

Prophecy Through the Bible

Vicki and I started our journey of Prophecy seven years ago with reading a book by **Dr. John Walvoord** called **Every Prophecy of the Bible**. Walvoord was a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary for 50 years, and was also the Chancellor, and president of the seminary. His skills as a Prophecy teacher and author are legendary, and his works have become the basis for education of many of today's best scholars in the area of Biblical Interpretation.

If you want a detailed, extremely well and clearly written book on this topic, you cannot do better than to buy **Every Prophecy of the Bible**, or the **Bible Knowledge Handbook(earlier version)**, both written by Walvoord. These are not light reading novels but detailed reference books. You can read in sections of the book, as they become your focus of studies. I have a recommended order of reading for any of you that become interested enough to follow up and buy **Every Prophecy of the Bible**.

As mentioned in the flyer for this class, the Bible is made up of many different types of books, and genres of writing. It has History, Law, Prophets...both major and minor, gospels, letters, and eschatological writings like Revelation, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Joel...even parts of Jeremiah and Isaiah. There are 66 books in the accepted Canonical version of the Bible. If you do a verse by verse comparison, there are approximately **28%** of the verses that are prophetic in nature, and almost every (but not all) book of the Bible has some prophetic content. This means for every 100 verses, 28 of them are prophetic or were prophetic when they were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

There are more than 1000 prophecies in the Bible, and interestingly about 500 of them have already been fulfilled (or come true). We cannot possibly cover all of them in this study but I will try and cover the significant ones that relate to the **First Coming** of our Lord (birth, life, death, and resurrection), His Purpose, the **Second Coming** (return for Judgment), and the period of time we call the **End Times** including the Millennial Kingdom.

History of Prophecy

In the history of the church, the eschatological or prophetic portions of the Bible have suffered more from inadequate interpretation than any other theological subject. The reason for this is that the church interpreters turned away from the normal method of interpretation, which is normal/literal reading with grammatical accuracy, and followed a non-literal and creative interpretation of Scripture to be "spiritual" or "allegorical". In this way, interpretations have been at the notion of the interpreter and at odds with the

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normal reading of the text. If you read commentaries or internet postings on subjects there is great variation of belief. This is true especially by denominational and vested-interest parties. Fortunately with the passage of time and the fulfillment of about 500 of the prophecies we have “discovered” what the early church knew at the time. These fulfilled prophecies have been fulfilled *literally, not spiritually*. Those of us who believe the Bible is the truth (undiluted by any error) are confident that if the first 500 of 1000 prophecies have been fulfilled literally, then there is no reason to believe that the remaining 500 will be fulfilled in any way but literally.

A second problem, and perhaps a bigger problem for today’s Christians, is the pervasive Biblical Illiteracy in the church. This has come about gradually as the seminaries have graduated preachers who do not believe the inerrancy of Scripture, or believe large parts of it are just stories. In this world of skeptical preachers, we see two trends that are affecting the church in a big way. The first is just not dealing with Prophetic Scripture and its meaning for us. They intentionally ignore 28% of Scripture dealing with our future as Christians and the future of mankind, because it is too complicated for the “sheep in the pews” to understand. If they deal with it at all, it is spiritualized into some fuzzy meanings as to not upset or scare us. While this trend is dangerous to the body of believers we call the church, the more dangerous trend is the increasing cutting away at the roots of our faith, so as to unlink us from our Biblical foundations. We see this as questioning the “Way, the Truth and the Life” or as the re-interpretation of the Blood of the Lamb atoning for our sins. This is a very dangerous trend that will actually promote social Christianity, divorced from Biblical Christianity. Of course, both of these are prophesied in the Bible as part of the end-times society. We are warned against flocking to hear those to “tickle our ears”.

Objectives and Goals

This class has several objectives, but it will attempt to remove the Biblical Illiteracy, as it pertains to Prophecy AND re-enforce the truth of Biblical revelation as being something we not only can count on... but depend on, as we live our lives. Prophecies also are a guide to the meaning of history. History in the abstract and God’s actions in history are hard to understand without the Prophetic Scripture that warns us of God’s desires, intentions, and actions. This is very plain in the Prophet books of the Bible, but again these are little studied and taught in churches across the land.

History, at least Biblical history, is the unfolding of God’s plan and purpose of revealing Himself, and manifesting His Love, grace, and righteousness, as an intertwined work of redemption. Most of you who have attended one of my sessions on Prophecy in the

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past, know the pearl necklace analogy, but it is useful to retell it again. If I were to hold up a pearl necklace of Vicki's grandmother, it would be a string of pearls, with a larger pearl at the bottom of the necklace, and a clasp at the top. On closer examination it is a graduated necklace that has larger pearls near the bottom and then gets smaller as we head back to the clasp. Another thing we notice is more obvious but essential to the story...it is a necklace made up of pearls. If I were to cut the necklace what would happen (other than my wife's reaction?) The pearls would spill on the floor and scatter. To be sure the string would be there, the clasps would be there, and the pearls would be close-by...but I no longer would have a necklace. You could pick up a pearl and put it in your pocket or several pearls and put them in your pocket.

Now I want to make an analogy that I believe is important to understand as we begin this study. As we study the Bible, or listen to sermons, live life, or read devotionals and commentaries...we are picking up pearls and putting them in our pocket. Depending on your habits and interest, some of us have more pearls than others. Indeed some of us have a little bag of pearls and we diligently search for more to add to the bag. Some of the pearls are perfect and others less perfect. Some may even not be pearls at all but appear like pearls. We have never been trained to recognize the unblemished pearl versus the lower grade pearl or the counterfeit pearl.

