

GOD WANTS US TO KNOW THE FUTURE:

**An Introduction To
Bible Prophecy**

by

Don Stewart

**God Wants Us To Know The Future:
An Introduction To Bible Prophecy**

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About The Author

God Wants Us To Know The Future: An Introduction To Bible Prophecy

You are reading the first volume in a four-book series on the fascinating subject of Bible prophecy.

While everyone would like to know what is going to occur in the future, where, if anywhere, can a person go to find the answers?

This four-book series will provide convincing evidence that there is a source to which human beings can go to find these answers—the Bible.

This series can be summed up as follows:

In this first book, *God Wants Us to Know the Future*, we will answer a number of introductory questions about the subject of Bible prophecy. We begin by paying attention to some of the specific claims in the Bible about God, His knowledge of the future, as well as His ability to correctly predict the future.

We will also examine some crucial questions about “last days” Bible prophecy. The truths that we learn in this book will set the stage for the rest of the series.

The next book lays out the evidence, in detail, of God’s record of past predictions and fulfillments. It is titled, *God’s Work in History: 50 Biblical Predictions Made and Fulfilled*.

Reading these past predictions and fulfillments will demonstrate, beyond any reasonable doubt, that the God of the Bible knows the future, is in control of the future, and has told us certain specific things about future events.

In our third volume, *25 Signs We Are Near the End*, we look at 25 signs that indicate we are in end times. While many prophecies of Scripture have already been fulfilled, many still await fulfillment. This particular book looks at the marvelous fulfillment of each of these “25 signs” of the “last days.”

Our last book, *Look Up! A Timeline of 50 Last Days Events* documents what the Scripture predicts will happen in the future. It explains these future events which are still to occur on our planet.

We trust that this entire series will be a great help in explaining this vast subject of Bible prophecy: past, present, and future.

**THE UNIQUE CLAIM OF THE BIBLE:
GOD ALONE CORRECTLY PREDICTS THE FUTURE**

Before we begin our examination of the vast subject of Bible prophecy, it is important that we understand that accurately predicting the future is something that the God of the Bible uniquely claims for Himself.

In fact, as we search the Scripture, we will find that God has specifically pointed to fulfilled prophecy to demonstrate that He exists, that He knows the future, and that He is in control of the future.

In light of this, we will cite a number of passages, make some observations about them, and then discuss what the God of Scripture has claimed about Himself through the predictions that He has made.

The Lord Challenges The Pagan gods (Isaiah 41:21-24)

In this context, the God of Israel is denouncing His people for worshipping idols—objects which their own hands have made! In these verses, the Lord directly addresses these non-existent idols:

“Present your argument,” says the Lord. “Produce your evidence,” says Jacob’s king. “Let them produce evidence! Let them tell us what will happen! Tell us about your earlier predictive oracles, so we may examine them and see how they were fulfilled. Or decree for us some future events! Predict how future events will turn out, so we might know you are gods. Yes, do something good or bad, so we might be frightened and in awe. Look, you are nothing, and your accomplishments are nonexistent; the one who chooses to worship you is disgusting (Isaiah 41:21-24 NET Bible).

Observations On This Passage

1. The Lord is challenging these so-called “gods” to present arguments that they exist. He wants them to produce some evidence.
2. Specifically, He asks them to tell everyone what will happen in the future
3. God also wants to see their past record—the Lord wants to know how and when their past predictions were fulfilled.
4. He then asks them to predict some specific future events so that we can know that they exist.
5. The Lord challenges them to do something! “Make us afraid, or in awe of you!”
6. He concludes by emphasizing that these gods are non-existent—those who worship them are fools.

The Claims of God: Look at His Past Record Of Fulfillments! (Isaiah 46:9,10)

In contrast to these non-existent gods, the Lord makes the following claims about Himself:

Remember what I accomplished in antiquity! Truly I am God, I have no peer; I am God, and there is none like me, who announces the end from the beginning and reveals beforehand what has not yet occurred, who says, ‘My plan will be realized, I will accomplish what I desire’ (Isaiah 46:9,10 NET Bible).

Observations On This Passage

1. The Lord says that He is the only God who exists—He has no rival, no peer. How do we know this?

2. We are told to remember what He has already accomplished in the past.
3. Namely, He has told us beforehand of certain things that will take place.
4. The result: His plan will be realized—it will come to pass.

