



Understanding Bible prophecy and God's eternal plan for our lives. In part one, Evans points to the Bible's trustworthy accounts of fulfilled prophecy—we can draw comfort from God's good plan. In part two, Evans explores the end times, including prophecies of the rapture, Antichrist, and Christ's second coming.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PROPHECY

When you go to a movie theater, the first twenty minutes will be spent viewing previews of upcoming attractions. These include the hot clips of what's to come. At the end of each preview, you will often see the month or the year that the new show will air. Sometimes, though, you will only see "coming soon."

Studying prophecy can be a lot like previews of upcoming attractions. We aren't given the whole show, but we do get glimpses into the highlights. Sometimes prophecy gives an exact date, like in the case of Daniel's dream interpretation, but most of the time it just says, "Coming soon." One thing that is always consistent is that prophecy involves the study of the future. It lifts our thoughts from the midst of the ticking clock of time and allows us to peek into the future.

Tomorrow is as real to God as today or yesterday because God is an eternal Being. God is not bound by time like we are. In fact, time designations have no meaning to Him. That's why God identified Himself to Moses as the great "I AM" (Ex. 3:14). He is forever in the present tense, the now.

But because the eternal God has chosen to unfurl His plan for creation in time, prophecy—the study of future things—is very important.

Most of us have a natural desire to know the future, to try to find out what tomorrow will bring. That’s why so many people turn to psychics or horoscopes. The people who sell you supposed knowledge of the future are preying on people’s desire to put together the jigsaw puzzle of life, whether it’s the collective history of a nation or an individual life. People want to know how things are going to unfold.

I don’t know about anyone else, but if I want to know something about what the future holds, I want to get my information from a reliable source. I don’t want to stake my life on what some horoscope might say.

The main problem with these so-called psychic “prophets” of the future is that they are *false* prophets. They are feeding people lies because they don’t truly know about the future, either on an individual or cosmic level. They are guessing. Even worse, sometimes they are demonically inspired. Bible prophecy is not designed to satisfy our curiosity about tomorrow or the next day, nor is it designed to fill our heads with information so we can get together and debate the details of God’s plan. Gaining information has its place in the study of prophecy. It’s important that we understand as fully as we can what God is saying to us. But at the heart of God’s purpose for prophecy is changing our hearts and affecting the way we live our lives.

As we start our study of the wonderful and complex revelation of God concerning prophecy, I want to help you see how important prophecy is. The last chapter of the Bible says:

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. (Rev. 22:18–19)

Prophecy is very serious business with God. Mess with His prophetic Word, and it will mess you up as well. God's prophetic message is so important that He announced a curse on anyone who tampers with it.

Let me say right up front that I know everybody does not agree on every interpretation of God's prophetic program. There are various views within the Christian community about exactly when Jesus will come back and the shape His kingdom will take. But these varieties of interpretations, if they remain within the sphere of orthodoxy, do not have to hamper us from gaining a broad understanding of what God has in store for His people.

So let's get started on this fascinating, awe-inspiring subject by considering the importance of prophecy. In this chapter, I want to answer the questions:

What makes this study significant to your life right now, where you are? and,

Why should you and I be vitally concerned about God's prophetic agenda?

PROPHECY HELPS AUTHENTICATE THE BIBLE

People often ask how we Christians can claim that the Bible is true as opposed to any other holy book. What makes the Bible distinct from other writings that claim to be from God?

The Bible's Prophetic Accuracy

There are many answers to that question, but one thing that sets the Bible apart is its prophetic accuracy. A large portion of biblical prophecy has already been fulfilled with flawless exactness. Events that one author wrote about were fulfilled precisely hundreds of years later.

One of the classic examples is the prophecy of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem by the prophet Micah more than seven hundred years

before the event (Mic. 5:2; cf. Matt. 2:1–6). If Bethlehem had been a major metropolis in Israel, someone could argue it was a good guess. But Micah pinpointed an obscure village because he spoke the mind of God. The fulfillment of prophecies like this helps to validate the truth of the Bible.

