

BIBLE PROPHECY UNDER SIEGE

RESPONDING BIBLICALLY TO
CONFUSION ABOUT THE END TIMES

RON RHODES

*Author of *The End Times in Chronological Order**

**BIBLE
PROPHECY
UNDER
SIEGE**

RON RHODES



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*To all my Christian friends who are committed
to “rightly handling the word of truth”*

2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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Drs. John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, and Charles C. Ryrie were among my mentors at Dallas Theological Seminary in the 1980s. All three are now enjoying heavenly glory. The insightful teachings of these men played a significant role in shaping my views on Bible prophecy. Only eternity will reveal how many people they have blessed through their decades of teaching, preaching, and writing.

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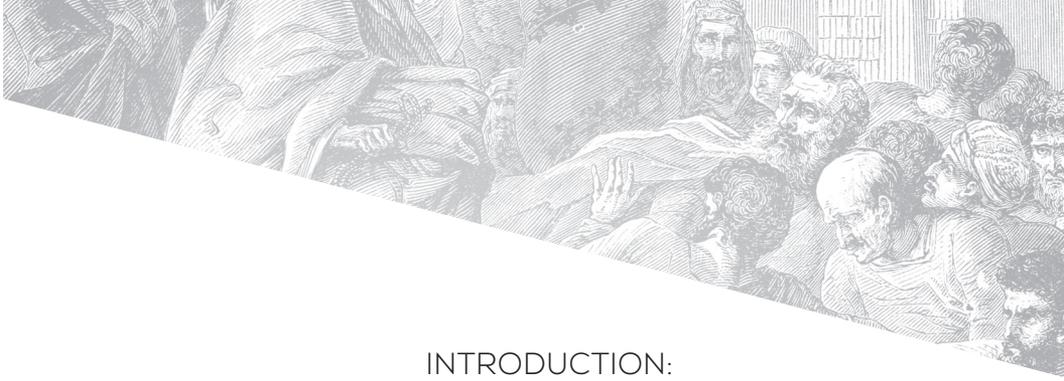
I truly appreciate my ongoing relationship with the fine team assembled at Harvest House Publishers—especially Bob Hawkins Jr. and Steve Miller. It is always a joy to work with Christians committed to spreading God’s truth.

Most of all, I express profound appreciation to our Lord Jesus Christ, who will one day come again as the “King of kings and Lord of lords,” and whose “eyes are like a flame of fire,” and upon whose head “are many diadems” (Revelation 19:16, 12). Jesus motivates *all* my writing and ministry.

Come soon, Lord!

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INTRODUCTION:

BIBLE PROPHECY UNDER SIEGE

You dummy!”

This barb came in an email from a rather feisty posttribulationist who seemed to take pleasure at shooting down pretribulationists.*

“The pretribulation rapture is heretical and speculative.”

Another email from another posttribulationist.

“You pretribulationists barely understand the ‘First Principles’ of the Word of God.”

Yet another email.

* *Posttribulationism* says the rapture will occur after the tribulation period; *pretribulationism* says it will occur before the tribulation period; *midtribulationism* says it will occur at the midpoint of the tribulation period.

“Pretribs* suffer from the pathology of ‘escapism.’ They are ‘cowards’—afraid to go through the tribulation period.”

Yet another email.

“If you teach people there is a rapture you might as well just worship Satan. That doctrine causes more harm than any demon.”

A Facebook post.

A prominent midtribulationist wrote an article claiming that pretribulationism has a satanic origin—from a demon-possessed girl.

Another critic said in an article that pretribs have a “weak view of Scripture” and a “warped understanding of prophecy.”

A preterist wrote that pretribulationism is “a deviation” and “a danger.” It “has no validation in the Scriptures.”

I’m beginning to resonate with the words of the psalmist: “O LORD, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me” (Psalm 3:1).

A JOURNEY BACK TO YESTERYEAR

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, I got both a master’s degree and a doctoral degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. My primary prophecy mentor was the late Dr. John F. Walvoord. Those were good years!

