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The Complete Reference Guide to Bible Prophecy

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*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood
and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father,
to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.
Amen.*

*Behold, he is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him,
and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.
Even so. Amen.*

Revelation 1:5-7

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Words cannot adequately convey the immense appreciation I have for the unwavering love and encouragement I receive from my incredible wife, Kerri, and our two amazing adult children, David and Kylie. In addition, our delightful grandsons, Carter and Bennett, fill my life with constant laughter and joy. My heart truly overflows with gratitude! Praise be to the Lord for giving me such an extraordinary family.

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Lord Jesus, I want to thank You yet again for the opportunity to serve You through the written word. In this book, I strive to showcase Your greatness, yet I humbly acknowledge that my efforts capture only a single drop from the boundless ocean of Your divine magnificence. May this humble literary endeavor bring glory to Your awesome Name.

Come soon, Lord!

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INTRODUCTION

The Complete Reference Guide to Bible Prophecy

It has been my privilege to write dozens of books dealing with various facets of Bible prophecy. These books cover a range of topics, including the chronology of the end times, lively debates on topics such as the timing of the rapture, and contemporary trends as they relate to Bible prophecy. Other areas explored include the antichrist, the false prophet, Israel's role in prophecy, the Ezekiel invasion of Israel, the rise of New Babylon, Jesus' teachings on the end times, high technology and the end times, and frequently asked questions about Bible prophecy.

Added to this collection are expository books such as *40 Days through Revelation* and *40 Days through Daniel*, which are designed to help readers understand these two apocalyptic books of the Bible. Each of my previous prophecy books has been a joy for me to write because they each contain important prophetic truths that Christians need to know about.

The advantage of the present book—*The Complete Reference Guide to Bible Prophecy*—is that I cover all of these topics and more. All of my previous books have helped me prepare for this one. All the research that went into writing those books has now been compiled into a single, cohesive volume. This book could be considered a one-stop shop for information on Bible prophecy. It is my sincere hope that it will become your trusted prophecy companion for many years to come. And I pray that it will bless you.

You will find that the book contains a considerable amount of descriptive text on many topics. But interspersed throughout are some special features—that will benefit you in your study of prophecy. These special features include:

- *Charts:* There are charts on all sorts of subjects. Examples include charts on messianic prophecies, conditional versus unconditional covenants, and a comparison of the various future judgments.

- *Fast Facts:* These are useful summaries of some of the most important aspects of prophecy. Examples include:
 - Fast facts on apostasy in the United States
 - Fast facts on the man of sin
 - Fast facts on Babylon in Revelation
- *Christ in Prophecy:* Jesus is the heart and center of Bible prophecy. For example:
 - Jesus will come for us at the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).
 - He will unleash judgments upon the earth during the tribulation period (Revelation 6).
 - He will return at the second coming (Revelation 19:11-21).
 - He will reign during the millennial kingdom (Revelation 20:2-5).
- *Personality Profiles:* Included are profiles of:
 - Gog,
 - Satan,
 - the antichrist,
 - the false prophet,
 - the 144,000 Jewish evangelists,
 - and God's two prophetic witnesses.
- *You May Be Interested to Know...:* These are little tidbits of interesting information. Here are a few examples:
 - Twenty-eight percent of the Bible is prophetic.
 - Thirty-five percent of Americans now pay greater attention to how the daily news might relate to the end of the world.
 - Israel's rebirth as a nation in 1948 sets the stage for other prophecies to be fulfilled—including these two:
 1. The antichrist will sign a covenant with Israel.
 2. The Jewish temple will be rebuilt.

- *Lexical Nuggets:* These are insights from the original Hebrew and Greek languages. An example is how the word *delivers* in the phrase “delivers us from the wrath to come” literally means “snatch from” (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Christians will be *snatched* from the earth before the wrathful tribulation period begins.
- *Frequently Asked Questions:* These are common questions that people ask. Among them:
 - Will little children participate in the rapture?
 - Do departed believers look over heaven’s balcony to observe us?
 - How can a good God cast people into the lake of fire?
- *Historical Insights:* Bible history helps us to better understand prophecy. For example:
 - Discoveries of sealed scrolls from Bible times give us insight into the seal judgments.
 - The discovery of a Bema seat (elevated seat) in Corinth gives us insight into the judgment seat of Christ. In Corinth, these “seats” were used to distribute victor’s crowns to winners of athletic contests.
- *Geography in the End Times:* These features focus on areas such as Israel and Jerusalem, the revived Roman Empire, New Babylon, Russia, and various Muslim nations that will attack Israel in the end times.
- *Numbers in Prophecy:* There are many references to numbers in the book of Revelation. These include seven years, 1,260 days, “time, times, and half a time,” 144,000 Jewish witnesses (12,000 from each tribe), two prophets, seven seal judgments, seven trumpet judgments, seven bowl judgments, and 666 in reference to the antichrist.
- *Cross-References:* These cross-references focus on major prophetic topics such as the rapture, the tribulation period, the antichrist, the second coming, the millennial kingdom, and the judgments.
- *Interesting Quotes:* There are many interesting quotations from both ancient and modern authors. They help bring clarity—and *enrichment*—to our study of prophecy.

- *A Lesson to Learn:* These are simple life-change lessons—applicational truths that are spiritually beneficial.

Of course, not every chapter will have all of these (and other) special features. But some will be included in each chapter. I think you will find the book very informative, *but it will also be fun to read.*

A Heartfelt Exhortation

Allow me to emphasize right from the beginning—in the very introduction of the book—that Bible prophecy is worthy of your trust because it comes directly from God Himself. Scripture reveals that God knows all things, both actual and possible (Matthew 11:21-24). He knows all things past (Isaiah 41:22), present (Hebrews 4:13), and future (Isaiah 46:10). There can be no increase or decrease in His knowledge, for He knows all things. Psalm 147:5 affirms that God’s understanding “is beyond measure.” His knowledge is infinite (Psalms 33:13-15; 139:11-12; 147:5; Proverbs 15:3; Isaiah 40:14; 46:10; Acts 15:18; 1 John 3:20; Hebrews 4:13). I encourage you to read these verses—they will inspire you and bless you!

God wants us to have a high degree of confidence in the accuracy of Bible prophecy. He doesn’t want us to doubt it. He assures us: “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’...I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it” (Isaiah 46:9-11).

When I first became a Christian, the thing that convinced me of the trustworthiness of Bible prophecy was that more than 100 messianic prophecies in the Old Testament were precisely fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus. You might say they were fulfilled to the crossing of the *t* and the dotting of the *i*. For example, the Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would be from the seed of a woman (Genesis 3:15), the offspring of Abraham (Genesis 12:3), from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), the son of David (Jeremiah 23:5-6), conceived of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), the heralded Messiah (Isaiah 40:3), the coming King (Zechariah 9:9), the sacrificial lamb who would be crucified for our sins (Isaiah 53), the one who would be pierced in His side (Zechariah 12:10), the one who would die around AD 33 (Daniel 9:24-25), and the one who would rise from the dead (Psalms 2; 16). These—and a multitude of others—were literally fulfilled in Jesus’ first coming.

