

# The Reason for Prophecy

The meaning of end time Bible prophecy is a field of study that receives a lot of attention in the world as it also has in the past. Several churches and denominations have had their beginnings when an individual came up with a different view about some prophecy. Probably the one most apt to come to mind is the Seventh Day Adventist church. This movement can trace its beginnings back to 1831 when a man by the name of William Miller declared that according to Biblical prophecy Christ would return to earth in the spring of 1844. He succeeded in gathering a large following. When the set time came and nothing happened, the group did some studying and found that it was not to be spring, but October 22 of 1844. This time also passed, so it was decided that Christ was not to come to earth at that time, but into the “most holy place” in heaven to “finish His work of redemption”. At first they taught that the door of mercy was now shut and no one else could be saved (expecting His return very soon), but as the time went on, this too was changed and they said another door of mercy was now opened.

With the advantage of looking back through history at this example it is not difficult to see that this movement was founded on human error, as *each change they made to their doctrine conclusively proved* their former position wrong. Also, we know that the plan of redemption was finished on the cross when Jesus said, “It is finished.” What went wrong? If they were trying to base their beliefs on the Bible, why were they led astray? If we consider for a minute, we recognize that the reason they were led astray is because they were putting their faith in their conclusions and theories as to what the Bible meant rather than putting their faith in what the Bible clearly taught.

## ANOTHER EXAMPLE

Now let’s look at a similar example. This time the subject is Christ’s first coming. Throughout history, the Jews were looking and longing for the Messiah. They read of the prophecies that He would come. There were even clues as to where He would come from

(see Matt. 2:15, 23). It was foretold that Elijah would come to proclaim His coming (see Matt. 3:3, Mal. 4:5, 6).

The Jews, especially the learned ones, were not completely without any idea as to how things were going to happen. It seems that they had a pretty good idea as to how these things would fit together. They were waiting expectantly for these events to take place.

Jesus was born in a stable, grew up in a lowly setting, and then began to gather disciples as they saw His power. One by one the prophecies about Him were fulfilled. Although the unlearned fishermen that He called to help Him, put their faith in Him, the learned doctors of the law and Pharisees couldn't believe that he was the Messiah, because *He hadn't come as they expected Him to*. He didn't *fit their understanding* of prophecy. They didn't see the events take place as they expected, so they weren't ready to accept His statement; "*This day is the scripture fulfilled in your ears*". (Luke 4:21)

Again, we can see that something went wrong. In both above examples people studied prophecy. In both examples they missed the Truth. Is prophecy dangerous? No! Prophecy is not dangerous or it wouldn't be included in the Bible. It is the misuse of prophecy that is dangerous.

## THE PURPOSE OF PROPHECY

Man tends to look at prophecy as something that needs *to be figured out* to know all about the future, which is not the reason prophecy was given. Prophecy, like the rest of the Bible, was not so much intended to be "*figured out*" as to be "*believed and accepted*."

The purpose of prophecy is not to let us figure out ahead of time exactly what is going to happen and when, but to help us *recognize events when they take place and increase our faith in God*, to *encourage* us and *remind us to keep "watching."* God explains His reason for prophecy to the Jews in the first part of Isaiah 48. We'll quote one verse here: "I have even from the beginning declared [it] to thee; before It came to pass I shewed [it] thee: *lest thou shouldest say, mine idol hath done them*, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them." (Isa. 48:5) (Emphasis added).

Several times Jesus told His followers the things that would happen in the future; He prophesied of His death, resurrection, ascension, giving of the Holy Spirit, second coming,

and the treatment of the church by the world. Sometimes after foretelling some of these events, He explained what was the *reason* for prophecy– *why* He was foretelling these things.

“And now I have told you before it comes to pass, *that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.*” (John 14:29) (Emphasis added.)

“Now I tell you before it come, *that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am [he].*” (John 13:19). Emphasis added.)

“But these things have I told you, *that, when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you.*” (John 16:4) (Emphasis added).

When were these prophecies revealed to the disciples? John recorded the answer for us:

“These things understood not his disciples at the first: but *when Jesus was gloried* then remembered they that these things were written of him, and [that] they had done these things unto him.” (John 12:16) (Emphasis added.)