Dr. Walvoord gave me some advice that has stuck with me through the decades: “Anyone who says their position on Bible prophecy has

* *Pretrib* is short for pretribulationist, while *posttrib* is short for posttribulationist.

no theological problems has not studied the issue carefully. While some positions have fewer problems than others, *they all have some problems.*”

Like Walvoord, I believe pretribulationism has the fewest difficulties when compared to midtribulationism, posttribulationism, the pre-wrath view, the partial rapture view, and the preterist view. (*If you are unfamiliar with some of these terms, do not be concerned. I'll define them as we go along.*)

Following seminary, in the late 1980s, apologist Walter Martin hired me to work at the Christian Research Institute in Southern California. Before hiring me, he called me into his office, and we spent a good hour or more discussing theological issues. He wanted to assess our overall theological compatibility.

We did not see eye to eye on some aspects of prophecy. Walter believed in the posttribulational view of the rapture—he was convinced it would occur *after* the seven-year tribulation period. I hold to the pretribulational view—I believe the rapture will *precede* the tribulation period. There was plenty to talk about in that meeting. We went back and forth like ping-pong balls on all this. But we did so with kindness and respect.

After we finished our theological discussion, Walter got up from behind his desk and gave me one of those big bear hugs he was famous for. With great enthusiasm, he asked me to join the team at the Christian Research Institute (CRI). He felt our theological agreements far outweighed any disagreements, and that areas of dispute were on nonessential matters. *We could simply agree to disagree in an agreeable way on the finer points of Bible prophecy.* This was especially easy to do because we agreed on the big picture of Bible prophecy—we both agreed there would be a rapture, a second coming, a judgment, heaven for the saved, and hell for the unsaved. We just disagreed on the *timing* of the rapture.

After joining the team at CRI, I became heavily involved in the

publications department. I hadn't been there long before Walter—the host of the national *Bible Answer Man* radio broadcast—exited earthly life and entered his heavenly home. Soon after, I became heavily involved in the broadcast department, regularly appearing on the *Bible Answer Man* broadcast. Over the next eight years, I answered an endless flow of questions on this live (and *lively*) daily national radio broadcast.

As I reflect on those years, I remember they were challenging because I was the only pretrib on staff. The other researchers were posttribs—although a few defined themselves with the well-worn cliché “pan-tribs,” who believe it will all pan out in the end. We all coexisted quite nicely. Even though my associates were mainly Reformed in their theological outlook—and even though we got into some fierce debates on live national radio on prophecy—our relationships remained characterized by kindness and respect. I appreciate that about my time at CRI. Those years taught me it is possible to disagree on Bible prophecy without resorting to vitriol.

After serving at CRI for nearly a decade, it was time to move on. My parents and my wife's parents lived in Texas, and because of their rapidly advancing old age, they were experiencing some rather significant health challenges. As hard as the decision was, my wife and I both felt the need to leave the sunny west coast of California (where CRI was located at the time) and move to Texas to be nearer to our parents. An added benefit to our relocation was that our kids could spend more time with our parents in their final years. Looking back in hindsight, our relocation turned out to be wise.

FAST-FORWARD TO THE PRESENT DAY

Today, Bible prophecy is *under siege*. There are atheists, secular humanists, liberal Christian theologians, posttribulationists, mid-tribulationists, preterists, and many others who are launching vitriolic attacks—particularly against pretribulationism. The widespread

acceptance of the pretrib view—the majority view by a huge margin—has brought out the critics in full force. Throughout the chapters in this book, I will give plenty of examples of these criticisms and how pretribs can respond biblically.

I receive a lot of emails from people who have read my books. The overwhelming majority of emails are from thoughtful Christians—most of them pretribulationists—who want to express thanks for one or another of my books. I so appreciate these many wonderful emails. They put wind in my sails!

Other emails are from Christians seeking answers to current theological attacks against pretribulationism. (*I'm always happy to help.*) Still other emails are from Christians seeking to convert me to posttribulationism or preterism. (*None have succeeded!*) It is unfortunate that some in this latter category of emails have used the word *heresy* in association with pretribulationism. To be fair, I am aware of at least some pretribs who have charged posttribs as being heretics. The charges are flying both ways. But pretribulationism is the larger target because it is much more popular than the other positions.

Some emails I have received are from unbelievers who spontaneously bought one of my books in a bookstore because the topic looked interesting to them. Some say they grew up in a Christian home but have since defected from Christianity and no longer believe in the “foolishness” of Bible prophecy.

Other emails come from former pretribs who are now posttribs or preterists. Such folks tell me they were formerly fooled by the “deception” of pretribulationism. Many of these folks seem extremely harsh in their rejection of pretribulationism. Some express bitter sarcasm.