Of course, Micah’s prophecy is just one of several hundred biblical prophecies that were fulfilled in Christ’s first coming alone. This validation of the Bible by prophecy is a strong argument to believe the many prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled.

The Divine Origin of Prophecy

In 2 Peter 1:20–21, the apostle wrote, “Know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” The accuracy of the Bible’s predictions should not surprise us, because this was not human writers doing guesswork. Prophetic Scripture is accurate in all of its details because God moved the authors to record what was said.

Someone who was good with numbers and probabilities figured out that it would require 100 billion earths populated with 8 billion people each to come up with one person who could achieve 100 prophecies accurately without any errors in sequence. In other words, it would be impossible. But the Bible contains hundreds of prophecies that have already come true. That’s because it’s not based on chance, but on the eternal knowledge of God.

PROPHECY REVEALS GOD’S CHARACTER

The second reason prophecy is important is that it reveals to us the character of God. When you understand God’s program, you get to know more about Him.

In Isaiah 46, the prophet made a powerful statement about God's character and knowledge as it relates to His prophetic program:

Remember this, and be assured;
Recall it to mind, you transgressors.
Remember the former things long past,
for I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is no one like Me,
Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things which have not been done,
Saying, 'My purpose will be established,
And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; . . .
I have planned it, surely I will do it. (vv. 8–10, 11c)

Whatever God plans, He accomplishes. No part of His will can ever be outwitted or thwarted by the mind of man. God was not caught off guard by human sin, because His plan for this universe was drawn up and nailed down in eternity past. But this raises a question for a lot of people. If God planned everything and nothing can change His plan, why should we do anything? Why not just sit back and take it easy, because what's going to happen is going to happen anyway?

The answer is that God's sovereignty does not relieve us of our human responsibility. We are still obligated to live righteously, because God is holy and just and cannot tolerate sin. And God will use our obedience to help accomplish His plan.

I realize there is plenty of mystery here because God's knowledge of the future includes not only everything that actually happens, but everything that could potentially happen. God knows all possibilities in any circumstance, but He chooses what *will* happen according to His will and purpose.

The word *surprise* is not in God's vocabulary. He never says, "Oops, I missed that one." All possibilities are taken into consideration. God's plan takes in "the end from the beginning." There are no surprises in heaven—absolutely none!

Prophecy not only reveals the character of God in terms of His perfect knowledge and power, but also in terms of His purpose to bring Himself glory and bless His people. Paul said of his trials, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18). The apostle knew that the suffering God was allowing in his life would work out to God's greater glory and his greater reward. Paul could say this because he believed Christ's message about a future hope that was laid up for Paul, and "not only to [him], but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8).

A knowledge of prophecy gives you confidence to trust God for what's ahead. If God knows tomorrow already because He has been there and taken care of it, then you can go to sleep tonight confident that He is in control.

Prophecy enhances our understanding of the character of God and leads us to worship Him. Over and over again in his letters, Paul became so overwhelmed with God's character that he couldn't help but worship when he considered God's powerful plan.

PROPHECY PROMOTES HOLINESS

A third reason for studying prophecy is that it is designed to promote holy living. The more conscious we are of Christ's return, and of the fact that we could be standing face-to-face with Him at any moment, the more this knowledge will affect us. But if we forget that Jesus is coming back, we will start living like He's not coming back. John gave a classic statement of prophecy's purifying purpose. "We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we will see Him

just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2–3).

A Prize to Be Won

Let’s look at this issue in more detail since it is so crucial. Paul said, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). Paul was determined to remain faithful to Christ because there was a heavenly prize to be won when Christ returned.

God’s prophetic program included a reward for Paul, one that was worth all of his commitment on earth. And he urged all believers to adopt the same attitude (v. 15). There’s a lot we will do if there’s a big enough prize at the end of the process. Paul went on to explain his perspective: “Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory” (vv. 20–21).