As admirable as collecting pearls may be, none of us has a necklace. We just have pearls...not placed in sequence, not connected, not even pure or authentic. They do not rise to the top at the clasp or fall in the middle to the more important pearl. What are we missing? We are missing the connective string, the Creator placing the pearls in the order He desires, the beauty of the necklace and the completeness of expression of the Creator. It is like that with Bible Study. We pick up small truths. We collect them in our bag of truth. Some of us have more than others, but some of our "truths" may be incomplete, or even false, yet we carry them in our bag. We do not have the string that connects them, or the placement of the truth by the Creator in the right order to have a necklace of the truth.

Goal - Our necklace of truth begins at the top (creation) and ends at the top (2nd coming/MK, Eternity) and it lays with the truth of Jesus as the center. As we notice the truth pearls, we see we are not at the end yet. God is not through with us, and there are many more truth pearls we need to understand.

Here is the key: Biblical prophecy is the string that holds the pearls of truth together for us and gives us the complete, and beautiful pearl necklace God has intended for us.

Without the string, we do not have a necklace at all, and the truth of the Bible is not in

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context at all. By studying Prophetic Scripture, we can see the thread and the pearls, and by the work of the Spirit, we can discern the true pearls from the fake to further our understanding. This is why studying and understanding Prophecy is so important for Christians in our time.

Approach to this study

The Bible is a continuing revelation by God. We believe that it is inspired, or in breathed, by God and represents the accurate and inerrant Word of God. I believe the Bible contains all the truth that God intended for us, and excludes what He did not intend for us. The later covenant (NT) completes the earlier covenant (OT) and does not discard the "Law" but gives us the view of "Grace". It may replace certain laws but never contradicts or erases it. The Bible is a special work of God but uses normal words to convey truth in forms like poetry, song, theological and historical texts, letters and prophetic writings. It uses figures of speech, and word pictures to explain truth. It speaks in supernatural ways but also in plain language, in the context of the day it was written.

For general interpretation, we will look at the words used, their general usage, and special meanings, and the probable meaning in the context of its audience and timeframe. These words will be taken in a grammatical context, the intended audience, and the application of the words to the audience, in the context of its writing. In addition, the words are to be interpreted in context, never isolated and with particular emphasis on its literary form...normal, word picture, analogy, parable, etc..

Pertinent in interpreting Prophetic writings, is the Bible itself. Many times it steps back and clarifies the meaning of any symbols, and stories. Words are used in many ways and other Scripture will be used to help us clarify meanings. In all cases, the Holy Spirit will help give us the insights we need to correctly interpret difficult passages, however, there are some prophetic writings that are to be understood later in the days of the Lord. Some of the Scripture regarding the end times and signs of the times could never be understood properly until the foretold birth of the land of Israel in May, 1948. (See Isa 66:7-8 and Ezek 36) Now we see what was not visible beforehand. There will be other Scripture we will accept without total understanding or knowledge, but simple faith.

In particular, in interpreting prophetic Scripture we must decide if it has been fulfilled, or is yet to be fulfilled. It may be conditional or unconditional. Assuming prophecy is conditional or unconditional is dependent on Biblical support or lack of it. Assumption is dangerous in prophetic interpretation. Another issue is dual fulfillment. As we look at

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mountains in the distance, sometimes we do not see the mountain behind the one closest to us, or it looks closer than it is. In Biblical prophecy, this is the multiple peak idea (aka the law of double reference,) which means that a particular passage has fulfillment in the past and future. Sometimes the future fulfillment is very distinct from current fulfillment and sometimes not. The Scripture itself will give us clues as to the timing or expectation of fulfillment. Sometimes it is partial fulfillment in the past and complete fulfillment in the future.

In light of our attention to literal, grammatical interpretation, we must decide if a Scripture is to be taken literally or figuratively. When the Lord says “*I am the door*” (John 10:9... READ 10: 1-10) it does not mean He is made of wood and opens, but it is a figure of speech meaning he is the gateway through which we must pass. If it is not clear from the text, we will take the Scripture as literal and grammatical for interpretation. By reading the balance of the referenced scripture, you can see the meaning which is plain in the words.

All of this sounds complicated and procedural, but is the natural way we read and interpret language in everyday life. We sift metaphors, country sayings, plays on words and all types of speech to distill out the meaning of the passage. Colloquial language is not only in use today, but was in use then as well. It is just harder for us to dig out what was trying to be said. The Bible interpreters do a pretty good job of that in general in our translations, which is very helpful. It will become clearer to you as we go along.

Study Guideline

We will take the approach taken in the Walvoord book mentioned earlier (*-see <http://www.jmlay.com/Lessons.html>)

1. Prophecy in the Pentateuch (first 5 books of OT)
2. Prophecy in the books of History
3. Prophecy in the books of Poetry
4. Prophecy in Isaiah
5. Prophecy in Jeremiah
6. Prophecy in Ezekiel *
7. Prophecy in Daniel *
8. Prophecy in the Minor Prophets *
9. Prophecy in the Gospels *
10. Prophecy in the book of Acts *
11. Prophecy in the Letters of Paul *

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12. Prophecy in the general Letters*
13. Prophecy in the Revelation of Christ *
 - a. Prophecy in John's Vision of Heaven and End times
 - b. Prophecy in the Second Coming, Millennial Kingdom, Eternal State
14. Final thoughts and summary