Still other emails take a condescending approach, declaring that educated people who have studied the issue do not believe in pretribulationism. I am informed that we pretribs are apparently unaware of the severe problems with our view—both historical and theological.

My friends, it is time for me to respond. Truth be told, I wish I

could write a five-volume response, with each volume weighing in at 500 pages. I honestly believe I could fill 2,500 pages in response to the critics! But the publisher would never go for it—and it would be far too expensive! I find myself in the same predicament so many authors face: *There is so much to say and so few pages to say it.* This means I must be highly selective in my approach and answer only the most pressing issues that will best help my readers. Also, please keep in mind that I write for the average Christian. I have tried to avoid complex academic argumentation.

Here is my promise to you: Even though some articles and books against pretribs are disrespectful and condescending, I will not respond in kind in this book. I intend to keep the discussion civil. I will focus my attention on Scripture, and, in some cases, history. My goal is to generate more *light* than *heat*. In areas where we disagree, I will seek to *agree to disagree in an agreeable way*—even if my critics choose not to do this. As an ambassador of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), it is not just *what* I say that is important, but *how* I say it as well.

If you are a pretribulationist, I believe you will be encouraged in reading this book and absorbing the biblical truths within it. Your commitment to pretribulationism will be strengthened, and your excitement about the coming rapture will be renewed.

I urge you to read this book in its entirety first. You can then keep the book on a nearby shelf to reference it as needed as the prophecy debates continue. I hope and pray that this book will serve as a source of prophetic strength for you in the years to come.

Through it all, remember that the day of your redemption draws near. Every day that passes brings the rapture one day closer. Indeed, “salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11).

Maranatha!



BIBLE PROPHECY UNDER FIRE

I was once invited to speak on prophecy at a church affiliated with a theologically liberal denomination. I was initially hesitant to speak there. In my mind's eye, I could see myself (a theological conservative) being booed off the stage by a bunch of theological liberals. But then, I thought, these people really need to hear the truth. So, I accepted the invitation. I promptly prepared four messages on the highlights of Bible prophecy—one for Friday night, two for Saturday, and one for Sunday morning. I booked my flight and off I went.

Upon arriving at the church, I discovered—much to my surprise—that even though it was affiliated with a theologically liberal denomination, it was not itself a liberal church. These folks were hungry for the Word of God. The church's pastor informed me: "Our denomination's curriculum materials don't have anything on Bible prophecy. Not anything at all. *Not even an honorary mention!* We've heard plenty of claims from folks in our denomination about why we shouldn't bother with prophecy. But we think differently at this church. We are keen to learn the truth, not an edited version of the

truth. That's why we invited you. We want to understand what the Bible really teaches about prophecy.”

I cannot begin to tell you how much I enjoyed teaching these folks who were so hungry for God's Word. I not only taught four sessions, but stayed late after each one, answering an endless flow of questions about prophecy.

Some questions I answered at this church involved claims *against* prophecy, some of which had been voiced by leaders within the liberal denomination. In what follows, I will address these claims and other common claims against prophecy. Since Scripture calls us always to be prepared with an answer (1 Peter 3:15), it is essential to know these claims and how to respond to them.



Some critics claim the Bible does not provide an explicit timeline concerning future events. So, we really can't be sure about the order of end-times events.

While it is true that the Bible does not provide us with an explicit timeline, there are many chronological clues scattered throughout end-times prophecies in the Bible that enable us to discern the order of end-times events. Please allow me to present a few illustrations from Scripture:

1. We discover a contextual outline of John's prophetic book in Revelation 1:19. The Lord instructs John: "Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this." The "things that you have seen" is a reference to Revelation 1, where we find a description of Jesus in His present majestic glory and an introduction to the book of Revelation. The things "that are" relate to the then-present circumstances of the seven churches of Asia Minor recorded in Revelation 2 and 3. John directed his book to these seven churches. The things "that are to take place after this" refer to futuristic prophecy of the tribulation period, the second

coming, the millennial kingdom, the great white throne judgment, and the eternal state described in Revelation 6 through 22. This outline is a great aid to a proper understanding of the chronology of the book of Revelation.

