

Why is prophecy obscure?

by Douglas E. Cox

This question is similar to the question the disciples asked Jesus: "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" [Matthew 13:10] Jesus explained that it is not given to everyone to understand the message of the gospel, and about his kingdom. "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them." He cited a prophecy of Isaiah:

*'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;
For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.'*

Jesus said to his disciples, "But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and

righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." Isaiah's prophecy was written about the people of Israel, but other prophecies convey a similar message about the Gentiles.

Habakkuk 1:5

Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days which ye will not believe, though it be told you.

Daniel said, the wise would understand, but none of the wicked.

Daniel 12:10

Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.

The reason why the things of God are hidden in obscure prophecies is similar to the reason Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden, in the Genesis story. In Eden, Adam lived in harmony and fellowship with God, until he sinned. The Israelites were likewise expelled from the land of promise, and went into exile, because of their sins. When Paul explained the fate of the Jews who did not believe the gospel, he said: "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all." [Romans 11:32] This shows that their blindness will eventually be taken away.

The prophets foretold a return to the land, but those prophecies are not about a return to a *literal* land of Canaan, such as the emigration of Jews to the Jewish state in Palestine is touted to be. The prophets said the people will come with *weeping* unto Zion, and that they would be given a new heart, and a new spirit. This has not happened in the modern Jewish state.

Ezekiel 36:26-28

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.

This return to the land involves the restoration of things that the promised land and the garden of Eden *represent*: fellowship with God, access to the tree of life, and reconciliation.

In the New Testament, Jude also spoke of a return; he said said Christians need to earnestly contend for *the faith once delivered*, the original, pure message of the gospel. "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." [Jude 1:3]

Men need to understand that Jesus is the real source of light and truth; he is the light of men. John wrote of him, "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." [John 1:9]

The restoration to the promised land means believing and understanding the truth of the gospel, and the message of the prophets.

The prophecies remain obscure to most people because believing and understanding their message is among the things promised to the people of God, the saints. Jesus said the Spirit will guide them to the truth. When they discover it, they are comforted and strengthened. This is part of the work that God performs, that others will not believe, but they are "concluded in unbelief," no doubt for their ultimate benefit. Eventually God will open the eyes of the blind. As Paul said of the unbelieving Jews, it is so that "he might have mercy upon all."