Paul said, “I’m really a citizen of heaven. I just have a temporary address here on earth.” Because Paul had such a high consciousness of eternity, he pressed on in history.

You can keep going, no matter what, when you know heaven is real. You can keep going if you understand that when your human body begins to decay on earth, you have just begun to live forever.

A Hope to Be Realized

John said our hope of Christ’s return should purify us. Paul agreed, writing in Titus 2:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. (vv. 11–13)

Notice the three distinct perspectives Paul mentioned here. Christians are people who are looking in three directions. We look back at the cross and remember what Christ has done. We look inwardly to see what Christ is doing in us today. And we look forward to the day when Christ will return for us.

A Perspective to Gain

Peter also had something to say about the way prophecy ought to promote holy living:

The day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God. (2 Peter 3:10–12a)

Peter said a day is coming when your house, your car, the clothes in your closet, and the money in your bank will burn. The earth as we know it is going to melt away. Since that's true, don't start treating that stuff as if it were eternal. Don't fall so deeply in love with the stuff that's going to burn that you miss out on the stuff that can't burn. Don't trade the things that have eternal value for the things that won't make it to heaven.

It's okay to have a house and car and clothes. Just don't put a value on them they don't have. Don't treat them like they're the real deal because when Jesus returns, they are going to be toast. It's okay to use the world, but not to be dominated by a worldly perspective (see 1 Cor. 7:31). Rather, we should all live with a kingdom worldview based on God's kingdom values.

A good understanding of prophecy can give us a reference point for living. When a farmer wants to plow a straight furrow, he picks out a marker at the other side of the field and keeps his eyes on it as he plows. You need a reference point when you're looking into the future. If you're just entering college and you want to be a doctor, that's your reference point. Your goal will determine what courses you take and the path you follow. You will most certainly set your sights on medical school.

The Bible says if you fix your sights and your hope on Christ's coming, that perspective on tomorrow will influence your thoughts and choices today. Prophecy can help you stay on God's kingdom path so that you can produce fruit for eternity.

A Future to Prepare For

Paul also said he lived in light of one inescapable fact. Speaking of the judgment of believers for kingdom reward, or the lack thereof, he wrote, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body" (2 Cor. 5:10).

This is how I picture the judgment seat of Christ taking place. Most stores today have security cameras recording a customer's every move. Some stores even alert people to that fact as they enter the store.

When I first saw those signs, I wondered why the stores were advertising the fact that they used security cameras. After all, the idea is to catch a thief in the act. But as I thought about it, the reason for the warning signs became clear. People who know someone is watching their every move will probably think twice before trying anything funny. But if they don't think anyone is watching, they'll be more likely to take a chance and steal something.

Well, our lives are being watched and recorded by God. At Christ's judgment seat, He will sit down with us to view our lives. When you have a prophetic mindset, it will affect your preparation for eternity. Prophecy can help give us a prepared mindset. It's important because it promotes holy living on the part of believers.

PROPHECY BRINGS STABILITY IN TRIALS

Stability in times of difficulty is a fourth reason prophecy is important to us. Knowing what tomorrow holds for us can help us be strong in the storms of today.

A Calm in the Storm

In the upper room, as He celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples, Jesus told them He was about to leave them. Their response was, “How are we going to make it?”

To reassure His faithful followers, Jesus spoke these well-known words of comfort:

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:1–3)

Jesus’ prophecy of His own return helped produce calm in the midst of the disciples’ panic.

Good News in Grief

One of the best examples of the use of prophecy to calm troubled hearts is in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, another familiar passage in which Paul comforted the Thessalonians concerning their fellow Christians who had died.

Verses 13–17 are Paul’s teaching on the rapture, the moment when Christ will return in the air to take His people home to be with Him forever. This is one of the great, central passages of prophecy in the

Bible. Yet Paul wasn't just dispensing doctrine. He closed this section by saying, "Therefore comfort one another with these words" (v. 18).

