

BASIC

BIBLE

PROPHECY

RON RHODES



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Basic Bible Prophecy

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*I dedicate this book to the
countless Christians who are new to Bible prophecy,
and who may think it is too complicated to learn.
I promise you—this book makes it easy.
I pray it blesses you!*

Acknowledgments

Through the years, I have received countless letters and emails from people around the world, asking a variety of interesting questions about Bible prophecy. In many cases, people were confused about some aspect of prophecy. In other cases, people voiced concern about the proper chronology of prophetic events. In still other cases, people were intimidated by Bible prophecy, but still expressed interest in trying to learn about it.

I appreciate each of you for taking the time to write. You have motivated me to author this book, which is an introductory guide to the end times. Perhaps for the first time, you will learn all about the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHY of Bible prophecy. This book will make it easy.

I want to express my profound thanks to God for the wondrous gift of my family—Kerri, David, and Kylie. Without their endless love and support, the sun would not shine as bright in my world. “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you” (Romans 1:8).

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Most importantly, I remain ever grateful to the Lord Jesus for the opportunity He has given me to serve Him during this short earthly life.

Come soon, Lord!

CONTENTS

Introduction: Basic Bible Prophecy	7
PART 1: HOW CAN WE MAKE SENSE OF BIBLE PROPHECY?	
1. How Is Bible Prophecy Important?	15
2. How Can We Understand Last-Days Lingo?	21
3. How Do God's Covenants Relate to Prophecy?	33
4. How Can We Decide on a Literal Versus Allegorical Approach?	41
5. How Can We Properly Interpret Bible Prophecy?	51
6. How Can We Avoid Prophetic Imbalances?	61
PART 2: WHO ARE THE PRIMARY PERSONALITIES OF THE END TIMES?	
7. Who Are the Bad Guys?	75
8. Who Are the Spiritual Beings Behind the Scenes?	89
9. Who Are the Good Guys?	101
PART 3: WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY EVENTS OF THE END TIMES? WHEN DO THEY OCCUR?	
10. Events Before the Tribulation Period	117
11. Events in the First and Second Halves of the Tribulation	131
12. Events at the End of (and Right After) the Tribulation	143
13. Events in the Millennial Kingdom	153
14. Events Prior to and During the Eternal State	161
PART 4: WHERE IN THE WORLD WILL END-TIME PROPHECIES UNFOLD?	
15. WHERE in the World: Part 1	173
16. WHERE in the World: Part 2	185
PART 5: WHY DOES GOD GIVE US PROPHECIES OF THE END TIMES?	
17. A Motivation to Live Expectantly	197
18. A Motivation to Live Righteously	203
19. A Motivation to Live with an Eternal Perspective	211
Postscript: Basic Bible Prophecy Quick Quiz	219
Bibliography	221
Notes	222

Basic Bible Prophecy

Dear reader, if you have ever shied away from studying Bible prophecy because you thought it was too big a topic or perhaps too controversial—with too many conflicting views—*this book is for you*. I take the complicated and make it simple. You may consider this book “Bible prophecy made plain.”

It may be that you have studied Bible prophecy before, but you are still confused by it. If that is the case, this book can help dispel your confusion. You will quickly gain clarity and become conversant on all the big issues of prophecy.

I will function as your Bible prophecy tour guide. I will help you understand what you need to know while avoiding unnecessary clutter.

Reading this book will enable you to grasp—perhaps for the first time—both the big picture of Bible prophecy and the most important finer details. The charts and visuals throughout the book will help keep things simple.

In this book I will examine the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHY of Bible prophecy. You may think of these categories as different vantage points for studying this important subject.

Different vantage points are a good thing. A police officer who writes up a report on a fender bender will typically interview several witnesses. Each witness has a different vantage point. The officer might interview one person who was walking along the sidewalk when the accident occurred. He might interview another person driving in the car behind the vehicle involved in the accident. He might also interview the person who was looking out the office window at the exact moment the accident occurred. And, of course, he will interview the

people involved in the accident. By combining the statements from people with different vantage points, the officer has a much better understanding of what occurred.

