

## WHY STUDY PROPHECY?

When you study the bible, there are major areas of study. For example, you can study the doctrine of salvation which includes everything you need to know about how someone comes to know Christ. You can choose to study the area of spiritual gifts that tell us how we serve God individually. You can study about the church itself and how it is to operate. One major doctrine that has to do with the teaching on last things is called prophecy. Prophecy could be defined as “pre-written history.” It is history for told before it happens.

People have always wanted to know what the future holds. The ancient Romans would cut open a bird in using some process try to discern the future by the insides of the bird.

The ancient Etruscans foretold the future by looking at sheep livers. They divided the liver into sixteen parts just as they had divided the heavens into sixteen parts. Certain Gods ruled various parts of the heavens and would get into corresponding parts of the liver and give signs that provided guidance for people.

Gastromancy-Meaning: Telling someone's fortune from the noises of the stomach interpreted as words

Gastromancy was a popular 17th century after-dinner pastime that declined in the 18th century when people discovered that practitioners of gastromancy were using ventriloquism to make sounds similar to words. (Some have suggested that the US Office of Management and Budget still uses it for predicting US budgetary needs.)

Gyromancy is a form of telling the future by going round in circles. The circumference of the circle is marked by letters. The message was gained from the words formed by the inquirer when he stumbled on the letters when going round the circle. Myomancy was a form of divination involving rats during ancient Egypt, Rome and Assyria. Their cries were believed to indicate the presence of evil.

Omphalomanity is a method of determining how many children a mother may have during her lifetime, based on the belief that the shape and markings of the [navel](#) of newborn infants can reveal this information.

Onychomanity is a way to tell the future by fingernails. It was practiced by watching the reflection of the sun in the nails of a boy, and judging the future by the shape of the figures displayed on their surface.

Another option to for telling the future is to read what the bible says about the future, and there's much of it there. It has been said that as much as 25% of the bible is made up of prophecy. Some of those prophecies have been fulfilled, and others are yet to come.

## What does prophecy accomplish?

### 1. Prophecy proves God to be God

*Isaiah 46:9-11 quotes the following divine declaration, "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: ...I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it."*

God says, "I AM god, the true god, and I do whatever I want to do in this world. What's more, "I can prove who I am by telling you what is going to take place in the future."

In Isaiah 44, God gives a challenge to all of those who would claim to be a god.

*Isaiah 44:7, "'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. 7 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."*

God says if someone claims to be a God, there is a simple test to follow. Let him foretell the future with accuracy. And so far, there is only been one who could do that, and that is the true God found in the scriptures.

### 2. Prophecy proves the Bible to be God's Word

There is no other book, ancient or modern, which has the kind of prophecies that the bible has concerning the world, the nations and even individuals. If the bible does indeed tell us what is going to happen in the future with accuracy, then we know that it is what it claims to be—the word of God.

The prophecies in scripture are not vague generalities. Neither are they things which would be likely to happen. Most of them are very unlikely to happen.

Chapter 26 of the Book of Ezekiel foretells the destruction of the great city of Tyre around 253 years before it took place. In Ezekiel's day, a prediction that Tyre would fall would seem ridiculous. The city of Tyre was the seaport of the world. It was a very wealthy city with strong defenses', but Ezekiel said that it would fall.

*Ezekiel 26:1-6, "In the eleventh year, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: 2 "Son of man, because Tyre has said of Jerusalem, 'Aha! The gate to the nations is broken, and its doors have swung open to me; now that she lies in ruins I will*

*prosper,' 3 therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring many nations against you, like the sea casting up its waves. 4 They will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her towers; I will scrape away her rubble and make her a bare rock. 5 Out in the sea she will become a place to spread fishnets, for I have spoken, declares the Sovereign LORD. She will become plunder for the nations, 6 and her settlements on the mainland will be ravaged by the sword. Then they will know that I am the LORD."*

*Ezekiel 26:12, "They will plunder your wealth and loot your merchandise; they will break down your walls and demolish your fine houses and throw your stones, timber and rubble into the sea.*

*Ezekiel 26:14, "I will make you a bare rock, and you will become a place to spread fishnets. You will never be rebuilt, for I the LORD have spoken, declares the Sovereign LORD."*

Secular history records that Alexander the Great laid siege to the island fortress of Tyre in 332 BC. His army demolished mainland Tyre and threw it into the sea. In their effort to construct a causeway to the island, they scraped even the dust, leaving only bare rock. Historian Phillip Myers in his history textbook, *General History for Colleges and High Schools* writes,

"Alexander the Great reduced Tyre to ruins in 332 BC. Tyre recovered in a measure from this blow, but never regained the place she had previously held in the world. The larger part of the site of the once great city is now as bare as the top of a rock -- a place where the fishermen that still frequent the spot spread their nets to dry."

A well known mathematician studied the probabilities of seven of Ezekiel's statements coming true by luck and found that it would be one chance in 75,000. Yet everything came true to the small detail.

When you come to the area of prophecies concerning the messiah who was to come, you have incredible statistics. It has been pointed out that by the law of chance, it would require 200 billion earths, populated with four billion people each, to come up with one person who could achieve 100 accurate prophecies without any errors in sequence. But the Bible records not 100, but over 300 prophecies fulfilled in Christ's first coming.

