

# THE PROPHETIC WORD IN CRISIS DAYS

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by

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### THE PROPHETIC WORD AND THE SECOND COMING

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When I am reminded that for every prophecy, concerning the first coming of Christ, there are eight concerning His second coming, I begin to realize the tremendous importance of this theme in the Word of God. In the last 1900 years, almost every aspect and detail of the first coming of Christ has been preached and taught, and yet there has been a tremendous neglect of the teaching concerning the second coming of our blessed Lord. In the urgency of these times, in which we now live, certainly there is need for emphasis upon this theme as never before.

I have two texts, — they both come from the same book, and they both read exactly the same way. Revelation 1:3 reads: **“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein”**; now the text, **“for the time is at hand.”** Revelation 22:10: **“And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book”**; now the text, **“for the time is at hand.”**

This statement, appearing twice in the Revelation, once in its opening words, and again in its closing words, bind together the message of this book. I want to call three things to your attention as I unfold the significance of this statement.

#### **I. FIRST, THE NEARNESS OF THOSE THINGS THAT ARE RECORDED IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION**

If I were to translate this statement just as literally as I possibly could, from the Greek language it would read: *“For the time is near.”* Now you cannot understand the significance of these words without knowing the Old Testament background. Some five centuries before Christ when the people of Israel were confined in hard bondage in the land of Babylon their hearts cried out for some information concerning the future. What did the future hold for them? Would they remain in captivity? Would they be released from captivity? Would they have opportunity to return again to their home land? Would it be their privilege to restore again the sacred sites and places?

What did the future hold for them?

The plaintive cry of their hearts gave voice to one of the most remarkable prayers in the Bible, the prayer of the prophet Daniel, and the emphasis in that prayer was on the subject of time. (You will find it recorded in the 9th chapter of the book of Daniel).

Before he had completed that prayer, the answer was on the way, and the answer constitutes the most significant eschatological passage in the entire Old Testament. It begins with verse 24, and you will recognize it immediately as the prophecy of the seventy weeks. Notice how it begins:

**“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city.”**

Now you cannot mistake the direction of those words, for Daniel's people were the people of Israel, and Daniel's city was the city of Jerusalem, and it is declared here, **“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city.”**

Now the Hebrew does not say seventy weeks. It says *“seventy sevens.”* In the Hebrew chronology there are three types of sevens:

- A seven of days, which we recognize as the ordinary week;
- A seven of weeks, which constitutes another period in Hebrew chronology; and
- A seven of years.

It does not take much examination of this passage to conclude that it is the third under consideration, namely, seventy weeks of years, 490 years in all. Although you may not be able to say very much that is good for the recent Revised Standard Version, you can say one thing. It translates this passage seventy weeks of years. From that point on it confuses the passage but at least that much is good.

These 490 years that are before us, are for the purpose of finishing something, verse 24. I am going to summarize it by saying, *“It is to finish the course and career of Israel under the Old Testament law.”*

The text tells us when those years begin; verse 25 reads, **“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem.”**

We know when the decree of Artaxerxes was issued, and from that point you can begin counting the years. We are also told where those years end. Verse 27 says: **“And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week.”** That is the final week of years, — the seventieth week in this chronology.

If you examine this period again, you will discover that it is divided into two segments. The first segment consists of 69 weeks, or 483 years in all. The final segment consists of one week, or seven years in all.

Look again at verse 25:

**“Know therefore and understand that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and three score and two weeks.”**

Sixty two plus seven makes sixty nine, 483 years in all, so that from the moment that the decree was issued by Artaxerxes, you may begin counting the years, one after another, consecutively and immediately, until 483 of them have passed, and it brings one to that day when Jesus rode down the Mount of Olives on the colt, the foal of an ass, crossed the brook Kidron, ascended Mount Moriah and entered in through the golden gate of the city and offered Himself to the people of Israel as their King.

Then something happened. The account says: **“The street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times, and after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself.”**

Messiah was cut off.

- He was cut off from His nation by rejection.
- He was cut off from life by crucifixion.
- He was cut off from this earth by His ascension back to Glory.

At this point you might expect that that final week of years would follow immediately, and consecutively just as the preceding 483 years. But not so. In the 1900 years since there has not been one seven year period that fulfills the prophecy of verse 27.

Moreover I want to remind you that the efforts of theologians are almost unceasing to rationalize systematically and theologically to discover one period of seven years that will fulfill the prophecy of verse 27. And the exegetes have not spared themselves in the same direction. There is just one conclusion, therefore, that week of years is yet future.

