

UNCOVERING
THE SECRETS OF
BIBLE
PROPHECY

JEFF KINLEY



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For Henry

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Introduction:

Why Study Bible Prophecy?

Bible prophecy.

The Enigma code of Christianity. And to many, a seemingly unsolvable Revelation-style Rubik's Cube. Like a puzzle with more than a few pieces missing, this subject continues to arouse interest and garner international attention.

Including yours.

Actually, Bible prophecy should interest you because it, above most everything else on planet Earth, is very interesting. One reason for this is that we currently find ourselves living in perilous and uncertain days. A strange moment in time, for sure. But regardless of whether you're simply at the curious stage or are a seasoned student of eschatology—either way, you still want to know more. And that's a good thing. It's also the mark of a true disciple of Jesus (Matthew 11:29; 2 Peter 3:18).¹

These days, more and more people find themselves drawn toward the apocalyptic—including those who frequent conferences, read books, magazines, and blogs, and watch movies with this theme. Even novels on the subject have become national bestsellers. But the common thread knitting all these people together is that, like you, they long to know what God's Word says about future things. They want to know what's coming and, if possible, discover a general idea of *when*.

More importantly, many seek the practical difference those prophecies can make in their lives...right now.

But this desire to engage prophecy is not some accidental curiosity. No, I believe it has been placed in you by divine design. Therefore, your pursuit of answers is actually more by providence than by your own plan. Naturally, if there *is* such a prophetic future as described in Scripture (and I believe there is), you should seek to find out what it will be like. You want to know how to navigate through the prophetic fog that blankets our time. But while eager to know what's on God's future calendar, you also desire to guard yourself from being duped by sensationalism and those who propagate the prophetic version of "fake news."

If that's where this book finds you, then you're in a good place. You're a part of a unique tribe, a band of believers not content to drift aimlessly in the shallow, lazy river of ignorance and mediocrity. You simply don't have time for that. You *must* dig deeper, discover more, and live purposefully.

Prophecy culture is growing, partially because it's becoming obvious, even to secular minds, that we are likely living in earth's end times.² The world stage continues preparing itself for the end of days as we ramp up toward Revelation's realities. And among Christians, you can expect this heightened prophetic interest to only become greater in the days to come.

But amid all the hoopla and *aha* experiences associated with engaging Scripture's truths about the last days, a key component is often left behind. What's omitted or overlooked while wading through Revelation's judgments and musings about "666" is how Christians can be certain all these things will actually come to pass. What do we really know? And what is still unclear, even to prophecy experts? How is someone like you supposed to approach the Bible and interpret these incredible predictions? What skills does it require? What pitfalls should you avoid? And what traps must you watch out for?

That's part of what this book will help you identify.

From God's perspective, prophecy goes way beyond merely predicting things. Scripture's prophetic word also reveals important truths about God's character, His values, and His relationship with humankind. And it provides practical benefits critical for you and your life *right now*. For embedded within Bible prophecy is a spiritual treasure waiting to be discovered and enjoyed, a storehouse of future truth meant to transform you in the present tense.

My prayer is that *Uncovering the Secrets of Bible Prophecy* will help you experience both the joy of discovery as well as the benefit of personal enrichment. You'll discover that Bible prophecy's "secrets" are not actually hidden after all, but laid out in plain sight whenever you open your Bible. Aside from satisfying your prophetic taste buds, these truths will also empower your life as you follow Christ in these troubling times. I trust your mind and spirit will be stimulated and refreshed as you read.

Finally, God's prophecies are not only true and certain, they're also good...and good for you. He who holds the future designed His prophetic truth to make you a better worshipper.

And with no time to waste, let's get started with the first key.

Chapter 1

Understanding the Nature of Prophecy

Its Essence and Divine Purpose

He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

REVELATION 21:5

Bible prophecy is a *thing*. A real thing, according to Scripture. And something that radically affects the lives of those who engage with it. Of course, practically speaking, if there are no biblical prophecies to anticipate, then Christians should just keep on doing church and living their lives for God as best as they can. Whatever eventually *does* happen, happens. After all, God's in charge, right? So why even bother thinking about the future? *Que sera, sera*. And no amount of wishful thinking or prophetic speculation about potential coming events will alter His plan. Besides, no one really knows the future... right?

