The

ESSENTIAL
GUIDE TO
BIBLE
PROPHECY

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Everyone is curious about the future. We all want to know what is going to happen next, but only God has the ability to see what is to come. Therefore, we must rely on His Word as our guide to understanding what lies ahead.

We are living in incredible times. Things are changing so fast we can hardly keep up with them. Before we can catch our breath, we are hurried on to the next significant event on the horizon. Tensions in the Middle East, the development of weapons of mass destruction, and threats to global peace fill the newspaper headlines. We all sense that the world is moving toward some great climax.

People today are asking, where are we headed? What will happen next? And how can we be prepared? These are the very questions Bible prophecy answers for us. Prophecy helps us to see into the future with clarity and confidence.

The purpose of Bible prophecy is not to frighten us, but to assure us that God is in control. In times of human uncertainty, we can rest assured that we have a “sure word of prophecy” (2 Peter 1:19 kjv)
that shines like a beacon of light into the darkness of our times. Therefore, we can lift our heads and know that our redemption is drawing near (Luke 21:28).

The purpose of this study is to help us examine what the Bible says about the future. We will look at key Bible prophecies about such matters as the rapture of the church and the rise of the Antichrist. We will explore major prophetic passages that describe the Tribulation, Christ’s glorious appearing, the millennial kingdom, and heaven.

The hope of the second coming of Christ is a strong encouragement for us to live right. The Bible reminds us, “Abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming…We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 2:28; 3:2-3).

God bless you as you study these great prophetic truths. May they challenge your mind, move your heart, and lift your soul with great anticipation for the Savior’s return.

Tim LaHaye
Ed Hindson
The uniqueness of God is expressed in the predictive nature of Bible prophecy. There is nothing like this in any other religion. Only the God of the Bible can predict the future with perfect accuracy. “For I am God, and there is no other…declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done…Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass” (Isaiah 46:9-11).

Jesus Christ also claimed divine authority for the prophetic Scriptures. The most dramatic prophecies in all the Bible point to the coming Messiah-Savior, who would both suffer and reign. These ancient prophecies were so precisely fulfilled that there can be no serious doubt that they point to only one person who has ever lived—Jesus of Nazareth.

After His resurrection, Jesus told His disciples, “All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me” (Luke 24:44). Christ Himself then taught the disciples which Old Testament scriptures predicted
His life and ministry. “He opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (verse 45).

The New Testament writers were instructed by the Lord Himself regarding biblical prophecies and their fulfillment. The threefold designation—Law, Prophets, and Psalms—refers to the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible. Jesus was specifically stating that the entire Old Testament predicted the details of His life, ministry, death, and resurrection. Therefore, the preaching of the early Christian disciples was filled with references to Old Testament prophecies and their fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ (see Acts 2:25-36; 3:22-23; 4:25-26; 13:46-49).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus was recognized as a prophet of God (Matthew 21:11; Luke 7:16) and a teacher from God (John 3:2). Jesus even referred to Himself as a prophet (Matthew 13:57; Luke 13:33). The early preaching of the apostles also emphasized the prophetic nature of Christ’s ministry (Acts 3:24-26; 7:37). Matthew’s Gospel alone makes 65 references to Old Testament scriptures, emphasizing their fulfillment in Christ.

The Prophet and the Prophetic Ministry

The prophetic histories are followed in the Hebrew canon by the prophetic books of prediction. The two form a unit in the middle portion of the threefold canon, under the common term Prophets. Jewish readers distinguish them as the “former prophets” and “latter prophets.” The manner of speaking by the prophets may be best characterized as preaching. Their messages also included symbolic actions (2 Kings 13:17-19), object lessons (Jeremiah 1:11-14), and written sermons (Jeremiah 36:4).

The Hebrew prophets were men of God who preached God’s Word and also predicted the future. Their messages revealed events that were yet to come. In this regard, their messages were supernatural, not natural. They were derived neither from observation nor
intellectual thought, but from knowing God and speaking with Him.

What is a prophet? The first person in the Bible to be called a prophet was Abraham. This was a title given to him by God (Genesis 20:6-7). There were likely prophets who served before Abraham, such as Enoch (compare Genesis 5:24 with Jude 14), but it is significant that Abraham is the first prophet explicitly mentioned in Scripture. From his life, we can observe two key traits of the biblical prophets.

First, God chooses a prophet. Abraham’s call makes this clear:

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:1-3 NIV).