2. A specific example from Revelation relates to how Satan will be bound for the duration of Christ's future 1,000-year millennial kingdom. There are chronological clues in the book of Revelation that confirm this for us. Notice the words I've italicized in the following passage: "I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and *bound him for a thousand years*, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, *until the thousand years were ended*. *After that* he must be released for a little while" (Revelation 20:1-3). Chronologically, Satan will be bound *before* the millennial kingdom and then released *after* the millennial kingdom. The chronological clues are clear.

3. We also find very helpful chronological clues in Christ's prophetic Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24–25). For example, Jesus prophesied about the judgment of the nations in Matthew 25:31–46. There are chronological clues found in verses 31 and 32 that tell us when this judgment will occur. Notice the words I've italicized in the following passage: "*When* the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, *then* he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." Clearly, the judgment of the nations takes place right after the second coming of Christ. *When* Christ comes again, *then* He will judge the nations.

Once this judgment is complete, Christ will invite believers from among the nations into His 1,000-year millennial kingdom. How do we know this? The biblical text tells us that right after the judgment, "*Then* the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who

are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom...” (Matthew 25:34). The word *then* in this verse is another chronological clue.

4. Sometimes, chronological clues come in the form of theological inferences. Don't let that fancy phrase throw you. An “inference” is simply a conclusion reached on the basis of evidence and reasoning. So, a “theological inference” is a theological conclusion based on theological evidence and reasoning.

Allow me to illustrate this as it relates to the chronology of rebuilding the Jewish temple. We know from the book of Daniel that the antichrist will disallow Jewish sacrifices during the second half of the tribulation period—that is, the last three-and-a-half years of the seven-year tribulation period. This is explicitly stated in Daniel 9:27. Since the sacrifices will be *disallowed* during the second half, we can theologically infer that they will be *allowed* during the first half. That there will be sacrifices in the first half tells us there will be a temple at that time. After all, these sacrifices can *only* take place within a temple.

Another chronological clue that the temple will exist during the first half of the tribulation period is that Jesus said the tribulation temple would be desecrated: “When you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place...then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Matthew 24:15-16). This “abomination of desolation” will involve the desecration of the Jewish temple by the antichrist, who will set up an image of himself within the temple at the midpoint of the tribulation (2 Thessalonians 2:4). This means the temple must be rebuilt before the midpoint of the tribulation period.

Based on such chronological clues, we can “theologically infer” that the Jewish temple must be rebuilt during or before the first half of the tribulation period. That is one reason it is so exciting to see preparations being made *in our day* for rebuilding the temple. Money is being raised, architectural plans are being designed, and items used in temple worship are now being prefabricated.

5. The verse we just examined about the chronology of the rebuilding of the temple also reveals the chronology of the Jews' escape from Judea. Notice the words I've italicized in this passage: "*When* you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place...*then* let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Matthew 24:15-16). *When* the temple is desecrated, *then* flee from Judea.

6. Many Christians are interested in how chronological clues relate to the timing of the rapture of the church—whether it is *before*, *during*, or *after* the tribulation period. I will cover all this in greater detail later in the book. But here is a brief summary to whet your appetite: (1) No Old Testament passage on the tribulation period mentions the church. (2) No New Testament passage on the tribulation period mentions the church. (3) The church is to be delivered from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10). (4) The church is to be delivered from the actual *time period of trial* that is coming upon the entire world (Revelation 3:10). (5) God has a long track record of delivering His people before His judgments fall. (6) Scripture indicates that the rapture is imminent—meaning it could occur at any time (James 5:9). Based on these chronological clues, it is legitimate to theologially infer that the rapture will precede the tribulation period.

To sum up, we do not find an explicit timeline of prophetic events in the pages of Scripture. But we have chronological clues scattered throughout all the prophetic passages in the Bible. The accumulative total of all these chronological clues enables us to construct a reliable chronology of the end times. (You may wish to consult my book *The End Times in Chronological Order*, published by Harvest House Publishers.)



Many critics claim that Bible prophecy is sensationalistic and is therefore unworthy of serious attention. I believe this claim is

inaccurate. Bible prophecy itself is not sensationalistic. Rather, some *interpreters* of Bible prophecy have engaged in sensationalism.

Sometimes sensationalism takes the form of airplanes dropping out of the sky at the rapture. Perhaps a more prevalent form of sensationalism involves the attempt of some to set dates for future prophetic events. Edgar C. Whisenant wrote a book entitled *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*. This 58-page book sold 4.5 million copies and stirred no small controversy in the church. The rapture, Whisenant claimed, would occur between September 11 and 13, 1988.