### **3. Prophecy prepares us for what is going to happen so that we will be ready for it**

*1 Thessalonians 5:1-5, "Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4But you, brothers, are*

*not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.*

The term, “the day of the lord,” is the most used term in the bible concerning what God is going to do during the last days. Paul is saying that people without Jesus Christ will be totally surprised by what God is going to do in those last days as they would if a thief broke into their house that night while everyone was asleep. Paul says Christians who know Biblical prophecy are not like that. We can live our lives aware and ready for the future.

For example, we should not be surprised at the problems that are going on in the Middle East. We should be surprised if there were not problems going on there. There are two cities in the bible that are mentioned more than any other cities in the bible. They are mentioned from the very beginning in Genesis, and they are mentioned in the end in Revelation. Those cities are Jerusalem and Babylon. Jerusalem is called the city of peace; Babylon is the city of confusion and war. The term Babylon and Iraq and Iran are really interchangeable terms because Babylon was a kingdom that took in both of those modern day countries. The bible tells us that this area called Babylon will be a major player in the end-times. Knowing what the bible says will shed a lot of light on the news broadcasts that you watch.

#### ***4. Prophecy assures us of the right way to live***

As you look at the current scene in our society, there are many different ideas of how someone should live his life. For many, relativism is the answer. There are no absolutes, so just do whatever you feel to be best at the time. On the other hand, the bible gives us commands and principles to cover every part of our lives. It tells us how to raise children, how to use our money, how to relate to our spouse. It tells us how to deal with that obnoxious person at your job as well as your employer. If the bible is correct on being able to tell the future, it is also correct when it tells us how to live in the present. We don't have to wonder and experiment with how to live our lives because we know that we have the word of truth.

#### ***5. Prophecy guarantees something better is coming***

Biblical prophecies tell us that this world with all of its sin and rebellion will one day pass away. It will be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth where people live in righteousness. However imperfect your life may be now, you can live with the assurance that it will one day be totally perfect in every way. That should give us comfort and motivation to live Godly lives now.

## Principles of living in light of the future

### 1. Keep your head on straight.

Matthew 24 begins with a conversation between Jesus and his disciples as they left the temple.

*Matthew 24:1-2, "Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings.*

The disciples were evidently in awe of the temple's great beauty. The temple covered about 1/6 of the land space of the city of Jerusalem, and it was considered one of the architectural wonders of the world. The answer of Jesus to the disciple was one that was certainly not expected. He said in verse two, "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

The prediction of Jesus happened only a few years later when the Romans sacked Jerusalem in 70AD. After fire raged through the temple, Emperor Titus ordered the leveling of the whole area, so no part of the original walls or buildings remained. The statement of Christ led into a discussion about in time events.

*Matthew 24:3-4, "Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" 4Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. 6You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.*

Jesus' word to the disciples was simple; "don't be deceived. "Don't believe everything you hear." We need to take that just as seriously as the disciples did because we live in a time of great deception. For example, I have received many emails which were supposedly from some very rich widow who wanted to donate a whole lot of money to our church. All I had to do was to give out some information so they could make the transfer to our bank. The truth is, they did indeed want to make a transfer from a bank, but it was from our bank to their bank. Jesus said don't be deceived. Don't believe everything you hear.

Years ago, someone wrote a book called 88 reasons why Christ must return in 1988. When that didn't happen, he wrote another book the next year entitled 89 reasons why Christ must return in 1989. How do you avoid deception? You must know the bible well so that you can evaluate what you hear based on what it says.

Another aspect of keeping our heads on straight is to avoid becoming an alarmist. Jesus said... (v. 6) "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed..."

He's saying don't panic every time you hear bad news. You may be hearing bad news in your personal life. Maybe you're concerned about your health or the health of someone that you love. Maybe you are afraid that you're about to lose your job.

I don't know what's going to happen in America in the coming months and years. Some of the warning signs are disturbing, but we don't have to live in fear. What we have to do is make an effort to be closer to Jesus than ever before, because it is only in him that we have security. Let hard times motivate you into a closer walk with Jesus.

## **2. Keep your heart in the right place.**

*Matthew 24:9, "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."*

Jesus said that in trying times, "The love of most will grow cold." You and I must guard our hearts. Be careful to feed the fires of your spirituality. When you love God above all else, the hardships of life aren't nearly as harsh because you know that God is right there with you. So if you want to outlast the darkness, keep your heart in the right place. Keep loving God, keep loving others.

## **3. Keep your feet on the pavement.**

*Jesus said in verse 13 "...but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."*

He goes on to say,

*v. 14 "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."*

Jesus is talking about standing firm, but he's also talking about staying busy. Even when your world turns dark, you are to keep doing the job that God called you to do. We still have good news, no matter how dark the world may become. So keep your feet on the pavement. Keep on working for Christ doing his will no matter what happens.

In one of his stories, Jesus told the story of a man who built his house on the sand and another man who built his house on a rock. We still have the choice today. We can build our lives on the shifting sand of our world's philosophies, or we can build our lives on the rock of God's unchanging word. If we build on the sand, our house will collapse. If we build on the rock, we will continue to be blessed no matter what the future may hold.