Because this is true, you can also trust what the prophetic Scriptures reveal about Christ's second coming and all the prophetic events leading up to it. Never doubt it! Put the stake in the ground today. I urge you to affirm with me:

I am confident that Bible prophecies about the future are accurate because God has been 100-percent accurate in all His prophecies in the past. He has set an unbroken precedent. I will never question Him. I will take Him at His word. All that remains is for me to learn what the Bible teaches about prophecy. Once I learn it, it will immediately become a firm conviction in my mind. I will trust what I learn from the Bible about prophecy because I believe in a trustworthy God. The matter is settled! There is absolutely no hesitation.

As is true with all of my writings, I hope that this book will not only inform your mind, but also touch your heart. Christian theology that does not touch the heart has failed in its task. I am convinced that this book will touch your heart because the truths it contains have already touched mine.

It is my prayer that this book will cause a paradigm shift in the way you view the present world. The more you think about the glorious truths of the prophetic future, the more you will gain an eternal perspective that will help you deal with the difficult situations you will inevitably face during this short earthly life.

May it be so!

PART 1

Understanding Prophets, Prophecy, and Prophetic Covenants

IN THIS SECTION

- 1—Demystifying Prophets and Prophecy—16**
- 2—The Vital Importance of Prophecy—24**
- 3—God’s Covenants: The Cornerstone of Bible Prophecy—31**
- 4—Essential Prophetic Passages You Need to Know—38**

Demystifying Prophets and Prophecy

God has revealed everything He wants us to know about Himself and how to have a relationship with Him through the Scriptures. He is the One who caused the Bible to be written. He speaks to us through the words of the Bible, just as He did to ancient people when those words were first given.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the Bible is its abundance of prophecies concerning the future. God reveals a great deal about the end times, particularly in apocalyptic books such as Revelation and Daniel.

YOU MAY BE INTERESTED TO KNOW...

Twenty-Seven Percent of the Bible Is Prophetic

- > Of the 23,210 verses of the Old Testament, 6,641 are prophetic. This is 28.5 percent.
- > Of the 7,914 verses of the New Testament, 1,711 are prophetic. This is 21.5 percent.
- > When the Old and New Testaments are combined, 8,352 of the 31,124 verses in the Bible are prophetic.
- > This is 27 percent of the Bible.



LEXICAL NUGGET: *Prophet*

The English word *prophet* comes from the Hebrew word *nabi*. It means “God’s spokesman.”

1. Prophets sometimes spoke of God’s predictions of future events.
2. Other times, they spoke God’s Word on contemporary issues.

Major Prophets and Minor Prophets

There are two categories of prophets:

The **major prophets** were Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. These guys were the “big wheels.”

The **minor prophets** were Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. These men were the “small fries.” Yet, their words were as divinely inspired as those of the major prophets. God spoke through all of them.

It is interesting to note that in the Old Testament, God’s human messenger spoke a prophetic word, and in the New Testament, those words are said to have come from God Himself. This shows that God was the ultimate source of their prophetic words.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCE	NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCE
The psalmist said (Psalm 95:7)	The Holy Spirit said (Hebrews 3:7)
The psalmist said (Psalm 45:6)	God said (Hebrews 1:8)
The psalmist said (Psalm 102:25, 27)	God said (Hebrews 1:10-12)
Isaiah said (Isaiah 7:14)	The Lord spoke by the prophet (Matthew 1:22-23)
Hosea said (Hosea 11:1)	The Lord spoke by the prophet (Matthew 2:15)
Eliphaz’s words (Job 5:13)	God’s Words (1 Corinthians 3:19)

FAST FACTS ON GOD’S PROPHETS

- God personally chose His prophets (Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:13-16).
- They came from all walks of life—from farmers to princes (Amos 7:14; Genesis 23:6).
- They often prefaced their words with “Thus saith the Lord.”
- Their words were not their own, but those of God.

- As a result, their messages—including their prophecies of the distant future—were supernatural rather than natural.
- God’s prophets were always 100 percent accurate.

Some Bible scholars define prophecy as “history written in advance.” It is more accurate to say that prophecy is *God’s revelation* regarding history in advance, since only God, in His omniscience, knows the future. God claimed this in 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.’”

The word *prophesy* (as opposed to *prophecy*) means to set forth prophecies. Everything that God prophesies will come to pass. You can be sure of that. God said this in Isaiah 48:3: “The former things I declared of old; they went out from my mouth, and I announced them; then suddenly I did them, and they came to pass.”

He likewise affirms in Isaiah 42:8-9: “I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.”

These verses show that God controls the course of human history. He alone can reveal the future to us. His predictions (or prophecies) are always accurate.

“History is a story written by the finger of God.”

—C.S. Lewis¹

“What has happened in the past, what is happening now, and what will happen in the future is all evidence of the unfolding of the purposeful plan devised by the personal God of the Bible. All the circumstances of life—past, present, and future—fit into the sovereign plan like pieces of a puzzle.”

—Robert Lightner²

The biblical prophets made very specific predictions about the future. As Mark Hitchcock put it, “The biblical prophets did not peddle predictions that were so vague and general that they could be adapted to any situation. The

prophecies recorded in the Bible are very precise and so specific that when they are fulfilled, it's very clear there's something unique and special about them.”³

For example, in the Old Testament, God's prophets predicted (1) Jesus' birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), (2) His conception by a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), and (3) His crucifixion (Isaiah 53:12; Zechariah 12:10). These predictions are very specific. There is no ambiguity. These three—and more than a hundred others—were explicitly fulfilled in Christ.

The prophecies of the end times are equally specific. These include prophecies concerning the rapture of the church, the rise of the antichrist, the false prophet, the tribulation period, the second coming of Christ, the millennial kingdom, the great white throne judgment, and the eternal state.

CHRIST IN PROPHECY

Jesus Fulfilled the Three Offices of Prophet, Priest, and King

As a Prophet, Jesus gave major discourses:

- > the Upper Room Discourse (John 14–16),
- > the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24–25),
- > and the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7).

Understanding Prophetic Terminology

Eschatology. The term *eschatology* comes from two Greek words: *eschatos*, meaning “last” or “last things,” and *logos*, meaning “study of.” Eschatology is the study of last things. It is the study of the end times. It is pronounced es-kuh-TOL-uh-jee.

The doctrine of eschatology can be divided into two distinct categories:

- *Personal eschatology* deals with an individual's death, future judgment, and heavenly or hellish destiny.
- *General eschatology* deals with more general topics, such as the rapture, the tribulation period, the second coming, and the millennial kingdom.

Apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature is a unique form of literature that reveals or unveils the future through divine revelations. (In Greek,

apocalypse means “revelation” or “unveiling.”) Daniel and Revelation are the two apocalyptic books of the Bible. It is beneficial to study these books simultaneously.

The last days. One would assume that the term “last days” is equivalent to “end times.” But this is not the case. The New Testament reveals that the term can be applied to our present church age: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2). This indicates that people from the time of the New Testament to the present day are already living in the “last days” (see also 1 Peter 1:20).

The term is used differently throughout the Old Testament. It often refers prophetically to Israel during the seven-year period of tribulation, after which the divine Messiah will return and establish His millennial kingdom on earth: “When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice” (Deuteronomy 4:30).

NUMBERS IN PROPHECY: *The Seven-Year Tribulation Period*

- > The tribulation period will last “one week” of years, which is seven years (Daniel 9:27).
- > Prophetic Scripture refers to *half* of the tribulation period in various ways:
 - » 42 months (Revelation 13:5), which is three-and-a-half years.
 - » 1,260 days (Revelation 11:3), which is three-and-a-half years.
 - » time, times, and half a time (Daniel 7:25), which is three-and-a-half years. (“Time” is one year; “times” is two years; “half a time” is half a year.)

The end times. The end times is a broad term that encompasses a variety of events that take place in the prophetic future. These events include the rapture, the judgment seat of Christ, the tribulation period, Armageddon, the second coming of Christ, the millennial kingdom, and the great white throne judgment. Also included are heaven (for believers) and hell (for unbelievers).

Pretribulationism. This is the theological view that the rapture will take place before the tribulation period. (This is my position.)

Midtribulationism. This is the theological view that the rapture will occur at the midpoint of the tribulation period.

Posttribulationism. This is the theological view that the rapture will occur after the tribulation period.

The pre-wrath theory. This is the theological view that the rapture will occur before the final portion of the tribulation, when God's wrath will be unleashed.

The partial-rapture theory. This is the theological view that only those who are prepared and waiting for Christ will be raptured. As Christians become purified and found worthy, they too will be raptured at various times throughout the tribulation.

Preterism. This is the theological view that the majority of the prophecies in the book of Revelation (especially chapters 6–18) and in Christ's Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24–25) were fulfilled in AD 70 when Rome overran Jerusalem.

Amillennialism. This is the theological position that there is no future millennial kingdom. Christ simply reigns over the church from heaven.

Postmillennialism. This is the theological position that Christ's second coming will occur after a long period of time—metaphorically described as 1,000 years—during which the church will Christianize the entire world.

Premillennialism. This is the theological position that Christ will return prior to the millennial kingdom, which will feature a 1,000-year rule of Christ on earth. (This is my position.)

Don't worry if you can't remember all these definitions. Appendix B: "A Simplified Glossary of Prophetic Terms" is always available to you.

The Personal Blessing of Prophetic Scripture

- God’s prophetic plan includes not only the whole world, but also each and every one of us.
- God has His eyes on us and has a wonderful plan for our future (Jeremiah 29:11; Psalm 32:8; Proverbs 3:5-6; Romans 8:28).
- It is beneficial to begin each day with this thought.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Did God’s prophets ever make mistakes?

No, not when speaking on behalf of God. However, some have tried to argue that Jonah made a false prophecy. After all, Jonah proclaimed that in 40 days Nineveh would be overthrown by God. But Jonah’s prediction of Nineveh’s destruction did not come to pass. Nevertheless, Jonah did not make a mistake. He told the Ninevites exactly what God had told him to say (Jonah 3:1-2). A repentance clause was built into Jonah’s prophecy: “If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it” (Jeremiah 18:7-8). The Ninevites understood that *if they did not repent*, Nineveh would fall in 40 days (Jonah 3:5-9). Because they repented, God withheld judgment.

Are there any prophets today?

Some Christians claim that there are prophets in the church today. However, the Bible indicates that the church was “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20). Once a foundation is laid, it is permanent. Therefore, there is no need to lay a new foundation with new apostles and prophets. Today’s self-proclaimed prophets do not have the predictive abilities of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Instead, they simply proclaim the Word of God. Therefore, they are called “prophets” in a very loose sense.

Will there be any prophets in the future?

During the tribulation period, God will raise up two mighty prophetic witnesses with the same miraculous abilities as Moses and Elijah (Revelation 11:1-15). I will address these prophets later in the book.

CROSS-REFERENCES

Prophecy

- A gift of the Holy Spirit—1 Corinthians 12:10
- Not based on the will of man—2 Peter 1:21
- Certainty of God's Word—Ezekiel 12:26-28
- God declares things before they occur—Isaiah 42:9
- God declares the end from the beginning—Isaiah 46:10-11
- God declares what is to come—Isaiah 44:7
- God fulfills the prophet's message—Isaiah 44:26
- Is a sure word—2 Peter 1:19
- Prime purpose of prophecy—John 13:19
- Prophetic visions and dreams—Numbers 12:6
- Qualification for a prophet—1 Samuel 10:12

The Vital Importance of Prophecy

Some Bible students may be unaware of the vital importance of Bible prophecy. They might assume that the sole function of prophecy is to inform us of the future.

Truth be told, Bible prophecy is full of benefits for those who look beyond that single purpose. These benefits make the study of prophecy invaluable.

1. Prophecy Proves that the God of the Bible Is the One True God

In Isaiah 41:21-23, God challenges the people to prove that their idols are indeed gods:

Set forth your case, says the LORD;
 bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob.
 Let them bring them, and tell us
 what is to happen.
 Tell us the former things, what they are,
 that we may consider them,
 that we may know their outcome;
 or declare to us the things to come.
 Tell us what is to come hereafter,
 that we may know that you are gods.

Obviously, these idols and false gods could not oblige because they do not even exist. In contrast, the true God says of Himself, “Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them” (Isaiah 42:9). This verse expresses the idea, “Everything I predicted in the past has come to pass, and I will now predict additional future events.”

God also later affirmed: “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’” (Isaiah 46:9-10). When God says, “There is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning,” it expresses the idea, “*No one else* can predict the future before it occurs like I can.”

2. Prophecy Proves the Bible Is the Word of God

Just as Bible prophecy demonstrates that the God of the Bible is the only true God, it also demonstrates that the Bible is the only true “holy book.” No other holy book, including the Muslim Qur’an, Hindu Vedas, or any New Age text, can compete with the Bible. The fulfillment of prophecy proves that the Bible is indeed the Word of God and can be relied upon.

COMPELLING EVIDENCE FOR THE BIBLE

1. God alone knows the prophetic future.
2. The Bible is the *only* holy book that contains God’s many specific prophecies about the future.
3. More than 100 Old Testament messianic prophecies of Christ’s first coming were fulfilled in the pages of the New Testament, demonstrating God’s perfect accuracy in predicting the future.
4. Prophecy, then, is compelling evidence that the Bible is God’s Word.