When Whisenant's predicted date for the rapture failed, he changed the September 11–13 date to October 3. When that date failed, he claimed it would be a few weeks later. When that didn't pan out, he claimed his calculations were off by a year and that Christ would return during Rosh Hashanah (September 30) in 1989, or perhaps at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles between October 14 and 20, 1989. *Wrong again!*

Whisenant is not alone. In his controversial book *1994?*, Harold Camping of Family Radio predicted that Jesus would return in September 1994. Camping claimed the likelihood of him being wrong on his calculations was very remote. He said he would be shocked if the world reached the year 2000. As I write, it is 2023.

Such date-setting triggered the “sensationalism alarm” in the minds of many critics. I must tell you that the sensationalism alarm also triggered—at a deafening volume—in my mind. That is why I wrote an article entitled “Millennial Madness” for the *Christian Research Journal* when Whisenant and Camping and others like them were claiming dates for the rapture. I wanted to warn Christians not to fall for the warped reasoning of these teachers.

Unfortunately, many critics wrongly assumed that Whisenant and Camping were representative of the general population of Christians. One can therefore understand why they leveled charges of sensationalism on such a broad scale.

The truth, however, is that despite the influence of Whisenant and Camping, *they were not representative of the general population of Christians*. Many Christians recognized that Whisenant and Camping departed from the clear teachings of Scripture: “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority” (Acts 1:7). “Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (Matthew 24:36). Because many Christians followed the example of the Berean Christians in testing all claims against Scripture (Acts 17:11), they rejected the teachings of Whisenant and Camping and others like them. During my eight years on the *Bible Answer Man* radio broadcast, I was delighted to see how many Christians called in and cited such verses against date-setting.

Now, please allow me to switch gears for a moment: I find myself compelled to distinguish between *sensationalism* and *sensational*. Here is what I mean: When ancient prophecies uttered thousands of years ago come to pass in our day, *that is sensational!* An example is the rebirth of Israel. In the vision of dry bones in Ezekiel 37, the Lord is portrayed as miraculously bringing the bones back together into a skeleton, and the skeleton becomes wrapped in muscles, tendons, and flesh. God then breathes life into the body. There is no doubt that this chapter in Ezekiel is metaphorically speaking about Israel’s rebirth, for we read: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel” (verse 11). Hence, this chapter portrays Israel as becoming a living, breathing nation, brought back from the dead, as it were. *That is sensational!*

Bible prophecy then predicts that following Israel’s rebirth as a nation, many Jews would stream back to the Holy Land from all the nations of the world. God promised: “I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land” (Ezekiel 36:24). Ever since 1948, when Israel became a nation again, countless Jews have indeed streamed back to the Holy Land, just as predicted. *That is sensational!*

Scripture prophesies that sometime after this, there would be a significant invasion into Israel by Russia, Iran, Sudan, Turkey, Libya, and other Muslim nations (Ezekiel 38:1-6). While this invasion has not yet taken place, the stage is currently being set for it. Expansionist Russia already has military alliances with these nations, and the Muslims have plenty of motivation to attack Israel. Many believe—with good reason—that it is *sensational* that the ancient prophets were so “spot on” in their predictions of the end times.

So, here is my point: While we should never engage in *sensationalism* in Bible prophecy, there is certainly nothing wrong in recognizing how *sensational* God’s fulfilled prophecies are. Such prophecies excite us about the coming of the Lord, whenever that event may occur.

There is one final balancing truth worthy of mention: Contrary to sensationalism, Scripture encourages us to be *serious-minded* about the end times. First Peter 4:7 explicitly instructs us: “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded.” The Holman Christian Standard Bible translates the latter part of the verse, “be serious and disciplined.” The New King James Version puts it “be serious and watchful.” The Amplified Bible renders it “keep sound-minded and self-controlled.” Such words leave no room for sensationalism.



Some critics claim that Bible prophecy can distract Christians from more important matters, such as fulfilling the Great Commission. But wait a minute. More than one-fourth of the Bible is prophetic. Are we to conclude that this extensive portion of the Bible is a distraction from fulfilling the Great Commission? *What a bizarre claim!*

I believe Bible prophecy actually *contributes* to fulfilling the Great Commission. Prophecy can play a powerful role in evangelism. I am living proof of this. My exposure to Bible prophecy in the 1970s directly led to my conversion to Christ.