Hope for the Future

We've mentioned this benefit of studying prophecy, but let me come back to it. The prophetic Word of God also brings us encouragement and hope for the future.

The Thessalonian church was shaken by the death of some of its members, because the believers weren't sure what had happened to these brothers and sisters. The church was also shaken by a false word from someone that the day of the Lord had already come. Paul answered that charge and put their fears at ease:

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. (2 Thess. 2:1–2)

Paul proceeded to give them details by which the day of the Lord can be recognized, and we'll cover these in a subsequent chapter. What I want you to see here is the way Paul used this teaching to restore their hope. He concluded in verse 15, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us."

God wants to teach us about prophecy so we will stand firm today and not be thrown off by Satan or false teachers. If you're not alert, people will throw you off. The devil will throw you off. They can make your knees wobble. But if you know God's Word, you have a firm hope to hold on to even in the changing wind of circumstances.

A Right View of Life

In 2 Corinthians 5:8, Paul said, “We . . . prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.” If you prefer heaven, you’ll make it on earth. But if you prefer earth, you’ll have a misperception of heaven. In other words, be heavenly. Colossians 3:2 says, “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” Your life should have such a heavenly dynamism about it that earth shrinks in significance.

The reason some of us aren’t making it here on earth is because this life is too big. We’ve made the world too big, Satan too big, and people too big. They are ruining our day.

There’s a lot to worry about today from a human standpoint. But if you have a firm grip on the fact that God has a prophetic program that nothing on earth can override, then you don’t have to have a heart attack worrying about what might happen. Prophecy contributes to a right view of life.

PROPHECY PROMOTES WITNESSING

God does not tell us about the future so we can argue about it or show how much we know. He wants us to know the truth about tomorrow and about eternity, because people on their way to hell need to know God *today* before it’s too late for them.

Let me show you several verses that underscore what I’m talking about. “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29). “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11). We are going to study a lot of prophecy in this book. Let’s make sure we are telling others the good news of God’s plan. Above all else, understanding prophecy should motivate us to witness to a world in need of Jesus Christ.

THE KEY TO PROPHECY

A key is important because it gives you access. A key that will unlock Bible prophecy, helping you see the individual details in their proper relationship and keep them in proper perspective, is hanging at the “door” of Revelation 19:10. After another awe-inspiring revelation by an angel, John was about to fall at the angel’s feet in worship. But the angel told John, “Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

That’s a profoundly important statement. It tells us that the key that unlocks the door to prophecy is not a thing or an idea, but a person. Jesus Christ is the key to God’s prophetic revelation.

By this I mean that the degree to which prophetic details are related properly to Christ is the degree to which we will understand prophecy. God did not simply string together a series of prophetic events that happen one after another. There’s a point, a definite climax, to God’s plan. Prophecy, like history, is taking us somewhere.

And that destination is Jesus Christ. So if we study all the details and yet miss Christ, we have missed the point of prophecy.

You can see this in the people talking about prophecy and end times who aren't Christians. They can make their predictions and their guesses, but they have no Christ-centered reference point; they can't make sense out of things. Without Christ at the center of prophecy, that will always be true, because "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

JESUS CHRIST IS THE CENTERPIECE OF PROPHECY

I want to look at four truths that are crucial to understand about the preeminent place Jesus Christ holds in the study of prophecy. Before we get to the plan, we need to see the person around whom God's plan unfolds.

The first thing we need to understand is that Jesus is the centerpiece of biblical prophecy.

Paul began the book of Titus by saying, "Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago" (Titus 1:1–2).

The Recipient of God's Promise

The phrase "long ages ago" refers to eternity. Long before He created the world, God promised eternal life to those who would be chosen by Him. But to whom did God make this promise? It wasn't to you and me because we didn't yet exist. God the Father made this promise to His Son, the Lord Jesus. In 2 Timothy 1:9, Paul said the grace that saves us "was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." In other words, we as believers were promised or given to Christ by His Father in eternity past.