So Jesus wasn’t prophesying these things so that they would know just how things were going to happen, but so that when these things did happen it would strengthen their faith rather than making them lose faith in Him! Is that not how we should still view prophecy?

## SOME INTERESTING FACTS

Following are some points we notice about the prophecies of Christ’s first coming. If we think about it a bit, we see that we can also apply this to most other major fulfilled prophecies,

1. There was not one who had it figured out right beforehand.
2. Those who thought they had it figured out were the very ones who rejected the actual fulfillment of the prophecy.

3. These strongly opposed the truth and the fulfillment of the prophecy. The fact that it was different than they thought automatically made them opponents of the Truth.
4. It was those who did not have their own opinions as to *how* the prophecies would be fulfilled, who could accept its fulfillment, and in this case, accept Jesus Christ.
5. Jesus never seemed to think that His disciples should have figured out any prophecy beforehand, but after His resurrection He reproved them for not believing the things that were prophesied of Him and *had been* fulfilled. "Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:" (Luke 24:25).
6. Figuring out beforehand the meaning of a prophecy in this case, as in the others in the Bible, (and in the world around us) was not to the benefit of anyone. It was to their own hurt. It often made them an *opponent* of the Scriptures.
7. Believing the Scriptures as they are and recognizing their fulfillment has strengthened the faith of many and brought many to Christ. A brilliant example of this is the way the apostles in their preaching used the prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus as an effective tool in converting the Jews (see Acts 2:16-36). The writings of the early Christians testify that this was one of their most effective methods of converting the unbelieving Jews for the next few centuries.

In many examples of fulfilled prophecy in the Bible we see the same purpose. For example, in I Kings 10, after Samuel had anointed Saul as king, he told him what would happen on his way home. It was not that there was any advantage to knowing beforehand, but the fact that these things were foretold and happened just as they were prophesied gave him faith that his calling was indeed of God who is the only one who knows the future.

Let's keep a Scriptural view of prophecy. Not as something we need to *figure out*, but accepting it in faith as the revelation of God that will manifest itself in due time, bringing us from faith to sight, and reinforcing our belief in God. Let us not fall into the error of relying on human calculations and conclusions, transferring our faith from God to man. If we do, we are in danger of rejecting the actual fulfillment of prophecy in its time as the Jews did.

Let us believe it as it is written and be satisfied with learning the rest of the details when God will reveal them.

“For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also am known.” (I Cor. 23:12).

“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.” (I Thess. 5:1, 2).

## CHRIST’S COMMAND TO US: “BE READY” AND “WATCH”

We are taught throughout the Bible that we cannot know when Christ will return for us. We are taught that our duty is to “Watch”, to be ready with our lamps trimmed and burning at all times because we do not know when He will return.

“*Watch* therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. *Therefore be ye also ready*; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” (Matt. 24:42-44) (Emphasis added).

“*Watch* therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” (Matt. 25:13) (Emphasis added).

“[For the Son of man is] as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: *for ye know not* when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning:” (Mark 13:34, 35) (Emphasis added).

“Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.” (Luke 12:40) (Emphasis added).

“Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed [is] he that *watcheth*, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.” (Rev. 16:15) (Emphasis added).

Recently we have read some tracts that label as false doctrine our common teaching of “the imminent return of Jesus” (meaning that He could return at any time.). They claim such a teaching is false because the Bible tells us that the church shall go through great

tribulation before the end comes. The error in their reasoning, I believe, is that they are looking for certain events that they could call "tribulation". I believe the church of today may well be in greater spiritual tribulation than at any time in history. This is not a physical trial of our body, but a spiritual trial in which there are so many half truths and groups that are nearly in the faith, so many wolves in sheep's clothing, the devil would deceive even the very elect if it were possible.

The Jews believed that Christ could not appear, because "Elias must first come" (Mark 9:11), when Elias had already come in the person of John the Baptist (Mark 9:13). Let us not fall into the same error about Jesus' second coming, thinking the great tribulation must first come, when the great tribulation may already be here.

When we are approached by someone claiming to reveal to us the meaning of end time prophecy, let us remember what Jesus asked of us is that we watch and be ready at all times. Let us remember the reason that He gave us prophecy:

"Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am [he]." (John 13:19).

By this example we can see why adding to Scripture is so dangerous, as God has warned us; "For I testify unto every man that hearth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:" (Rev.22:18).

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