Continuing this thought (Isaiah 48:3-6):

I announced events beforehand, I issued the decrees and made the predictions; suddenly I acted and they came to pass. I did this because I know how stubborn you are. Your neck muscles are like iron and your forehead like bronze. I announced them to you beforehand; before they happened, I predicted them for you, so you could never say, 'My image did these things, my idol, my cast image, decreed them. You have heard; now look at all the evidence! Will you not admit that what I say is true?' (Isaiah 48:3-6 NET Bible).

Observations On This Passage

1. The Lord has announced events before they have taken place—He has made decrees, or predictions.
2. These predicted events have always come to pass!
3. Furthermore, He gave predictive prophecy because the people of Israel were stubborn.
4. Namely, they would give credit to their idols as “gods” instead of to Him. Predictive prophecy from the God of the Bible, thus, was to demonstrate that all these idols and “gods” were false gods, and that there was only one God who exists, the Lord Himself.
5. Punch Line: “You have heard, now consider all the evidence!” If you consider the evidence—God’s predictions and the fulfillment of them—you will have to admit that what He says is true: He is indeed the Lord.

Now let’s look at the New Testament...

We find that Jesus, during the last week of His life, made a number of predictions with respect to the future:

Palm Sunday

Now when Jesus approached and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you had only known on this day, even you, the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes” (Luke 19:41,42 NET)

Observations On This Passage

1. Jesus is emotional over the unbelief of the Jews.
2. They could have known the meaning of this day—the Messiah could have brought them peace.
3. But they were not willing to believe in Him.
4. Now they will not see the truth; it is hidden from them. Judgment will soon be coming.

A Few Days After Palm Sunday Jesus Said Something Similar (Matthew 23:37-39)

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her. How often I have desired to gather your children in the same manner as a hen gathers her brood underneath her wings. Yet, you were not willing. Behold! Your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me from now until you say, 'Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!' (Matthew 23:37-39).

Observations On This Passage

1. There is genuine emotion here in Jesus' voice.
2. Jesus said that Jerusalem is the city that murdered all the ones the Lord had previously sent to her.
3. Many times He wanted to gather them and to protect them.
4. But the people were not willing! They did not want to hear His message!
5. They could have received God's kingdom at the time Jesus came into the world—but they were unwilling—they were willfully ignorant.
6. The Lord then predicted judgment upon the city and the temple. (This was literally fulfilled about 40 years later.)
7. However, He also promised that they WILL see Him again!

The Emmaus Road (Luke 24 On Easter Sunday)

On Easter Sunday, the resurrected Christ joined two of His disciples as they were leaving Jerusalem. Their eyes were supernaturally held back so that they would not recognize Him. After asking them their thoughts about Jesus, the Lord then said the following to them:

So he said to them, "You foolish people—how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Wasn't it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things written about himself in all the scriptures (Luke 24:25-27 NET).

Observations On This Passage

1. Like most of the nation, these two disciples were ignorant concerning what the prophets had taught about the Messiah.
2. If they had believed everything the prophets had said, then they should have expected the Messiah to die.
3. In fact, they should have known what to look for when the genuine Messiah arrived.
4. Obviously, they did NOT believe everything that the prophets had written.
5. The Lord then explained to them exactly what the Scriptures had predicted about Him and His coming into the world.

Summing It Up:

The people in Jesus' day could have known, and should have known, the time of His coming. But they did not!

Some Did Understand the Times

We do find, however, that there will be some people who did indeed understand the times in which they were living.

Simeon

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" (Luke 2:25-32 NLT).

Anna

Anna, a prophetess, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38 NLT).

Mary Of Bethany

Now while Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of expensive perfumed oil, and she poured it on his head as he was at the table. When the disciples saw this, they became indignant and said, "Why this waste? It could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor!" When Jesus learned of this, he said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a good service for me. For you will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me! When she poured this oil on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her" (Matthew 26:6-13 NET).

In sum, there were a few people, two women and one man, who did understand what was taking place in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Going Forward, We Want To Be Like the People From Issachar!

There is an Old Testament passage that sums up what our attitude should be as we live in these "last days:"

From Issachar there were 200 leaders and all their relatives at their command—they understood the times and knew what Israel should do (1 Chronicles 12:32 NET).

This should be our goal—to understand the times in which we are living and then know what we should do. With these thoughts in mind, let us now begin our examination of the fascinating subject of Bible prophecy: past, present, and future.

Question 1

What Is Bible Prophecy?

The study before us is Bible prophecy. As we begin our focus of this most-exciting of subjects, we must consider a few introductory matters such as the definition of a prophet and of Bible prophecy itself.

