

# All the Prophets Proclaimed These Days -- All the Prophets Proclaimed These Days

by John Piper

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*Peter explains that all the prophets proclaimed the days of fulfillment, which began with the first Christmas, and calls his listeners and our listeners to repent and turn to Christ.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 46:9, Luke 11:29, Acts 2:38, Acts 3:19, Acts 3:21-22, 1 Corinthians 10:11, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 1:2

**Topics:** "Repentance And Forgiveness", "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

John Piper preaches on Acts 3:17-26 where Peter seizes the opportunity to preach the gospel after healing a lame man, emphasizing that Jesus, whom they put to death, was the Author of Life and raised by God. Peter urges repentance for the forgiveness of sins, pointing to the fulfillment of prophecies by Moses and the prophets, the era of the church with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the future return of Christ. He explains that all the prophets proclaimed the days of Jesus' earthly life, the times of refreshing through the Spirit, and the final consummation. Peter calls for repentance and turning to Christ for the blotting out of sins and experiencing God's refreshing presence.

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## Transcript

Acts 3:17-26

In Acts Chapter 3 Peter and John heal a lame man at the gate of the temple in Jerusalem. He follows them into the temple walking and leaping and praising God, and the people are filled with wonder and amazement. So Peter seizes the opportunity to preach the gospel. "Don't think we did this by our own power. The Jesus that you put to death was the Author of Life and God raised Him from the dead; and it is by faith in His name that this man was healed."

"And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from the old. Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also

proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness."

The text is taken from verse 24: "All the prophets . . . proclaimed these days." I have four questions to answer concerning this text.

- 1) What days did all the prophets proclaim?
- 2) In what sense did all the prophets proclaim these days?
- 3) How can a man proclaim what will take place centuries later?
- 4) What should the response of Peter's listeners in Jerusalem and my listeners in Minneapolis be to these things?

1) First, then, when Peter says, "All the prophets proclaimed these days," what days does he mean? The preceding five verses (19-23) refer to three different periods of time. Taking them in their historical order, the first is seen in verse 22. Peter quotes Deuteronomy 18:15 where Moses prophesied, "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as He raised me up. You shall listen to Him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people." The days referred to here are the days of Jesus' earthly life and ministry. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea the word of Moses began its final fulfillment. God was raising up a new prophet whose word had all the authority of God. And so this first period of time probably extends from Jesus' birth to his ascension to the Father's right hand. In verse 26 Peter looks on the fulfillment of Moses' prophecy as something that is past and over: "God having raised up his servant (as Moses said He would) sent him to you (Jews) first to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness." The earthly life and ministry of Jesus was the sending of the great Prophet proclaimed by Moses. Now that period is over. Jesus has returned to the Father.

The second period of time is referred to in verse 19: "Repent and turn again that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." The Prophet has come and gone but he has commissioned his apostles to preach the good news of the forgiveness he purchased. And He has promised to give his Spirit for the refreshment of all who believe. The "times of refreshing," therefore, are the era beginning with Pentecost, the period of the church, the period in which forgiveness of sins is preached on the basis of Jesus' death and resurrection and the period in which the refreshing cleansing of the Holy Spirit comes to all who believe in Christ.

The reason I think the "times of refreshment" in verse 19 refer to the outpouring of God's Spirit is because Acts 2:38 and Acts 3:19 are so similar. 3:19 says, "Repent and turn again that your sins may be blotted out and that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." 2:38 says, "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." In the one Peter says, "Repent, be forgiven and receive the gift of the Spirit." In the other he says, "Repent, be forgiven and experience times of refreshing." Therefore, I conclude that the "times of refreshing" are the age of the Spirit when the gospel is preached and men and women receive the gift of the Holy Spirit by turning from sin and trusting in Jesus. This era extends from Pentecost to the return of Christ in glory.

The third period of time Peter refers to is mentioned in verses 20 and 21. The final hope that Peter holds out to his listeners is "that God may (now again) send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old." Here is a period of time which is yet future. It will have its beginning when God sends Christ to earth the second time. This will be the time for establishing, or bringing to final consummation all that God spoke through his prophets. Christ will reign as King supreme on earth and of his Kingdom there will be no end to all eternity. This period, then, begins at the second coming of Christ, includes what is commonly known as the millennium and extends forever into the future.

