

God's PATHWAY Through PROPHECY

Why Study Bible Prophecy?

INTRODUCTION: Why should God's people give themselves to the faithful and fruitful study of Bible prophecy? Many frown upon the subject of Bible prophecy, not because of the message of prophecy, but because of the manner in which so many approach the study of prophecy. Most students of Bible prophecy engage in their studies because they are motivated by a fancy for speculations, symbolisms, and the sensational; rather than a deep devotion for God's Word, and a desire to know God's Will and God's Works regarding things to come. They are motivated by fanciful types, flamboyant thoughts, and frivolous theories; rather than a sincere hunger for futuristic truth that transforms how one should live today in the light of that day. Those who approach prophecy this way, are more concerned with conspiracies and conjectures, than they are with Christ. Accordingly, they miss the fundamental tenet of Christocentricity which teaches that Jesus is the soul spirit, and supreme subject of prophecy, "*for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*" (Rev. 19:10). Because many man-centered modern approaches miss the true spirit of prophecy, they must be rejected as proper approaches to the study of Bible prophecy. The Bible alone can tell us why we should study Bible prophecy. It does so by providing us with eight biblical reasons for why we should study Bible prophecy!

I. The PLACE of Prophecy in the Bible

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Genesis 2:17)

Prophecy assumes a prominent and primitive place in Scripture. It dates all the way back to the Garden. By the time we come to the second chapter of God's Word we are confronted by the first prophetic utterance that establishes some very important interpretive truths surrounding biblical prophecy. The prophetic seed text of Genesis 2:17 reveals the following facts. Fact one, biblical prophecy finds its place in God Himself. God is the God of all biblical prophecy. Prophecy commences with God, and prophecy will culminate with God. Fact two, because biblical prophecy is always of God, it is always true in both its feature and fulfillment. The prophecy is as trustworthy and reliable as God Himself, because the prophecy is the Word of the Lord. Fact three, from the very beginning biblical prophecy may have a more immediate spiritual or typical fulfillment, while in its more remote context it will always have a historical and literal fulfillment in a future, fuller, and final expression. For instance, upon eating the forbidden fruit Adam and Eve immediately died spiritually. As the prophecy states, they died that very same day. Spiritual death came to both Adam and Eve as their sin immediately brought separation between the creature and the Creator. This immediate spiritual fulfillment was yet to manifest itself in a more historical and literal fulfillment. The already was awaiting the not-yet as spiritual death would finally give way to the more remote fulfillment in the historical and

literal expression of physical death. This essential concept of an already spiritual/typical fulfillment followed by the more remote, not-yet historical/literal fulfillment translates from the seed text of Bible prophecy to all subsequent prophecies in Scripture. One should therefore look for both the immediate shadow, and the more remote substance of fulfillment.

II. The **PRIORITY** of Prophecy in the Bible

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: (2 Peter 1:19)

God's Word places a paramount priority on the in-scripturated prophetic scriptures. In the context of his own amazing first hand historical experience of hearing God's voice audibly thundering down from heaven, Peter asserts that as believers we now possess in God's inspired and infallible Word, "a more-sure word of prophecy"! What an astonishing statement. The prophecies of sacred writ are declared to be a "more sure word" for God's people than even the very audible voice of the Lord billowing out of heaven. It is this priority of the sacred text that led Paul to proclaim, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). Nothing and no one in heaven, earth, or hell hold the authority and priority that inspired and in-scripturated prophecy holds. Even if an angelic messenger come down out of heaven and speaks with man face-to-face, that experiential encounter is subject to Scripture, and must be tested by Scripture. This is the very reason the Holy Spirit moved John to pen this warning to believers, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 Jn. 4:1). The Bible and the prophecies of the Bible must always assume pre-eminent priority. This was true in the first century, it remains true today, and it shall remain true until the end of the age. Peter is very purposeful in telling his audience that the priority of biblical prophecy provides a sure and certain light by which they are to be safely guided until that future and final Day dawns and the very light of Christ floods our hearts at His return. Because of the priority of prophecy God's people do themselves well to take heed to the prophecies as unto a light that shines in the midst of a dark and deceived world until the Day finally dawns, and the Day Star rises in our hearts.

