

Lesson 0, Prophecy: the Telling and Forthtelling of God's Story

“But 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.” 2 Peter 1:20-21

The Bible is God’s Story – His Plan

We can look all the way back to the beginning of the Bible and then, throughout the rest of the Old Testament and find that God’s Word tells the story of Man’s fall into sin and God’s redemptive plan for Mankind. Everything God reveals, points to this unfolding plan that He had to send His Son into the world to be the satisfactory and perfect blood sacrifice to atone for the sin of the people, to provide the way of salvation for them. For the wage of sin is death. Death was conquered at the cross. Jesus has come to earth the first time to defeat death for us. Jesus’ return the second time will culminate human history. God started human history and He will end it fully achieving His purposes, His plan for earth and for heaven. For those of us who have partaken of His redemption for our sins, the ending that we see for Mankind in Revelation, initiates a glorious new beginning for us.

This is God’s world

God is still in control. We may think from the current news we read every day, that this world is spinning out of control. We see ha-Satan pushing his agenda into every nook and cranny. Despite what we may see and feel, God will fully accomplish His plan on earth and in heaven. We, who are His, have a future and this future is secure because God is faithful and true and He has made promises to us that He will keep. He controls eternity. I have heard it said that “God weaves your story into His-story.” We can trust Him with the uncertainties of our lives. We can look past the craziness of this world and find security in Him. This book of Revelation exalts God and reveals His ultimate justice. God will have the ultimate victory. He will soon return a second time and all will be as it should be.

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Guidelines for Interpreting Predictive Prophecy from the New Inductive Bible Study

I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to my words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. “You may say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken? When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” Deuteronomy 18:15-22.

“Jesus said, ‘I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.’ John 14:29

I have included the full text for you of the Guidelines for Interpreting Predictive Prophecy² from Precepts upon Precepts’ New Inductive Study Bible Revised 2000. I do have permission from Precepts to print the full text. Please keep this Guideline handy at all times as we traverse through this section of Revelation as it is extremely important to keep these things in mind. I’ve also heard it said that all Biblical prophecy is equally TRUE, but all Biblical prophecy is not equally CLEAR to our understanding. These guidelines will help us to keep on track as we evaluate each verse in Revelation 6-22.

The Guidelines:

“From Genesis to Revelation the Bible is filled with prophecy. If you want to handle the prophecies in the Word of God accurately, the following guidelines will give you some important parameters.

The Greek word for prophecy, *propheteia*, comes from two Greek words, *pro*, meaning “forth,” and *phemi*, meaning “to speak.” It means to speak forth the mind and counsel of God. According to this definition, all Scripture is in a sense prophecy.

Predictive prophecy points to a future fulfillment and is of divine origin. In *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, Dr. Robertson McQuilkin says: “There are two purposes for predictive prophecy. The chief purpose is to affect the conduct of those who hear the prophecy. Another purpose is met only when the prophecy is fulfilled. That purpose is to build forth, to establish confidence in the God who miraculously foretold events (John 13:19; 14:29; 16:4).”

Some scholars divide predictive prophecy into two categories: forthtelling and foretelling. Forthtelling prophecies contain a message about the present or immediate time. (Often this is a call to godly living in the light of prophecy yet to be fulfilled.) Foretelling prophecies contain a message about what God will do in the future.

When a prophet spoke for God, the prophecy could refer to the following:

- A present or near fulfillment
- A future fulfillment
- A twofold fulfillment: a near fulfillment and then a later, future fulfillment³

As you read the prophecies of the Bible, keep in mind the following guidelines and discern whether the prophecy refers to:

- The prophet’s own time and/or a future time
- The captivity and/or restoration of Israel or Judah
- The first coming of Christ and any events connected with it

² The New Inductive Study Bible Revised, New American Standard, Harvest House, 2000, Eugene, Oregon, pp. 2101-2103, full text.

³ Jackie Fierman of Ariel Ministries which is Dr. Arnold G. Fructenbaum’s ministry, says that there is only one fulfillment, not a near and a later or far fulfillment. This is from 1st session of Daniel according to the Jewish Mindset, 9-16-2025.

