

BIBLE  
Prophecy  
*for*  
EVERYONE

Tim LaHaye



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## **BIBLE PROPHECY FOR EVERYONE**

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*Dedicated to  
the memory of Margaret LaHaye,  
Bible student, soulwinner,  
Child Evangelism director in  
Lansing, Michigan, for 23 years,  
and my mother.*

*Her love for Bible prophecy  
sparked my own. She has been  
with her Lord for 30 years  
and now all her questions  
are answered, for she “knows  
even as she is known.”*



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## THE URGENCY

The phenomenal response to the LEFT BEHIND® series of prophetic novels that I coauthored with Jerry B. Jenkins beginning in 1995 has proven people have a deep fascination for knowing about the future. A single book I had hoped would sell 100,000 copies or so has now become a series with sales of over 70 million and climbing. The success of the spinoff children's series has already broken all publishing records and proves that the younger generation also yearns to know about the future.

The outrageous terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001 caused prophecy books of all stripes to sell off the charts as people tried to find some insight into the future. Such curiosity, whether fueled by the LEFT BEHIND® series or cataclysmic events, is understandable for man was created by God as an eternal soul, and thus he has always wondered where and how he will spend his eternal future. And apocalyptic-type events such as those that took place in New York City and Washington, D.C. spur millions more people to search for answers.

The good news is that God has given answers to us in His prophetic Word. In fact, 28 percent of the Bible was prophetic when it was first written. In all, there are over 1,000 passages of Scripture that were prophecies at the time they were written, and more than half of them have already been fulfilled. This track record of fulfillment is our assurance that the prophecies not yet fulfilled will come to pass when the proper time comes.

I am convinced that their time is rapidly approaching. Of one thing I am certain: There has never been a more urgent time when God's people have needed to know His wonderful plan for the future, and it can be found in the one book that tells us the truth—the Bible. Our generation has witnessed more fulfilled prophecy about the end times than any before us. This book will confront you with many of these signs.

Our Lord Himself warned His disciples seven times in the Olivet Discourse—which is His description of the end times—that there would be deceivers, false Christs, false teachers, and false prophets in the last days. That is an important reason we as God's people should study the prophetic Word. If we are indeed the generation that is seeing the signs of the times, then we need to know what to expect so that we will not be deceived. Not only must we protect ourselves from falling into the error of these false teachers, but we can know with certainty God's wonderful plan for the future.

Jesus Christ is coming again! Even many people who are not Christians believe that fact, according to a recent Gallup poll on religion. We can't know the day or the hour (Matthew 25:13), but we can know the season or general period of time. And we should all be prepared for Christ when He comes.

That's what this book is all about—to acquaint you with God's plan for the future so you won't be deceived by false teachers and charlatans who come in sheep's clothing and lead many astray. You will see that the best days for mankind are yet ahead.

Prophecy is not so difficult that we can't understand it, or else God would not have put it into Scripture. This book is written to help you find out for yourself what God has in store for you in both your earthly and your eternal future. You will find it both exciting and inspiring, and I pray that it will motivate you to live every day as if your Lord could return to this earth at any moment as He promised and take you to be with Him, permitting you to become an eyewitness and participant in His exciting plan for the future of mankind.

A special feature of this book is that you will not only *read* about Bible prophecy, but you'll have the opportunity to *study* it as well. This book can help you find out for yourself what prophecy teaches. It is a companion to my other study book by Harvest House Publishers, *How to Study the Bible for Yourself*.

This book is designed to give you a working knowledge of the



basics of Bible prophecy and the study of future things. It will equip you to answer the false teachers who are popping up everywhere. Even more important, it will help you straighten out the thinking of the many people you meet who are being deceived by these false teachers.

The Bible challenges us to rightly divide the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). This book will help you rightly divide the truths of prophecy!



# A NEW WAY TO STUDY PROPHECY

**Y**ou are about to embark on an exciting but sometimes controversial area of Bible study—one that could change your life. Prophecy sometimes becomes controversial because there are so many different opinions about it. Most of the controversies have to do with the timing of the Lord’s return or the interpretation of the signs related to His return. Rather than risk being labeled “controversial,” some Bible teachers rarely or never teach prophecy, even though it occupies nearly one-third of all Scripture.