Abraham’s role as a prophet was not a vocation he sought. Rather, it was a result of God’s unique, sovereign calling upon his life.

Second, a prophet is a person with God’s message. God called Abraham to serve Him by revealing God’s message to others. Moses, who would also later serve as a prophet, likewise revealed God’s message by receiving the law of the Lord for the people of Israel. Other Old Testament prophets would look to both Abraham and Moses as examples of their role as people called by God to communicate the message of the Lord to those who needed it.

The revelation of God to the prophet is a process by which God
reveals His secrets to the prophet (Amos 3:7). The term “reveal” (Hebrew, galah) means to “uncover,” as in “uncovering the ear” (1 Samuel 9:15). Thus, when God “uncovers” the prophet’s ear, He reveals what has been previously hidden (as in 2 Samuel 7:27) so that the prophet perceives what the Lord has said (Jeremiah 23:18).

A prophet’s message is not the product of human effort. Rather, biblical prophecy finds its origin in the Spirit of God. “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21 niv).

These verses indicate several specific details related to the revelation of God. First, prophecy is completely from God: “No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things.” Second, prophecy is completely of God: “Prophecy never had its origin in the human will.” Third, prophecy is communicated through God’s prophets: “Prophets, though human, spoke from God.” Fourth, prophets were guided by God’s Spirit: “Prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” In every way, Scripture makes clear that biblical prophecy is a work of God through prophets of God to communicate God’s message.

Another consideration is the relationship of prophecy to the Bible as a whole. It has been estimated that 27 percent of the Bible includes prophecy. In other words, approximately one-fourth of the Bible is prophetic. If the Bible is considered authoritative and perfect, then the prophecies of the Bible encompass a large portion of God’s perfectly revealed Scripture.

What does the Bible teach regarding the nature of the Scriptures? A brief look expresses a clear view that the words of the Bible are indeed perfect. For example, consider Psalm 19:7-11 (NIV):
The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.
The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous.

They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.
By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV), Paul called Scripture “God-breathed.” We have seen that Peter taught that prophets were controlled by God’s Spirit. Jesus Himself agreed with this high view of Scripture:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished (Matthew 5:17-18 NIV).

Here, Jesus made clear that His incarnation and ministry were fulfillments of Old Testament writings. In making this statement, He indicated that the Old Testament authors were inspired by God and accurately spoke of His coming.
It is obvious, therefore, that the Spirit of God is necessary for prophetic inspiration. Thus, it was by the Spirit that the Word of the Lord was communicated to the prophet and by the Spirit that the Word was mediated to the people.

**Messianic Prophecy**

The high aspirations of the Old Testament writers and their application of God-like characteristics to a coming prince, the Messiah, the son of David, compel us to see one who is more than a mere man. He was called both the son of David and the Son of God.

The New Testament based its entire apologetic on the facts that Jesus was the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament and that these predictions were conclusively fulfilled in Jesus’ life. The New Testament recognizes the value of using predictive prophecy and its fulfillment as apologetic evidence to prove that Christianity is supernatural and credible.

Jesus Himself repeatedly taught that these prophecies “must be fulfilled.” Under God’s direction, He subjected Himself completely to the course they charted, and He considered the details of His life and death as events that must take place because they were written in the Word of God. The purpose of messianic prophecy was to make the Messiah known after He had fulfilled the events foretold. These prophecies served as preparatory devices that signaled His arrival.

The New Testament writers insisted that Jesus was the Christ on the basis of three essential arguments:

1. Jesus’ resurrection
2. eyewitness accounts of what happened
3. fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies

Within weeks of the resurrection, the early Christians were proclaiming the events in Jesus’ life as fulfillments of specific prophecies.
In the first Christian sermon, Peter announced, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel…David says concerning Him…[God] would raise up the Christ to sit on [David’s] throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ” (Acts 2:16, 25,30-31).

In following this line of proof, the apostles did what God’s prophets had done for centuries. They pointed to the fulfillment of prophecy as the ultimate proof of the truthfulness of God’s Word. In so doing, they urged their listeners to believe the whole message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Prophecies Fulfilled in the Life of Christ

The Old Testament is filled with prophecies about the human race, the nation of Israel, and future events in general. And the most important prophecies are those that point to the coming of Christ. These are not merely isolated “proof texts”; the whole of the Old Testament points the way to a coming future Messiah.

