

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1 ALL THAT THE PROPHETS HAVE SPOKEN

2 JESUS RETURNS TO HEAVEN

3 DO YOU BELIEVE THE PROPHETS?

1 ALL THAT THE PROPHETS HAVE SPOKEN

Seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, God had the Prophet Isaiah write these words. Read them carefully and see if you can interpret this prophetic passage of Scripture.

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.

Isaiah 53

This is one of many prophetic passages that give specific information concerning the Messiah who was to come. It's no wonder that Jesus, in speaking to the two disciples, said ...

"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ [or Messiah] have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

Luke 24:25

Perhaps he would say the same thing to us.

2 JESUS RETURNS TO HEAVEN

In the days immediately following Jesus' resurrection, he spent time with his disciples and ...

... showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

Acts 1:3

In the end, Jesus took them back to familiar ground, just two miles from Jerusalem.

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.

Luke 24:50,51

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Acts 1:10,11

The angels said Jesus would come again. If we were to study the Bible further, we would see that it has a lot to say about that future event. Just as God kept his promise related to prophecies about his first coming, we can be assured that he will keep his Word regarding his second coming. He always does.

The rest of the Bible records the events surrounding the lives of the disciples who became known as apostles. These followers of Jesus told multitudes of people about him.

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of [temple] priests became obedient to the faith.

Acts 6:7

Even priests who had been instrumental in Jesus' death believed. But not everyone was convinced and, just as the disciples must have anticipated, there was resistance. One particularly ardent Jesus-hater was a young Pharisee named *Saul*. Saul was zealous in following the laws and traditions of his religion. He *thought* he believed the prophets but, in fact, he had *never understood* their message. He decided that Jesus' disciples must be silenced.

Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

Acts 9:1-5

This was the beginning of a most remarkable life. Saul changed radically. He stopped killing believers and became one himself. The tables turned and the persecutor became the persecuted. On one occasion he was stoned with rocks and left for dead. Three times he was beaten with rods; five times whipped; three times shipwrecked (during one of which he floated on the sea for twenty-four hours). All of this occurred as Saul tried to tell others about his own belief that Jesus was THE PROMISED SAVIOR about whom all the prophets wrote.

3 DO YOU BELIEVE THE PROPHETS?

There are those who after reading the Bible and understanding what it has to say, decide to take a risk. They decide not to believe it.

They choose to:

Ignore its message...

Reject it outright...

Get busy with life, and thereby forget it...

Water down its message...

...and they hope that the Scriptures are wrong.

Herod Agrippa took such a risk. As the grandson of Herod the Great and first cousin of Herod Antipas, he must have been privy to the gossip about Jesus in the royal household. No doubt, spies had reported every word the prophet from Nazareth spoke. But Herod had status; he was an important man. Rather than humble himself before the King of Kings, he continued to live his life for himself. He even gained an element of popularity by beheading one of Jesus' disciples. But then...

On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

Acts 12:21-23

God in his grace will tolerate sin for awhile, but then in his justice he will judge it. Judgment may come in this life or it may be withheld until after death, but it will happen. Herod died and faced an eternity in the Lake of Fire. The next verse is noteworthy...

But the word of God continued to increase and spread.

Acts 12:24

Another contemporary of Jesus was Herod Agrippa II. As the great grandson of Herod the Great, and son of Herod Agrippa, he would also have known about Jesus. The Bible says King Agrippa was well versed in all the things concerning Jesus. Saul, now known as the apostle Paul, was arrested and testified before him. In his defense before Agrippa, Paul told him about Jesus. He said...

"I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that he would

*be the first to rise from the dead and would proclaim light to the people and to the Gentiles. ... For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, **do you believe the prophets?***

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

Acts 26:22,23,26-28 NKJV

King Agrippa seemed to understand Paul quite well, so much so that he even admitted that Paul had almost persuaded him to believe. But Agrippa took the risk. He didn't believe. He side-stepped the message of the prophets in an effort to avoid making a decision. As far as we know, Agrippa never did believe. He went to his grave *understanding* but not believing. It was his choice.

Paul also defended himself before a Roman governor named Felix. Paul always took these opportunities to give a lengthy explanation of who Jesus was and what He had done.

Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you."

Acts 24:24,25

Felix put off his decision. He was waiting for a more convenient time. It's easy to do that, but the Bible reminds us that *now* is the time to decide...

... now is the accepted time; ... now is the day of salvation.

2 Corinthians 6:2 NKJV

Neither biblical nor secular history records what happened to Felix but, to the best of our knowledge, he never did find a convenient time to believe.

Saul, Herod Agrippa, Agrippa II, Felix—all these men made a choice. It's the same choice we face.

... do you believe [the message of] the prophets?

Acts 26:27