3. Prophecy Is a Powerful Tool of Evangelism

Evangelism and prophecy can be an effective combination. Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost illustrates this. Several supernatural events had just occurred. Therefore, Peter addressed the large crowd about what was happening in their midst. He began his message by discussing a prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the people: “What you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16 NLT). After discussing the prophecy, Peter launched into his evangelistic pitch, culminating with this invitation: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (verse

21 NLT). *The result?* “Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all” (verse 41 NLT). Prophecy can be an important component in evangelism.

A TESTIMONY

My family regularly attended a liberal church in the 1970s. Liberal churches typically teach that the Bible is man-made, the miracles in the Bible never happened, Jesus is not really God, and Jesus is not the only way to salvation.

I had no idea that I was attending a false church. I was biblically illiterate. Then I started reading some books on Bible prophecy. These books caused a major paradigm shift in my life. As a direct result of prophecy, I became a Christian, left the liberal church, joined a good biblical church, eventually attended Dallas Theological Seminary, received both a master of theology degree and a doctor of theology degree, and have been serving the Lord ever since.

I am a living testimony of how prophecy can be used in evangelism. Bible prophecy has completely changed the course of my life.

4. Prophecy Comforts Us When We Lose a Loved One in Death

In the early history of the church, the Thessalonian believers lost some family members in death. The apostle Paul had previously explained to them how living believers would one day be caught up in the rapture. But what about deceased believers? This was the question they posed to Paul.

Paul explained in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 that the dead in Christ would first be resurrected, and then living Christians would be translated into their glorified bodies. Both groups would then instantly be caught up to meet Christ in the air and taken to heaven (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54). Paul said, “Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

Of course, it is natural for us to continue to grieve after the death of a

Christian loved one. However, we do not “grieve as others who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). We know that a reunion is imminent. We will be with our Christian loved ones again. We will once again see their faces, hear their voices, and exchange hugs with them. Someone once said, “No two Christians will ever meet for the last time.” I believe this to be true.

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

Prophecy Was a Great Comfort to the Early Christians

- > The original readers of Revelation were Christians who lived about 65 years after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection.
- > These second-generation Christians faced tremendous obstacles.
- > Because of Roman hostility toward Christianity, their lives had become increasingly difficult.
- > Many of them suffered persecution and some were even martyred (Revelation 2:13).
- > Revelation was written to provide these believers with a strong sense of hope that would enable them to patiently endure their suffering.
- > *The big lesson:* Human suffering is temporary. Eternal life with God is forever.

5. Prophecy Demonstrates that God Will Triumph Over Evil

A new day will soon come. The antichrist, the false prophet, Satan, and all anti-God human rebels will be quarantined forever in the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20; 20:10). Meanwhile, resurrected believers will dwell directly in God’s presence for all eternity in the New Jerusalem, the city of the redeemed. As the Scriptures state:

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:3-5).

Evil will no longer exist!

YOU MAY BE INTERESTED TO KNOW...

Americans Are Increasingly Interested in the End of the World

- > Thirty-five percent of Americans are now paying more attention to how the news—mostly *bad* news—relates to the end of the world.
- > Seventeen percent believe the end of the world will happen in their lifetime.
- > Fifty-nine percent believe the prophecies of the book of Revelation will be fulfilled.¹

6. Prophecy Is a Source of Spiritual Blessing

Revelation 1:3 states unequivocally: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.” This is the first of seven special pronouncements of blessing in the book of Revelation (see also 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7-14).

People like to read about the blessings, but they often overlook the part about obedience. The blessed are “those who hear, *and* who keep what is written in it.” We recall the exhortation of James: “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22).

Read the prophetic Word, obey the Word, and be blessed!

7. Prophecy Has Contemporary Relevance

A final reason Bible prophecy is vitally important is that a number of ancient prophecies appear to be coming to pass in our time, or at least the stage is being set for their fulfillment. These include:

- the rebirth of Israel as a nation,
- a falling away from the truth,
- the widespread acceptance of doctrinal error,

- a significant moral decline,
- a growing tolerance for all things evil,
- a widespread outbreak of sexual sins and perversions,
- a steady decline in religious freedom,
- increased worldwide persecution of God's people,
- ever-escalating conflict in the Middle East,
- efforts to rebuild the Jewish temple,
- the stage being set for a massive Russian/Muslim invasion of Israel,
- the steady rise of globalism,
- political and economic moves toward the establishment of a revived Roman Empire,
- and the emergence of a cashless world in preparation for the anti-christ's control of the world economy during the tribulation period.

It is sobering to think about how all of these are trending in varying degrees in our present day—sure indicators that we are living in the end times. This makes prophecy vitally important.

CHRIST IN PROPHECY

Jesus Addressed Many Prophetic Issues

- > The Olivet Discourse is so named because Jesus delivered it while seated on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24:3).
- > The disciples asked Jesus, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3).
- > The Olivet Discourse is Jesus' answer to this question.
- > Jesus foretold false christs, wars, famines, earthquakes, the desecration of the Jewish temple, cosmic upheavals (Matthew 24:4-28), the sign of His coming (verses 29-31), and how the end times would resemble the days of Noah (verses 36-39).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Does the study of Bible prophecy distract Christians from more important matters, such as fulfilling the Great Commission?

No. In fact, Bible prophecy aids in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. As Peter demonstrated when he preached on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), prophecy can play a significant role in evangelism. In keeping with this, Matthew's Gospel contains many quotations and allusions to Old Testament messianic prophecies in order to demonstrate to the Jews that Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah. In addition, more than a quarter of the Bible is prophetic. This is too large a portion of the Bible to ignore.

Are liberal critics correct in claiming that messianic prophecies of Christ's first coming were inserted into the Bible after the fact, and are therefore untrustworthy?

No. Nearly all scholars agree that the Old Testament prophetic writings were completed at least 400 years before the birth of Christ, with many books dating back to the eighth and ninth centuries BC. The exception is the book of Daniel, which some scholars date to 167 BC. A critically important manuscript copy of Isaiah dates to 150 BC, which is 150 years before the birth of Christ. This means that all of the specific prophecies of the coming divine Messiah found in Isaiah—for example, that Jesus would be born of a virgin (7:14), be named Immanuel (7:14), be anointed by the Holy Spirit (11:2), have a ministry in Galilee (9:1-2), have a ministry of miracles (35:5-6), be silent before His accusers (53:7), be crucified with thieves (53:12), accomplish a sacrificial atonement for humankind (53:5), and then be buried in a rich man's tomb (53:9)—could not possibly have been recorded after the fact.

You can trust Bible prophecy!

God's Covenants: The Cornerstone of Bible Prophecy

Covenants were common in biblical times. Nations made covenants with other nations (1 Samuel 11:1), just as individuals made covenants with other individuals (Genesis 21:27).