What is a biblical prophet and what exactly is Bible prophecy? How should we understand these terms?

We can make the following observations:

1. A Prophet Speaks For Someone Else

The Hebrew word translated “prophet” occurs over 300 times in the Old Testament while the Greek word for prophet is used over 100 times in the New Testament.

The English word “prophet” comes from two Greek words *pro* meaning “before” or “in place of” and *phymē* meaning “to speak.”

A prophet, therefore, is someone who speaks in the place of another. The Bible says Aaron was a prophet to Moses:

And the LORD said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet” (Exodus 7:1 ESV).

Moses told God that his lack of eloquence prevented him from being His spokesman. God then told Moses that his brother Aaron could accompany him and be his spokesman to the people as his prophet.

2. A Prophet Is A Spokesman For God

In the Bible, a prophet is a spokesman for God. In fact, God sent and commissioned a prophet so that the words of a prophet are the words of God.

As the priest represented the people to God, the prophet was God’s representative to the people. The Bible is exceedingly clear that the words of the prophets were not the product of their own spirit, but came from a higher source—the One True God.

3. The Job Of A Prophet Is The Proclamation Of God’s Word

A prophet’s message was the proclamation of the Word of God to the people. They were essentially a preacher and a teacher—a person who relays a message from God to humankind. God told the prophet Jeremiah:

But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak . . . But you, dress yourself for work; arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them (Jeremiah 1:7,17 ESV).

Jeremiah was to speak those things which the Lord had commanded him to say. In doing so, he was not to be afraid.

Thus, the biblical prophet is one who fearlessly proclaims the Word of the Lord.

4. Prophecy Is Also Predictive

There is also the predictive element in Bible prophecy. If the people did not receive the message of the prophet, then the prophet would predict future events. These events would deal with God's program for His people, including judgment as well as a way to escape the judgment.

Jesus said one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit was to show believers "things to come." We read His words in John's gospel:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come (John 16.13 ESV).

Bible prophecy, therefore, has both a local and future application. A biblical prophet was both a forthteller of local issues and foreteller of the future. The main message in these prophecies, whether predictive or not, was for the people to follow the Lord.

This briefly summarizes the nature of Bible prophecy.

Summary To Question 1 What Is Bible Prophecy?

It is crucial to have a basic understanding of Bible prophecy before we can do any real study of the subject. Simply stated, in the Bible, a prophet was a man or woman who was a spokesman for God. In other words, they spoke in God's place to the people and their words were His words. Bible prophecy, therefore, consists of God's Words delivered to the human race through a human spokesman.

A biblical prophet was first a proclaimer of God's Word and secondarily a predictor of future events. They would initially speak God's truth to the people of their day. In doing so, they would deal with local issues. At times, it was necessary to predict things which would happen in the future.

No matter the message, whether it dealt with the present or the future, a biblical prophet would always encourage the people to obey the Lord in all things. This basically sums up the job of a biblical prophet.

Question 2

Why Is It Important To Study Bible Prophecy?

The study of Bible prophecy is very important for the believer and non-believer alike. There are a number of reasons as to why this is so. They include the following:

1. We Are Commanded To Study The Scriptures

To begin with, the Bible encourages believers to study the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul told Timothy to give diligence to the study of Scripture so that he could, in turn, instruct others. He said:

Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15 CSB).

The Contemporary English Version puts it this way:

Do your best to win God's approval as a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed and who teaches only the true message (2 Timothy 2:15 CEV).

Isaiah the prophet wrote of the need to search the Book, or scroll, of the Lord. He said the following:

Look in the scroll of the LORD and read (Isaiah 34:16 NIV).

Jesus told the religious leaders of His day that it was necessary to study the Scriptures, and to study them diligently. He said:

You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you possess eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me (John 5:39 NIV).

Therefore, since the subject of Bible prophecy is part of Holy Scripture, it should be thoroughly studied.

2. All Scripture Is Profitable For Study

In addition, the Bible says that "all" Scripture is profitable for study. Paul wrote:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17 NLT).

In this passage, Paul lists four reasons as to why God's Word is profitable. They can be briefly stated as follows:

The Scriptures Are Profitable For Teaching

First, Paul says that a study of the Scripture is profitable for teaching others God's Word. Indeed, the Holy Scripture alone contains the teachings, or the doctrines, which the living God has revealed to the world. Nowhere else can these truths be discovered.

Thus, it is only through a study of the Scripture that these divine truths from the living God can be known.