III. The **PERSUASION** of Prophecy in the Bible

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13)

On only a few occasions do we ever find God's Word directly saying, "Don't be ignorant," or, "I would not have you to be ignorant" relative to specific areas of God's truth. Two such occasions concern the topics of spiritual gifts and Bible prophecy. And yet, if there are two areas in which God's people are profoundly ignorant today, it is in these two areas. The modern

Church is profoundly ignorant regarding spiritual gifts and prophecy. Relative to the latter, God has provided sufficient revelation to confront and correct the willful lack of knowledge among His people if we are only open to hear and heed His Word. Biblical prophecy possesses the power to persuade the human mind and heart of the truth that sets the captive free. Prophecy confronts human ignorance with divine wisdom and truth. Through the telescope of prophecy, the present becomes informed by the future so that this day finds the light, life, and liberty of that day. The Divine disclosure of prophecy expels human folly by persuading the mind and heart with truth, and dispels the clouds of hopelessness with the sunshine of hope. Through prophecy God's people not only discover that God has a plan, they actually discover that plan. The discovery of God's plan persuades us to face every day with the courage and confidence that God is working all things to the ultimate end of His perfect eternal will for His glory and our good. This powerful persuasion of prophecy leads to our obedient "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13).

IV. The **PROMISE** of Prophecy in the Bible

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. (Revelation 1:3)

Holy Scripture bestows a specific promise of blessing upon the man who reads, hears, and obediently responds to the prophetic word. God assigns a special blessing to the sincere and serious student of prophecy. Do we desire the blessings of God? For all who answer yes, we need to understand that prophecy provides the path upon which these blessings are found. All who would be blessed to the maximum degree with the blessings of God, must deliberately and decisively choose to travel the pathway of prophecy, because it is upon this journey that endless blessings abound. If for no other reason, we should study Bible prophecy because we desire the blessings of the God of prophecy!

V. The **PROFIT** of Prophecy in the Bible

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (2 Timothy 3:16)

Because "ALL scripture" is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God; the prophetic portions of Scripture are themselves the Word of God. Just as the historical books, the wisdom literature, the Gospel records, and the epistles are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction; so also, are the prophetic writings. We should give ourselves to the prayerful and careful study of prophecy because it constitutes a major portion of the whole counsel of God. Studying all other portions of Scripture, while neglecting the prophetic passages, amounts to the folly of reading the beginning and middle sections of the story, only to close the story without discovering how it ends. The biblical prophecies are God's Word to His people and are therefore worthy of study. As God's Word all prophecy studied within the sacred canonical context will prove to be profitable to the individual believer as well as the entire Church. Those who fail to study prophecy fail to avail themselves of the profit that prophecy brings into their life and

ministry. The profitability of prophecy includes at least five categories essential to Christian grace and growth.

A. Instructional

Behold, I have told you before. (Matthew 24:25)

Prophecy instructs us concerning God's plan and purpose for things to come so as to prepare us in advance. Jesus makes it clear that prophecy is meant to make us ready. He who studies prophecy can face the future with clarity, courage, and confidence because he knows not only where history has been, but also where history is moving. He sees this world in the light of the world to come.

B. Apologetical

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: (1 Peter 3:15)

Prophecy provides us with answers and prepares us to give answers. Through prophecy we discover the truth of God's revelation in such a way as to be able to defend that truth for those who seek answers. Prophecy emboldens the child of God to be more confident in their faith. The practical fruit of this confidence produces a daily consecration in conduct and conversation as the presence of the Christ of prophecy consciously increases in our hearts through hope.

C. Edificational

These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee. (Titus 2:15)

The relative pronoun, "these things," has its contextual antecedent in the "the blessed hope" and "the glorious appearing" of our great God and Savior – Jesus Christ. The revelational reality of Jesus' prophetic return is to be the topic of which every Christian clearly and consistently speaks, exhorts, and compassionately and correctively rebukes with all boldness and authority. Prophecy holds an edificational place in the body of Christ. This ministry of edification is to be carried out with authority. But the only way one can have such authority relative to the prophetic writings is to first know the prophetic scriptures. And the only way a man can know the biblical prophecies is to diligently study them.

