

The  
Master's Perspective  
on  
**BIBLICAL  
PROPHECY**

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**RICHARD L. MAYHUE  
ROBERT L. THOMAS**

*general editors*

The Master's  

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Perspective  

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Series

Volume 4

*Foreword by*

**John F. MacArthur Jr.**

The Master's Perspective Series

Volume 4

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*Academic & Professional*

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## Foreword

It may seem, in view of the current evangelical theological climate, as if God doesn't really care about how the truths of eschatology are interpreted. As long as we get our theology proper, Christology, and so on, right, God is content with our effort. In fact, some people might suggest that if God expected us to be clear on prophecy concerning the end times and the Savior's return, He failed to give us enough inspired data. This is as if to say that, when God inspired the Bible—which reveals the saga of redemption—He, like an inept writer, never made the conclusion clear.

It is ironic that many people who think that the Bible is unclear about the end also reject the clear, straightforward words concerning the beginning. That is, they accept the popular idea that Genesis 1–2 is not a literal seven-day history of the creation of the universe.

No one was there when God created, so we have to take His Word for it—and no one can see the future, so we have to take His Word for that, too. And by using the same hermeneutics for everything between Genesis and Revelation, we will be able to understand what God intended to tell us about the end.

Redemptive history will end with the same exactness and precision with which it began. The truths of eschatology are neither vague, unclear, nor unimportant. As in any book, how the story ends is the most crucial and compelling part.

The Master's Seminary faculty and guest contributors offer rich insight and understanding into the truth about the end of God's book.

—John F. MacArthur Jr.

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## Introduction

The apostle John, in writing to Christians of the Roman province of Asia, turned their eyes to the future with the following words: “Beloved, we are now the children of God, and what we shall be does not yet appear. We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2–3, author’s translation).

The return of Jesus Christ is appealing to Christians because of the prospect of being conformed to His likeness. That appeal, in turn, transforms a Christian’s current behavior by bringing him/her to live a spiritually clean life. The more we can learn about the Bible’s teaching regarding the future contributes to our maturity in Christ by sharpening our focus on that great day when we will be caught up to meet Him in the clouds.

The articles in this volume revolve around themes intimately associated with the end times and Christ’s return to retrieve His church and to establish His kingdom on earth. One chapter (chap. 5) discusses His imminent coming to take the faithful away from the earthly scene and to plunge the rest of the world into an awful time of trial. Another chapter (chap. 4) treats principles of interpretation to be used in studying the last book of the Bible, a book devoted almost exclusively to future matters.

Two more chapters (chaps. 7 and 8) amplify sections of that same book as they unfold how God will deal with the world in the end times. National Israel is the theme of two chapters (chaps. 1 and 3) because Israel will play such a prominent role in God’s plan for the times just

before and just after Christ's return to earth. Spirit baptism plays a significant part of new-covenant fulfillment in the future; one chapter (chap. 11) clarifies its part in both the present and the future. Four chapters (chaps. 2, 6, 9, and 10) focus on prophecies about Christ's future kingdom on earth.

Hopefully, each part of this work on biblical prophecy will add to a reader's understanding of the future and help conform him/her more closely to the image of Christ through an enhanced understanding of relevant Scriptures. That is the prayer of the editors.

The analysis of each area of discussion is that of the contributor and does not necessarily represent the opinion of The Master's Seminary, its administration, or its faculty. Each analysis, however, is a proposal that they recommend for consideration by readers of this volume.

We want to express our thanks to Mr. Mark Axelson for his help in compiling the indexes for this volume.

—Richard L. Mayhue and  
Robert L. Thomas, general editors



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## About *The Master's Seminary Journal*

For readers who are unfamiliar with *The Master's Seminary Journal* (*TMSJ*), a word of introduction is in order. *TMSJ* began publication in 1990 with the following statement of purpose:

With this issue, *The Master's Seminary Journal* launches its career as a medium for the publication of scholarly articles dealing with the biblical text, Christian theology, and pastoral concerns. As you have noted, or will note, it also contains reviews of current and significant books and occasionally, of articles, relating to these issues. With these emphases in mind, technical articles dealing with such issues as the philosophy of religion, linguistics, or archaeology, will not be included unless they clearly, directly, and significantly contribute to the understanding or application of God's written Revelation—the Holy Bible. The editors desire that all articles be understandable, not only by seminary professors and other professional scholars, but also by pastors, and, indeed, by any serious students of Scripture.