There were many kinds of covenants. In some cases, nations made covenants in the form of treaties or alliances. People sometimes signed friendship pacts as covenants (1 Samuel 18:3-4). A person could even make a covenant with himself. This is illustrated by Job: “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look with lust at a young woman” (Job 31:1 NLT). He made a pact with himself in order to help him avoid immorality.

This chapter focuses on the major covenants God made with His people. These include His covenant promises to Abraham (Genesis 15:12-21; 17:1-14), David (2 Samuel 7:13; 23:5), and the people of God under the new covenant (Hebrews 8:5-13). These covenants are the cornerstone of Bible prophecy. They demonstrate that God is a God of promises.

YOU MAY BE INTERESTED TO KNOW...

God Is a Promise Keeper

- > Numbers 23:19 tells us that “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?”
- > An aged Joshua declared, “Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass” (Joshua 21:45).
- > Joshua, near the time of his death, later affirmed: “And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts

and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed” (Joshua 23:14).

- > Solomon later proclaimed, “Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant” (1 Kings 8:56).

6a UNDERSTANDING OUR TERMS: *Covenant*

Simply put, a covenant is a promissory agreement between two parties.

In biblical times, there were two types of covenants: conditional and unconditional. A *conditional covenant* is similar to a contract with an “if” clause. Conditions had to be met for the promises to be fulfilled.

A conditional covenant between God and humans required that humans meet specific requirements before God was obligated to fulfill His promise. Such a covenant might be as simple as, “Obey Me, and I will bless you.” If the conditions are not met (“obey me”), God is not obligated to fulfill His promises (“I will bless you”).

The fulfillment of an *unconditional covenant* was not contingent on any conditions; no “ifs” were attached. This form of covenant involved God’s firm and unbreakable promises regardless of the merit (or lack thereof) of the humans to whom God made the promises.

Some Christians like to call this a *unilateral covenant* instead of an unconditional one. “Unilateral” means that one person (in this case, God) does something without putting any conditions on the other party (for example, Israel). Other Christians prefer the designation *one-sided covenant* or *divine commitment covenant*.

CONDITIONAL COVENANT	UNCONDITIONAL COVENANT
Two-sided covenant	One-sided covenant
Entails human and divine commitment	Entails divine commitment alone
Conditions attached	No conditions attached

Blessing hinges on human merit	God blesses regardless of merit
Blessings are earned	Blessings are freely given

The Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the new covenant are three of the most important biblical covenants that God made with human beings. The Abrahamic and Davidic covenants have significance for Israel's future (especially the land and throne promises), but the spiritual blessings of the covenants extend to the Gentiles as well. The new covenant has both present and future applications for all believers, Jews and Gentiles. (More on this shortly.)

The Abrahamic Covenant

God's covenant with Abraham was unconditional (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18-21). According to Genesis 12, God made seven prophetic promises to Abraham (then named Abram) in this covenant:

1. *I will make you a great nation (12:2)*. From Abraham's perspective, this was an extraordinary promise. He and Sarai had not yet had a child. They were also old. It seemed unlikely that the Jewish nation would come from him and his wife. With God, however, all things are possible (Mark 10:27).
2. *I will bless you (12:2)*. God blessed Abraham with great wealth (13:2) and substantial material possessions (24:35). God favored Abraham (21:22).
3. *I will make your name great (12:2)*. God made Abraham famous and gave him an excellent reputation. Both the Old and New Testaments testify to this. Abraham was known as a "prince of God" (Genesis 23:6), "a friend of God" (James 2:23), and the founder of the Jewish nation (Genesis 15:1-6; Romans 4:1). Abraham is a well-known figure today among Jews, Christians, and others around the world.
4. *I will bless those who bless you (12:3)*. Abraham's relationship with God was so close that to bless him was to bless God. Friends of the Jewish people are considered to be friends of God and thus receive His blessing.
5. *I will curse those who curse you (12:3)*. Anti-Semites are ultimately hostile to God and will be punished accordingly.

6. *All peoples on earth will experience blessing through you (12:3).* This blessing was realized with the birth of Abraham's descendant, Jesus Christ, the Savior of humanity (Galatians 3:8, 16).
7. *I will give you and your descendants the land of Canaan (12:1; 15:18-21).* This is "the Promised Land" (Psalm 47:4).

These land promises to Israel will be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom, which will come after the second coming of Christ. This means that God's promise will be fulfilled thousands of years after He made it. Israel will one day possess the land, just as God foretold! God is faithful.

God later reaffirmed this covenant with Isaac, Abraham's son (17:21; 26:2-5), because it was so important to Israel's future. He also reaffirmed it with Jacob, the son of Isaac (28:10-17; 35:12-14). The Bible describes this covenant as an *everlasting* covenant (Genesis 17:7-8; 1 Chronicles 16:17; Psalm 105:7-11; Isaiah 24:5).

The Davidic Covenant

God's covenant with David was unconditional. God promised that a descendant of David would rule forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13; 22:51). This covenant contains three notable words: *throne*, *house*, and *kingdom*—words that point to a royal dynasty. This covenant is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who was born of the royal line of David (Matthew 1:1).

Christ will reign as Monarch from the throne of David in Jerusalem during the future 1,000-year millennial kingdom (Micah 4:15; Zephaniah 3:14-20; Zechariah 14:18-21). This reign will extend beyond the Jews to include the Gentile nations. Christ's authority will extend "from sea to sea...to the ends of the earth!" (Psalm 72:8). Daniel 7:14 states, "All peoples, nations, and languages" will serve Him.

CHRIST IN PROPHECY

Matthew's Genealogy

- > Matthew begins his Gospel by alluding to the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.
- > He opens with the words: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1).
- > Matthew thus emphasizes that Jesus came to fulfill the unconditional covenants God made with David and Abraham.

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

Mary and the Davidic Covenant

- > Mary, the mother of Jesus, quickly realized that her unborn child would fulfill the Davidic covenant.
- > The angel Gabriel appeared to her and said, “The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33).
- > Notice the three key words—*throne*, *house*, and *kingdom*. These are the three key words God used in His covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:16).

The New Covenant

The new covenant is a vital, unconditional covenant made by God. In it, God promised to provide for the forgiveness of sins solely through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Under the old covenant, worshipers did not receive complete forgiveness. Under the new covenant, Christ our High Priest has provided that complete forgiveness: “God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT).

When Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples in the Upper Room, He spoke of “the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you” (Luke 22:20 NLT). Our forgiveness was accomplished through the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

This covenant revolutionizes our relationship with God. Without these wonderful promises in the new covenant, neither you nor I would have any hope of an afterlife in paradise in the direct presence of God.

A LESSON TO LEARN

If there is one thing we have learned about God in this chapter, it's that He keeps His promises. So today, drive the stake into the ground. You should have unwavering faith that God will fulfill all that is promised in the prophetic Scriptures. Let there be no doubt in your mind (1 Kings 8:56).

