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The Bible Unveils the Future

History tells us something unique about the human race: We have a great hunger to know what the future holds. Traditionally we have sought this knowledge by spiritual means that bypass our reason or capability, means such as astrology, pronouncements from oracles, fortune-telling and various forms of mysticism. These attempts have proved elusive and deceptive.

In recent times we have turned to more sophisticated and scientific ways to feed our craving. Experts in various fields—physics, sociology, economics, even population demographics and food production and weather prognostication—have conducted countless studies to shed light on the days to come. The results of these works, though thought-provoking and helpful, nevertheless simply verify the fact that no human mind or system can foresee the many contingencies that affect future events. For this reason, none of these studies can be accepted as fully reliable.

There remains, however, a third source to which we may look for revelation about the future. This third source is faultless in its reliability. It is the Bible, and within its pages lie the prophetic insights we seek. Only the Word of God can satisfy our longing to see into the future.

First and foremost, we must understand that the Bible offers light to those who study it and obey it. A number of Scriptures make this point, including the familiar words of the psalmist to the Lord: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). In order to have forward mobility, we generally require feet to walk with and a path to walk on. But in order to move forward with confidence, it helps to see where we are going. God’s Word provides light for our feet and light for our path. In other words, the Bible shows us where to step next. It may not always show us a long way ahead, but we are never left to walk in darkness. What a

tremendous blessing that is! If we study and obey the Bible, we will never be left walking in darkness.

With this universal desire to know what the future holds, we might think that believers, who consider the Bible God’s inspired revelation of His will, would search its pages eagerly for understanding about the period immediately preceding the return of the Lord—the time referred to as “the last days” in at least half the books of the Bible. In my contact with Christians of different nationalities, denominations and backgrounds, however, I have found just the opposite to be true. I have consistently run into an altogether inadequate appreciation of the importance of biblical prophecy! I recognize that some Christians have been turned off by so-called prophets who have made predictions in the name of the Lord, including the exact date Jesus is due to return. Because this happens from time to time in the history of the Church, people get turned off and say, “If that’s what prophecy is like, I don’t want any part of it.”

That is a disastrous conclusion because Christians need to understand biblical prophecy. Why can I say this with assurance? Because at least one-quarter of the Bible is predictive prophecy. We cannot afford to ignore one-quarter of the Bible and expect to receive all that God has for us. Let’s look at what God Himself says in regard to His prophetic word.

God Reveals the Future

Throughout the Bible, God actually claims to foretell the future within its pages. Look at these passages from the book of Isaiah.

“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.”

Isaiah 44:6–7, NIV

The Lord presents a challenge here: “I am God. I know what happened in the past; I know what will happen in the future. If anybody repudiates this, let him come forth with the same breadth of factual information that I offer.” Then in the next verse, God says to His people: “Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?” (verse 8, NIV).

Those who do make claims of predictions through “alternative” sources of information are easily shown to be impostors. To the astrologers, fortune-tellers and soothsayers—of whom there were multitudes in biblical days, just as there are today—the Lord says this:

“This is what the LORD says—your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners [fortune-tellers], who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense, who carries out the words of his servants and fulfills the predictions of his messengers.”

Isaiah 44:24–26, NIV

When God’s servants predict, God stands behind what they say and sees that it happens. But when false prophets predict, God turns their words upside down and makes them look foolish. Only God’s Word will stand—His purpose alone is the one that will be worked out. Almighty God is speaking in these verses, the One who created the heavens, created the earth, created mankind and all things. He is in full control of all that He brought into being.

“Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.”

Isaiah 46:9–10, NIV

If we believe God alone can reveal the future, it follows that we must gain a right appreciation of His sovereignty, majesty and justice. God never makes mistakes. Everything He does is right. We may have gone through situations that left us wondering if He was being unfair, but that is impossible. God is always just and always right.

Here is a passage of Scripture I like to speak as a proclamation. It is taken from two chapters of Daniel and declares the sovereign majesty of God.

“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him.”

. . . For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, “What have You done?”

Daniel 2:20–22; 4:34–35

The last two verses are the words of Nebuchadnezzar, who went through a pretty difficult time to come to that realization. He spent seven years like an animal out in the wild. His hair grew like a bird’s feathers, his nails like an animal’s claws, and he fed on grass. But at the end of seven years God restored everything that Nebuchadnezzar had lost.

By then Nebuchadnezzar had become a different man, transformed by the school of God’s discipline. This was his testimony: “Your dominion is an everlasting dominion. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing. You do according to Your will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain Your hand.” Though he had ruled as the most powerful monarch on earth

at that time, Nebuchadnezzar came to realize there was One infinitely more powerful than he. That One was the God of Israel. This knowledge of God's sovereignty is an essential basis for approaching biblical prophecy.

Proof That His Prophecies Are True

If we have any further doubts about God's ability or plans to reveal the future to us through the Bible, we need only look at His record. Given below are two prominent examples: predictions made concerning the life of Jesus and the nation of Israel. These are just a handful of the many predictions made thousands of years ago that have been and are still being accurately fulfilled in every detail.

The Life of Jesus Christ

Words spoken through God's prophets, as recorded in the Old Testament, foretold every significant event in the life of Jesus in accurate detail. When each one of these prophecies came true, the Bible says that it happened "that the Scripture might be fulfilled." Here are eighteen specific events in the life of Jesus as predicted in the Old Testament and shown to be fulfilled in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life.

His birth of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:24–25).

His birth at Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:4–7).

