the Church, has lost its salt and light. Discipline is coming, perhaps has already started, and the righteous are going to be caught up in it.

Ask some of our members who live, or have friends, in Colorado, if they have noted any changes after the legalization of marijuana?



Now, the marijuana issue is just one of many possible examples we could choose to illustrate the points we have been making regarding two perspectives. This is what I mean—how could a populace that claims to be 76% Christian legalize marijuana? There are two possibilities: 1) There are not really that many Christians; or, 2) They have been drawn into the thinking of this world rather than seeking and adhering to God's ways. For the abuse of pharmaceuticals is a manifestation of the sin nature per Galatians 5:19-21

Now it is very tempting for us as a church fellowship to take on an *us* versus *them* mentality. We have a nice *holy huddle* here, and we are going to be very tempted to just hunker down and try and survive. Like Elijah—we can bemoan the fact that we are “the only ones left.”

Or we could be like Daniel. We would do so by understanding God's calling on our lives to **go and make** disciples in this day of apostasy, and to let the prophetic



Word of God give us backbone.

When we are tempted to ask the question, “God—are you still in charge?” We reflexively hear the Spirit respond:

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth ... Matthew 28:18

Now perhaps you are thinking, “Does this mean we too should view ourselves as a remnant?” Excellent question, and we will have to look at this carefully. On the one hand, it is a concept with which we should be very familiar. It is a potent truth and we must understand its intent is to make it clear that God has the power to both preserve and restore His people.

On the other hand, I do not think the Biblical concept of a *remnant* is meant to apply directly to the church. To begin with, its Biblical usage is thoroughly Jewish in nature. Further, it is not explicitly applied to the church. Now follow this carefully! Like many Old Testament ideas, rather than simply going away in the New Testament, it is multiplied many times over. For example, the Law set a standard of behavior for the Israelites; now consider how much higher the *bar has been raised* for New Testament saints.

For the New Testament Scriptures require us to be “imitators of God” and also to “be holy as He is holy.” (Ephesians 5, 1 Peter 1:16) So how does the remnant-principle apply to the Church? Consider these truths:

- Christ is the head of His body, the Church. (Ephesians 5:23)
- The gates of hell shall not prevail against that of which Christ is head. (Matthew:16:18)

- Can God preserve us while we carry out the functions of the body? Romans 8:31-f makes that clear:

If God is for us, who can be against us? . . .What shall separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution. ...

- Can He restore us like He did the nation of Israel? That is not really the issue for the Church. Rather, it is a case of will we as a local fellowship be found faithful? On the one hand, there are those that were not:

“... I have this against you, that you have forsaken your first-love.”

Revelation 2:4 Referring to the Church at Ephesus

“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot ... because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.”

Revelation 3:15-16 Referring to the Church at Laodicea

- On the other hand, just like within the Old Testament concept of the remnant, there are those fellowships who will be found faithful. There will be those who do not succumb to the lures of this world, and keep their eye on:

... the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”

Colossians 3:1

So we want to take the concept of the remnant, multiply it in terms of appropriating what God has provided for us to follow after Him, that we might be found faithful and receive commendation from Him.

“Behold, I am coming quickly! ... hold fast to what you have that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God. ...”

Revelation 3:11– 12 Referring to the church in Philadelphia,



In Closing

In closing this lesson, let me summarize our major points. God chose to reveal much prophecy through His servant Daniel. In keeping with the practical nature of our study, if we look at the life of Daniel, and the effect that the prophetic Word of God had upon him, we have a marvelous practical illustration. Daniel was a great man because he had a clear vision of who God was.

Furthermore, God's plans for the future shaped his present and gave it rich meaning—it can and should do the same for us!

There are two kinds of people reading this lesson: children of God and the curious.

Children of God. First, there are those who are children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. For this category, as we increasingly understand God's message regarding His plans for the future, the following should occur:

- Despite the turmoil of our day, we should be ever more certain God is in charge.
- We should feel the pull to purify our lives in expectation of the Lord's return and our evaluation by Him.
- We should have an increasing desire to be found fully engaged in the mission that He has given to us, that is to represent Him to the lost that He brings into our lives. God has said:

“... to him who overcomes I will grant the right to sit with me on My throne. . .” Revelation 3:21

Might it need to be a really big throne just to hold the faithful *remnant* from our fellowship!

The Curious. There may also be those reading this lesson, who out of curiosity, have read thus far. But they know that they do not yet have a personal relationship with the Father through His Son. Let me just add a reminder that the plans and purposes of God are moving forward—like a great river flowing. The merely curious are on the bank watching. I invite you to become a part of God's unfolding plans.

It is as straightforward as John 1:12:

But as many as received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.

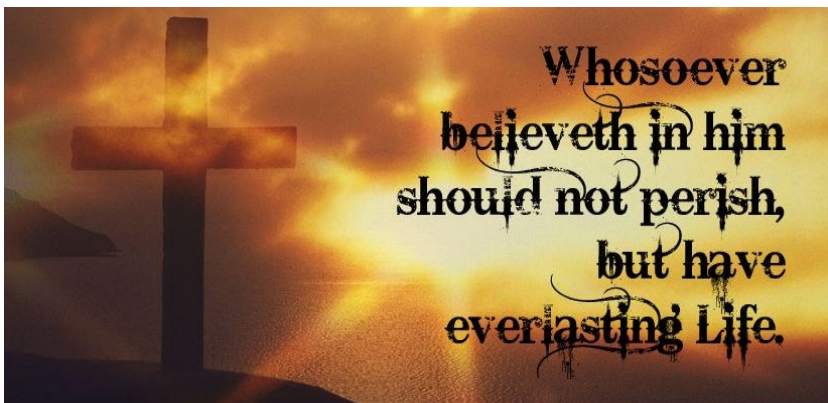
To believe in “His name” is to place your faith in who He is—the Son of God who came to save; and to believe in what He has done—died on the cross to receive in Himself the judgment for our sin.

Perhaps you are thinking, “That is just too easy!”

It *is* easy for us—faith in Christ is a decision on our part to trust the provision of God.

On the other hand, in the grace plan of God, Christ did all the work and it cost Him dearly. Furthermore, the study of prophecy forces us to come to grips with the truth that although entry into the family of God is easy, it is part of a very high calling. We have a mission to represent Christ in this fallen world, which amounts to enemy territory.

The challenges are great, but the benefits and rewards are eternal. To be part of the “remnant”—the ones found faithful by God—gives meaning to life and reward for all eternity.



What are you waiting for?



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