- The second coming of Christ
 - The last days or end times
1. *As you study prophecy, it is important to remember that the prophets did not always indicate intervals of time between events, nor did they always write their prophecies in chronological order.* For example, an Old Testament prophecy could include the first and second comings of Christ without any indication of the time span between the two comings. One such prophecy is found in Isaiah 65:17-25. In this prophecy, Isaiah first talks about the new heavens and the new earth (in which we know there is not death), and then in verses 18-25 he refers to a time when a youth dies at age 100 and the wolf and the lamb lie down together. Chronologically, verse 17 will be fulfilled after verse 18-25 become a reality.
 2. *Always approach a prophecy as literal (in its usual, ordinary meaning) unless one of the following occurs:*
 - The grammatical context shows that it is figurative language by the use of similes, metaphors, parables, allegories, symbols, or types.
 - A literal interpretation violates common sense, is contrary to what the author is saying, or is contrary to what the rest of Scripture teaches.
 3. *When a prophetic passage cannot be taken literally, look for what the author is trying to convey through his figurative or symbolic language. To discern what the author is saying, look for answers in the following places:*
 - Within the context of the book in which the passage appears
 - In any other writings of that author
 - In any other prophetic writings to which the author had access (for example, other prophetic books or passages in the Word of God)
 4. *Remember that often when a prophet refers to future events, he does not use the future tense*
 5. *When you interpret Scripture, consider the historical context of that writing, remembering that God was delivering His prophecy to a particular people at a particular time.* Granted it might have been a prophecy with a future fulfillment, but it would still be delivered in a way that was comprehensible to those receiving that prophecy – even though they might not understand the details, the symbolism, or the full implications of the prophecy.

Make a careful historical and cultural analysis of the text. Determine the identity of all historical events, proper names, and geographical locations before you attempt to interpret the text.

6. *Remember that the meaning of a specific prophecy could not always be understood by the prophet or by the people who heard the message.* For example, Daniel could not understand what he had written, since it was to remain sealed until the end time (Daniel 12:8,9).

However, many prophecies will come to light through the following:

A fulfillment as recorded in history

A fulfillment as recorded in the New Testament

An explanation given by an Old Testament or a NT writing (i.e., Acts 4:24-28)

7. *Remember that many New Testament prophecies include Old Testament quotations and allusions.* Scholars estimate that at least **350** Old Testament quotations or allusions appear in the book of Revelation alone. Revelation is replete with the language of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and the minor prophets. It is obvious that the author of

Revelation was steeped in the Old Testament, for he talks in Old Testament phraseology. So, to correctly interpret New Testament prophecy, check Old Testament cross-references.

8. *When you study prophecy, watch for phrases which indicate periods of time. For example, look for phrases which indicate periods of time. For example, look for in the last days, day of the Lord, day of wrath, and end of the age.* When you come across phrases such as these, carefully observe the things which occur during that particular time period. Then ask the following questions.
 - Have these events ever occurred in history?
 - Do these events coincide with any other particular period of time?
 - Do these events parallel any events, mentioned in another place in the Word of God?"
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So why have I included these Guidelines to Predictive Prophecy for you up front before we begin our study of Revelation chapters 6-22? If you use these guidelines in interpreting what is before you in these chapters, you will have a baseline for the literal interpretation of this book. Interpreting Revelation in this fashion will give you what the text of the Scripture actually says. Now, is there room for allegorical interpretation? Some believe there is. For example: the Preterists interpret the Beast of Revelation (whose number is 666) not as a future world dictator, but as the Roman emperor, Nero.⁴ The Preterist views chapters 6-19 as the trials and triumphs of the early church before the fall of Jerusalem to Rome in 70 A.D. They believe that all these things in Revelation 6-19 occurred prior to the fall of Jerusalem and were a judgment on the Jewish people for their disbelief that Jesus was the Messiah.⁵ Are the preterist's right or wrong? Let's consider something: I want you to read the text of Matthew 24. Once you are finished reading Matthew 24, read Revelation 6. What you will see in these two references is that Jesus' predictions in Matthew 24 flow almost seamlessly with those seal judgements in Revelation 6. So why do the preterists' believe the way that they do? Jesus starts out the Olivet Discourse telling those present with Him that not one stone of the Temple will be left upon another, which will not be torn down. What year was this prophecy fulfilled? In 70 A.D. Then He goes on to give you the lowdown of what things will happen in what order. If John penned the book of Revelation in 68 A.D. like the Preterists believe and the book was circulated rapidly among the Jewish Christians, then John (really Jesus through John) may have been warning them to get out of Jerusalem before all of this happened. To hide the Beast's identity, John could have used the gematria system of numerical values for Hebrew letters to throw the Roman government off base in case the writing wrongly fell into their hands. When transliterated into Hebrew, "Nero Caesar" has the numerical value when added together of 666. This would make Babylon referred to in Revelation 17 "Rome". In addition to this, in Revelation 1:1, it says that God showed Jesus who then showed His bondservants the things which must **SOON** take place. That little word **SOON**