While the faculty members of The Master's Seminary will contribute most of the articles, the editors will solicit articles and reviews from recognized evangelical scholars, will evaluate voluntary contributions for possible inclusion, and will occa-

sionally include outstanding historical selections from the public domain.

It is our fervent prayer that our Lord Jesus Christ will be honored and exalted, either directly or indirectly, on every page of this publication, and that every article and review will contribute to the understanding or application of the Holy Scriptures as we await His return (excerpted from "Editorial," *TMSJ* 1, no. 1 [1990]: 1-2).

The *Journal* has continued without interruption since that time, endeavoring to fulfill the purpose established at its beginning. Readers interested in a subscription to *TMSJ* may contact Professor James F. Stitzinger, *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 13248 Roscoe Blvd., Sun Valley, CA 91352, or by e-mail <jstizinger@tms.edu>.

As a matter of policy, in its fall issue each year, *TMSJ* publishes the annual Faculty Lecture Series delivered to The Master's Seminary student body in January and February of that year. The fall 1999 issue covered the subject of the biblical covenants, the fall 2000 issue dealt with Christian ethics, and the fall 2001 issue dealt with the "openness of God" position. Besides these topics, of course, other issues have treated a wide variety of biblical, theological, and practical subjects. Articles from past issues are available on The Master's Seminary Web site at <www.tms.edu>.

The following are sources of *The Master's Perspective on Biblical Prophecy*: volume 2 (1991) of *TMSJ* contributed one chapter (chap. 4); volume 3 (1992) provided one chapter (chap. 6); volume 4 (1993) was the source of two chapters (chaps. 7, 9); volume 5 (1994) furnished one chapter (chap. 8); volume 7 (1996) supplied three chapters (chaps. 2, 5, 10); volume 8 (1997) furnished two chapters (chaps. 1, 11); and volume 9 (1998) provided one chapter (chap. 3).

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## The Mission of Israel and of the Messiah in the Plan of God

Robert L. Thomas

*God placed human beings, including the Messiah and the people of Israel, in His creation to fulfill a mission. The four Servant Songs of Isaiah (42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12) summarize the mission of the Messiah as coming in two phases: a period of lowliness, at the end of which He would die for the sins of His people and rise from the dead, and a period of exaltation, during which He would restore Israel's land and provide salvation to all peoples. Features of the Servant's first phase identify Him clearly as Jesus of Nazareth, with His second phase receiving full development in Daniel 7, as explained in Revelation. The mission of Israel has marked similarities to that of the Messiah, for example, the responsibility of witnessing to the nations. Israel has failed in her mission, however, and awaits a future restoration before she can fulfill her mission. That will come in her future kingdom when the Messiah returns. Israel also has a significant mission during the present age, illustrated by Jewish authorship of all but two of the NT books. Yet, she is not currently fulfilling OT prophecies of her future role in the kingdom. The ultimate mission of all peoples will receive fulfillment in the New Jerusalem when they enjoy personal fellowship with God in bringing glory to Him.*

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This essay also appeared as a chapter in *Israel: The Land and the People* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998) and is used by permission.

\* \* \* \* \*

God has a plan for this world. As a personal Creator of all things, He had a goal in making the universe and planet earth the way He made them. Human beings whom He put into the world play a vital part in achieving His goal for the world. He has assigned them a mission to execute.

In particular, God's servant has the task of carrying out the mission of God. Scripture applies the words *My servant*<sup>1</sup> to ten individuals and one corporate body.<sup>2</sup> One of the individuals referred to by this title is God's Servant,<sup>3</sup> the Messiah. His mission is paramount in the fulfillment of God's plan. Another primary participant in God's program is God's corporate servant, Israel. The current discussion will focus on the mission of these two participants in implementing the plan of God.

### The Mission of the Messiah

Of special interest are references to God's Servant in the "Servant Songs" in Isaiah's prophecy. The prophet records the four songs in 42:1–9;<sup>4</sup> 49:1–13;<sup>5</sup> 50:4–11;<sup>6</sup> 52:13–53:12.