The same is true as we study Bible prophecy. By considering the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHY we will have a much better understanding of Bible prophecy. I hope you find this to be true as you go through the book.

As a bonus, each chapter will close with some bullet points that summarize the big ideas that you need to remember. I will also include some “questions for reflection” that will help you think through the significance of what you have learned. I think you will find the book to be an enriching experience.

If you are like me, you will soon discover that an understanding of Bible prophecy can be life-changing. My exposure to biblical prophecy was a big contributing factor to my becoming a Christian way back in the 1970s. As a new Christian, I found that the more I studied Bible prophecy, the more I came to understand that—

- God truly knows the future.
- The Bible—which contains God’s prophecies of the future—is the Word of God, and you can trust it.
- God is in sovereign control of all that occurs in the world.
- God has a plan for humanity—and He has a plan for you and me.
- God will one day providentially cause good to triumph over evil.
- A new world is coming—a new earth and new heavens, a new city in which to live (the New Jerusalem), and new resurrection bodies that never age, get sick, or die.
- We will experience a joyful reunion with all our Christian loved ones in the afterlife.
- The Lord is coming sooner than we think!

Factors such as these make this book extremely relevant.

Our God Is an Awesome God

One of the most significant benefits growing out of my personal study of Bible prophecy is my ever-growing understanding of the awesomeness of God. I think you will experience this benefit as well.

The God who knows the future is wondrous, majestic, and glorious. He is “the First and the Last; there is no other God” (Isaiah 44:6). The prophet Daniel exulted:

“Praise the name of God forever and ever,
 for he has all wisdom and power.
 He controls the course of world events;
 he removes kings and sets up other kings.
 He gives wisdom to the wise
 and knowledge to the scholars.
 He reveals deep and mysterious things
 and knows what lies hidden in darkness,
 though he is surrounded by light.”
 (Daniel 2:20-22)

Our awesome God is all-knowing. He perceives the past and the future with equal clarity. God’s knowledge of all things is from the vantage point of eternity. The past (Isaiah 41:22), present (Hebrews 4:13), and future (Isaiah 46:10) are all encompassed in one ever-present “now” to Him. *He sees all!*

God knows all things, both actual and possible (Matthew 11:20-24). Because He knows all things, there can be no increase or decrease in His knowledge. Psalm 147:5 affirms that “His understanding is beyond comprehension” (see also Psalm 33:13-15; 139:11-12; Proverbs 15:3; Isaiah 40:14; Acts 15:18; Hebrews 4:13; 1 John 3:20). Such verses reveal we can trust God when He communicates prophecies about the future to us. *Never doubt it.*

Scripture also portrays God as being sovereign. He rules the universe, controls all things, and is Lord over all (Ephesians 1). There is nothing that can happen in this universe beyond the reach of His control. All forms of existence are under His absolute dominion. Psalm 66:7 affirms that “by his great power he rules forever.” Psalm 93:1 affirms

that “the LORD is king!” God Himself asserts, “Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish” (Isaiah 46:10). God assures us, “It will all happen as I have planned. It will be as I have decided” (Isaiah 14:24). Proverbs 16:9 tells us, “We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps.” Proverbs 19:21 likewise says, “You can make many plans, but the LORD’s purpose will prevail.”