Surely when Peter said that all the prophets proclaim "these days," he did not mean to exclude any of these three periods of time, neither the earthly ministry of Christ, nor the times of gospel refreshing, nor the final consummation after Christ's return. The earthly prophetic ministry of Jesus was proclaimed by Moses (v. 22). The final age of consummation was proclaimed, v. 21 says, by the holy prophets from of old. And the "times of refreshing" that come through the forgiveness of sins and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit were proclaimed by the Old Testament Joel. We can see this in Acts 2:16. On the day of Pentecost the disciples received the Holy Spirit and spoke in other tongues. So Peter says in verse 16, 17, "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy and your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams.'"

Therefore, all the days from the coming of Christ, through his earthly life, through the times of refreshing by the Holy Spirit and unto eternity in the age of consummation--all these days were proclaimed beforehand by the prophets.

There is something tremendously important to get hold of here for understanding the Biblical teaching about prophecy and fulfillment. We often think of prophecy as relating to what is yet future or to what is now beginning to happen in the world. And we easily forget that what is past for us was future for the prophets. What we need to remember is that with the coming of Jesus Christ into the world the days of fulfillment, proclaimed by all the prophets, began. And ever since the first Christmas we have been living in those days. The "last days" foretold by the prophets are not the 1980's. The last days began in 1 AD.

This was the uniform New Testament witness. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:11 that the Old Testament events happened "to them by way of an example and they were written down for our instruction upon whom the end of the ages has come." For Paul the end of the ages was not 2000 years hence. At least the beginning of the end was already present, because the long awaited Messiah had come. So the writer to the Hebrews (1:1,2) says, "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son." When God sent his Son into the world the last days began.

It is a great privilege to live in the last days, because Joel prophesied, "In the last days . . . God will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh." All the prophets looked forward to the day when the Messiah, the Son of David, the King of Israel would come, for that would be a day of great blessing for God's people. And now He has come, his Kingdom has been inaugurated, we live in an age of fulfillment. And what we anticipate in the future at Christ's second coming is not something completely new, but rather the consummation of the blessings we already enjoy because the promises have begun to be fulfilled in our lives.

Christmas cut history into two ages: the age of promise and the age of fulfillment. So when Peter says in Acts 3:24, "All the prophets proclaimed these days," we see that he means, "these last days" (Hebrews 1:2) in which God has spoken to us by a Son, the days from the first Christmas to the time of consummation, yet to come.

2) The second question to answer concerning our text in Acts 3:24 was this: In what sense did all the prophets proclaim these days? I'm not sure what the answer is to that question. On the one hand there are numerous prophets in the Old Testament which clearly and explicitly proclaim these days: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Micah, Zechariah, Malachi-- they all contain clear references to the days of the Messiah. But on the other hand, there are other prophets, for example Jonah, which seem to deliver a word from God which relates only to their own situation. For Jonah it was a warning to the people of Nineveh to repent lest they be judged. But in what sense can it be said that Jonah "proclaimed these days"--the days after Messiah has come?

There may be a clue in the way Jesus uses the prophet Jonah in his own teaching. In Luke 11:29ff Jesus says, "This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be to this generation. . . . The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold something greater than Jonah is here." Jesus pictures the life and ministry of Jonah as a kind of inferior foreshadowing of his own superior life and ministry. Could it be that when Peter says, "All the prophets proclaimed these days," he meant that some refer to these days explicitly but others, by the way they describe the intentions of God and the conditions in history, only give implicit witness that God is going to do something greater, something more in the future? If so, then in this way all the prophets, whether explicitly through predictions or implicitly through foreshadowings,-- all of them proclaim these days of fulfillment.

3) Third question to answer about our text is perhaps the most important and the one with the most impact on our faith: How can a man proclaim what will take place centuries later? There are two ways to answer this question and both are true but the first can be misleading if the second is not added.

