

Why Study Bible Prophecy?

A film crew was on location deep in the desert. One day an Old Indian went up to the director and said, "Tomorrow rain."

The next day it rained. A week later, the Indian went up to the director and said, "Tomorrow storm." The next day there was a hailstorm. "This man is incredible," said the director. He told his secretary to hire the Indian to predict the weather. However, after several successful predictions, the old Indian didn't show up for two weeks.

Finally the director sent for him. "I have to shoot a big scene tomorrow," said the director, "and I'm depending on you. What will the weather be like?"

The Indian shrugged his shoulders. "Don't know," he said. "Radio is broken."

This morning we begin a series on Biblical Prophecy titled "Bible Prophecy: Back to the Future". Many Christians steer clear of prophecy because of some of the goofy things that have been claimed about bible prophecy. I have in my files a booklet that caused quite a stir in my home church when I was in high school. The title of the booklet is *88 Reasons Why The Rapture Is In 1988*. The *Rapture* refers to a future event prophesied in the New Testament when Jesus will gather all Christians, dead and alive, and take them to heaven to be with Him. Well, 1988 has come and gone and no rapture (at least I hope not).

I remember a man who got really upset and stopped shopping at my parents' Bible bookstore because they replaced their mechanical cash register with an electronic cash register with a digital display. He was absolutely convinced that the digital cash register was part of the mark of the beast.

If you've ever studied Bible prophecy you know that within the church there are all kinds of interpretations of prophecy. There are premillenarians, amillenarians and postmillenarians. There are pretribbers, midtribbers and posttribbers. Because of all the different views and the debates, some Christians are turned off by Bible prophecy and would rather stay away from it.

It's things like these, the goofiness and controversy, that have made some Christians leery about studying biblical prophecy. Other Christian brothers and sisters have come to think that Bible prophecy is not important and pretty much ignore it altogether.

But I don't think that's a good way to go for several reasons.

Jesus chided His disciples for not knowing and understanding the prophecies concerning His first coming. Jesus' disciples had some knowledge of the prophecies concerning the Messiah contained in what we call the Old Testament. Jesus' disciples believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark and Luke make it very clear that the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus took His disciples by surprise. They had a skewed understanding of the prophecies concerning the Messiah. Jesus' disciples expected Jesus to overthrow their enemies and establish His kingdom on earth. They were familiar with the prophecies that revealed the Messiah as conquering king, but they didn't understand the passages that

revealed that the Messiah would come twice: the first time to suffer for the sins of mankind and the second time to establish His kingdom on earth.

It was on the day of His resurrection that Jesus chided His disciples for not understanding that it was prophesied that Messiah would die and rise again. Resurrection day should have been a day of great joy and celebration amongst His disciples, but instead it was a day of confusion and sadness. Turn with me to Luke 24:13 to get a sense of the disciples' despair.

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

These two men were disciples of Jesus, but they were not from the inner twelve disciples. As they walked they were discussing all the things that had happened to Jesus in the previous three days including His arrest, torture, crucifixion and burial. And most confusing of all, they were discussing the report they had received just that morning that Jesus' body was missing from the tomb in which He had been buried!

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

So as these two men are walking to Emmaus, they are joined by a third man. Now we understand from Matthew that the third man was Jesus, but for some reason the two disciples were kept from recognizing Jesus. And here is a bit of the conversation that followed.

And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

Luke 24:13-18

As the three of them continued to walk, the two disciples explained to "the stranger" how Jesus had been arrested and crucified though they were hoping He was the one to redeem Israel. They concluded their report with the news that Jesus' tomb was empty. Here is Jesus' reply to these two men:

And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Luke 24:25-27

There on the road to Emmaus, Jesus reproaches His disciples for not knowing all that the Prophets spoke – including the prophecies concerning His suffering and death. The fact that the disciples were so distraught by Jesus' arrest and execution shows that they were really in a state of unbelief. Wouldn't you have loved to be on that walk as Jesus began with the first five books of the Bible which are called "Moses" and worked His way clear through the Old Testament showing all the prophecies about His first coming and especially the prophecies about His death and resurrection?

Finally, the identity of Jesus was revealed to these two men and immediately they walked back to Jerusalem to report to the main body of disciples that they had been with the resurrected Jesus. Look with me at Luke 24:36 as we pick up the action:

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.

Peter, James, John and the other disciples really struggled to understand and believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Even with Jesus standing right in front of them, their initial assessment was that they were seeing a spirit, not a man resurrected from the dead. Jesus asked for something to eat and they gave Him some fish and He ate it proving to them that He was a physical being and not a spirit.