One of my favorite professors at Dallas Theological Seminary was the late Dr. Robert Lightner—affectionately known as Lightning Bob among his students. In one of his books, he offered this great perspective on God’s sovereign oversight of human history:

When viewed from the perspective of Scripture, history is more than the recording of the events of the past. Rather, what has happened in the past, what is happening now, and what will happen in the future is all evidence of the unfolding of the purposeful plan devised by the personal God of the Bible. All the circumstances of life—past, present, and future—fit into the sovereign plan like pieces of a puzzle.¹

C.S. Lewis, once a professor at Oxford University, sums it up nicely: “History is a story written by the finger of God.” His point was that God controls the nations (Job 12:23; Psalm 22:28; Daniel 4:17); He sets up kings and deposes them (Daniel 2:21); and He does all according to His sovereign plan (Acts 4:27-28). *That means you can trust prophecy!*

Peace in the Heart

My friends, supreme peace in the heart is the natural result of trusting that God is not only all-knowing, He also sovereignly oversees all that happens in the world. No matter what we may encounter—no matter how much we do not understand why certain things happen, and no matter how horrible the newspaper headlines may often seem to be—the knowledge that our sovereign God is in control of human history is like a firm anchor amid life’s storms. We can be at peace no matter what the future may hold.

I want you to remember this as we continue through the rest of this book. God does not want us to be fearful about the prophetic future. He wants us to have confidence and peace. When Jesus spoke to His followers about the prophetic future, He added these words: “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me” (John 14:1). Remember—our personal relationship with Jesus gives us peace, no matter the external circumstances. Jesus affirmed: “I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid” (John 14:27).

GOD’S PEACE FOR CHRISTIANS	
We can have perfect peace.	Isaiah 26:3
Peace can guard the heart.	Philippians 4:7
Peace can rule the heart.	Colossians 3:15
We have peace in Christ.	John 16:33
Do not be troubled.	John 14:27

My experience has taught me this:

- The more I understand about the prophetic future, the greater is my sense of God’s awesomeness, power, and might.
- The more I understand of God’s awesomeness, power, and might, the greater is the peace in my heart.

May it be the same for you!



PART 1

*HOW CAN WE
MAKE SENSE OF
BIBLE PROPHECY?*

How Is Bible Prophecy Important?

My primary focus in this book is on the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHY of Bible prophecy. First, however, I wish to consider HOW we can make sense of Bible prophecy. Toward that end, I want to address some specific questions:

- How is Bible prophecy important?
- How can we understand last-days lingo?
- How do God's covenants relate to prophecy?
- How can we decide between a literal or allegorical approach?
- How can we properly interpret prophecy?
- How can we avoid prophetic imbalances?

After we understand the HOW of Bible prophecy, the other broad categories—the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHY—will make much better sense. Trust me. I've been studying prophecy for decades.

We begin with the foundational question: *How is Bible prophecy important?* Studying Bible prophecy is important because it brings some great benefits. These benefits are part of the motivation for studying prophecy. You do not want to miss out on these benefits. Following are seven that are especially meaningful to me.

1. Prophecy Proves God Is the *True* God

The Bible reveals that one proof of the true God—in the face of many false gods and idols—is that He can predict the future. In Isaiah 41:21-23, God challenges people to supply proof that their worthless idols are really gods:

“Present the case for your idols,” says the LORD. “Let them show what they can do,” says the King of Israel. “Let them try to tell us what happened long ago so that we may consider the evidence. Or let them tell us what the future holds, so we can know what’s going to happen. Yes, tell us what will occur in the days ahead.”

These idols and false gods could not comply. By contrast, the true God says of Himself: “Everything I prophesied has come true, and now I will prophesy again. I will tell you the future before it happens” (Isaiah 42:9). He later likewise affirmed: “I alone am God! I am God, and there is none like me. Only I can tell you the future before it even happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish” (Isaiah 46:9-10).

2. Prophecy Proves the Bible Is God’s Word

Fulfilled prophecy shows that the Bible is, in fact, the Word of God and can be trusted. The logic is simple:

1. God alone knows the prophetic future.
2. God shares multiple specific prophecies of the future in the pages of the Bible and no other holy book.
3. Over one hundred Old Testament messianic prophecies of Christ’s first coming—the fulfillment of each one recorded in the pages of the New Testament—confirm God’s 100 percent accuracy rate in foretelling the future.
4. Prophecy is thus a compelling proof that the Bible is God’s Word and can be trusted.