A popular Bible teacher taught his congregation the entire New Testament book by book, from Matthew to Jude. After he finished, he started again at the book of Matthew. One of his students interrupted him and said, “You have forgotten the book of Revelation” (an entire book of prophecy). The teacher responded, “Oh, it’s too controversial and too difficult to understand.” Nonsense! Revelation 1:3 promises a blessing to those who read and obey the book of Revelation. And how can you get a blessing out of it if you can’t understand it? God in His graciousness has given us prophecy, which is essentially history written in advance. The study of the end times, or eschatology as it’s referred to, will not only inspire us but prepare us for the events of the last days.

This is not the time in history to avoid “the study of future things.” If we avoid teaching Christians the basics about prophecy, they will be “tossed to and fro” (Ephesians 4:14) by false teachers

who come to them with cunningly devised fables and interpretations that will deceive them. And if our expectations are correct, that increase of false teachers has already arrived on the scene and will continue in the days to come. Christians need to know *more* about prophecy, not less, so that they can be armed with the truth and defend themselves against erroneous teachings.

## It Is Possible to Understand Bible Prophecy

It is this author's conviction, after studying prophecy for many years and after writing several books on the subject (including a commentary on the book of Revelation), that prophecy is not so difficult to understand that it should be avoided. Instead, avoiding it could be dangerous to the spiritual health of Christians. The apostle Paul obviously thought prophecy was important for young Christians to study, for he addressed it in every chapter in the little book of 1 Thessalonians. (Bible scholars tell us this five-chapter book was probably the very first of his 13 epistles to be written, and that Paul had ministered in Thessalonica for only three weeks, yet obviously had taught many prophetic things during that short time.) In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-5 we read:

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness (NIV).

Obviously Paul did not think that such a subject as "the day of the Lord" (another reference to the second coming of Christ) was too complex for these baby Christians. The fourth chapter of 1 Thessalonians, which we will study later, contains the most detailed description of the coming of Christ for His church to be found in the whole Bible. Then in 2 Thessalonians, which was written just a short time later, Paul taught about the coming of the Antichrist and

other future events. Paul clearly did not think that future subjects were too controversial or so hard to understand that they should be ignored. Instead, he considered them important for young believers, and especially essential to challenging Christians to live holy lives in an unholy age.

Some details of prophecy are admittedly difficult to understand, but the essentials are not. And that is why this book is written—to help you see through your own study that such subjects as the return of our Lord, the resurrection of the dead, the future activities of the dead (including the judgment seat of Christ for Christians only and the white throne judgment for sinners only), the millennial kingdom, heaven, and the glorious appearing of Christ to rule and reign over this earth are just not that hard to understand.

I am convinced that even if some minor misunderstandings result from the pursuit of prophetic studies, this is still far better than ignoring the subject entirely. Ignorance has never been a virtue! As the apostle Paul said, “I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). I share that concern. I would not have you ignorant about the most important events God has planned for your future. For if you understand His plan, it will motivate you to live the kind of life that will cause Him to say to you on judgment day, “Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matthew 25:23).

## **What Makes This Book Different?**

Most books on prophecy, including some of mine, are written by one or more authors for the purpose of persuading you of their own interpretation of the prophetic Scriptures. However, the purpose of this book is to help you analyze the prophetic passages of the New Testament (and those from the Old Testament that have a bearing on them) in such a way that you can come to your own conclusions. Scripture texts will be given with space available for you to write your understanding of the passages. Questions will be asked to help you reach your own conclusions. In this way, God can speak to you directly on the subject. Then *after* you have reached your conclusion on what you believe the text teaches, I will provide my understanding of it for comparison. In some cases I will also give other interpretations by Bible-believing Christians for you to consider.

Keep in mind that the Bible was not written to divide Christians, even though it has sometimes been used that way. (In some instances, whole denominations have been started over differences related to Bible prophecy.) The Bible was written to ordinary people like you and me, and most passages are easy to understand and believe if we apply the golden rule of interpretation to the passage: *When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, but take every word at its primary, literal meaning, unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise.* As the apostle John said in Scripture about Christians understanding God's Word for themselves:

These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him (1 John 2:26-27).