#### The First Servant Song (Isa. 42:1–9)

God is the speaker in the first song. Westermann points out how Isaiah 42:1 relates to the Servant's God-given mission: "The first words [i.e., 'Behold, My Servant' or 'This is My Servant'] plainly describe a designation. This means that someone with the right so to do designates or appoints someone else to perform a task or to hold an office."<sup>7</sup> He notes three descriptions of the Servant's task in the first song: to bring forth justice to the nations (42:1d), to bring forth justice in truth (42:3c), and to establish justice in the earth (42:4b).<sup>8</sup> To Westermann's list of tasks, the Servant's appointment as a covenant to the people<sup>9</sup> and a light to the nations<sup>10</sup> (42:6cd) is an additional responsibility. Westermann's three tasks interpret *justice* as having a special meaning in the context of Isaiah's prophecy, that of refuting the claim of Gentile gods that they are deity, because the Lord alone is God.<sup>11</sup> The Servant's task is to spread this message worldwide. That is the illumination He must bring to all mankind. A further mission that He is to fulfill comes out in 42:3ab, where the figurative language tells of the

comfort and encouragement He will bring to the weak and oppressed. In addition, He will, during His earthly reign, replace Israel's spiritual blindness with clear vision and restore her captives to freedom (42:7; cf. Isa. 29:18; 32:3; 35:5; 61:1).

One feature of the first song that renders improbable the identification of the Servant as corporate Israel lies in 42:3–4. The picture of gentleness and patience in verse 3 and of the absence of hesitation or discouragement in verse 4 is inapplicable to the nation as a group in fulfillment of her mission of bringing justice and light to the nations (cf. Isa. 41).<sup>12</sup>

### **The Second Servant Song (Isa. 49:1–13)**

In the second song, the Servant speaks. That song includes other tasks for the Servant: bringing Jacob back to God (49:5b), restoring the preserved ones of Israel (49:6b), serving as a light to the nations to extend the LORD's salvation to earth's extremities (49:6cd), and functioning as a covenant of the people Israel to restore the land (49:8cd) and release the captives (49:9ab). The return of captives will be much more miraculous than the exodus from Egypt under Moses. Although it is not stated directly, the Servant's task through all of this activity also includes glorifying the one true God (49:3). Thus, the broader scope of the Servant's office extends to the whole Gentile world, although its immediate scope aims at Israel and bringing her back to God.<sup>13</sup> In accomplishing these tasks, the Servant must endure humiliating treatment that will—for the moment—seem to doom His mission to failure (49:4ab, 7bc), but He will eventually reign as the supreme ruler throughout the earth because of the Lord's blessing upon Him (49:4cd, 7efg).

The survey of the Servant Songs has thus far assumed the Servant's identity as an individual person. In the second song, however, that simple identification is insufficient because the prophet specifically identifies "My servant" as Israel (49:3a). Identification of the servant as corporate Israel has strong attestation elsewhere in Isaiah and in other books of the OT (e.g., Isa. 41:8, 9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21, 26; 45:4; 48:20; Jer. 30:10; 46:27, 28; Ezek. 28:25; 37:25). God affirms frequently His choice of the nation (e.g., Isa. 41:8, 9; 43:10; 44:1, 2; 45:4). Yet, spiritual blindness and deafness have beset God's servant Israel (Isa. 42:19), causing

# The Master's Perspective on **BIBLICAL PROPHECY**

Christ's return will fulfill the believer's expectation of being conformed to His likeness, a future reality that helps transform the present life of the Christian. Learning what the Bible teaches about the future matures us in Christ, keeping our focus on that great day when we will be caught up to meet Him in the clouds. The contributors to this work examine critical themes associated with the end times and Christ's return.

Chapters by notable scholars such as Stephen J. Nichols, Kenneth L. Barker, Larry D. Pettegrew, and Robert L. Thomas include:

- "The Mission of Israel and of the Messiah in the Plan of God"
- "Literary Genre and the Hermeneutics of the Apocalypse"
- "The Kingdoms of Christ in the Apocalypse"
- "Premillennialism in the Book of Daniel"
- "Dispensationalists and Spirit Baptism"

"Redemptive history will end with the same exactness and precision with which it began. The truths of eschatology are neither vague, unclear, nor unimportant. As in any book, how the story ends is the most crucial and compelling part. . . . Contributors [to this work] offer rich insight and understanding into the truth about the end of God's book."

—John F. MacArthur Jr.  
from the Foreword

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