This chapter demonstrates that one of God's promises is that Jesus will rule from the throne of David during the millennial kingdom. This will not happen until after the second coming of Christ. However, today Christ must also reign supreme upon the throne of our hearts. He must have complete control over all aspects of our lives (John 14:23-24).

Hold nothing back!

Refuse all compromise!

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION

How do we know the Abrahamic covenant was unconditional?

In ancient Judaism, parties to a conditional covenant would divide an animal into two halves and walk between the halves. This was a picture of how each party was held accountable for keeping their promises (Jeremiah 34:18-19). When God made His covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, only God walked between the two halves after Abraham was put to sleep (verses 12, 17). This visually illustrates that God's promises to Abraham in the covenant were unconditional and depended on God alone.

CROSS-REFERENCES

Jesus, the Messianic King

Authority over everything—Matthew 11:27

Bless the King—Luke 19:38

Complete authority—Matthew 28:18

David's throne established forever—2 Samuel 7:16

Everlasting kingdom—Daniel 2:44; 7:14; Luke 1:33

Father installs Son as King—Psalm 2:6

Government will rest on His shoulders—Isaiah 9:6

Jesus, King of kings—Revelation 19:16

Kingship—John 18:37

Magi worshiped the child King—Matthew 2:1-2, 11

Everlasting dominion—Daniel 7:13-14

Land Promises to Israel

Land promised to Abraham and his descendants—Genesis 11:31; 12:7

Parameters of land promises—Genesis 15:18-21

Promises passed to Isaac's line—Genesis 26:3-4

Promises passed to Jacob's line—Genesis 28:13-14

Promises reaffirmed—Psalm 105:8-11

Land permanently restored to Israel—Deuteronomy 30:5; Isaiah 11:11-12;

Jeremiah 23:3-8; Ezekiel 37:21-25; see also Isaiah 60:18, 21; Jeremiah 23:6; 24:5-6; 30:18; 31:31-34; 32:37-40; 33:6-9; Ezekiel 28:25-26; 34:11-12; 36:24-26; 37; 39:28; Hosea 3:4-5; Joel 2:18-29; Amos 9:14-15; Micah 2:12; 4:6-7; Zephaniah 3:19-20; Zechariah 8:7-8; 13:8-9

Essential Prophetic Passages You Need to Know

This chapter contains a concise summary of the major prophecies of the Bible. These summaries are introductory. I will discuss these passages in much greater detail throughout the rest of the book. But I wanted to include this chapter early in the book for two reasons:

1. It will familiarize you with the most important prophecy passages in the Bible.
2. It will give you the “big picture” of Bible prophecy before we delve into the finer details.

I recommend that you review this chapter periodically. Doing so will help you to increasingly think *biblically* about prophecy-related issues. The more that these passages are imprinted upon your mind, the stronger your confidence will be in your understanding of the prophetic future.

THE REBIRTH OF ISRAEL—EZEKIEL 37:1-6

The vision of the dry bones shows the Lord putting bones back together into a skeleton. It is then covered with muscles, tendons, and skin. God then breathes life into the body. This metaphorically refers to Israel becoming a nation again (see verse 11). This became a reality in 1948!

END-TIMES DOCTRINAL AND MORAL APOSTASY—1 TIMOTHY 4:1-2; 2 TIMOTHY 4:3-4

The apostle Paul lamented, “The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1-2). He warned, “The time is coming when

people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

THE RAPTURE—1 THESSALONIANS 1:10; 4:13-18; 5:9

First Thessalonians 1:10 affirms that Jesus “delivers us from the wrath to come,” which is the wrathful time of the tribulation. “Deliver” has the literal meaning of “snatch away.” The dead will be resurrected, and the living will experience an instant transformation into their glorified bodies. Both groups will be “snatched” from the earth to meet Christ in the air (4:13-18). After all, “God has not destined us for wrath” (5:9).

THE RAPTURE—REVELATION 3:10

Jesus promises in Revelation 3:10, “I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.” This means that Christ will keep us from the time of tribulation.

THE RAPTURE—1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58

“We shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (verse 51). The rapture will happen instantly. Believers who have died will be resurrected—“the dead will be raised imperishable” (verse 52). Believers still alive will be transformed into glorified bodies—“we shall be changed” (verse 52). Death will thus be defeated (verse 55).

THE RAPTURE—JOHN 14:1-3

Christ pledges to “take you to myself” (John 14:3). This is how He “delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:10) and “will keep you from the hour of trial” (Revelation 3:10). Christ will snatch us from the earth and transport us straight to heaven—the “Father’s house.”

THE EZEKIEL INVASION—EZEKIEL 38:1-6

The prophet Ezekiel said that in the end times, the Jews would be brought back to the land of Israel from “many nations” (Ezekiel 36-37). Sometime

after this, a powerful military leader named Gog would lead Russia and a group of Muslim nations—Iran, Sudan, Turkey, Libya, and other Islamic nations—in an overwhelming military attack on Israel (38:1-6). Their goal will be the complete annihilation of the Jews. God will turn the tables and destroy the invading army (39).

HISTORICAL INSIGHT

God Is the Protector of Israel

1. From Old Testament times to the prophetic future, God is the Protector of Israel.
2. He watches over Israel: “Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:4).
3. He promises the Jews that “no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed” (Isaiah 54:17).
4. He promised Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse” (Genesis 12:3).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION

Is “Gog” another term for the antichrist?

No, it is not. The antichrist will lead a revived Roman Empire (Daniel 2, 7), while Gog will lead an invading force comprising Russia and some Muslim nations (Ezekiel 38:1-6). God will destroy the invading force (Ezekiel 39), ending Gog’s brief time in the spotlight. However, the antichrist will remain in power throughout the seven-year tribulation period (Revelation 4–18).

THE EMERGENCE OF A REVIVED ROMAN EMPIRE—DANIEL 2; 7

We read about Nebuchadnezzar’s prophetic dream in Daniel 2. This passage depicts the end-times revived Roman Empire as a combination of iron and clay. Daniel, the great dream interpreter, understood this to mean that, just as iron is strong, so too would the Roman Empire of the end times be strong. However, just as iron and clay do not naturally mix, the end-times Roman Empire would have some internal divisions. Complete integration would be missing.

Daniel 7 reveals that this empire would comprise ten nations ruled by ten monarchs. Out of this ten-nation alliance, another monarch—the antichrist—will emerge. He will start small, but he will soon become strong enough to overthrow three of the existing monarchs. Eventually, he will acquire power and authority over the entire revived empire.

THE SEVENTIETH WEEK OF DANIEL (THE TRIBULATION PERIOD)—DANIEL 9:20-27

Daniel 9 shows that the prophetic calendar for Israel is divided into 70 groups of seven years. This totals 490 years. The first 69 seven-year periods (totaling 483 years) ended with the first coming of Jesus the Messiah (Daniel 9:25). The prophetic clock then stopped. There is a gap between these 483 years and the last seven years of the prophetic timeline for Israel. During this interval, several events were predicted to occur:

- The Messiah would be killed.
- Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed, which occurred in AD 70.
- From then on, the Jews would experience tribulation and distress (Daniel 9:26).