His flight into Egypt (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15).

His being anointed by the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 61:1; Matthew 3:16).

His ministry in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1–2; Matthew 4:15–16).

His healing of the sick (Isaiah 61:1; John 5:1–9).

His use of parables (Psalm 78:2; Matthew 13:34–35).

His being betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9; John 13:18).

His being forsaken by His disciples (Psalm 88:8; Mark 14:50).

His being hated without a cause (Psalm 35:19; John 15:25).

His being rejected by the Jews (Isaiah 53:3; John 1:11).

His being condemned with criminals (Isaiah 53:12; Luke 22:37).

His garments being parted and divided by lot (Psalm 22:18; Matthew 27:35).

His being offered vinegar for His thirst (Psalm 69:21; Matthew 27:48).

His body being pierced without His bones being broken (Psalm 34:20; John 19:36; also Zechariah 12:10; John 19:37).

His being buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57–60).

His rising from the dead on the third day (Hosea 6:2; Luke 24:46).

Scripture is unerring in all these points concerning the life of Jesus.

The History of the Nation of Israel

Our second example of biblical prophecy involves the history of the nation of Israel. Again, the examples are far too numerous to list here, but suffice it to say that the Bible has predicted the course of Israel's history accurately for the past 3,500 years. Here are a few specific aspects of Israel's history predicted in the Bible long before they occurred:

Enslavement in Egypt (Genesis 15:13).

Deliverance with wealth from Egypt (Genesis 15:14).

Possession of the land of Canaan (Genesis 15:18–20).

Turning to idolatry there (Deuteronomy 32:15–21).

Center of worship in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 12:5–6; Psalm 132:13–14).

Assyrian captivity (Amos 5:27; 6:14; 7:17).

Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 16:13; 21:10).

Destruction of the first Temple (2 Chronicles 7:19–22).

Return from Babylon (Isaiah 6:11–13; 48:20).

Destruction of the second Temple (Matthew 24:2; Luke 19:43–44).

Scattered among all nations (Leviticus 26:33–34; Ezekiel 12:15).

Persecution and oppression (Leviticus 26:36–39).

Regathering from all nations (Isaiah 11:11–12; Zechariah 10:9–10).

Here are a few predictions yet unfulfilled:

All nations against Jerusalem (Zechariah 12:2–3; 14:1–2).

Supernatural revelation of Messiah (Zechariah 12:10–14).

Messiah comes in glory (Zechariah 14:3–5).

In light of the Bible’s proven record, we can turn to it confidently as our source for information about events still in the future. Remember, if we study and obey the Bible, we do not need to walk in darkness.

Giving Heed to Biblical Prophecy

This leaves us with one final question as we begin our study of end time prophecy in the Bible. What is the ultimate purpose? Why would God give us a book that tells us what is going to happen in the future? All of the prophecies throughout Scripture that have yet to occur have one central mission: to make us aware of the coming of the Lord as an imminent reality.

Let’s look at just one verse from the second epistle of Peter. Peter has been writing about the revelation he and two other apostles had of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration when they saw the honor and glory God the Father had bestowed upon Jesus. Then he relates that there is something even more important: “We [also] have the prophetic word confirmed [made more sure], which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19).

Peter is saying, in effect, “That revelation we had on the Mount of Transfiguration was wonderful. It was valid, and it is recorded now in Scripture. But there is something much more certain: It is the prophetic word of Scripture, the written prophecies of the Bible.”

Let’s make a crucial distinction. The gift of prophecy, which I esteem, believe in and from time to time exercise, comes from human agents and must be judged by Scripture. When we talk (as Peter does here) about the prophetic word given in Scripture, however, it is *not* to be judged. There is a great difference. Every word of God is pure, like silver purified in a furnace seven times (see Psalm 12:6). The written, prophetic word of God is totally and absolutely authoritative, and Peter says we do well to give heed to it. In other words, it is in our best interests to pay attention

to it. If we fail to do so, we are depriving ourselves of an important provision of God for our lives.

We need to give heed to the prophetic word “until the day dawns and the morning star rises in [our] hearts.” Peter is not talking about what is happening in the world; he is talking about what is happening in our hearts. Even if a person is a believer—saved, baptized in the Spirit and destined for heaven—that one will be walking in darkness here on earth if he ignores the light God has provided. Walking in darkness does not mean we will be refused entry into heaven when we die. But it does mean we will be stumbling and groping while here on earth, not understanding what is going on, fearful and confused.

During my service in World War II, I spent three years stationed in the deserts of North Africa. Most of that time we lived by the sun because we had no artificial sources of light. When it got dark, we went to bed. When it became light, we got up. During that time I observed some unique sights. One was that at certain seasons of the year when the sun was due to rise, the horizon would become luminous, growing quite light in that part of the heavens. You would think the sun was rising, but it was not the sun. It was the morning star called Aurora. It was an infallible sign: When Aurora rose, we knew that the sun was going to rise next. Peter says to let this Aurora—this morning star—rise in our hearts, because when it arises we will know for sure Jesus is coming back. God desires that every one of us live in excited anticipation of the return of the Lord. That is how every believer should be living.

As Hebrews 9:28 tells us, Jesus is going to appear for those who wait for Him eagerly. Are we waiting for Him eagerly? If the morning star has risen in our hearts, then we will be waiting for Him with great anticipation, and He will appear to us the second time.

Let us, then, turn to God’s prophetic guidance about the end times. There is a great deal that He wants to tell us about these days in which we are beginning to see the glow of the morning star.