Even before the time of Jesus, the Jews recognized that many of these predictions were messianic. Here are ten examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prophecy</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Fulfillment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 3:15</td>
<td>seed of a woman</td>
<td>Galatians 4:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“her Seed”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“born of a woman”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 12:3</td>
<td>descendant of Abraham</td>
<td>Matthew 1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“All the families of the earth shall be blessed.”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“the Son of Abraham”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The scepter shall not depart from Judah.”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“the son of Judah”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 9:7</td>
<td>heir of David</td>
<td>Luke 1:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“upon the throne of David”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“the throne of His father David”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Another clear example is found in Matthew’s account of the wise men.

“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

“‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel’”
(Matthew 2:5-6 niv, quoting Micah 5:2-4).

These Jewish scholars were well aware of Micah’s prophecy long
before Jesus was revealed. Yet Micah had spoken these words 700
years earlier with explicit precision regarding the exact location of
the Messiah’s birth.

to Christ’s entry into Jerusalem on the day we call Palm Sunday.

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he
had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners
asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”
They replied, “The Lord needs it.”
They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the
colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread

What is the significance of Jesus entering the city on a young
donkey? The Jewish prophet Zechariah wrote,

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!
Shout, O Daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you;
He is just and having salvation,
Lowly and riding on a donkey,
A colt, the foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).

Utilizing donkeys for travel was common during this time, but
specifically referring to “a colt, the foal of a donkey” demonstrates a
level of accuracy that appears to have no other explanation than pre-
dictive prophecy. Amazingly, Zechariah penned these words around
550 years before the event!
In yet another prophecy, Matthew shared the financial motivation behind Judas Iscariot’s betrayal of Jesus: “Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, ‘What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?’ So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver” (Matthew 26:14-15 NIV).

Interestingly, Matthew, the former tax collector, noted that an Old Testament prophet had previously predicted this specific amount of money. God commanded Zechariah to “shepherd the flock marked for slaughter” (Zechariah 11:4). After a dispute about his work, he ended his shepherding (verses 8-9). In his exit interview with his employer, he remarked, “‘If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.’ So they paid me thirty pieces of silver” (verse 12). This visual form of teaching served as a specific prophecy regarding the exact price the chief priests paid Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus.

These are just three of the approximately 120 distinct Old Testament prophecies of the first coming of Christ. They are like pieces of a puzzle. Each presents a distinct element of the Savior’s life and ministry, but the whole picture portrayed by these pieces can be seen only after their fulfillment. Not until Jesus came did these prophecies come into clear relation with one another. The chances of all these prophecies being fulfilled in the life of one man is one chance in 84 followed by 131 zeroes.

These 120 prophecies of Christ’s first coming are overwhelming evidence of the divine origin of Scripture, the messiahship of Jesus, and the truth of Christianity. When viewed as a whole, the collective impact of these prophecies and their fulfillment in the Gospels cannot be easily dismissed by unbelievers. Again, the mathematical possibility of all these predictions being fulfilled in one person is absolutely astounding.

Louis Lapides grew up in a Jewish family in New Jersey. During a time of reflection on his own spiritual journey, he realized that the
description of the Messiah in Isaiah 53 perfectly fit the portrait of Jesus of Nazareth. Now a pastor, his studies and life experiences have led him from skepticism regarding messianic prophecies concerning Jesus to personally embracing Him as Messiah in his own life.

In an interview, Lapides was asked, “If the prophecies were so obvious to you and pointed so unquestionably toward Jesus, why don’t more Jews accept Him as their Messiah?”

He answered, “In my case, I took the time to read them.” In many cases, we undervalue the impact of the fulfilled prophecies regarding Jesus Christ because of our lack of study regarding how specifically the Bible has spoken. In our study together, we’ll discover that Scripture has frequently spoken very specifically regarding many events, both those fulfilled in the past as well as those that are yet to be fulfilled.

What About Future Prophecies?

The accurate fulfillment of the prophecies of Christ’s first coming point us to the certainty that the 300 prophecies of His second coming will also be fulfilled. Because the prophecies relating to Christ’s first coming have been fulfilled literally, we can confidently expect that the prophecies relating to His second coming will be fulfilled equally as literally.

We have every reason to believe in the trustworthiness of the Bible's prophecies about the future, but we can accept them only by faith until the time of their fulfillment. And our faith in these prophecies is not based on a misplaced pious hope. Rather, it is based on the literal fulfillment of prophecies from the past. This alone gives us great confidence that the prophecies not yet fulfilled will indeed come to pass.