Prophecy was certainly used in the evangelistic sermon preached by Peter on the Day of Pentecost. People visiting Jerusalem had just witnessed people speaking in tongues—that is, speaking the gospel message in many languages that were recognized by various ethnic groups visiting Jerusalem from out of town. Peter promptly launched into his sermon by saying, “These people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:15). Peter then got specific about how the supernatural phenomena that occurred on the Day of Pentecost was a partial fulfillment of what Joel had prophesied so long ago. Following this, Peter launched into his evangelistic appeal, and 3,000 people became believers that day (Acts 2:41). *Peter effectively combined prophecy and evangelism.*

I once spent part of an afternoon with Hal Lindsey, author of the mega-seller *The Late Great Planet Earth*. I met with him just prior to his appearance on the *Bible Answer Man* radio broadcast. Hal has thousands of letters in his file cabinets from people who became Christians after reading his prophecy book. Given this, who can deny that prophecy can play a vital role in fulfilling the Great Commission?

Another example is how messianic prophecies have often been used in evangelizing Jewish people. From a prophetic standpoint, the Messiah had to become a human being (Genesis 3:15). He had to be Jewish—a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 12:1-3). He had to come from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10) and from David’s family (2 Samuel 7:16). He had to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). He was to be despised and rejected by His fellow Jews, be put to death following a judicial proceeding, and be guiltless (Isaiah 53). These and countless other messianic prophecies are often used in an effective way in evangelism among Jewish people.

Contrary to being a distraction, Bible prophecy is a great help in fulfilling the Great Commission.



Critics sometimes allege that because Daniel 12:9 says prophecy is “sealed” until the end of time, no one can understand it until then. We should therefore not expend much time or effort studying prophecies like those in Daniel.

Let’s consider the details of Daniel 12:9. This verse says that the prophetic words communicated to Daniel were to be “shut up and sealed until the time of the end.” This verse means that the prophetic words recorded in Daniel were to be kept safe and preserved for future generations—especially for those who may be alive during the future tribulation days. At that time, the words would become particularly meaningful and understood. The Lord thus indicated to Daniel that much of what he had prophetically received would remain obscure until the end times. One Bible commentator summarizes the instructions to Daniel this way: “Daniel, go your way. Seal up this prophecy...The wise will understand at the right time. But Daniel, shut the book. It’s not for your day.”¹

Of course, the sealing of Daniel’s book does not mean we are to ignore this portion of the prophetic word in the Bible. While some of what Daniel wrote is reserved for full understanding in the end times, much of what Daniel wrote parallels the book of Revelation. The study of Daniel alongside Revelation can yield many insights into the end times. (See my books *40 Days Through Daniel* and *40 Days Through Revelation*, both published by Harvest House Publishers.)

Further, the sealing of Daniel’s book certainly does not stand in the way of us studying other end-times prophecies in the Bible—for example, those found in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Matthew 24–25 (Christ’s Olivet Discourse), John, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and other books of the Bible. Daniel is one of many books in the Bible that contain prophecies of the end

times. To dismiss *all* end-times prophecies because prophecies in a *single* prophetic book are “sealed” is as unwarranted as it is unwise.

Here is something important to think about: Many believe we are now living in the end times. This is indicated by the convergence of multiple prophecies being fulfilled in our day, or at least the stage is being set for their fulfillment. An example of a significant end-times prophecy being fulfilled is the rebirth of Israel as a nation (Ezekiel 37). If we are living in the end times, as I believe we are, then we ought to pay particular attention to the prophecies in Daniel. We are drawing closer to when these verses will come into full clarity.



Some have claimed that because Jesus said, “No one knows the day or the hour,” we should not spend much effort or time studying Bible prophecy. This claim ultimately amounts to saying, “Because no one knows the day or the hour, we should not spend much effort or time studying one-fourth of the Bible.” After all, one-fourth of the Bible is prophetic. I think this claim involves Satan-inspired logic, for Satan loves to keep people from the Word of God (Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12).

One who chooses not to study prophecy robs himself of special blessing. There are seven specific pronouncements of blessing in the book of Revelation. The first is found in 1:3: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near” (see also 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). The word *blessed* means “spiritually happy.” Since spiritual happiness comes from studying the prophecies in the book of Revelation, why would one choose not to study those prophecies?

