

## The Importance of Prophecy

### 1) Why is it important to study and understand Bible prophecy?

A) Prophecy is a major part of divine revelation.<sup>1</sup>

(1) Consider the following statistics on the amount of prophecy<sup>2</sup> in the Bible:

- Number of verses in the Bible: 31,124.
- Number of predictions in the Old Testament: 1,239.
- Number of OT verses that contain predictions: 6,641 out of 23,210.
- Percent of the OT that is prophecy: 28.5%.
- Number of predictions in the New Testament: 578.
- Number of NT verses that contain predictions: 1,711 out of 7,914.
- Percent of the NT that is prophecy: 21.5%.
- Percent of the whole Bible that is prophecy: 27%.<sup>3</sup>

(2) Consider these facts concerning Christ's Second Coming (the Return):

- Of the 333 prophecies concerning Christ, only 109 were fulfilled by His first coming. This leaves 224 prophecies that will be fulfilled in His Second Coming.
- There are over 300 references to the Second Coming in the 260 chapters of the New Testament—one out of every 30 verses.
- Twenty-three of the 27 NT books mention the Lord's coming.
- Jesus refers to His Second Coming at least twenty-one times.
- There are 1,527 OT passages that refer to the Second Coming.
- For every time the Bible mentions the first coming, the Second Coming is mentioned eight times.
- People are exhorted to be ready for the return of Jesus Christ over fifty times.<sup>4</sup>

B) Prophecy helps us understand the Bible.

(1) Reading the Bible without understanding prophecy is like trying to put a jigsaw puzzle together without the picture on the front of the box—it's almost impossible. Prophecy reveals God's plan for the future, and that plan provides a framework which helps us understand the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

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<sup>1</sup> The main points in this lesson come from Mark Hitchcock, *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days*, (Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), 3–20. See also Hitchcock's *The Complete Book of Bible Prophecy*, (Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 15–26. Although I have adapted Hitchcock's material to my lesson format, the bulk of the content comes from these two excellent books.

<sup>2</sup> When I use the word "prophecy" in this lesson, I am referring specifically to the prediction of future events, not the general sense of "telling-forth" God's Word.

<sup>3</sup> J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 674–75.

<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur Jr., *The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ* (Valencia, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1981), 1.

Prophecy tells us about: a) God's decision to redeem mankind from sin, b) the means by which He would accomplish this redemption, c) the people group through which He would save the world—the Jews, d) the future history of the Gentile nations, e) the mystery of the body of Christ—the Church, and f) the coming kingdom of His Son, Jesus Christ. “A person without a basic knowledge of prophecy will be lost in many books in the Old Testament” as well as several books in the New Testament.<sup>5</sup> If we truly desire to understand God's Word, we must spend time studying Bible prophecy.

### C) Prophecy points us to Christ.

(1) The first prophecy in the Bible promised a deliverer who would crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). The last prophecy in the Bible speaks of Christ's Second Coming—“Surely I am coming soon” (Rev 22:20). From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is filled with prophecies that point to the person and work of our Savior. Look at some of the ways Jesus is revealed in prophecy:<sup>6</sup>

- the seed of the woman who will crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15).
- the Passover lamb (Exod 12; John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7).
- the star from Jacob (Num 24:17).
- the priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4).
- the prophet foretold by Moses (Deut 18:18).
- the son of David who would be king of Israel (2 Sam 7; Luke 1:32–33).
- Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6).
- “My servant” (Isa 42:1–4).
- a man of sorrows (Isa 53:3).
- the smashing stone (Dan 2:31–35).
- the son of man (Dan 7:13).
- the Anointed One (Dan 9:25–26a).
- the Son who will rule the world (Ps 2).
- “the shepherd” (Zech 13:7).
- the Lord of the Temple (Mal 3:1).
- the resurrection and the life (John 11:25–27).
- the glorified, risen Savior (Rev 1).
- the Lord of the church (Rev 2–3).
- the Lamb of God (Rev 5:6ff).
- the judge of the nations (Rev 6–11).
- the male child who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron (Rev 12).
- Faithful and True—the coming King (Rev 19).
- the Lord of heaven and earth (Rev 20–22).

### D) Prophecy demonstrates the sovereignty of God.

(1) Someone once noticed a sign on the door of a psychic which read, “Closed due to unforeseen circumstances.” Aren't you glad there are no unforeseen

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<sup>5</sup> Hitchcock, *The End*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

circumstances with God? He rules sovereignly over the universe. He knows everything (omniscient), is present everywhere (omnipresent), and possesses all power (omnipotent). This enables Him to predict the future with 100% accuracy. Consider what God says about His ability to foretell the future:<sup>7</sup>

- (a) “This is what the LORD says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come—yes, let him foretell what will come. Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one” (Isa 44:6–8 NIV).
- (b) “Do not forget this! Keep it in mind! Remember this, you guilty ones. Remember the things I have done in the past. For I alone am God! I am God, and there is none like me. Only I can tell you the future before it even happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish” (Isa 46:8–10 NLT).
- (c) “Daniel answered and said: ‘Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him’” (Dan 2:20–22).