3. Prophecy Promotes Evangelism

Prophecy can be a powerful evangelistic tool. We find a perfect example of this in Peter's sermon delivered on the day of Pentecost, after all kinds of supernatural phenomena had just occurred. Peter began his message by speaking about prophecy related to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon people: "What you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). Later in the sermon, Peter moved into his evangelistic pitch: "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved" (2:21). The result? "Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all" (2:41).

I can personally confirm the powerful effect of Bible prophecy as a tool of evangelism. In my teens, I was a member of a liberal Christian church. I had never trusted in Christ for salvation. Everything changed once I started to study Bible prophecy. Prophecy got my attention! I not only became a true believer in Jesus, but I became insatiably hungry for God's Word. The study of prophecy was a significant turning point in my life.

4. Prophecy Comforts Us in Our Grief

Prophecy can have a profoundly positive effect on us when we lose a Christian loved one in death. The Thessalonian Christians had lost some of their loved ones and asked the apostle Paul whether they would experience the rapture, that glorious future event in which the dead in Christ will be resurrected and living Christians will be instantly translated into their resurrection bodies—and both groups will be caught up to meet Christ in the air and taken back to heaven (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

Since these Christians were so concerned about the matter, Paul provided them a full explanation:

Dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.

We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. So encourage each other with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Of course, it is natural for us to still experience grief when a Christian loved one dies. But we will not grieve “like people who have no hope.” We know that a reunion is coming. We will be with our Christian loved ones again. Someone said, “No two Christians will ever meet for the last time.” I think that is true.

5. Prophecy Can Strengthen Believers Facing Adversity

The original recipients of the prophetic book of Revelation were Christians who lived about sixty-five years after Jesus experienced crucifixion and then was raised from the dead. Many of these were second-generation Christians, and the challenges they faced were enormous. Their lives had become increasingly difficult because of Roman hostilities against Christianity.

The recipients of the book were suffering from persecution, and some of them were even being martyred (Revelation 2:13). Unfortunately, things were about to get even worse. The book of Revelation was intended to give these believers a strong sense of hope that would help them patiently endure amid relentless suffering. *Human suffering is temporal, but our eternal life with God is forever.* As my old friend Walter Martin used to put it, “I read the last chapter in the book, and we win!” We need to keep this in mind whenever we face adversity.

6. Prophecy Proves God Will Triumph Over Evil

Part of the “big win” for believers is that in the afterlife, the anti-christ, the false prophet, and Satan will experience eternal quarantine

in the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20; 20:10). Meanwhile, resurrected believers—no longer having a sin nature—will live directly in God’s presence in the New Jerusalem, the eternal city of the redeemed:

“Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:3-5).

Evil will be gone forever!

7. Prophecy Brings Special Blessings

Right at the beginning of the book of Revelation, we are told: “God blesses the one who reads the words of this prophecy to the church, and he blesses all who listen to its message and obey what it says, for the time is near” (Revelation 1:3). This is the first of seven pronouncements of special blessing in the book of Revelation (see 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14). You will notice from these verses that *obedience brings the blessing*. We should not be just *hearers* of God’s prophetic Word, but *doers* of it (James 1:22-25).

My friends, I share all this so you won’t consider the study of prophecy just an academic exercise. It not only informs the brain, but it also deeply touches the heart. Our lives can change for the better because of studying Bible prophecy. Don’t miss out!

The Big Ideas

- Prophecy proves God is the *true* God.
- Prophecy proves the Bible is God’s Word and can be trusted.
- Prophecy promotes evangelism.
- Prophecy comforts us in our grief.

- Prophecy can strengthen believers facing adversity.
- Prophecy proves God will triumph over evil.
- Prophecy can bring special blessings.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are three of the most meaningful things you learned about prophecy in this chapter?
2. What changes might you want to make in your life in view of what you have learned about prophecy so far?