Jesus Himself confirmed this when He said, “All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out” (John 6:37). The Word could not be clearer. Every Christian is a gift from God the Father to God the Son.

The reason God the Father made this gift to His Son is that there exists such an intense love relationship among the members of the Trinity that They seek ways to express Their love. Jesus said, “The Father loves the Son” (John 5:20). One of the ways to express love is through a gift. God the Father has given the Son He loves a gift, a body of people who have put their faith in the Son. My point here is that Jesus is the delight of His Father, whose program centers on the Son.

The Goal of God's Gift

The Father's goal in giving Jesus Christ this gift is that we might become conformed to Christ's image (see Rom. 8:29). God's prophetic goal, if you will, is to create a group of people who look like Jesus. The Father does this, once again, because He loves His Son with infinite love. God wants people in heaven who remind Him of Jesus Christ.

Can you see why I say Jesus Christ is the centerpiece of God's program? Anything we say about prophecy in this book must be related to Christ to be properly focused.

JESUS CHRIST IS THE CAUSE OF PROPHECY

All of this raises a question: Why did God craft this plan, before there was ever a creation, to redeem a portion of humanity by His sovereign choice and present these people as a gift to His Son? A lot is mystery here, because we were not present when the Trinity held its eternal council. But at least part of the answer goes back to another event that took place before creation—the rebellion of the angel Lucifer in heaven and his judgment by God. The rebellion of

this angelic being who became Satan led to God's gift of Christ to a redeemed humanity.

Part of my objective in setting the stage for our study of prophecy is to show you how Jesus Christ came to be the key and the focus of God's prophetic program. To see this, we must understand how the conflict between God and Satan developed and progressed.

So we need to review some central biblical teaching on God's war with Satan. This material is also important because Satan will appear again and again on the prophetic stage since the primary goal of his existence is to thwart the work of God and foil His plan for the consummation of this earth.

Lucifer's Exalted Status

Two major passages, Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14, introduce us to this angel called Lucifer who occupied a unique place in the heavenly realm. These chapters also describe his sin that led to open rebellion against God. We'll begin with Ezekiel 28. Ezekiel 28:12 says of Lucifer, "You had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty." This being was created flawless by God.

Lucifer also hung out in a perfect place. "Eden, the garden of God" (v. 13) may refer to an original Eden in heaven of which the garden of Eden on earth was a copy. This angel was a perfect being in a perfect location.

Lucifer's position was exalted too. As the "anointed cherub who covers" (v. 14), placed there by God, Lucifer was the head angel. He was God's showroom piece, His chief of staff. He led all the myriads of angels in the worship and adoration of God. He was the greatest of all God's created beings.

Lucifer's Terrible Downfall

But Lucifer's great beauty and exalted status were his downfall. They led him into pride. "Your heart was lifted up because of your

beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor” (Ezek. 28:17). In other words, Lucifer forgot he was created, not the Creator.

He began to think he had made himself powerful. He thought he had anointed himself as cherub. Lucifer forgot he was a creature totally dependent upon God for his glory, his beauty, his clout, his recognition, his awesomeness. And his heart was lifted up with pride, the greatest sin of all.

There is no sin worse than pride because all other sins come from it. Lucifer looked in the mirror and said, “Look how beautiful and how powerful I am. I don’t need God. I can pull this thing off myself.”

Lucifer’s arrogance reminds me of the army officer who had just been promoted to general way before the creation of cellphones. He had gotten a new office, and was feeling very important. So when someone opened his office door to tell him a soldier was outside waiting to see him, the general decided to strut his stuff.

The general told the soldier to wait at the door as he picked up the telephone and said loudly, “Yes, Mr. President. I understand, Mr. President. I’ll take care of it right away, Mr. President. You can count on me, Mr. President.”