In Daniel 12:4, we read the angel said to Daniel:

**“But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end.”**

As if that were not sufficient, it is repeated, in verse 9, **“And he said, Go thy way, Daniel; for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.”**

From these two passages, there is one thing of which I am convinced. When God closes a book, it is closed; and when He seals a message, it is sealed, and there is no genius, natural or supernatural that can open that book, or unseal that message.

Notice carefully that there was a time limit placed on this, namely, **“till the time of the end.”** Of course, that raises a real question as to the identity of the end.

Therefore, keeping this in mind, let us read again Daniel 9:26:

**“And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself; and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.”**

Verse 27: **“And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation,”** or as the word means, the end.

Upon the basis of these facts I am going to utter something to which I hope you will listen carefully. There is one thing upon which the Old Testament and the New Testament agree. The end is to be characterized by the coming of Christ. I did not say the second coming, I said the coming. When one reads the Old Testament, all he reads in the Old Testament is about the coming of Christ. He does not know anything about two comings when he reads the Old Testament. Not until Christ comes the first time does His coming unfold into two comings.

That first coming initiated the end, and His second coming will terminate the end. That 1900 years has elapsed between the two does not vitiate that fact. It only enlarges upon the long suffering of a gracious God. Significantly before us, in Daniel 9:26, we read about His first coming, and in verse 27, His second coming.

After Jesus went back to Glory, ten days elapsed, and then on the day of Pentecost, something new was initiated, — the Church was born. The Church carried on its course for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years. In that period of time, there was not one seven year period that fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel 9:27. Then John the Apostle was banished to the Isle of Patmos, and on that rock-bound coast the greatest revelation ever vouchsafed to mankind was given to him.

In its opening words, Jesus said to him, **“For the time is at hand.”**

And after the revelation had run its course and was concluded, Jesus again said to John, **“Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.”**

How pertinent these words when it is recognized that the burden of the book of the Revelation from chapter 4 through chapter 19 is the unfolding and the expansion of the prophecy in Daniel 9:27. Think of it, will you? 1900 years ago the last words that Jesus left with His Church were, **“For the time is near.”**

## **II. THE SECOND THING I WANT TO SPEAK ABOUT IS THE IMMINENCY OF THOSE THINGS THAT ARE RECORDED IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION**

Since I have already asserted that our passage says, *“For the time is near,”* we ask immediately, how near? The answer is, it is imminent.

By the use of that term imminent, we mean that an event is possible at any moment, and therefore it is an event that ought to be expected at any moment.

It further means that there is no other event that intervenes between the present and the occurrence of that event. But in spite of that fact somehow the Church, in these 1900 years has either failed or refused to grasp the fact and believers have been using one method after another to set the date for the coming of the Lord. It began with the Apostles and it persists until today.

Jesus anticipated that so He said to His disciples as recorded in Mark 13:32, **“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.”**

In that statement He declared that no human being knows the time. He went beyond that. He said that not even the sovereign Son of God knows the time. This was the proof that He was God. This was one point of information upon which He limited Himself. If we know something we can't limit our knowledge. The conclusion is that there is just One who knows, — that is the Father.

But did those disciples comprehend that? No indeed! For after Christ had risen from the dead, during those forty days in which He taught them many things pertaining to the kingdom of God, they came to Him with a question. It is recorded in Acts 1:6, **“Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”**

His answer was, **“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power.”**

In these two passages of Scripture no less than four different words for time appear. There is the word hour, which marks a point of time. There is the word day, which marks a more extended period. There is the word season, which points to a still more extended period, and there is the word time, or *chronos*, which marks the grand expanse of time. I do not see how He could have used four terms that would more accurately describe every detail and aspect of time than He did. And He inscribed over all of it the fact of human ignorance.

But in spite of this fact the Church goes right on trying to set the date. Why? For a very practical reason. If one knows the date, he does not need to prepare for this event until immediately prior to the date. Suppose I were to say, Jesus will come in a thousand years, we could shrug that one off easily, couldn't we? But suppose I should say a hundred years; really, a hundred years is a long time. Who among us will live to be old enough to pluck the bloom off the century plant?

But suppose, I should say ten years. Well, after all, ten years is a long time and doubtless none of us would be too much concerned about that coming until immediately prior to the event. But suppose I should say a year. Well, a year has fifty-two weeks in it. How many of us would put it off until the last week?

Why, friends there are students in my seminary who know three years ahead of time what is going to be demanded of them, and they put it off until the last minute. I am not finding fault with the students. They are just like everybody else.