D. Missiological

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12)

A proper study of biblical prophecy motivates sound and sober missions. The prophetically minded man will be a mission minded man. The more we understand the prophetic message, the more we engage in the prophetic mission because we understand that God has sovereignly set a time for missions and that the door will soon be closed. His day of grace is rapidly fading and He will not always strive with man. Prophecy reveals that the day shall soon come when God Himself will close the door on those who once heard the truth only to reject it in their depravity and rebellion. Prophecy confirms that TODAY is the day of salvation and NOW is the accepted time. It warns us to take soberly and seriously the prohibition, “harden not your hearts as in the provocation” (Heb. 3:7), because that day is rapidly passing away and he who understands this redeems the time before the evil days come.

E. Cosmological

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. (2 Peter 3:3-7)

The correct study of biblical prophecy puts the entire cosmological order and program back into proper perspective. Biblical prophecy gives God’s full and final answer to the scoffers and skeptics who swallow and seek to serve others the satanic seduction of Uniformitarianism. This naturalistic, anti-Christ ideology argues that the world is eternal and unchanging. But past prophecy, namely, the now historical predictive fulfilment of Noah’s flood which destroyed the world that then was; serves as an ominous warning to an unbelieving world that God has in the past, and will once again in the future, intervene in the cosmological order with divine prophetic judgment. With the coming of His Son, God will once again bring the world that now is into final destruction. The entire destiny of human history and cosmological history depends upon the outcome of biblical prophecy. When we see the world through the lens of biblical prophecy, we know that it is on a death cycle. Heaven and earth are destined to pass away. Our home and hope are not here. Our home and hope are with Christ in another world to come when final prophecy is fulfilled and all things are made new! Thus, we ought not seek to store up treasures upon the world that now is. Instead, we ought to seek to store up treasures in the world that is to come. Biblical prophecy brings life into perspective by turning our focus from this world, to that world which is to come. It moves us to set our affections on things above, not on things upon the earth (Col. 3:1-3).

f. Christological

“And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10).

Above all other things, biblical prophecy moves us Christ-ward! It turns our eyes upon JESUS and brings us back into a Christo-centric study of holy scripture, as well as history past and history future. The true spirit of biblical prophecy is all about the testimony of JESUS. Prophecy both conceals and reveals Christ. Prophecy is all about Jesus, and when it is approached in the right spirit it magnifies Jesus and moves man to Jesus. Prophecy, and prophetic studies are never about the fanciful and the fantastic features that excite man’s morbid imagination. While prophecy includes the subordinate and ancillary features such as anti-Christ, the great Red Dragon, the Great Whore, Wars on earth and in heaven, along with many other things; these are not the centrality of prophecy. Christ alone is the central concept of prophecy. The subject and study of biblical prophecy is all about JESUS. The person who knows prophecy in the manner in which prophecy is to be known, will know Jesus more personally and more passionately. Bible prophecy has a way of dispelling a lukewarm heart by reigniting the flame of first-love love for Christ. Jesus, and Jesus alone is the supreme reason as to why we should give ourselves to the study of prophecy!

VI. The POWER of Prophecy in the Bible

but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)

Biblical prophecy possesses the precious power to purify sinful men through the sanctification of Scripture. The Bible’s treatment of sanctification consistently conveys that Christian consecration depends upon hope. Hope itself depends upon a clear and correct perspective of the future. Prophecy alone produces such hope, because prophecy alone provides a clear and correct perspective of the future. As prophecy paints a picture of the risen and glorified Christ, and of God’s victorious program which shall be fulfilled through the revelation of His Son in glory, our minds and hearts become filled with hope. This prophetically inspired hope fuels the way we live life here and now, so that we are transformed by truth. Hope always leads to holiness. By putting this day into the perspective of that day, we are motivated to a new standard of living. That standard is called sanctification and leads to purification. Hope becomes the catalyst for consecration. The living and life-giving hope found only in and through the prophetic scriptures becomes the inspiration for love, light, life, and liberty as we look forward to the coming of our Great God and Savior – Jesus Christ!