Wrong.

I believe we can know what is going to happen. In fact, we already do. And it's written down in a centuries-old document just waiting for us to discover it. That's because prophecy is both *in there* (the Bible) and *out there* (the future). God has already revealed it to us in His Word. And best of all, He wants us to know about it, respond to it, and let it revolutionize our lives.

Reading the Writings

I come from a large extended family. My dad was one of nine brothers, so there were lots of men I called “uncle.” One of those men, my uncle Floyd, never learned to read very well. Growing up during the Great Depression, Floyd decided early on in elementary school that “readin’ and writin’” weren’t his thing. He never went past the fourth grade, opting instead to stay home and help out around the house, eventually joining the workforce in his teenage years. Though he functioned well enough to get by, Floyd was nevertheless semi-dependent on others to help him read the newspaper or an occasional magazine. On into his later years, the gentle-spirited man would often hand me a newspaper, then with a wink and a smile say, “Hey, Pete,” (Floyd called everybody Pete) “read that article to me. I left my glasses at home.” Or “I was absent the day they taught readin’ at school.” Looking back, Floyd may also have suffered from a learning disability. Regardless, ask any of my 40 or so cousins who their favorite uncle was, and to a person they’ll point to Uncle Floyd. Just weeks before his passing from cancer, I had the privilege of leading my dear uncle to faith in Jesus. He cried out to God in simple faith, and He answered. Thankfully, you don’t have to be well educated to call on the name of the Lord for salvation.

Floyd’s lack of education reminds me of many Christians who are functionally illiterate when it comes to the Bible. It’s not that they can’t read it. It’s just that their ability to handle the Word is handicapped by the fact that they have neglected the Scriptures in their daily lives. You may be in a strong Bible-teaching church or have an extensive knowledge of God’s Word. If so, you are by far the exception and not the rule.

According to Lifeway Research, only 19 percent of American churchgoers read their Bibles daily. And among teenagers, only 3 percent read them each day, though seven out of ten own a Bible. There are several plausible explanations for such dismal numbers.

Many have simply never been taught how to read and understand the Bible. Some pastors spoon-feed their flocks with feel-good,

self-empowering messages, and yet fail to equip their people to become self-feeders (Ephesians 4:11-16). You could add laziness, busyness, apathy, and sin to the list of reasons as well. But regardless of the factors, here we are. Over 80 percent of churchgoing adults are not regularly nourishing themselves with the Word of God. Though they may spend time with other Christians and listen to uplifting music or even Bible-teaching podcasts, these are not replacements for interacting with God one-on-one through His written revelation. Though not characteristic of every church, multiply this mass malnourishment by the roughly 250,000 Protestant churches in America, and you end up with tens of millions of professing believers who are biblically nonfunctional. That means someone else has to cut up their spiritual meat and do the chewing for them. These Christians lack the skills to navigate their way through a book of the Bible or to interact with theological truths found in Scripture. It also makes them much more susceptible to embracing false teaching and idolatrous lies about God. That's because biblical illiteracy logically leads to theological bankruptcy and guaranteed spiritual anemia. And it shows in our culture, where our gospel light has been dimmed and our moral influence diminished.

But as we examine Scripture, we see that this disease of doctrinal deficiency is not a recent phenomenon. It's precisely why Paul exhorted Pastor Timothy to be "constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following" (1 Timothy 4:6). Without an accurate knowledge of Scripture and regular encounters with it, our chances of growth are virtually nil. We effectually die, though we still function. Like spiritual zombies.

Perhaps nowhere is this epidemic more clearly seen than when it comes to Bible prophecy. Many Christians find themselves at a loss when attempting to articulate anything remotely resembling what the Bible says about the end times. And though the vast majority of evangelicals believe we are living in the last days, we really don't seem to care that much. In many churches, our Sunday morning attempts to reach the lost have trumped our mandate to "make disciples...teaching them

to observe all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20). Instead of “equipping the saints for the work of service” (Ephesians 4:12), our consumer-oriented, performance-driven, entertain-me church services have inundated us with what theologian Charles Ryrie once referred to as an “eschatological agnosticism.” Translated: Christians simply don’t know what the Bible says about the end times. And worse, we don’t seem to be bothered by that fact. We don’t understand the times because we’re too busy trying to *survive* the times!