Suppose it were possible for me to say, Next Sunday night at the hour of seven o'clock Jesus will come. How would you live these next seven days? Don't tell me. You just answer that before the Lord. Suppose I could say, Tomorrow night at the hour of seven Jesus will come. How would you spend the next twenty-four hours? My dear friends, I cannot say any one of those things, but there is one thing I can say with absolute assurance. Jesus may come at any moment.

At this point I want to read to you a series of passages from the New Testament which speaks so clearly on the subject at hand. For this reason everyone of us ought to be alerted. When Jesus came the first time, He came in last days, Hebrews 1:1, 2. **“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us in his Son.”**

Jesus died on the cross of Calvary in the end of the age, Hebrews 9:26. **“For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world. But now once in the end of the world,”** that word is age, **“hath he appeared to put away sin, by the sacrifice of himself.”**

The Holy Spirit of God came in last days. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost he cited an Old Testament prophecy. You will find it recorded in Acts 2:17. **“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.”**

Someone will be quick to say, Yes, but that refers to the time when the Kingdom is going to be set up, and that I do not deny. But there is a time element included. Is it not possible that this time element also covers the Day of Pentecost? Thus both of these outpourings are within the period of time.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian congregation, he wrote this way in I Corinthians 10:11, **“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”**

The word world is the word age. Nineteen hundred years ago the end of the age had come upon that Corinthian congregation. Well, if that's true then you and I are living now in the end of the end of the age.

Peter wrote a prophecy (II Peter 3:3), **“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers walking after their own lusts, and saying. . . .”** And then the prophecy follows.

Several years later, Jude wrote, and this is what he recorded in verses 16-18. **“These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.”**

Peter says they shall come, Jude says they are here. Both writers identified last days as being true nineteen hundred years ago.

The Apostle John in his epistle, chapter 2, vs. 18 wrote, “**Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.**” The word translated **time** in both of those instances is the word *hour*. It is the last hour. Westcott said that the word cannot be frittered away to mean a last hour. It is the last hour. And if so, it has lengthened out into a long period of time. By now, certainly, it is ebbing out.

And finally John wrote again the words of the Lord Jesus, “**For the time is at hand.**” “**Seal not the saying of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.**”

Nineteen hundred years ago, my dear friends, the time was near. If that be so, it is nineteen hundred years nearer today. At any moment He could come and catch His Church out, and usher in that final week of years in the history of Israel.

### **III. FINALLY, THE OPPORTUNITY THAT IS YOURS AND MINE So LONG As THAT EVENT DOES NOT OCCUR**

Since the passage reads, “**For the time is at hand,**” We are confronted with a special word translated **time**. It is the word, *kairos*. It means time that is charged with opportunity. It means the fit, proper, suitable time for a thing to take place.

I shall now read several passages from the New Testament where that word appears. These passages themselves will define the meaning of the word. In Matthew 13:30, Jesus is giving the parable of the wheat and tares, and He says, “**Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest.**” There's that word. You will agree that there is a fit, suitable, proper time in which to gather in the produce of the ground. And, we might add, there is a fit, suitable, proper time in which to plant. If a farmer should get those two confused it would be tragic.

In II Corinthians 6:2 we read, “**For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.**” And do you know the word translated time is exactly the same word? What he is saying is that the fit, suitable, proper time in which to be saved is right now, — not tomorrow, not next week, not next month, not next year, but right now. God hasn't granted to anyone of us a lease on life, but he has graciously given us now. And even if he should grant us continuing life, Jesus could come, and thus cut off our opportunity to receive Him.

When Paul wrote to this Corinthian congregation, he wrote to a congregation that was split four ways. They had four leaders in that church, all of them vying for prominence, and every last member of that congregation had joined themselves to one or the other of those leaders. The factionalism that developed also carried with it a lot of judging of one another, which always goes with that sort of thing. The conclusions to which they came were invalid because they didn't have enough facts with which to work, and they were unable to see those facts in their true perspective. So therefore, the Apostle Paul had to write to them like this, (I Corinthians 4:5), “**Therefore judge nothing before the time,**” (there is that word again) and then he adds, “**until the Lord come.**”

Now that is going to be a wonderful time for judgment within the Church, because there will be so many more facts available. And all of those facts will be seen in their true perspective, because the scales will have fallen away from our eyes, and the cobwebs will have been swept from our minds, and salvation will be completed, and we will be able to see everything in its true perspective. The conclusions, then, will be valid.

