

10 Reasons to Preach Prophecy

by Dr. Mark Hitchcock

Many pastors and teachers today avoid preaching end time prophecy. There are undoubtedly many reasons for this. There are many different views about the end times, so some fear that it might be divisive. Others may feel that it's too negative. Or too complicated. Or not relevant to everyday life. Let me give you 10 key reasons why I believe Bible prophecy should be part of the regular diet of God's sheep.

1. Prophecy is a major part of divine revelation.

Many people are surprised to learn that 28% of the Bible was prophecy at the time it was given. This means that believers have to understand something about prophecy to understand the message of the Bible. There's a story about a preacher from back East whose parishioners said he was the best they had ever seen at taking the Bible apart, but problem was, he couldn't get it back together. Sadly, this describes far too many Christians. Many Christians read their Bible faithfully and pray but really have no idea what they're reading, because they lack an overall grid or framework for evaluating the pieces and putting them in the proper place.

Understanding God's prophetic program for this world gives a person the best overall framework possible for understanding the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. As Randall Price observes, "To be a student of the prophetic Scriptures is to be a student of the Scriptures in their entirety" (Randall Price, *Jerusalem in Prophecy: God's Stage for the Final Drama*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998, p. 55).

2. Special blessing is promised on those who study prophecy and pay attention to what it says.

Revelation is the final book of the Bible and records the consummation of God's program for man and the world. When people think of Bible prophecy, the first book they think of, and maybe the only one, is Revelation. In Revelation 1:3, the

Lord promises a special blessing on those who study Bible prophecy. "God blesses the one who reads this prophecy to the church, and he blesses all who listen to it and obey what it says." This is the only book in the Bible that contains this specific, unique promise.

3. Jesus Christ is the subject of prophecy.

Theologians have frequently noted that Jesus is the center of theology, because all of the great purposes of God depend on His person and work. What is true of theology in general is especially true of eschatology or Bible prophecy. Revelation 19:10 says, "For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness to Jesus." The truth of this verse is certainly borne out in Scripture. Prophecy is all about Christ.

Bible prophecy finds its beginning and end in the person and work of the Savior. The very first prophecy in the Bible in Genesis 3:15 is about the coming of the Deliverer who will crush the head of the serpent. Enoch's ancient prophecy recorded in Jude 14-15 prophesied the flood judgment but also previews the Second Coming of Christ. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is filled with prophecies that ultimately point in some way to the Savior. Studying Bible prophecy is vital because its very essence is to give witness to Jesus.

4. Prophecy gives us a proper perspective in life.

Bible prophecy is important because it tells us the end of the story. It tells us where we're going. It reveals that just as our world had a definite beginning in Genesis 1:1, it will also have an ending. This world will not continue on forever through infinite cycles of history. History is not an endless recurrence of reincarnations, karma, birth, life and death. Bible prophecy reveals to us that there is an end. It reveals to us that there is a purpose and goal for this world, creation, man, and the events of everyday life. Knowing this truth gives us meaning, perspective and purpose and helps us not to be cynical about life. Bible prophecy is the vehicle God has given us to reveal the grand consummation of history and to provide a terminus or goal for our thinking about life and its ultimate meaning and purpose.

5. Prophecy can and should be used as a tool for evangelism.

As I have listened to the testimonies of hundreds of people through the years, I am amazed how many people first began to think about their relationship with God as a result of Bible prophecy. This shouldn't surprise us, because Bible prophecy holds a unique place of fascination even for unbelievers. Everyone wonders what is going to happen to this world. There's no doubt that people are fascinated with the future. Psychic hotlines, tabloid newspapers and astrologers make a living preying upon man's innate interest in the future. Like Dwight Eisenhower once said, "I'm interested in the future, because that's where I'm going to spend the remainder of my life." All people have the same basic questions about the future. What's going to happen to the world? Are these the last days of the world as we know it? Is Jesus really coming back? Will the human race survive in the future? Is there life after death? Are heaven and hell real? The Bible answers all of these ultimate questions about the future, and we can and should use this natural fascination with the future as a bridge to share the gospel with the lost.

6. Prophecy can help insulate people from heresy.

Think of all the false teachers who have gained a following by appealing to Bible prophecy. William Miller was a date setter who gained a large following by predicting that Jesus was coming back in 1843. He then revised the date to 1844 when Christ didn't come. Since Miller's day there have been hundreds of date-setters who have led throngs of people to sell their belongings and wait for Jesus on some mountaintop in their pajamas.

The Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons often appeal to Bible prophecies of the future to gain a listening ear. David Koresh sucked people into his outlandish brand of the Adventist movement primarily by his teachings on the last days. His tirades on the end of the world, Armageddon and the judgment of God held his followers spellbound. The Heaven's Gate cult attracted its following through its bizarre views on the last days, alien life and heaven. A proper view of Bible prophecy and the last days insulates God's people from all kinds of harmful, heretical teachings, from date setting to Heaven's Gate.

7. Prophecy helps us understand our world today.

The rapidly increasing tempo of change in modern life has given the entire world a sense of impending crisis. Our world today faces convulsions and changes that threaten our very existence: constant turmoil in the Middle East, an escalating oil crisis, economic uncertainty, radical jihadists, nuclear proliferation, global warming, and the potential of catastrophic, global plagues. Modern man is asking questions about the future as never before. They are solemn questions; they are searching questions. The Bible is certainly the best place to look for answers. Even the most skeptical person can put these prophecies to the test by noting the literal, precise fulfillment of past prophecies.

For this reason, biblical prophecy is being discussed more than ever before. In these prophecies it is possible to probe for clues to find where we are in God's program and the predicted events that may occur in our lifetime. Prophecies, which in the past were sometimes brushed aside as incredible, are now being studied again.

The study of prophecy, however, has been plagued by two extremes. The one extreme is to disregard prophecy or to interpret it in a nonliteral sense. About half of the prophecies in the Bible have been fulfilled. Studying these passages clearly shows that when prophecy in the Bible was fulfilled, it was fulfilled literally. The demonstrated pattern of fulfillment to date contradicts the skeptics' theories that prophecy should be considered metaphor.

Another extreme, however, is to take prophecies out of context and interpret them to fit every headline. This is often called "newspaper exegesis." One prophecy isolated and out of context should not be used to interpret headlines or set dates for future events. The careful student of prophecy attempts to put all unfulfilled prophecies together into a chronology of events that is true to their literal meaning. Careful interpretation of prophecy reveals a chronology of events the Bible predicts will set the stage for the final act of world history. As students of the Bible observe proper interpretation principles, they are becoming increasingly aware of a remarkable correspondence between the obvious trend of world events and what the Bible predicted centuries ago.

8. Prophecy reveals the sovereignty of God over time and history.

In order to accurately predict the future one must be omniscient (know everything) omnipresent (be present everywhere) and omnipotent (possess all power). The true prognosticator must know all things, must be present at all times and places and must have all power to make sure the prediction is fulfilled. The God of the Bible issues a challenge to any would-be rivals to His place of supremacy in the universe. The basis of the challenge is that only the True God can accurately predict the future. Read what God says about His ability to disclose the future.

Isaiah 41:21-24 'Can your idols make such claims as these? Let them come and show what they can do!' says the Lord, the King of Israel. Let them try to tell us what happened long ago or what the future holds. Yes, that's it! If you are gods, tell what will occur in the days ahead.

Isaiah 42:9 Everything I prophesied has come true, and now I will prophesy again. I will tell you the future before it happens. (see also Isaiah 44:6-8; Isaiah 46:8-11; Daniel 2:20-22)

Bible prophecy proves beyond any shadow of a doubt that God is the true God who alone rules over time and history! He not only rules the ages, but He is also in total control over the events of the life of every person. What a comfort and encouragement it is to know that God is in control!

9. Prophecy proves the truth of God's Word.

Just as Bible prophecy establishes that God is the True God, it also proves that God's Word is the True Word. An old Chinese proverb says, "It is very difficult to prophesy, especially about the future." That's why Bible prophecy is absolute proof of the truth and veracity of God's Word. The hundreds of prophecies that have come to pass exactly as the Bible has said, prove that the Bible is the inspired Word of the Sovereign Lord.

10. Prophecy is given to change the way we live today.

Every key passage on the coming of Christ contains a practical application closely associated with it. Prophecy was not given just to stir our imagination or

capture our attention. Prophecy is intended by God to change our attitudes and actions to be more in line with His Word and His character. There are at least four practical, life-changing effects or influences that understanding Bible prophecy is to have on our hearts.

- Prophecy Effect #1: Bible Prophecy Has a Cleansing Influence on Sinning Hearts

The Word of God is clear that a proper understanding of Bible prophecy should produce a life of holiness and purity. "Yes, dear friends, we are already God's children, and we can't even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that when he comes we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. And all who believe this will keep themselves pure, just as Christ is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). Focusing the mind and heart on prophecy, especially Christ's coming, is a fail-safe formula for maintaining personal purity. Note the certainty: "And all who believe this will keep themselves pure." Here is a perfect prescription for living a life of holiness focusing on the coming of Christ. However, this coming must be a reality to us. It is one thing for us to hold right doctrine about Christ's coming. It is another thing for the doctrine to hold us!