The apostle Paul set the right example for us. He “did not shrink from declaring...*the whole counsel of God*” (Acts 20:27, emphasis added). Surely the “whole counsel of God” includes Bible prophecy.

If we as Christians want to understand the whole counsel of God, then Bible prophecy *must* be among the doctrines we study.

It is true that we cannot know the day or the hour of specific prophetic events. For example, we cannot say that the rapture of the church will take place on November 11, 2027, at 4:47 p.m. However, we can know that the rapture is an imminent event that could occur at any moment—even today (James 5:7-9). There is not a single prophecy that must be fulfilled before the occurrence of the rapture. That is why we call the rapture a “signless” event. There are no signs of the times that precede it.

In keeping with this, the apostle Paul affirmed that “time is running out” and “our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11 NLT). Pretribs believe the word *salvation* in this context refers to the rapture, for Paul describes it as a specific future event. At the end of each day, the Christian is that much closer to the rapture. Paul thus exhorted that we “eagerly wait” for the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:7 NKJV; Philippians 3:20 NKJV). We are now “waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). Indeed, “the Lord is coming soon” (Philippians 4:5). We “are looking forward to the coming of God’s Son from heaven” (1 Thessalonians 1:10 NLT). In other words, *we live in constant expectancy of Jesus coming to rapture us*. We don’t know the day or the hour, but the Lord could come for us at any moment.

Scripture shows that while we cannot know the day or the hour of prophetic events, we can nevertheless know we are living *in the season* of the Lord’s return. Speaking of the end times, Jesus instructed His followers: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near” (Luke 21:29-31). This passage does not tell us we can know the day or the hour, but we can

certainly know that the Lord's coming is drawing near when we witness certain "signs of the times."

Since this is true, it is unjustified to say we shouldn't study prophecy because we cannot know the day or the hour of the Lord's return. Just the opposite is true. Because we do not know the day or hour, *we need to be prepared for the Lord's coming at all times*. And the only way to be ready for His coming at all times is to study all that the Bible teaches about prophecy, and act accordingly.

Finally, let us not forget that prophecy has a life-changing effect. Those who await the Lord's return pursue purity and righteousness in their lives (Titus 2:13-14; Romans 13:11-14; 1 Peter 4:7-10; 2 Peter 3:10-14; 1 John 3:2-3). To cease studying Bible prophecy robs one of these life-changing benefits.



It is sobering that some Christian pastors are claiming we shouldn't waste time studying the rapture because there are so many interpretations of it—pretribulationism, posttribulationism, midtribulationism, the pre-wrath view, and the partial rapture theory.

In response, does this mean we should not study the book of Revelation since people hold to different views—the futurist view, the historicist view, the idealist view, and the preterist view? Does this mean we shouldn't study the millennium since people hold different views—premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism? Does this mean we should not study the biblical covenants since people hold different views—such as dispensationalism versus covenant theology?

For that matter, should we avoid studying all the other issues in Scripture where Christians have different viewpoints, such as the spiritual gifts, the nature of biblical inerrancy, the nature of sanctification, original sin and the fall, the extent of the atonement, God and the problem of evil, the role of women in the church, forms of

church government, the use of musical instruments in church, the days of Genesis 1, the significance of the Lord's Supper, eternal punishment, water baptism, eternal security, the relationship of Israel and the church, Christianity and science, and the relationship of faith and reason?

As noted previously, the apostle Paul felt compelled to teach “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). He didn't cherry-pick what he thought people needed (or wanted) to hear. Rather, he taught the whole truth and nothing but the whole truth—including the truth about the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:50-51; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). The fact that there are five views of the rapture is not a reason to avoid studying the doctrine. On the contrary, it should motivate us to study the doctrine *all the more* so we can discern which of the five views is correct.



Liberal critics often claim that messianic prophecies of Christ's first coming were inserted into the Bible after the fact, and are therefore untrustworthy. This claim is flatly false. Scholars are practically unanimous that the Old Testament prophetic books were completed at least 400 years before Christ was even born, with many books dating as far back as the eighth and ninth centuries BC. The exception is the book of Daniel, which some scholars date to 167 BC. However, no matter whether a prophetic book dates 167 years before Christ's birth or 800 years, it is equally hard to predict a future event. For a prophecy to be fulfilled perfectly requires that it come from God alone, who knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10).