The final “week” of seven years for Israel will begin when the antichrist confirms a seven-year covenant with Israel (Daniel 9:27). The signing of this peace treaty will signal the beginning of the tribulation period.

CHRIST’S OLIVET DISCOURSE (THE TRIBULATION PERIOD)—MATTHEW 24–25

This discourse is known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus “sat on the Mount of Olives” when He delivered it (Matthew 24:3). The disciples had asked, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” The Olivet Discourse is Jesus’ answer to this question.

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus predicted the destruction of the Jewish temple (Matthew 24:1-2). He then addressed the signs of the end of the age—including the appearance of false christs, wars, earthquakes, famines, the abomination of desolation, cosmic upheavals (verses 4-28), and the sign of

His coming (verses 29-31). Jesus compared the end times to the days of Noah (verses 36-39) and urged His followers who are alive during the tribulation period to prepare for His return (verses 32-35, 45-51; see also 25:1-13, 14-30). Finally, He discussed the judgment of the nations that will occur after His return (verses 31-46).

RELIGIOUS NEW BABYLON DOMINATES THE WORLD—REVELATION 17

Religious New Babylon is portrayed as a “religious prostitute” that will influence the entire world during the first half of the tribulation period (verse 1). This idolatrous and apostate religion will exercise powerful political clout (verses 12-13). It will seem outwardly glorious while being inwardly corrupt (verse 4). It will persecute believers in Jesus around the world (verse 6).

THE RISE OF THE ANTICHRIST—REVELATION 13:1-4

The beast, known as the antichrist, emerges from “the sea.” The sea symbolizes the Gentile nations (Revelation 17:15). This suggests that the antichrist will be a Gentile.

The prefix *anti* can mean “instead of,” “against,” or “opposed to.” Therefore, the term *antichrist* can mean “instead of Christ,” “opposed to Christ,” or “against Christ.” Perhaps each of these nuances is appropriate for this diabolical leader.

THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS (THE ANTICHRIST)—2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12

The terms “man of lawlessness” (2 Thessalonians 2:3) and “lawless one” (verse 8) indicate that the antichrist will pay no heed to God’s laws and commandments. The antichrist “shall do as he wills” (Daniel 11:36), not as God wills.

THE ANTICHRIST—DANIEL 11:36-45

Instead of pursuing God’s will, the antichrist will be driven by his own desires. He will also do what Satan desires (2 Thessalonians 2:9). The

antichrist, energized by Satan, will seek worship by claiming to be God. He will say many things against the one true God.

THE BLASPHEMY OF THE ANTICHRIST—REVELATION 13:5-10

The antichrist will commit grievous blasphemy against the true and only God. He will relentlessly deify and exalt himself. He is truly “anti-Christ,” putting himself in Christ’s place. During the tribulation, he will wage war against God’s people and persecute them.

THE RISE OF THE FALSE PROPHET—REVELATION 13:11-14

A supreme false prophet will arise as the antichrist’s right-hand man and first lieutenant during the tribulation. The antichrist will be a military and political leader, while the false prophet will be a religious leader. He will promote the worship of the antichrist. Those who refuse to comply will be executed.

THE 144,000 JEWISH EVANGELISTS BEGIN MINISTRY EARLY IN THE TRIBULATION—REVELATION 7:1-8

God chose the Jews to be His witnesses. They were tasked with spreading God’s good news to all other nations (Isaiah 42:6; 43:10). The Jewish people were tasked with representing God to the Gentile nations of the world. They failed in this endeavor because they did not even recognize Jesus as the divine Messiah. Early in the tribulation, the 144,000 Jews who accept Jesus as the divine Messiah will begin their ministry, and they will finally fulfill this divine mandate.

THE TWO PROPHETIC WITNESSES BEGIN MINISTRY EARLY IN THE TRIBULATION—REVELATION 11:1-6

Early in the tribulation, God will raise up two mighty prophetic witnesses who will bear amazing testimony to the true God. The power of these witnesses is reminiscent of Elijah (1 Kings 17; Malachi 4:5) and Moses (Exodus 7–9). In Bible times, two witnesses were required to confirm a testimony (see Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; John 8:17; Hebrews 10:28).

THE FIRST SIX SEAL JUDGMENTS ARE UNLEASHED—REVELATION 6:1-17

Human suffering will steadily increase throughout the tribulation. Early in the tribulation period, the seal judgments will be the first set of judgments to be unleashed on the earth. These include carnage and war, famine, death, economic upheaval, a large (and catastrophic) earthquake, and cosmological disturbances.

THE SEVENTH SEAL JUDGMENT—REVELATION 8:1-6

Christ's opening of the seventh seal inaugurates a whole new series of judgments known as the trumpet judgments. When this seal is broken, heaven is silent for half an hour. The inhabitants of heaven get a sense of what is in store for everyone on earth.

THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPET JUDGMENTS—REVELATION 8:7-13

The seal judgments were terrible enough. The trumpet judgments are even worse. The first trumpet judgment brings blood-infused hail and fire upon the earth. One-third of the earth and trees, as well as all the grass, will be burned. In the second trumpet judgment, something like a flaming mountain is hurled into the sea, killing one-third of all marine life. One-third of the sea becomes blood. The third trumpet judgment results in a giant meteor or asteroid striking the earth, thereby rendering one-third of the world's water unfit for human consumption. The fourth trumpet judgment dramatically reduces the amount of sunlight reaching the earth.

THE FIFTH AND SIXTH TRUMPET JUDGMENTS—REVELATION 9

The fifth trumpet judgment releases demons from the bottomless pit. They inflict excruciating pain on human victims for five months. The sixth trumpet judgment sees the destruction of one-third of humanity by four fallen angels.

THE GREAT MULTITUDE OF BELIEVERS—REVELATION 7:9-17

The tribulation period will see many people become believers in Jesus. Upon witnessing the miraculous departure of millions of Christians from the earth at the rapture, many people will undoubtedly become convinced of the

truth of Christianity. (Bibles and Christian literature will be left behind to explain the event.) Numerous conversions will also come through the ministry of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists described in Revelation 7 and 14. Add to this the miraculous ministry of the two witnesses of Revelation 11—prophets whose powers are comparable to those of Moses and Elijah—and it is understandable why “a great multitude that no one could number” will become believers during the tribulation period (Revelation 7:9-17).

THE MESSAGE OF THE LITTLE SCROLL—REVELATION 10

John was told to take the scroll from an angel and “eat” it. The symbolism is profound. John described the scroll as tasting like honey when he ate it. This symbolizes how John found great joy and pleasure in God’s Word because it was rich in God’s glorious promises. After John ate the scroll, his stomach quickly soured. This symbolizes how sickening it is for unbelievers to understand the doom and gloom that the prophetic Scriptures proclaim for those who reject God.