In 1988 a book was published entitled 88 Reasons Why Christ Will Return in 1988. In the book the author stated that he had conclusive proof that Christ would rapture the Church to heaven in early October, 1988. A friend of mine who was a pastor in eastern Oklahoma called me in the summer of 1988 to ask me some questions about the book. In our conversation he told me that the book had caused quite a furor among many people in his church and other churches in the area. Of course, the Bible clearly declares that date-setting concerning the coming of Christ is futile and foolish (Matthew 24:36; Luke 21:8). However, this erroneous book caused many people to re-examine their lives just in case the book was right.

Obviously, the book was totally incorrect, but the point is that when people began to consider the fact that Christ might return soon, it transformed their lives. The Bible declares that we are to always be looking for Christ's coming, not just when someone sets an arbitrary date. "We should live in this evil world with self-control, right conduct, and devotion to God, while we look forward to that wonderful event when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be

revealed" (Titus 2:12b-13). Prophecy and purity are mentioned together in Romans 13:11-14. The practical, cleansing effect of prophecy is also presented in 2 Peter 3:10-14. When anyone says that studying Bible prophecy is not practical, they reveal that they don't understand what the Bible says about the personal impact of prophecy. In an immoral, sinful society like ours, what could be more practical than personal purity?

- Prophecy Effect #2: Bible Prophecy Has a Calming Influence on Stirring Hearts

Another practical effect of Bible prophecy is that it has a calming influence on us when our hearts are troubled and stirred up. In John 14:1-3 Jesus said, "Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's home, and I am going to prepare a place for you. If this were not so, I would tell you plainly. When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know where I am going and how to get there."

The word "troubled" means "to be stirred up, disturbed, unsettled or thrown into confusion." There are many things in our world today to disturb and unsettle us: the moral decay in our society, crime, economic uncertainty, terrorism, racial unrest, etc. Added to these problems are the personal trials and difficulties we all face in our daily lives. Trouble is the common denominator of all mankind. Often these troubles and difficulties can leave us distraught, distracted and disturbed. One of the great comforts in times like these is to remember that our Lord will someday return to take us to be with Himself.

In John 14:1-3, three main points are emphasized to calm our troubled hearts a person, a place and a promise. The person is our Lord, the place is the heavenly city (New Jerusalem) and the promise is that He will come again to take us to be with Him forever.

- Prophecy Effect #3: Bible Prophecy Has a Comforting Influence on Sorrowing Hearts

Every person who is reading these words either has faced or will face the grief of losing a close friend or loved one in death. When death strikes, pious platitudes do little to bring lasting comfort to friends and family. The only real, lasting

comfort when death takes someone we love is the hope that we will see them again in heaven. God's Word tells us with certainty that we are not to sorrow as people who have no hope, because we will be reunited with our saved loved ones and friends at the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The truth of the rapture should transform the way we view death. God has promised that death has lost its sting, that it will ultimately be abolished and that life will reign. We are to find deep solace, hope and comfort for our sorrowing hearts in the truth of God's Word about the future for His children.

- Prophecy Effect #4: Bible Prophecy Has a Controlling Influence on Serving Hearts

In 1 Corinthians 15:58, after presenting the truth of the coming of Christ for his people, Paul concludes with a strong admonition. "So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and steady, always enthusiastic about the Lord's work, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless." Paul is saying, since you know that Christ will someday come to receive you to Himself, let nothing move you; be strong and steady in your Christian service. So many today are unstable and unsettled in Christian work. They are constantly vacillating.

Knowing about Christ's coming and future events should cure the problem of instability and inconsistency in Christian labor. Realizing that Christ could return at any time is to make us enthusiastic, energetic and excited about serving the Lord.

The principle in the Bible is clear: waiters are workers. When Christ comes we are to "be dressed for service and well-prepared" (Luke 12:35). If the events of Bible prophecy are a reality to us, they will motivate us to work faithfully for our Lord. The Lord intends for our knowledge of Bible prophecy to translate into devoted service for those around us as we await His return.

The Welcoming Committee

Warren Wiersbe tells a story of when he was a young man preaching on the last days with all the events of prophecy clearly laid out and perfectly planned. At the end of the service an older gentleman came up to him and whispered in his ear,

"I used to have the Lord's return planned out to the last detail, but years ago I moved from the planning committee to the welcoming committee."

Certainly we want to study Bible prophecy and know about God's plan for the future. And as I've said, I do believe we should observe discernible signs of the times, but **we must be careful not to get too caught up in the planning and forget the welcoming.** Are you on the welcoming committee for the Lord's return? Are you living each day to please the Master?