However, ironically, Revelation and other Scriptures related to the end times were meant to help us do just that. In fact, they go way beyond just helping us get by. This area of biblical truth is one of God’s divinely designed means to help us *thrive* in the midst of these dark days in which we live.

The nature of prophecy is that (1) it is divine in origin, meaning it comes not from man’s fantastical imagination but from God Himself, and (2) it involves the foretelling of events, both from a national (Israel and Old Testament) and global (Revelation) perspective. And in the end times, the two will overlap.

Rather than being a mere curiosity, Bible prophecy takes up a significant portion of God’s Word (28 percent). It’s just as legitimate as the Hebrew poetry of Psalms, the narrative Gospel of John, and the didactic Epistle to the Romans. In prophecy, we discover divine promises, predestined predictions, and unconditional provisions given by God concerning the fate of the world, the state of the church, the rebirth and return of the nation Israel, and the future of humankind. In our Lord’s prophetic texts, we are given unique insight into His character and the righteous outworking of His eternal plan.

So why would a child of God shy away from such a rich treasure of truth? And how can a lover of Scripture blatantly ignore such a significant portion of the Bible, including hundreds of prophecies yet to be fulfilled? How could we ever view prophecy as merely a spiritual hobby for certain Christians, treating it as one of many menu options in a

scriptural buffet? Truthfully, if you remove the prophetic genre from the Bible, you cut out about one-third of all Scripture! If the Bible were a map of the United States, that would be like erasing 16 states. But no worries, you'd still have 34 left, right? This is preposterous!

Eschatology Road

All that being said, I can understand why Bible prophecy seems so hard for most Christians. Eschatology (the study of the end times) can be very *unlike* those warm and comforting passages we underline and highlight elsewhere in Scripture. Like two magnets, our hearts and these passages are sometimes irresistibly drawn to one another, forming a strong bond and connection. But turn the page and you may encounter another kind of biblical truth, one producing an almost repelling response. Some prophetic passages can seem prickly and therefore tough to embrace. Honestly, as we fast-forward to history's coming season of judgment and wrath, we encounter some troubling truths in the Word. And because we typically like to keep things positive and upbeat in church, we lean toward those Scriptures that bring us happiness, not heartache. Though this is understandable, it's not biblical.

But can you imagine what would've happened if the Old Testament prophets had taken this approach? What if, in heralding the ancient, prophetic revelation, those tasked with leading God's people had simply left out the heavy, uncomfortable stuff? Perhaps instead of being known as the "Weeping Prophet," Jeremiah could have become the "Positive Prophet" by telling Israel how to have a good self-image or a prosperous life. Nathan didn't really have to face down King David regarding his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband, did he? That might make him upset. Instead, why not just tell the king, "Okay, look, so you made some unwise choices. We all mess up every now and then. Just try not to do it again, okay?" Rather than confronting and condemning Herod's marriage to his brother's

wife, John the Baptist (the last official Old Testament prophet) could have shared with the newlywed couple some helpful tips on having a happy marriage.

Obviously, those are ridiculous examples. “*All Scripture is inspired by God*” and that includes the desirable as well as the difficult truths (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Like the double-edged sword that Scripture is, it comforts and heals as powerfully as it cuts and wounds (Hebrews 4:12). And even though eschatology contains some very unpleasant future happenings, the endgame of prophecy is that our Savior and King is victorious, our sin nature eradicated, our salvation and glorification completed, and our destiny secured. Plus, we reign with Jesus forever! God wins! And we get to share in His joy and celebration. How can these coming realities be anything other than positive and uplifting?

Even so, I do get it. I know why “all that Revelation stuff” seems above most Christians’ pay grade. During my 30 years of pastoring, I have observed some of the big reasons why the majority of Christians bypass the sometimes bumpy and uncomfortable road of prophecy. Allow me to articulate each of these reasons for you.

