

# **Pre – Isaiah Lesson 3**

## **The Prophetic Foreshortening (What Isaiah Saw)**

### **Understanding the Mountain Peaks of Prophecy**

#### **Introduction: The Mountain Peaks of Prophecy**

Tonight, we continue our preparation for our study of Isaiah, the greatest of the writing prophets. Remember, we have completed our journey through the Hebrew Narrative, where we saw the King promised, then in Matthew, where the King was presented and rejected, and in Acts, where the King was rejected perpetually and postponed, with the revelation that the new administration (the Church) is in effect. Now we turn to Isaiah, and I want to address a fundamental question that has puzzled many believers.

The question is this: Why did the Jews miss the Messiah, and why didn't John the Baptist and the apostles understand what the Messiah had to accomplish? They had the Scriptures. They had studied the Scriptures diligently. They were looking for the Messiah. So, what happened? The answer lies in how prophecy was revealed to the prophets.

I want to introduce you to a concept that theologians call "Prophetic Foreshortening." Here's the core concept: prophecy is often delivered to the prophet without an understanding of time. The prophet sees multiple historical events stacked one behind the other, like mountain peaks seen from a distance. The valley between them - what we now know as "the Church Age" - is completely obscured from their view.

Our goal tonight is to show from the text how God presented the two advents of the Messiah to the prophets as a single, imminent event, thus revealing why there was confusion during the time of Jesus, and to help us not make the same mistake.

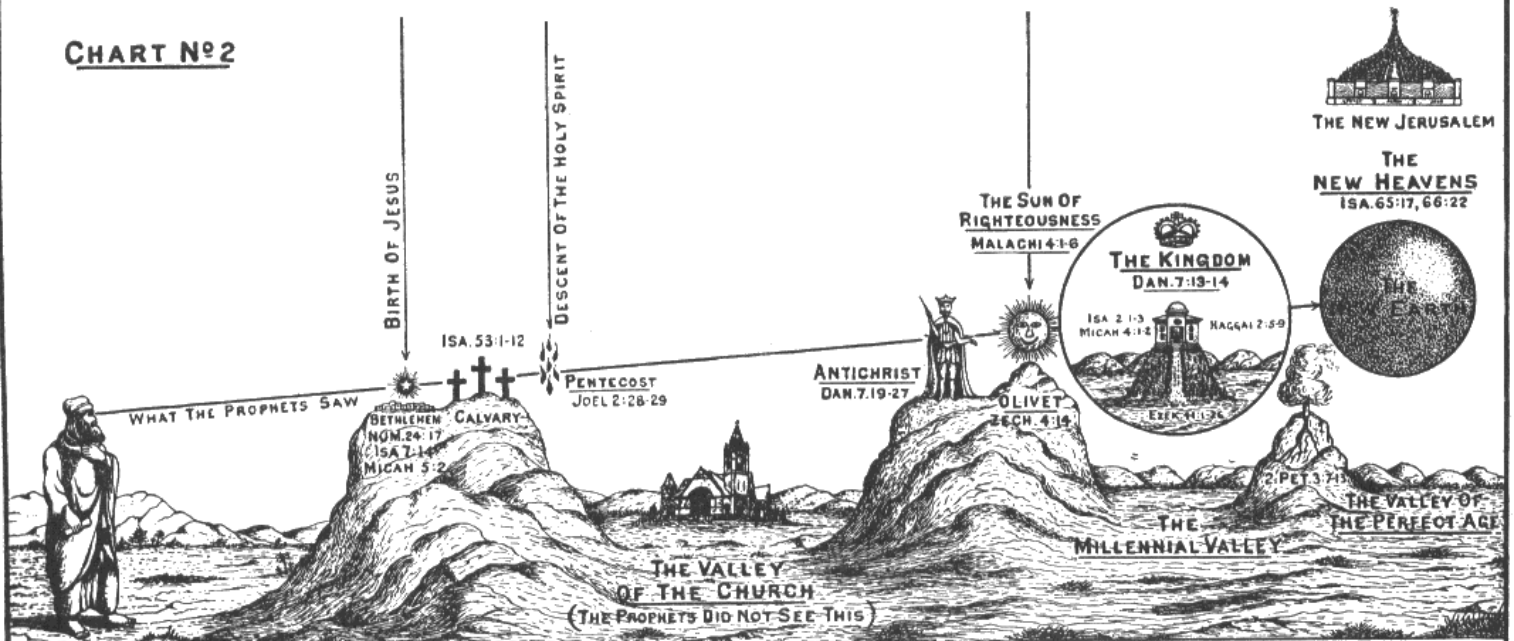
1. The prophets' own confusion about their writings
2. The primary example in Isaiah 61
3. How this explains the confusion we saw in Matthew and Acts