Let me take you to one more passage, Galatians 6:9, 10, “**And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season**” (there is that word for time again); “**in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not.**” Verse 10, “**As we have therefore opportunity,**” (and there is that word again) the same word — “**let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.**”

My dear friends, so long as Jesus doesn't come, that portion of time that we call the present is the fit, suitable and proper time in which we ought to do good; for one of these moments Jesus is coming, and such opportunity will be cut off from us.

Permit me to ask you,

- Have you done everything you ought to do before Jesus comes?
- Have you stopped everything you ought to stop before Jesus comes?
- Have you witnessed to that dear one in your own family, among your relatives, or your neighbors? You have thought to do it, — you planned it, but have you just put it off?
- Have you put a price, a value on those moments that we call now?

What does it take to alert the people of God to the importance of that period of time we call now?

Do you know that the hazards of the highways are so multiple today that there isn't a guarantee that anyone of us will reach our homes safely when we go out on the highways today? I said that to a congregation of people several years ago and not ten minutes elapsed before its truth was sealed to the heart of every person present, in a horrible tragedy. A woman left that congregation, a woman of about sixty years of age, and thank God a good woman. She drove her car out on one of those well-travelled highways in Indiana. She was going home to pick up a covered dish and bring it back to a fellowship meal. But when she drove out on that highway, something happened, — we will never know. Perhaps she blacked out, perhaps the car went out of control. One thing was certain, she was driving down the left side of that highway. An oncoming car, estimated by the police as going at the rate of eighty-five miles an hour, hit hers in a head-on collision. So sudden and tremendous was the impact that it literally dragged her out of her shoes, — there they were beneath the brake and clutch pedal. It threw her over the steering wheel, out through that windshield, and just strewed her along the highway. All they could do was just shovel her up and pour her into a coffin. The driver of the other car was killed instantly, his fourteen-year-old son was killed instantly, the mother died in several hours, and the four-year-old boy was left a cripple. Is that what it takes to sober us and make us realize the value of these moments, that we call now? Is it possible that we have believed the Saviour to the salvation of our souls and yet ignore the last word that a loving Saviour left with us, “**For the time is at hand**”?

Jesus said, “**The evil servant hath said in his heart, My Lord delayeth His coming.**” Do you notice where He said that? He did not make a public profession of that. He said that in his heart. Perhaps you would say, publicly, I believe Jesus will come back at any moment. That is a good profession; it's one that we ought to make. But it's amazing how we can make public professions but never bring our walk into conformity with those professions.

The great preacher, Robert Murray McCheyne, only lived to be twenty-nine years of age. But in that short span of years, he accomplished more than most of us do in a span of years that far exceeds that.

One night, after a prayer meeting, he called his board into session. After the business had been completed he turned to the elder gentleman who was the chairman of the board, and said to him, “Do you think Jesus will come tonight?”

The old gentleman wrinkled his brow, ran his fingers through his hair, as in reflection, and then he said, “No, I don't think Jesus will come tonight.”

He turned to the next man and asked him the same question, and that man, perhaps influenced by the elder gentleman, answered the question in exactly the same way.

He turned to a third, the response was similar. He turned to a fourth, and a fifth, until he had gone the entire round of that board. And every last man answered, “No, I don't think Jesus will come tonight.”

So Mr. McCheyne opened the Bible to Matthew 24:44, and he read these words, “. . . **In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.**”

If I understand this passage of Scripture, Jesus said nineteen hundred years ago that the time, — the fit, suitable, proper time — had drawn near.

Today His coming is imminent, a time when He could come and catch the Church away and usher in that final week of years in the history of Israel. In His graciousness, these days have lengthened out into centuries and now into almost two millenniums.

Peter explains the very fact that they have lengthened out when he writes, “**And account that the long suffering of our Lord is salvation.**”

I thank God that they were lengthened out, for it is during this period that I heard the truth and was saved. And all of you who are saved have had the same experience, and are thankful in your hearts for the mercies of God. But I want to remind you that that does not invalidate or alter the statement of the Lord Jesus. That time drew near nineteen hundred years ago, and the very passing of these nineteen hundred years has drawn that event nineteen hundred years nearer.

Christ came the first time according to His Word. You may be sure He will keep His promise to come a second time.

One of these moments Jesus is going to come. As you read these words, if you are without the Lord Jesus as a Saviour, don't neglect this opportunity to receive Him, for **“as many as received Him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”**

**“For the time is at hand.”**

**~ end of chapter 14 ~**

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