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

"Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead..."

Luke 24:44,46

Because the disciples did not know and understand the prophecies about Jesus' death and resurrection, they were distraught and doubting Jesus on the day of His great triumph over sin and death! The events that should have deepened their faith almost destroyed their faith because of lack of knowledge of biblical prophecy.

When we study and understand Bible prophecy our faith is strengthened as we see prophecy fulfilled. By studying Bible prophecy we come to understand the Great Drama of which we are a part. And with this understanding we better grasp our responsibilities as followers of Jesus. In fact the wise person prioritizes their entire life in light of bible prophecy.

Let me say that again: the wise person prioritizes his or her life in light of bible prophecy. The foolish person lives their life without thinking about bible prophecy.

Jesus taught His disciples to live every day in light of prophecy. Turn with me to Matthew 24:42. The context of these verses is what we call the Olivet Discourse because Jesus delivered this teaching while He and His disciples were sitting on the Mt. of Olives looking west at the spectacular Temple on the Temple Mount of Jerusalem.

At the beginning of the chapter Jesus' disciples asked Him three questions: what will be the sign of the Temple's destruction, what will be the sign of Jesus' second coming and what will be the sign of the close of the age. In answering these three questions, Jesus teaches His disciples to live every day in light of the fulfillment of these future events. Look with me at Matthew 24:42

Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

Matthew 24:42-47

Again, in Matthew 25 beginning with verse 14 Jesus taught the disciples to live every day in light of prophecy.

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“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Matthew 25:14-30

What is Jesus teaching His disciples in this parable? Please keep in mind that in most parables Jesus is teaching one main idea. This is not a parable about who goes to heaven and who goes to hell. This parable is directed at Jesus’ disciples in light of the prophecies He has made concerning His second coming and the end of the age.

Jesus is teaching us that in between His first and second coming, we are to take the spiritual and physical resources He has entrusted to us and use them to expand His kingdom and when He returns He will reward those who were faithful and He will rebuke those who were unfaithful.

Your experience in the Messianic Kingdom is directly related to your knowing and living your daily life in light of biblical prophecy.

Put another way, bible prophecy should organize and prioritize how you use your time, your energy and your resources in this life. Your future depends on it.

As you can see understanding bible prophecy is not just about things in the future, but understanding prophecy is very relevant for our daily lives. Knowing prophecy gives us peace and hope in the midst of this life's trials.

Jesus comforted His disciples through prophecy. Turn with me to John 14. The context of this passage is the night on which Jesus was crucified. Jesus spent this evening celebrating the Passover with His disciples and preparing them for what was going to happen later in the evening and the next day when He was arrested, tried and crucified. As I already mentioned, Jesus' disciples were distraught by Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. As we read John 14 we discover that Jesus comforted His disciples through prophecy!

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

John 14:1-3

Here is the promise of the Rapture. The disciples were struggling with what Jesus was revealing about His arrest, death and resurrection and being separated from Jesus. Jesus comforts them with the promise that He will come again and take them to be with Him in heaven.

How did the Apostle Paul comfort and encourage Christians who were grieving the deaths of family members and friends in their church in Thessalonica? He comforted with prophecy!

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Prophecy is the foundation of our hope and peace in this world. No matter what happens to us here in this life, we have the hope and assurance of the resurrection and rapture to be with Jesus forever.

There are other great reasons for studying prophecy including our confidence that the Bible is indeed God's inspired Word because of fulfilled prophecy and also that fulfilled prophecy gives us greater confidence in sharing Christ with unbelievers.

But I hope I have persuaded you that studying and understanding bible prophecy is of great value and importance for our lives here and now and our lives beyond the grave.

Jesus chided His disciples for not knowing and understanding the prophecies concerning His first coming.

How much more should we know and understand the prophecies not only of His first coming, but of His second coming?

Jesus taught His disciples to live every day in light of prophecy.

Our reward and responsibility in Christ's Kingdom is directly related to how we organize and live our lives today in light of prophecy.

Jesus comforted His disciples through prophecy.

Our peace and hope in the midst of life's trials is directly related to the fulfillment of promises Jesus has made to us about what is going to happen in the future.

For these reasons I hope you will be excited to come with me on a study of biblical prophecy. Before we look to the future, we're going to look to the past and first study the prophecies of Messiah's first coming. After we have laid that foundation we'll turn our sights to the prophecies of His second coming.