#### **I. Defining the Problem: The Prophets' Confusion**

Let's start with a key text that explicitly addresses this issue. 1 Peter 1:10-12.

*As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these*

## CHART N<sup>o</sup>2



**THE OLD TESTAMENT VALLEY**  
THE VIEW-POINT OF THE PROPHETS

**OUR VIEW-POINT**  
WE SEE THE "MOUNTAIN PEAKS" AND "VALLEYS" FROM THE SIDE  
AND SO CAN SEPARATE THE FIRST AND SECOND COMING PROPHECIES

## THE "MOUNTAIN PEAKS" OF PROPHECY

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*things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven; things into which angels long to look.*

I want to focus on the verbs Peter uses here, because they're quite revealing in the original Greek. When he says the prophets "made careful searches," he uses the word ἐκζητέω (ekzeteō). This is a strong, intensive verb. The root ζητέω (zeteō) means to seek or strive after. But, with the prefix ἐκ (ek), which in composition intensifies the meaning, it indicates exertion of effort. They were doing a deep, difficult study to understand their own writings.

Similarly, "inquiries" translates ἐξερπυνάω (exeraunaō) - another compound word with ἐκ (ek) attached to ἐρπυνάω (eraunaō), which means to search or examine. This word means "to try to find something out."

What's crucial is what they were seeking: "what time or what manner (circumstances) of time." The translation in some versions might lead you to think they were trying to figure out "who." That is neither true nor accurate. Moses, Abraham, David, Isaiah, and the rest of the prophets knew it was YHWH in the flesh they were looking forward to; they did not know when. Finally, in Jeremiah and Daniel, it was revealed that this wasn't happening within their lifetime.

The Holy Spirit revealed what was coming (Christ's suffering and glory), but not when it was coming, nor the interval between the two events. The prophets understood the substance of the Messiah's work, but the historical sequence was hidden from them. This objective lack of chronological information is what we call Prophetic Foreshortening.

Think of it this way: If you're standing in a valley looking at a mountain range in the distance, two peaks might appear to be right next to each other. But when you actually climb the first mountain and reach its summit, you suddenly realize there's a vast valley between it and the next peak. This is exactly what happened with prophecy - from the prophets' vantage point, the sufferings and the glory appeared as a single event.

## II. The Primary Example: Isaiah 61:1-2

Now that we understand the concept, let's look at the most vivid example of the two advents merged into one cohesive statement. Isaiah 61:1-2.

This passage is critical because it's one that Jesus Himself read and commented on, giving us how to understand prophetic foreshortening.

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The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the YHWH has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the YHWH and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.

Now, observe something crucial: the two events - the proclamation of grace and the day of final judgment - are connected by a simple conjunction "and" and presented as a single, inseparable mission. There's no indication of a time gap. Nothing in the Hebrew text suggests these two events are separated by thousands of years. To Isaiah, they appeared as one unified mission of the Messiah.

Now, let's look at how Jesus Himself used this passage. Luke 4:16-21.

*And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, 'THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.' And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'*

Did you catch what happened? Jesus stops reading at a specific point. He quotes up to "the acceptable year of the Lord," and then He stops. He deliberately omits the phrase "and the day of vengeance of our God."

This conscious choice to stop reading is a demonstration of the Mountain Peaks I've been describing. The "acceptable year" is the first Mountain Peak (the first advent/grace/sufferings of Christ). The "day of vengeance" is the second Mountain Peak (the day of judgment/the Second Advent/glory).

The omission signifies the unrevealed valley - the Church Age, our current dispensation and administration. Jesus is showing us that these events, presented as a single mission in Isaiah, are actually separated by a time period that wasn't revealed to the prophet.