#### E) Prophecy is evidence of the truth of God’s Word.

- (1) The Bible contains hundreds of prophecies which have come to pass exactly as the Bible said. This is evidence that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Here are some examples:<sup>8</sup>
  - (a) King Cyrus of Persia – The prophet Isaiah wrote during the last half of the eighth century BC (during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah). In his writing, Isaiah foretold the rise of a king by the name of ‘Cyrus’ (Isa 44:28–45:6). Isaiah predicted Cyrus’ conquests and his restoration of the Jewish people to Jerusalem some 150 years before Cyrus became king (2 Chr 36:22–23; cf. Ezra 1:1–11).
  - (b) The Fall of Nineveh – Between 663 and 654 BC God told the prophet Nahum that the great city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, would be destroyed. Moreover, God described exactly how the devastation would occur (Nah 1–3). History records that in the year 612 BC all these predictions were fulfilled—the Babylonians and Medes invaded, plundered, and utterly destroyed the powerful city of Nineveh.
  - (c) The Destruction of Tyre – In 587 BC, Ezekiel predicted the destruction of the ancient city of Tyre—first by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek 26:7–11), and then by the Greek king, Alexander the Great (Ezek 26:12–14).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 12–14.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 14–20.

Ezekiel's prophecy was made some 255 years before Alexander marched against Tyre in 332 BC. Alexander destroyed the mainland city and then used stones and timber from the debris to construct a causeway across the water to the island stronghold. This fulfilled Ezekiel's prophecy that the very stones, timbers, and dust of the city would be cast "into the water" (Ezek 26:12).

F) Prophecy guards us from heresy.

- (1) From the earliest days of Christianity, the teachings of the church have been twisted by false teachers. Almost every book in the New Testament contains at least one passage that addresses false doctrine (e.g., 2 Cor 10–12; Phil 3; 2 Tim 3; Tit 1). In a few instances, the false teaching that troubled the early church concerned speculation about the last days and the coming of Christ. In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul corrected a false teaching that the Day of the LORD had already come. In 2 Peter 3, a group of scoffers took the false teaching in another direction—they mocked the idea that Jesus was coming back at all. An accurate understanding of Bible prophecy protects God's people from those who would misuse it and goes a long way in preventing the spread of false teachings.<sup>9</sup>

G) Prophecy motivates us to live godly lives.

- (1) Prophecy was not given just to satisfy our curiosity or stir our imagination. "God intends for prophecy to change our attitudes and actions so they will be more in line with His Word and His character."<sup>10</sup> Charles Dyer once said, "God gave prophecy to change our hearts, not to fill our heads with knowledge. Every time God announces events that are future, He includes with His predictions practical applications to life. God's pronouncements about the future carry with them specific advice for the 'here and now.'"<sup>11</sup>
- (2) The apostle Peter tells us that our knowledge of the Second Coming should affect the way we live (2 Pet 3:10–18):
  - We should live holy and godly lives (v. 11).
  - We should wait patiently (v. 12)
  - We should hasten Jesus' coming by working to save the lost (v. 12).
  - We should be diligent to live peaceful lives that are pure and blameless (v.14).
  - We should understand that God's patience is for our salvation (v. 15).
  - We should be on guard so that we are not led astray by error (v.17).
  - We should grow in grace and in the knowledge of God (v.18).

H) Prophecy is an effective tool for evangelism.

- (1) "The first Christian book many unbelievers read is a book about Bible prophecy. God often uses the prospect of the last days and the coming of Christ to awaken people to their need for a Savior. This phenomenon shouldn't surprise us,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Dyer, *World News and Bible Prophecy* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1995), p. 270.

because Bible prophecy fascinates everyone—even unbelievers. Most people have the same basic questions about the future: What’s going to happen to the world? Are these the last days of the world as we know it? Is Jesus really coming back? Will the human race survive in the future? Is there life after death? Are heaven and hell real? The Bible answers all these questions, and we should use this knowledge to share Christ with others as God opens the door of opportunity.”<sup>12</sup> Randall Price said: “What good is it to be able to understand the seven heads described in Revelation 13:1 if we don’t use our own head? Of what profit is it to discern the ten toes of Daniel 2:41-44 if we don’t move our own two feet? And what value is it to know about the great mouth that speaks lies (Dan 7:8; Rev 13:5), unless we open our mouth and speak the truth? In every generation where prophecy has been properly proclaimed, the results have been a harvest of souls to the glory of God.”<sup>13</sup>

- I) Prophecy holds a special blessing for those who study and live by what it says.
  - (1) In Revelation 1:3, the Lord pronounced a special blessing on those who study the book of Revelation: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.” Revelation is the only book in the Bible which contains this specific, unique promise. For this reason it has often been called the “Blessing Book.” Jesus urges us to pay attention to what He said and carefully obey what He commanded. Let’s live our lives in the light of prophecy!<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hitchcock, *The End*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>13</sup> Randall Price, *Jerusalem in Prophecy: God’s Stage for the Final Drama*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998), p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Hitchcock, *The End*, p. 5.