If you are a Christian, you can understand the Bible, including the prophetic passages, and especially those verses that God designed to motivate His children to live holy lifestyles. Our Lord promised, "When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth...and He will tell you things to come" (John 16:13).

But first, let's examine *why Christians should study prophecy*.

# WHY CHRISTIANS SHOULD STUDY PROPHECY

God has given us three important signs that He is a supernatural God. The first is creation, the second is His Son Jesus Christ, and the third is His written revelation of Himself that we call the Bible.

Creation provides ample evidence that He exists (Romans 1:19-20). Because it is totally impossible to get order out of disorder, only a blatant skeptic would deny that the magnificent order in this well-designed universe demands a Superdesigner. All creation testifies that there is a God of creative design behind this universe, this earth, and mankind.

Jesus Christ, the most famous and influential man who ever lived, is the evidence of both God's existence and His incredible love for mankind. For God not only sent His Son Jesus into this world to identify with mankind, but to *die* for mankind, so that men and women could have their sins forgiven and enjoy God forever.

But the very best revelation we have is the Bible. Creation is limited in what it can tell us about God; it does not reveal His love or His forgiveness—only His almighty power. Jesus the Son is the complete revelation of God, for His words, actions, and teachings were the exact expression of God. Yet they were dependent on the

written Word of God for preservation and present-day discussion. We would know very little about Christ if it were not for the Bible.

Within the Bible we have a whole body of truth that testifies to the divine authorship of Scripture, and that body of truth is *fulfilled prophecy*. Only God can foretell the future. Man tries, but in time he is shown to be a fraud. The late Dr. D. James Kennedy, in one of his messages, told of reading 50 prophecies in *National Enquirer* that were supposed to be fulfilled during the 1970s. By the time the 1980s came to pass, not one of them had occurred! More about this later on in the book.

The Bible, however, is filled with prophecies that have come to pass—prophecies about Israel, the Gentile nations, and most important of all, the Messiah. The fact of fulfilled prophecy is how we can know without a doubt that Jesus Christ is the Messiah of God: More than 100 prophecies about His first coming were fulfilled in His birth, life, and death!

And that is why we can be so confident that He is coming again. In fact, someone has counted eight times as many prophecies regarding Christ's *second* coming as for His *first* coming! But as comforting and exciting as that certainty is, it will be of no help to the Christian unless he studies it for himself, or it is taught to him by someone else. There are, of course, other reasons for studying this very important subject. Consider the following:

1. *God must consider prophecy important, for He has put so much of it in the Bible.*

The Bible is not a single book but rather a library of books, of which almost one-third are prophetic writings. Of God's 66 volumes to mankind, you will find that most of the books were written by prophets. Even Moses, the lawgiver and author of the first five books of the Old Testament, was a prophet. In fact, most of God's messengers to man—including Samuel, Elijah, Daniel, and John the Baptist—were prophets. In the New Testament, there was a special first-century gift known as the gift of prophecy. Peter, Paul, James, Jude, and others had that gift. Our Lord, of course, knew all things, and He gave the most definitive prophecy of things still to come in His Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24–25. There are 16 books on prophecy in the Old Testament, including the Minor and the Major Prophets. In the New Testament, God used four books to cover the



subject—Revelation, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Jude. In addition, many of the other books include long prophetic passages or subjects, including our Lord's Olivet Discourse. The fact so much of Scripture is called prophecy makes it clear God intended for His children to study it. If we omit the study of prophecy as too controversial or too complex, we will omit almost one-third of the entire Bible!

2. *Prophecy reveals our Lord as He really is.*

One reason I have always loved prophecy is because of the exalted view it gives of our Lord. The prophetic portrayal of Christ is different than that found in the Gospels, which tell the wonderful story of His humiliation, including His birth, suffering, and death. In order to “taste death for everyone,” Christ had to humble Himself and make Himself “lower than the angels” (Hebrews 2:9); and during His time on earth, He was abused by His creation. It was not a pretty sight to see our Lord abused, rejected, and crucified.