Then the general hung up the phone and asked the soldier what he wanted. “Well, sir, I’m here to hook up the telephone.”

The Reasons for Lucifer’s Fall

This was Lucifer when he became filled with pride. The point at which he became Satan is detailed further in Isaiah 14, where this exalted being made five “I will” pronouncements in rebellion against God. We’ll review them briefly as we set the backdrop for the central place Christ holds in prophecy. Verse 12 describes Satan’s fall and judgment, and then in verses 13–14 we find the reasons for his fall.

His first rebellious statement was “I will ascend to heaven.” Satan wanted to take God’s *position*. He was determined to occupy the very throne of God, to sit where God sits. Satan wanted it to be *his* heaven.

Second, he declared, “I will raise my throne above the stars of God.” (“Stars” here are angels.) He also wanted to usurp God’s *pre-eminence*. Satan said, “I’m tired of relaying God’s commands to the other angels and making sure His orders are carried out. I want to be the one giving the orders. I want the other angels obeying me.”

Satan’s third statement was “I will sit on the mount of assembly.” He wanted to share God’s *power*. The word *mount* in the Bible is used of kingdoms. Satan wanted to sit at the center of God’s kingdom rule. He didn’t want to execute the plan; he wanted to make the plan.

A fourth desire of Satan’s was “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds.” Clouds in the Bible refer to God’s glory, so Satan wanted to rob God of His *praise*. This angelic being wanted the glory and the worship that ascended to God to flow his way.

This proud boast reminds us of Jesus’ temptation, when Satan showed Him all the world’s kingdoms and then said, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:8–9).

Fifth and finally, in Isaiah 14:14, Satan boasted, “I will make myself like the Most High.” This is sort of a summary statement. Satan wanted to share God’s *prerogatives*, the privileges and qualities God enjoys as the Sovereign of the universe. In particular, Satan desperately wanted to be independent of God. Satan saw that God was the only person in heaven who did not have to answer to *anybody*—and he wanted that same kind of total independence.

Yet Satan didn’t get what he hoped for. Instead, he was judged for his rebellion. He was expelled from heaven and consigned to eternal punishment (see Matt. 25:41), a sentence that will be carried out as the last stages of God’s prophetic plan are unveiled.

The Connection to Prophecy

How does the rebellion of Satan tie together with Jesus’ central place in prophecy? The Bible declares that Jesus was revealed to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). In reference to Satan’s

judgment, Jesus said, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning” (Luke 10:18).

A trial was held in heaven in which Satan and his demons were found guilty of cosmic treason, rebellion against God. Jesus was saying, “I was at the trial when Satan was judged.” Jesus saw Satan booted out of heaven “like lightning.” The trial didn’t last long, and the sentence was carried out in a hurry.

When he was convicted, the devil also got a name change. He who was Lucifer, “shining one,” became Satan, the “adversary.” Whenever God changes someone’s name in the Bible, it’s to reflect that person’s character. *Satan* was the right name for God’s adversary.

When Satan was kicked out of heaven, he took up temporary residence on the earth. His presence is evident from the fact that the earth was “formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep” (Gen. 1:2). The earth became a garbage dump, because wherever Satan lives, he produces garbage.

God allowed Satan to inhabit the earth instead of just throwing him immediately into hell because the Trinity got together and made a decision. We don’t know if this meeting was held before or after Satan actually rebelled, because as we said in the previous chapter, time distinctions are meaningless to God. Past, present, and future are the same to Him.

The important thing is that the Godhead decided to use Satan for a very crucial purpose. God the Father said to Jesus Christ, “My Son, Satan’s rebellion and judgment present an opportunity to accomplish two very important purposes.

“To show You how much I love You, I am going to create mankind, a race of beings inferior to Satan and the angels. Satan will mess with these beings and try to get them to follow him. I will redeem from this race a body of humanity I am going to give You as My love gift to You. And I am going to redeem these people right out of the hand of Satan.