VII. The PREMISE of Prophecy in the Bible

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own

lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: (2 Peter 3:3-6)

The overwhelming importance of Bible prophecy is due to the foundational premise of both truth and error. The truth is that truth and error are both realities, and the only way to discern the latter, is to be clear about the former. Just as the whole of Scripture exist due to God's gracious provision of revealed truth for His people; so also, the do prophetic portions of Scripture exist for the illumination and preservation of God's elect people within a world given over to darkness, deception, and despair. Writing prophetically under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter sounds a clear prophetic alarm. He warns that we need to know something first and foremost, namely, that in the latter days false teachers and false teachings will arise in heretical efforts to downplay God's eschatological program. The danger of error makes prophecy vitally important. Fiction can only be answered by fact. The only way to observe and overcome the false teachings of future things is to first know the truth concerning future things. The only way we can know the truth is to give ourselves to a serious study of the prophetic Scriptures. God has warned us concerning falsehoods, and has graciously provided us with the truth concerning His future plans for the future to keep us ready against that day. The wise man will avail himself of God's truth so as to be found faithful and fruitful to the very end. As a wise man his desire is to ever be wise and understand exactly what the will and workings of God really is, both now, and as things yet to come in the future (Eph. 5:17).

In addition to the more overt errors propelled against Divine revelation and futuristic supernatural prophecy by manifold critics and skeptics who hold to and promote the pseudo-science of evolutionary atheistic naturalism; a more covert and sinister error surrounding the study of biblical prophecy and God's program for the future, resides in the popular approaches of spiritualizing Bible prophecy. For many, a literal interpretive method that takes the plain sense of Scripture at face value without seeking some secret symbolic sense; ceases when one comes to the prophetic texts. This methodological treatment of the prophetic scriptures reduce them to a non-literal and non-historical message of mystical spiritualization that ignores the very historical categories emphasized in the earlier seed text of prophecy found in Genesis 2:17, as well as Peter's own immediate comparative example meant to correct the fallacious thinking of those who reject the literal reality of eschatological events. For those who would spiritualize the yet future events regarding future judgements upon the world to come, they must deal with the literal reality of the past events surrounding the past judgments upon the world that once was. The way past prophecy is treated must guide and govern the way future prophecies are treated. For example, if all of the prophecies concerning Jesus' first advent were literally and historically fulfilled. One is correct in assuming that unless Scripture clearly states otherwise,

all of the prophecies concerning Jesus' second advent will be fulfilled literally and historically. While, as it has already been stated earlier, many prophecies do have an immediate spiritual aspect, these in no way negate the more remote literal historical aspect. The shadows always anticipate the reality; and if the already of prophecy was itself literal, then how much more shall the not-yet of prophecy also be literal.

VIII. The PLEA of Prophecy in the Bible

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. (Mt.24:42)

Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. (Mt. 24:44)

Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh. (Matthew 25:13)

The final reason why every child of God should study Bible prophecy is to be obedient to the clarion call of the Lord Jesus Himself. Repeatedly Jesus issues the commands, "watch" and "be ready"! Watchfulness and readiness presume diligent and faithful study. The only way we can be watchfully ready is through careful and consistent study that leads to prayerful preparation. The Christian who ignorantly or indifferently ignores biblical prophecy, will never stand watchful, and will never be ready. He will become so caught up in this day, that he forgets that day. He will fall asleep and will be caught by surprise when these things begin to come to pass. But the person who is faithful to study God's prophetic Word will be sober and vigilant. He will stand wide awake and ready. Because he knows what to expect, he will look for such things with great expectation and anticipation. Bible prophecy pleads for us to be ready and possesses the power to carry out its own plea by making us ready through persevering study accompanied by prayer!