This isn't a minor detail; it's the key that unlocks our understanding of why so many in Jesus' day, including devoted followers of God, misunderstood the Messianic timeline.

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They weren't stupid or unfaithful; they were working with incomplete chronological information that God had deliberately withheld.

### **III. The Confusion in Matthew and Acts**

This explains the confusion we saw in our studies of Matthew and Acts. Let's look at two specific examples.

First, consider John the Baptist in Matthew 3:7-12.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Matthew 11:2-6

Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, 'Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and report to John what you hear and see: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.'

John was the last Old Testament prophet. What was he expecting? Was he expecting a meek, humble servant that will suffer? No, he was expecting the righteous King who would restore Israel, judge the enemies, and destroy the corrupt leadership unless they reconsidered and corrected their abuses.

Based on the prophecies he had studied, he was certain Christ would bring immediate judgment, as prophesied right alongside the grace. When John is in prison and no judgment

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is occurring, he sends his disciples to ask, "Are You the expected One, or shall we look for another?"

This isn't a question about Jesus' identity. John isn't doubting who Jesus is - he's confused about the chronology of events. He saw the King, but he didn't see the time between the grace and the vengeance. He's essentially asking, "If you're the Messiah, where's the judgment part of your mission that was prophesied alongside the mercy?"

Consider also the disciples in Acts 1:6. Even after spending three years with Jesus, witnessing His death and resurrection, they still ask, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

They had spent three years with Jesus, but they still saw the Theocratic Kingdom as the immediate next step, right after the resurrection. The Prophetic Foreshortening had been so ingrained that the apostles could not yet conceive of a gap (a new dispensation and administration) that would be instituted before the promised restoration.

Jesus' answer in Acts 1:7 is telling: "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority." Notice that Jesus does not deny the Kingdom restoration; He only corrects the timing. This confirms that the timing (the valley between the Mountain Peaks) was still not fully revealed, only the fact of the future restoration.

Also in Acts, Peter anticipates the day of the Lord imminently. Acts 2:17-21, 29-36

‘AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ God says, ‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy. ‘AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. ‘THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME. ‘AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’

“Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. “And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. “This Jesus God raised up again, to

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which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. “For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET. Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.

When the Jews and proselytes in Jerusalem heard this, they asked, “What shall we do?” This question is not about individual restoration (eternal life) but about the individual response in order to prepare for the day of the Lord and the return of the King.

Notice that the response given to them is similar to the one given to the Jews by John the Baptizer.

Acts 2:38-40

Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. “For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!”

Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins...And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins...

John the Baptizer and Peter were still anticipating the subsequent peaks as if they were on top of each other.

#### **IV. Another Example**

Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. “He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good...For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name

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will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

#### **Conclusion**

The problem of the early disciples was not a lack of faith in the Person of Christ, but an inaccurate understanding of the prophetic schedule. They were convinced of His identity but confused by the timing.

When we read Isaiah, we must strive to understand what Isaiah saw but also understand the complete picture through the lens of later revelation (Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Revelation) to correctly separate various events so as not to end up spiritualizing or mysticizing the prophetic content. This has profound implications for how we read prophecy today; we need:

1. Humility in interpretation - even the prophets themselves struggled to understand the timing of their own prophecies.
2. Patience in fulfillment - God's timeline often includes intervals and gaps not revealed in the original prophecies.
3. Confidence in God's sovereignty - what appears to be "delay" is actually part of God's perfect plan.

Let me close with some thoughts:

- The prophets foresaw Christ's sufferings and Christ's glory. They saw the mountain peaks but not the valley between them. We live in that valley - the Church Age - with the advantage of looking back at the first mountain (Christ's first coming) while looking forward to the subsequent mountains (judgment, return, Millennial Reign).
- This gives us a perspective the prophets longed for but never had. But now as we gaze into prophecy, we need to be aware that there may be pieces and gaps that we cannot see as well.
- We are privileged to have access to the revelation found in God's Word, insight that even the prophets and angels deeply desired to understand. As we study Isaiah, it is important to seek discernment and openness, working diligently to accurately understand the Scriptures. This study calls for patience as we trust God's timeline, confidence in His promises, and steadfastness during this unforeseen period between Christ's first and second comings.