As an example, let us consider the book of Isaiah, written around 680 BC. This book is ideal for our purposes because it contains so many messianic prophecies.

In the early 1900s, the earliest available manuscript copy of Isaiah we had in our possession was dated at AD 980. Following the

discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, scholars could examine a manuscript copy of Isaiah dated at 150 BC. This means that any specific prophecies of the coming divine Messiah that are recorded in Isaiah—including that Jesus would be born of a virgin (7:14), be called Immanuel (7:14), be anointed by the Holy Spirit (11:2), have a ministry in Galilee (9:1-2), have a ministry of miracles (35:5-6), be silent before His accusers (53:7), be crucified with thieves (53:12), accomplish a sacrificial atonement for humankind (53:5), and then be buried in a rich man's tomb (53:9)—cannot possibly have been recorded after the fact, as some have tried to claim. These prophecies—recorded in a manuscript dated at 150 BC—were fulfilled with pinpoint precision in the life of Jesus the Messiah. This attests to the existence of a supernatural God who alone has the ability to make accurate predictions hundreds of years in advance.

This supernatural God makes the following assertions in the book of Isaiah (pay special attention to the words I've put in italics):

- “Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. *Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen*” (Isaiah 44:7).
- “*Have I not told you from of old and declared it?* And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any” (Isaiah 44:8).
- “*Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD?* And there is no other god besides me” (Isaiah 45:21).
- “*The former things I declared of old; they went out from my mouth, and I announced them; then suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. . . I declared them to you from of old, before they came to pass I announced them to you, lest you should*

say, ‘My idol did them, my carved image and my metal image commanded them’” (Isaiah 48:3, 5).

Of course, anyone can make predictions—that is easy. Having them fulfilled is another story altogether. The more statements you make about the future, and the greater the detail, the better the chances are that you will be proven wrong. *But God was never wrong.* All the Old Testament messianic prophecies about Christ’s first coming—most of them dating at least 400 years before the time of Christ—were explicitly fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. None of the prophecies were adjusted after the fact.



Liberal critics sometimes claim that Jesus’ disciples manipulated His life so that He appeared to fulfill messianic prophecies when He actually did not. This claim does not fit the biblical facts. The writers of Scripture were God-fearing Jews who gave every evidence of possessing the highest moral character, each having been raised since early childhood to obey the Ten Commandments—including the commandment against bearing false witness (Exodus 20:16). It breaches all credulity to say that these men were deceitful and sought to fool people into believing Jesus was the Messiah when He really was not. It also breaches credulity to suggest that these men chose to suffer and even give up their lives as martyrs in defense of what they knew to be a lie.

Further, there are many prophecies fulfilled in the person of Jesus that the biblical writers could not have manipulated, such as His being born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), His direct descent from David (2 Samuel 7:12-16) and Abraham (Genesis 12:2), His being born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), the identity of His forerunner, John the Baptist (Malachi 3:1), the Sanhedrin’s gift of 30 pieces of silver to Judas, the betrayer (Zechariah 11:12), the soldiers gambling for His clothing (Psalm 22:18), His legs remaining unbroken (Psalm 22:17), and other prophecies.

Still further, related to prophecies of Jesus' resurrection from the dead (Psalm 16:10; 22:22), it is unlikely that the writers of Scripture could have stolen the body to give the appearance of a resurrection. After all, the tomb was blocked by an enormous stone weighing several tons. It also bore the seal of the Roman government—with an automatic death penalty for anyone who breached it. The tomb was also guarded by Roman soldiers trained in defense and killing. To say Jesus' Jewish followers overcame these guards, moved the enormous stone, and stole the body is not a credible scenario. Not only is it not credible, but the biblical evidence indicates that Jesus' followers scattered like a bunch of spineless cowards after Jesus' arrest: "They all deserted him and ran away" (Mark 14:50 CSB). They were in no frame of mind to do battle with trained Roman soldiers in order to take the body of Jesus.



It is possible that some of the claims I address in this chapter may have initially seemed convincing to you. In each case, however, I have shown how these claims are easily answered. This illustrates something Solomon once said: "The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him" (Proverbs 18:17). In the next chapter, we will consider some of today's most common claims against the pretribulational rapture.