The first way to answer the question is this: it is not merely men who speak in the Old Testament prophecies but God speaking through men and God knows all things, even what will happen centuries from now. Peter writes in his second letter (1:20, 21): "First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Or as Paul put it in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is inspired by God . . ." It is a grand and wonderful doctrine of the Christian Church that in the writings of the Bible we do not hear the mere voices of men but we also hear God. The words of our text put it most forcefully of all: Acts 3:21, "Heaven must receive Jesus until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old." How can a man proclaim what will take place centuries later? A mere man can't. But men moved by the Spirit of God can.

Assuming of course that God does know the future. But I have a book in my library written by a man in this city which argues that God does not know the future with certainty. And I was at a meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society two years ago when a notable theologian suggested that perhaps the traditional doctrine of God's omniscience should not include God's knowledge of all future events.

I have to admit that I would be hard put to worship a God who did not know what was coming next in the world. In fact I find such a God impossible even to imagine in any coherent way. And I am grateful that Scripture does not require me to imagine or worship Him, because it declares that the only true God is a God who "declares from ancient times things not yet done." Isaiah 46:9,10: "I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'" God would not be God if He could not declare from ancient times things not yet done. Therefore, if God inspires a prophet, he can proclaim what will take place centuries later.

But if we stopped there and merely said that the reason prophets can proclaim the latter days is that they are inspired by God who can foresee what will happen, we would be left with a misleading view of God and only half the Biblical teaching. So the second way of answering our question must be added, namely: God does not merely know history in advance, He makes history; he creates history.

If we didn't say this, we might be tempted to think of God as one who creates the world, establishes certain laws and then withdraws and watches and knows and predicts but does not rule or control or move history. But that would be very wrong. The text we just read in Isaiah 46:10 explains how God can predict the future: it's because he says, "My counsel shall stand and I will accomplish all my purpose." God knows what will happen because He accomplishes what will happen. He does not merely watch the world; he shapes the world.

The first two verses of our text, Acts 3:17,18 show that in Peter's view the fulfillment of prophecy was not due so much to God's foreknowledge of history as to his action in history. He says to those who crucified Jesus, "Now brethren I know that you acted in ignorance as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled." What God foretold God fulfilled. God knows the future because He plans the future. Peter uses these very words in Acts 2:23. He says to the men of Israel that Jesus was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God."

So the really final and ultimate answer to the question, how a man can proclaim what will take place centuries later, is that the prophets were inspired by God to proclaim what God Himself intended to do. "My counsel shall stand; I will accomplish my purpose."

4) And that brings us to our fourth and final question: What should the response of Peter's listeners in Jerusalem and my listeners in Minneapolis be to these things? The response Peter wants (and who am I to want anything different) is plain in verse 19 of our text: "Repent therefore and turn again that your sins may be blotted out that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." Repent means stop banking your hope for happiness on your own achievements and the pleasures of sin and turn to Christ and bank your hope on his promises. Stop following all the recommendations of the world and turn and start following the commandments of Christ.

There are two grand incentives for this personal revolution to happen. One is that we live in the days of fulfillment. The first Christmas is history. The Messiah has come. He has died for our sins and purchased our redemption so that times of refreshing might come to all who trust Him. He will give the Holy Spirit to all who turn from their sin and ask Him. Repent therefore, that your sins may be blotted out and that times of refreshing may come to your heart and your family and all your relationships.

And now finally there is one other incentive to repent in this text. The God who is calling us to repent is a God of awesome power. He is the Lord of History: his counsel stands, it cannot be thwarted. He proclaims the future because he makes the future. And this power should cause us to turn from our sins and flee to Christ for two reasons. If we don't turn, we remain in our sins and God's infinite power is against us, and there will be no escape from destruction. "Whoever does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people" (3:23). But if we do repent and turn to Christ then all the divine power that governs every detail of history will not be against us but for us. And if God is for us who can be against us!

What a great time of year to turn from the Lordship of self and sin to the saving Lordship of Jesus. Perhaps on this first Sunday of Advent that candle was lit just for you.

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