The fact that Bible prophecies have always been fulfilled in an exact and detailed manner assures us that, in regard to prophecies not yet fulfilled, Christ will come again just as He said (John 14:1-3).
We can look forward to the unfolding of the future because we know it is under God’s sovereign control.

John’s Gospel ends by reminding us that the “world itself could not contain” the books that could be written about Jesus Christ (John 21:25). But John himself, Jesus’ personal disciple, states, “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31).

Why Does Bible Prophecy Matter?

All prophecy is important today for several reasons. This is the clear teaching of the New Testament.

_Studying unfulfilled prophecy is useful._ Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV), “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Paul referred to all Scripture, which includes the unfulfilled prophecies of the Bible. These portions of God’s Word are valuable for teaching what the future holds as well as standing against false teachings regarding what will occur in the end times.

_Studying unfulfilled prophecy gives us hope._ Romans 15:4 (NIV) teaches, “Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.” When we understand God’s plan for our future, we can live with hope even during our most difficult days. Prophecy is not intended to frighten those of us who believe but to encourage us. As 1 Thessalonians 4:18 (NIV) urges, “Encourage one another with these words.”

_Studying unfulfilled prophecy promotes holy living._ “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming” (2 Peter 3:11-12 NIV). A proper understanding of what the future holds directs our lives toward
holiness now. Our goal is to live now in such a way that we have no regrets in the future when we stand before our Lord.

_Studying unfulfilled prophecy compels us to share the gospel._ When we understand that Christ's rapture could take place at any moment, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52) according to the apostle Paul, we cannot help but long to share the reason for the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15).

_Studying unfulfilled prophecy brings blessing._ In Revelation 1:3 (NIV), John proclaims, “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” In contrast, Revelation also teaches a curse upon those who add to the words of its prophecies or take away from them (Revelation 22:18-19).

Prophecy is worthy of our attention, study, and devotion. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV), “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” This applies to our study of all Scripture, but it is certainly relevant to our understanding of the Bible's many prophecies. Our goal must be to know what God has spoken so that we may live with hope, holiness, and a desire to help those who have yet to experience a relationship with the risen Christ.

Jesus personally expected His followers to carefully study Scripture in preparation for His return. In Matthew 24:42 (NIV), He commanded His disciples, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”

In contrast, Jesus condemned the religious leaders of His day because they did not recognize the signs of the times.

The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

He replied, “When evening comes, you say, 'It will
be fair weather, for the sky is red,’ and in the morning,
‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’
You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky,
but you cannot interpret the signs of the times” (Mat-
thew 16:1-3 niv).

Jesus expected the people during His first coming to recognize
Him and to eagerly anticipate His second coming. We are likewise
called to both reflect on Christ’s fulfillment of biblical prophecy and
to look ahead at His future prophecies.

Biblical prophecies and their literal fulfillment fascinate our curi-
osity and challenge our minds, but they are ultimately intended to
bring us to a personal point of decision and faith. If the Bible pre-
dicted these things would happen and they actually did happen,
then we must take Jesus’ claims about Himself seriously. If He alone
fulfilled these prophecies, then He alone is the Savior, the Son of
God, King of kings and Lord of lords. And if He is, then He deserves
our faith, our lives, and our complete devotion.
Lesson 1

Only God Can Prophesy

When it comes to predicting the future, mankind has a poor record. We simply have no way of knowing what’s going to happen tomorrow, next week, next month, or next year. By contrast, God knows the future and reveals glimpses of it in the Bible. And so far, every single prediction that’s been fulfilled has occurred exactly the way God said it would. He has never even been slightly wrong.

1. Read Isaiah 46:9-10. What is God able to do that no one else can do?
2. Read Isaiah 45:5-7. What things does the Lord do? What does this tell you about Him?
3. Read Psalm 33:10-11. What does this passage say about the plans of people? What does it say about the plans of the Lord?
4. What does Proverbs 21:1 tell us about God?
5. Based on these Bible verses, how much control would you say God has over world events?
6. What does this knowledge do to your level of confidence in God’s ability to fulfill all the predictions He made in the Bible?

Applying Prophecy to Everyday Life

God is not only able to fulfill all the predictions in the Bible but also able to keep all His promises. How does that benefit you as a Christian?