“This redemption will bring Me eternal glory. It will prove that I can take mankind, the lesser creature, and do more with lesser beings who obey Me than I can do with angels who rebel against Me. My second purpose is to demonstrate to the angels and all of creation what happens when anyone rebels against Me. I am going to allow Satan to continue his operations on earth, and yet in the end I will utterly defeat him and his associates and gain the final victory for all eternity.” God’s prophetic program is His response to Satan’s rebellion.

What happens when the smoke of the final battle clears, when every prophetic event in the Bible has been fulfilled and time is no more? Jesus Christ has His redeemed throng rejoicing with Him forever in heaven, and Satan is totally defeated and thrown into the lake of fire.

Giving It All Back to God

Let me show you one more thing before we move on. Paul wrote of the final resurrection, “Then comes the end, when [Jesus] hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. . . . When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:24, 28).

Guess what God is going to do? When His program for this earth is finished, when the goal of defeating Satan and redeeming a special people for His Son has been achieved, when Christ has ruled in His millennial kingdom, then the Son is going to say, “Father, You have loved Me so much to give Me this. Now let Me show My love to You by giving it all back to You.”

When it’s all over and eternity is ushered in, God will be all in all. There is such an equality of love and equality of essence between the Father and the Son that they will share equally in the fruit of the prophetic plan that was conceived before the world began.

JESUS CHRIST IS THE CONTENT OF PROPHECY

There is no question that Jesus is the centerpiece of prophecy. And He is the cause of prophecy in the sense that the purpose of God's plan was to present a gift of redeemed humanity to His Son.

Jesus is also the content, the subject, of prophecy. There's no guesswork about this either, because we have Jesus' word on it. He said so Himself to two of His discouraged disciples on the road to a little village called Emmaus.

Missing the Message

You probably know this story well. It's a familiar account in Luke, occurring at evening of the most important day in history, the day of Christ's resurrection. The two disciples were returning home discouraged because they didn't believe the reports that Jesus had risen. Jesus joined them on the road, although they didn't recognize Him.

When Jesus asked the two what they were discussing, they explained that it concerned "Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people" (Luke 24:19). They went on to explain that they had hoped this Jesus would be Israel's Messiah. But since He had been crucified, and since it was now the third day since His death, they figured they had been wrong, and they were heading home.

This is amazing unbelief on the part of these two disciples, considering they also told Jesus all about the women's reports of the empty tomb and how other disciples had checked it out (vv. 22–24). They apparently did not believe the reports.

Jesus in the Old Testament

No wonder Jesus said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary

for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” (Luke 24:25–26).

And then, “Beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (v. 27). This is a very important verse, because it’s here that Jesus demonstrated to these two men how He was the subject of all the prophetic Scripture.

“Moses and the prophets” was another term for the Old Testament. Moses takes us all the way back to the beginning and the first five books of the Bible. Jesus was saying that Moses talked about Him, the writers in the poetic books talked about Him, and the prophets talked about Him.

But Jesus wasn’t born until after all the Old Testament writers were long gone from the scene. So what does that make their writings about His coming? Prophecy. Jesus showed these men that the Old Testament was all about Him.

All the sacrifices offered in the Old Testament were made in anticipation of the coming Lamb of God. The Levitical priesthood was all about the High Priest who was to come. The Old Testament prophets came to foreshadow the Prophet who would come someday (see Deut. 18:15). The kings of Israel pointed forward to the coming King of kings.

I’m sure Jesus also took them to Psalm 22 and the prophecy of His crucifixion, and mentioned Psalm 16, which prophesies His resurrection. He probably pointed them to Isaiah 9:6, the prophecy of the Child who would be born. The entire Old Testament is about Christ.

Fellowship with Christ

If you don’t see Christ, you become spiritually blind, like these disciples were that night on the Emmaus road. And when you become spiritually blind, circumstances rule your emotions. That was their problem. They were depressed because they thought their Messiah was gone, yet He was walking with them.