1. “Prophecy is really difficult to interpret and understand.”

After all, there are symbols, metaphors, similes, cryptic words, and “hidden” meanings. There are allusions, historical references, seemingly undecipherable word-pictures, and expository enigmas. All these combined create a sort of Rubik’s Cube, and everybody knows only geniuses can solve those things. So, to the average believer, prophecy can seem like a very long game of unsolvable riddles. Rated “E” for expert. Ever felt like that?

2. “I’ve never heard much teaching on this subject by my pastor.”

Tragically, a small percentage of pastors equip their people with solid teaching in this area of theology, and there are many reasons why they avoid the subject altogether (see endnote for the Top Ten

Reasons Why Pastors Don't Preach on Bible Prophecy).¹ One of those reasons is that they themselves were not taught much eschatology in their seminary experience. Other pastors are bi-vocational or have no formal biblical training at the graduate level, and so they may feel inadequate to effectively tackle the subject. And without great training, a pastor must teach himself or be a diligent student of exposition and theology. Most bi-vocational pastors don't have the luxury of time to devote to this amount of study. Since church members form their spiritual values from topics taught by their pastors, they, too, end up either neglecting prophecy or seeking teaching and insight from various outside sources. But part of a pastor-teacher's calling is to "equip the saints" so they can become doctrinally sound and spiritually mature (Ephesians 4:11-16). Like Paul, ministers are to preach the "whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27). The apostle knew that in the last days, it will become passé to preach the whole truth of God's Word. This is one reason he wrote to his young pastor friend, Timothy,

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

As a pastor for three decades, there were times when I found it awkward and inconvenient to preach certain passages or truths from Scripture. I would've preferred a more positive message, but my calling and duty demanded that I preach the next passage. Inconvenience does

not exempt pastors from certain truths, regardless of the difficulty of the truth or people's feelings or responses. What I discovered, though, was that the Holy Spirit always accompanied His Word, illuminating the hearts and minds of seeking Christians and helping them to process His Word, even when it was uncomfortable.

Some leaders in the church today view eschatology as an unnecessary distraction from more central, core doctrines. And understandably, every sermon should not be about the end times. But in an age when Bible prophecy appears to be headed toward fulfillment, it is critical for Christians to hear a clear Word from God concerning the state of the church and the destiny of our world. Sadly, millions of presumably hungry Christians remain confused, mistaken, or stuck in a fog concerning God's prophetic plan and its implications in these last days.

3. "I'm afraid of Revelation and end-times prophecy. It scares me."

I've actually heard this from Christians as to why they steer clear of Revelation. They avoid it like a dark alley or a giant pothole in the road. As such, the last book of their Bible remains uncharted waters for them. I suspect they have seen apocalyptic movies or even heard sermons where Revelation's horrific judgments are portrayed in graphic detail. Mental images of blood rivers, 100-pound hailstones, demonic locusts, global earthquakes, the antichrist, the number 666, and believers being beheaded are enough to give anyone nightmares, particularly if they think there's a chance they might have to endure such a time.

However, I believe this fearful response also has something to do with how they have been taught to view God and His Word. Their preformed image of God seeks to buffer or mute Scripture's portrayal of Him as a God of wrath. "God wouldn't do that to people—He loves them" is not an uncommon reaction. Others' compassionate personalities have a natural aversion to wrath and judgment. This is

understandable. But because of this, they end up missing other *comforting* truths found in the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

What has escaped these Christians' notice (or maybe it was never presented to them) is that God "*rescues us from the wrath to come*" (1 Thessalonians 1:10), and that He has "*not destined us for wrath*, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9).² The context of both these passages concerns the age of the apocalypse and end times. Therefore, the more we know about Bible prophecy, the more hope we have. But never a sense of anxiety or dread. This demonstrates once again that fear is always the enemy of faith.

Actually, this fear-fueled reaction to the end-times narrative more accurately describes what *unbelievers* experience during the tribulation period, in which case it is justifiable and appropriate for them (Revelation 6:16-17).