⁴ Tim LaHaye says in the Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy, p. 366, "In the case of Nero, the identification involves a defective spelling that necessitates changing 'Nero' to 'Neron' in order to make the calculation work." Some Greek manuscripts read 616 instead of 666 which may be based on the Latin form of Nero without the final 'n.'

⁵ After talking with some Preterists and reading Dr. Michael Heiser's work and Brian Godawa's historical fiction books, I have surmised that the Preterists do not believe that Israel's return to the land (a second time) has any significance to the world scene at all.

has haunted those who believe the literal, sequential and future unfolding of Revelation as the only proper interpretation. I saw this in several of the students (including a pastor) in the online class I took on Revelation, who held to the literal interpretation and yet were “worried” about the word “SOON.”

I think I have an answer that might satisfy both parties and show that there is some of the Truth in both of these interpretations. In the Guidelines for Predictive Prophecy, it said: “When a prophet spoke for God, the prophecy could refer to a twofold fulfillment” which means there could be a near fulfillment and then a later, future fulfillment. What if they are both right? Now, there are partial preterists and full preterists. The full preterists do not believe there will be a Rapture of the Church and most do not believe there will be a literal 1000 year rule of Christ on a political throne in Jerusalem after His Second Coming. Some of these believe that God has replaced the Jewish people with the church and the promises and covenants made to Israel are no longer valid. There are many good scholars that hold to the Preterist viewpoint: RC Sproul, John Piper, and Michael Heiser are just a few of them. And there are some scholars that believe a combination of viewpoints within Preterism. The Futurist or Dispensational view believes that chapters 6-19 are about the unfolding future of the closing events of history This includes the second coming of Christ. They believe that Revelation was penned by John around the year 95 A.D. during the reign of Domitian, the brother of Titus Vespasian, who was thought to be worse than Nero. Most hold to the belief that there will be a Rapture and that Christ will return to establish a political throne upon the earth in Jerusalem for a thousand years. Their thinking on this stems from a firm belief that Israel are still God’s people and that God’s promises made to them and covenants made with them are “yeah and amen” or still intact. There are many good scholars who hold to the Dispensational viewpoint, amongst them are Thomas Ice, John Walvoord, Tim LaHaye, and J Vernon McGee. Again, many scholars believe a combination of viewpoints within Dispensationalism, as well.

In my belief, there is partial room for both of these interpretations. However, we will approach the basic understanding of the text as we go through this book together as literal, futuristic, and chronological. Along the way, I will point out other viewpoints when I think it is critical to know those viewpoints. I want to encourage all of you to have an open mind and have your own opinions on what you believe. However, because no one can absolutely understand everything that is going on in this book, we need to be respectful of each other and each other’s’ beliefs. It is more important to live our lives and put into practice the teachings of Christ that we receive from this book, than to fully understand every detail.

This is God’s World

This book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is not just for others in the past; it is for us today. It speaks to us today in its relevance to our world. We can affect this world we live in with what we learn from this book. God is faithful and his fulfilled prophecies mean we can trust His promise to return to this world. We can live triumphantly and face the future with confidence knowing that God is ultimately in control of this world and He has a plan which cannot be derailed. Jesus ultimately reigns!

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