But the second coming is a different matter! Never again will Jesus Christ come into this world to suffer or be subject to the whims of people. The next time He comes it will be “with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30) as “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:16). At that coming the Bible says “every eye shall see him” (Revelation 1:7 KJV) and “every knee [shall] bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and... every tongue [shall] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).

3. *A proper understanding of prophecy arms the believer against cults and false prophets.*

Scripture teaches that false Christs and false teachers will arise in the last days. Although there have always been false teachers, their numbers will increase as we approach the end times. The best defense is to “put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes” (Ephesians 6:11 NIV). Our Lord predicted that these false Christs and false prophets will be able to perform great signs and miracles and deceive even the elect—that is, believers who do not know the Scriptures well, particularly those Scriptures that relate to future things.

A good illustration of this are the Jehovah's Witnesses, who came

on the religious scene at the latter end of the nineteenth century. They predicted that a special group of 144,000 witnesses of Jehovah would arise just before the coming of Christ, and that they were commissioned to recruit them. Those Christians who understood Revelation 7:5-8 (from which Jehovah's Witnesses claim to get this teaching) were not deceived, for they knew that those 144,000 witnesses would arise during the coming Tribulation period, and that all of the witnesses would be Jews. (The Jehovah's Witnesses are primarily Gentiles.) In 1960 the Witnesses realized that they had recruited more people into their membership than 144,000, so they changed their interpretation of prophecy to fit their growth. From then on, they began teaching that only special members who did a lot of witnessing got to be a part of the 144,000 who would go to heaven. The rest were promised that they would "inherit the earth."

A more recent illustration is the man who sold 300,000 books explaining his claim that Christ was coming in September 1988. The date came and went, and he realized he was wrong. So he refigured his teaching and decided he had missed the date by exactly one year—so he put out another book. This one sold only 30,000 copies! Many individuals, on the basis of his false teaching, are said to have sold their homes and quit their jobs to await the Lord's return. Such Christians would have known better if they had been taught this simple fact our Lord had proclaimed regarding the time of His coming: "Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matthew 24:36).

A good rule to follow about any teacher of prophecy who sets a day or hour for the coming of Christ is this: *Don't believe him!* As our Lord said, "Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:5). The best way to avoid being deceived by the false teachers is to know the prophetic teachings of the Word of God.

#### 4. *The study of prophecy promotes an evangelistic church.*

The most evangelistic periods of church history have been times when the church studied prophecy. The church at Thessalonica, an infant church to which Paul taught the truths of prophecy, was an evangelistic church. So also was the early church as a whole. From the time that our Lord said, "I will come again and receive you unto Myself" (John 14:3), the early church had an evangelistic fire that

lasted almost three centuries. True, it was a persecuted church, but part of the reason it was persecuted was because of its evangelistic fire that was due in part to the emphasis given to teachings about our Lord's soon return.

Later, when paganism was brought into the church during about the fourth century, the Bible was no longer taught widely. What's more, certain religious leaders felt the Bible shouldn't be read or handled by the common people. That was the view during the Dark Ages—an era that was dark toward the truths of the Word of God, for the Bible was kept from people. That is why John Wycliffe (1330–1384) is considered one of the greatest Christian leaders of all time. In the fourteenth century, he determined to translate the Word of God into the common language so everyone could read it. He was called “the morning star of the Reformation,” and the Bible began to be studied again. In the nineteenth century came the rediscovery of the study of prophecy, or the study of last things. It was during this period that the greatest missionary and evangelistic emphasis of the modern church era was born. Throughout the twentieth century some of the most evangelistic and missionary-minded churches were those that taught prophecy, especially the prophecies of our Lord's soon return.

The study of prophecy is also helpful in counteracting the materialism of this present age. I need not convince the reader of this book that we live in a society that is not conducive to sacrifice or spiritual dedication. Even some Christians have gotten caught up in materialistic pursuits that detract from their relationship with God. But those who study Bible prophecy recognize that this world is very temporary. One day “the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10), and, as Scripture asks, “Then whose will those things be?” (Luke 12:20). The Christian untaught in prophetic truth is prone to get the idea that “all things [will] continue as they were” and “Where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Peter 3:4). But the promise is there; it just needs to be found in the study of prophecy.