4. "I really don't see the practical relevance of prophecy to my daily life."

Let's be honest. As humans, we always want to know what's in it for us, don't we? What are the perks? The benefit package? The payoff? This is a natural question, and one that isn't necessarily sinful or selfish. God wants us to internalize and apply His Word. It was He, not us, who said, "All Scripture is...profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). His words, not ours. So it's a good thing to ask, "What can prophecy do for me?"

And it's here that the adage "Knowledge is power" holds true. When it comes to studying prophecy, that "knowledge power" involves a supernatural enablement from God Himself. Knowing and engaging with prophecy enables you to embrace the truth of God. This influences your thinking, which in turn affects both your decisions and emotions. As you become more familiar with what God says is going to take place on planet Earth, you are able to move forward by faith and, like Noah, realize your purpose and fulfill your destiny!

So what *does* knowing about prophecy do for you?

1. Prophecy helps you understand the times in which you live (1 Chronicles 12:32; Daniel 2:28).
2. Prophecy calms your fears about the future (Matthew 28:20; John 14:1-3,27).
3. Prophecy gives you confidence, courage, and comfort in the present (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 16:33).
4. Prophecy increases your faith in God who's in control of earth's story (Isaiah 40:12-26; Psalm 115:3; Daniel 4:35). Revelation 4 precedes 5-18.
5. Prophecy strengthens your confidence in God's Word (Matthew 5:17-18; 24:35; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). The Bible is batting a thousand.
6. Prophecy builds expectancy and anticipation for what's coming (Revelation 22:10; Matthew 6:10).
7. Prophecy gives you positive hope in a hopeless world, rescuing you from despair (Titus 2:11-15).
8. Prophecy keeps you centered in an age of doctrinal error, heresy, and apostasy (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1-17).
9. Prophecy blesses you as you listen to and obey Scripture's prophetic words (Revelation 1:3).
10. Prophecy motivates you to be urgent about your mission here on earth, not wasting your time on worthless pursuits (Ephesians 5:15-16).
11. Prophecy fuels the fire of your desire to see others know Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:10-13; 6:2).
12. Prophecy imparts a perspective on the temporary nature of suffering (John 16:1-4; Romans 8:18).
13. Prophecy helps you prioritize spiritual things over physical things, living wisely (Psalm 90:10-12; 2 Peter 3:11-13).

14. Prophecy purifies your life as you prepare yourself as Christ's bride (1 John 3:1-3).
15. Prophecy helps you know what to expect as you live for God in an increasingly hostile world (John 15:18-23).

So, again, why should every Christian study Bible prophecy?

- Because it's in the Bible (28 percent of the Bible was prophetic at the time it was written).
- Because of the times in which we live.
- Because of false teaching and misinformation on the subject.
- Because of the huge personal benefits.

When asked by His disciples, "When will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3), Jesus took time to prophesy many of the events found in the book of Revelation. Then He took their minds back to another ancient prophecy regarding the days of Noah (Matthew 24:1-39). For them (and us), understanding the past is key to making sense of the future and navigating the present.

I encourage you to reject the passivity that prevents many Christians from living with confidence, direction, and hope by engaging in what God says about your future!

God highly values His prophetic Word. And Jesus rebuked both the Pharisees and those disciples who failed to recognize, understand, or heed Bible prophecy regarding Him (Matthew 16:1-4; Luke 24:13-32). It stands to reason that if there are prophecies that have not yet come to pass, then God similarly expects His children today to heed them, *especially* if they may soon be fulfilled.

The Bible was written not simply to be marveled at, but to be understood and obeyed. Admittedly, the meaning of a Bible prophecy is not always immediately discernible at the time it is given or recorded. Many are not understood until the actual time of their fulfillment.

(We'll discuss this more in chapter 5 when we tackle the principles of prophetic interpretation.) But to detour around an entire field of theology just because it doesn't seem directly applicable to our lives demonstrates a shallow spirituality, a lack of hunger for God's Word, or just plain apathy.

I take it you are the kind of disciple who would rather know and grow. If so, turn the page.