So Jesus gave these two an unforgettable Bible study as they walked along. Notice Luke 24:28–29: “They approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. But they urged Him, saying, ‘Stay with us.’”

Why did Jesus act as if He was going to keep going when they arrived at Emmaus? Why did He give the two disciples an opening to invite Him to stay with them? I think Jesus was testing them to see what they were going to do with what they had heard. He had just taught them everything the Old Testament had to say about Himself. Would they invite Him in?

Jesus Christ is doing the same with us today. If I am not going to do anything with Jesus, He will skip my house and come to your house. That’s why some believers are further ahead than other believers in their Christian lives. Some people come to church and hear the truth, but then they allow Jesus just to keep on walking right by them. In fact, when they get into their cars after church and head home, Jesus is heading in the other direction because there is no invitation for Him to fellowship with them.

Remember, God doesn’t want you to learn prophecy so you can know facts and argue the points. He wants you to learn prophecy so He can fellowship with you around the truth of His Word, so you can be intimate with Him as you look forward to all that will unfold in the days to come. The content, the point, of prophecy is Jesus Christ.

Jesus accepted the offer from the disciples and sat down with them. As soon as He had broken bread, they recognized Him, and He disappeared from their sight (Luke 24:30–31). “They said to one another, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?’” (v. 32).

Don’t miss the sequence of events here. Even though Jesus had taught them a wonderful “series” on prophecy, they didn’t get the message until they sought fellowship with the Teacher. If you miss Jesus, you have missed everything.

JESUS CHRIST IS THE CULMINATION OF PROPHECY

As we consider our fourth and final point, I want to turn to Ephesians 1, where we read, “[God] made known to us the mystery of His will . . . with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth” (vv. 9–10).

Clearly, the culmination of God’s program is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We saw that God’s plan started with Christ in the councils of eternity, and it is going to end with Christ. Every knee is going to bow at the name of Jesus (see Phil. 2:10).

The Climax of God’s Program

The book of Revelation, which describes the culmination of God’s prophetic program, opens with this declaration: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:1). This book, with all that it has to say about the future, is fundamentally about Him.

Then Christ made this statement: “I am the Alpha and the Omega . . . who is and who was and who is to come” (v. 8). Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, so Jesus was saying He is the whole show. All things climax, or culminate, in Him.

Therefore, we can say that prophecy is about the exaltation, glorification, and adoration of Jesus Christ. God has placed all of history in the lap of Jesus Christ. And that’s why to miss the Son is to miss the point of everything, including life itself.

The Subject of Our Praise

If all of history culminates in Jesus Christ, that means you and I had better be directing all our praise to Him. Later in the Revelation, John said:

I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God. (Rev. 7:9–11)

This is quite a picture of praise. Redeemed people from every corner of the earth, the myriads of angels, and the special beings in heaven whose job is to praise God were all gathered before God the Father and Jesus the Lamb, pouring forth their praise and adoration.

What is the culmination of prophecy going to be like? The council meeting of the Godhead that began before history is going to end with God the Father saying to Jesus, “Son, I love You. You are the apple of My eye. To let You know how much I love You, I have created for You a redeemed humanity. And so that You will never forget how much I love You, these redeemed people are going to sing Your praises for eternity.”

God has created millions, and perhaps billions, of creatures who will sing praises to the Son. We who know Christ as our Savior will have the privilege of being in this eternal choir. If we are going to be singing the praises of Jesus Christ in heaven for all eternity, doesn't it make sense that we should be getting our voices in practice down here? He is the culmination, the capstone, of God's program—and the object of His Father's attention and love.

So as we look at the details of prophecy, it's okay to get excited about them as you see the things predicted in the Old Testament coming true in the New Testament, and as you see the wonderful future God has prepared for His own.

THY KINGDOM COME

But in your excitement, and in your study, don't miss Jesus. Because to miss Jesus is to miss the real excitement. Jesus Christ is the key to prophecy.

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