THE DEATH, RESURRECTION, AND ASCENSION OF THE TWO WITNESSES—REVELATION 11:7-14

At the midpoint of the tribulation period, the antichrist will execute the two prophetic witnesses. The inhabitants of the world will celebrate this in Christmas-like fashion by exchanging gifts (Revelation 11:10). After lying dead in the streets for three-and-a-half days, the prophets are resurrected by God. As the lifeless corpses suddenly rise in full view of live television and internet feeds, the Christmas-like celebrations quickly give way to global terror. The resurrection and ascension of the two witnesses will serve as a resounding exclamation point to their prophecies throughout their three-and-a-half-year ministry.

THE FALL OF RELIGIOUS NEW BABYLON—REVELATION 17

At the midpoint of the tribulation period, the antichrist and the ten kings under his authority will destroy the false world religion, the idolatrous “prostitute” of the end times. The false religious system that flourished during the first half of the tribulation period will be obliterated because the antichrist will now be on the religious center stage. The final global religion will consist solely of worship of the antichrist. No competing religious system will be tolerated.

THE RISE OF COMMERCIAL NEW BABYLON—REVELATION 18

New Babylon will now transition from a religious center to a commercial center. World leaders will be instrumental in making commercial New Babylon a worldwide powerhouse, motivated by the wealth it brings them. New Babylon will also enjoy widespread support from international business leaders because of its unparalleled potential for financial success. Anyone associated with the business of New Babylon will live in luxury. The antichrist, a business wizard influenced by Satan, will rule over the bustling commercial metropolis of New Babylon.

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR IN HEAVEN—REVELATION 12

Still at the midpoint of the tribulation period, war now breaks out in heaven between God's holy angels and the evil angels. Satan and his fallen angels are no match for the angelic legions of God, led by the archangel Michael. Satan once had access to heaven, as described in the book of Job. But that access ends abruptly at this point. Satan is enraged and will now unleash his unrestrained wrath on earth's inhabitants through the antichrist.

THE MARK OF THE BEAST—REVELATION 13:15-18

The false prophet will attempt to force people worldwide to worship the antichrist, the man of sin. He will force them to receive the mark of the beast. Without this mark, no one can buy or sell (Revelation 13:16-17). This "squeeze play" effectively means that people will either worship the antichrist or starve.

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET JUDGMENT—REVELATION 11:15-19

Things continue to unravel during the second half of the tribulation period, going from bad to worst. The seventh trumpet inaugurates the seven bowl judgments toward the end of the tribulation period.

THE BOWL JUDGMENTS—REVELATION 16:1-21

The third and final set of God's judgments is now unleashed upon the world. These are God's final judgments on earth's inhabitants. These judgments include horribly painful sores on humans, more bodies of water turning to blood, the death of all sea creatures, people being scorched by the sun,

rivers drying up, total darkness descending upon the land, a catastrophic earthquake, and widespread destruction, among other things (Revelation 16). Such is God's judgment on a world that rejects Christ.

THE FALL OF COMMERCIAL BABYLON—REVELATION 18:1-24

God will cause a military force to attack the headquarters of the antichrist in Babylon. Just as God used the Babylonians to punish Israel in the Old Testament, He now uses a northern alliance to punish Babylon. God shows no mercy to Babylon, just as Babylon showed no mercy in its oppression of Israel. However, the antichrist will not be in the city when the attack occurs. He will be with his armies preparing for his own attack against Jerusalem.

THE CAMPAIGN OF ARMAGEDDON—REVELATION 19:17-21

The campaign of Armageddon begins with the assembling of the antichrist's allies who are bent on eradicating the Jews (Psalm 2:1-6; Joel 3:9-11; Revelation 16:12-16). Jerusalem will be attacked and ravaged (Micah 4:11-5:1; Zechariah 12-14). The forces of the antichrist then move against the Jewish remnant in the wilderness (Jeremiah 49:13-14). The remnant has no hope of survival. But then a wonderful thing happens. These Jews finally believe in Jesus as the Messiah and cry out to Him for deliverance. Christ responds immediately. From Bozrah to Jerusalem, all the antichrist's forces will be decimated at the second coming of Christ (Joel 3:12-13; Zechariah 14:12-15; Revelation 14:19-20). The believing remnant will then be invited into Christ's millennial kingdom.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST—REVELATION 19:11-16

Christ will return as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (verse 16), and "on his head are many diadems" (verse 12). "From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations" (verse 15)—He will essentially tell the invaders to "drop dead," and the forces of the antichrist will be decimated.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS—MATTHEW 25:31-46

Believers and unbelievers from among the Gentile nations are depicted as sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46). They will be judged based on how

they treated Christ's "brothers" (the 144,000 Jewish witnesses) during the tribulation period. Those found to be believers (the sheep) will be invited into Christ's millennial kingdom. The goats (unbelievers) go on into punishment.

CHRIST'S MILLENNIAL KINGDOM—REVELATION 20:1-6

The devil will be chained in the bottomless pit just before Christ's millennial kingdom begins. This quarantine will effectively remove a powerful destructive and deceptive force from all areas of human life and thought.

The millennial kingdom of Christ will be magnificent. During this time, righteousness will blossom and flourish (Isaiah 11:3-5), peace will spread throughout the world (2:4), and the earth's productivity and fruitfulness will skyrocket (35:1-2).

SATAN'S FINAL REBELLION—REVELATION 20:7-10

Satan will be released from the bottomless pit at the end of Christ's 1,000-year kingdom. He will have one last chance to deceive the nations. God's purpose appears to be to demonstrate once and for all that every human being is desperately evil. Even in the most favorable environment (Christ's kingdom), the fallen human nature is relentlessly inclined toward sin.

The final defeat of Satan will see him thrown into the lake of fire. The anti-christ and the false prophet have already been there, suffering for 1,000 years.

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT—REVELATION 20:11-15

The wicked of all ages will face Christ at the great white throne judgment. They will be resurrected to take part in this judgment (John 5:28-29). Warren Wiersbe explains, "There will be a Judge but no jury, a prosecution but no defense, a sentence but no appeal. No one will be able to defend himself or accuse God of unrighteousness."¹

THE NEW JERUSALEM AND THE ETERNAL STATE—REVELATION 21-22

You will notice that the Bible begins with paradise, but it is soon lost. The Bible ends with paradise being restored. Fire will destroy the present earth and heavens to make way for the new heavens and earth. Following the cleansing

of the present universe, God will construct a new heavens and earth. The remnants of the curse and Satan's extended presence will be completely removed. There will be no more curse, no more bad germs, and no more sickness. No more sorrow, tears, or death. A glorified humanity will inhabit a glorified, re-created earth.

The remaining chapters of this book will provide an in-depth examination of each of these topics.