##### 5. *The study of prophecy tends to purify the believer.*

It is no secret that we live in an unholy age. Unfortunately, too much of that unholiness is found even in the church. One tool the Holy Spirit uses to help believers live holy lives is the study of

prophecy, particularly those passages that relate to our Lord's soon return. The apostle John said this about those who hold to the promise of the Lord's second coming: "Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3).

Many a believer, including this writer, has in a moment of temptation thought, *Do I want to be doing this when Christ returns?* When the answer is a resounding "No!" it is easier to reject the temptation. Instead, we are challenged to so live that when Jesus comes we will be found doing those things that will earn the praise, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21) rather than the rebuke that will be extended to those who are "ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28). It is my prayer that the study of the exciting prophecies we will examine in this book will produce a heightened degree of holiness in your life so that you will be ready when Jesus comes.

#### 6. *Prophecy offers confident hope in a hopeless age.*

People can absorb many pressures in life, but lack of hope is not one of them. The world in which we live has no hope. Looking back, we see an unending history of war, war, war, all of which reveals the inhuman traits of mankind. The very study of history is a study of war and man's inhumanity to his fellow man. Yet the whole world yearns for peace, but knows no peace. Even the world's greatest thinkers have no workable solutions to the myriad problems facing humankind.

Prophecy students, however, not only know what our loving God has planned for the future of this planet and the billions who live on it, but they have a firm confidence (that is the biblical definition of *hope*) toward the future and are not afraid. We can say, "If we live, praise the Lord! If we die, praise the Lord!" Or we can say with the early Christians, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Those Christians had a greeting that needs to be rekindled in the church today: "Maranatha," which means "O Lord, come" (1 Corinthians 16:22). The student of prophecy will not dread the uncertain future, for he not only knows some of the things that must come to pass, but he also knows the One who holds the future.

The sad part is that the worst days in world history are not behind us but are still ahead. Our Lord Himself warned that toward the end of human history as we know it there will be a time of

“great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21). When we study that passage in detail, we see that this terrifying future will be unparalleled in all of human history. Yet it should offer no great personal concern for the Christian who rightly understands God’s prophetic plan as outlined in the Scriptures, for he is confident of his place in that plan. Unfortunately, many Christians unnecessarily experience the same distress and insecurity that unbelievers do when they read about the things destined to come upon the earth. That’s the price of being ignorant of Bible prophecy.

This confidence (or hope) is not automatic; it comes in response to the study not just of the Word of God in general but of those passages that pertain to prophecy. You may wonder why I refer to hope as confidence. But that is what the biblical word translated “hope” literally means. Because of our faith in the Lord of the future, which is strengthened by our study of the Word of God, we do not look to the future with a casual understanding of hope, saying, “We hope things will turn out all right.” No, we are *confident* that the future will happen exactly as Christ predicted. We do not merely wish that Jesus will come again; we are *confident* that He *will* come again because He promised He would. The more we know about God’s prophetic promises, the more convinced we will become of their future reality.

If, as many prophecy scholars believe, we begin to see world governments merge into one federated government over which one key leader will rule, Christians need not become unduly worried, for that would be just one more sign that the coming of the Lord is near. The same is true in regard to the other signs predicted for the end of the age, such as an increase in earthquakes, famines, pestilences, a spirit of lawlessness, and the disintegration of the family. Informed Christians will enjoy a “peace...which surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) as a result of knowing the prophetic Word. Obviously, nothing in the future will take God by surprise...nor will it surprise the Christian who knows the prophecies found in God’s Word.

Ultimately, Bible prophecy predicts the destruction of Satan by the Lord Jesus Christ. Currently Satan is “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4), and that is why it seems that evil continually overcomes good. But prophecy tells us that on the day when Our Lord comes, He will chain Satan in the bottomless pit, where

he will “deceive the nations no more” (Revelation 20:3). And ultimately the Lord will triumph over Satan forever. Christians who know nothing about these coming events will have little confidence or hope as they face the future. Only those who are familiar with prophecy can face what seems to be an uncertain future with peaceful confidence.