They Are Profitable For Rebuking

Scripture is also profitable for rebuking the sinner for their wicked ways. The Word of God brings conviction of sin to those who read and study its truths.

Therefore, the Scripture has the purpose of showing us the error of our ways.

The Bible Is Profitable For Correction

Those who are astray, either in their belief or their behavior, can be corrected through the teaching of Scripture. It is one thing to point out someone's faults but it is quite another thing to give a person the tools to correct these faults. Scripture provides these tools. This is another reason as to why the study of Scripture is beneficial.

The Bible Is Profitable For Training In Righteousness

This leads to the final thing. The Word of God trains people in righteousness, or living right. We learn how to live rightly before the living God through a study of His Word. The Lord has told us what He requires of us and it is our job to respond to what He has said.

The final result will be that the Bible-believer will be completely equipped for every good work. In other words, we will lack nothing.

Therefore, we find that the entire written Word of God is profitable for study. Consequently, since the subject of Bible prophecy is part of God's divinely inspired Word to the human race, studying it will be a profitable undertaking in many ways.

3. The Subject Of Bible Prophecy Covers Much Of Scripture

There is something else which must be considered. A large part of Holy Scripture deals with the subject of Bible prophecy. Indeed, we find that over one fourth of the books of the Bible can be catalogued as prophetic books. In fact, over 25% of the words of the Bible are prophetic words, about the size of the entire New Testament.

Moreover, seventeen out of thirty-nine Old Testament books are prophetic. All of the books from Isaiah to Malachi are prophetic in nature and many of the psalms are also prophetic. Furthermore, a large number of these prophecies, which mainly deal with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to the earth, still remain to be fulfilled.

Since a large part of Scripture is devoted to the subject of Bible prophecy, and since many of the prophecies remain unfulfilled, these are two other important reasons as to why we should study this subject.

4. God Wants Us To Know The Future

We also find that the study of Bible prophecy is important because the living God wants us to know the future. We read the Lord saying the following:

Then the Lord said, "Should I hide what I am about to do from Abraham?" (Genesis 18:17 CSB).

These words of the Lord are in the context of the punishment which He was about to place upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He did not want to hide the future from Abraham. He wanted His man to know what was going to happen.

The prophet Daniel was told that the future would be made known to him. We read the following words in the Book of Daniel:

Listen, and I will tell you what will happen at the end of time, when God has chosen to show his anger (Daniel 8:19 CEV).

Jesus also emphasized that believers could know certain things about coming events. He made this statement with respect to the future:

But when these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is near (Luke 21:28 CSB).

Jesus wanted believers to be informed, not ignorant, of the future.

The Bible also says that the Lord has put “eternity in our hearts:”

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end (Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV).

We have been made for eternity; we have been created to think about eternity. Consequently, the Lord wants us to know the things which are to come.

5. Prophecy Was Important To Jesus

While He was here upon the earth, predictive prophecy was an important aspect of Jesus’ ministry. We read about this in the gospel according to Luke.

On the road to Emmaus, on the day of His resurrection, Jesus rebuked the two wandering disciples for not paying attention to Bible prophecy that was contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament. He put it this way:

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:25,26 ESV).

They should have listened to the words of “all” the prophets. If they had done this, they would have understood about the need for the Christ, or Messiah, to suffer.

Later that same day, the Lord Jesus added further to His message of the importance of the writings of the prophets. He said:

While I was still with you, I told you that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Books of the Prophets, and in the Psalms had to happen.” Then he helped them understand the Scriptures. He told them: The Scriptures say that the Messiah must suffer, then three days later he will rise from death (Luke 24:44-46 CEV).

It is interesting that the first recorded teachings we have from Jesus, after He came back from the dead, have an emphasis on Bible prophecy. Obviously, it was an important subject to Him.

Before His death on the cross, Christ spoke to His disciples about coming to the earth a second time. He gave them the following encouraging words:

Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's home, and I am going to prepare a place for you. If this were not so, I would tell you plainly. When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am (John 14:1-3 NLT).

Predictive prophecy, including events fulfilled at Jesus' First Coming, as well as things remaining to be fulfilled, were a large part of His ministry.

Therefore, if the subject of Bible prophecy was important to Jesus it should also be important to us.

6. Prophecy Was Important To The Apostle Paul

The writers of the New Testament also stress the importance of the prophetic Word. Indeed, prophecy was one of the main subjects dealt with by the Apostle Paul.

After writing to the church at Thessalonica about coming events, he reminded them that he had spoken about these things to them while he was in their presence:

Don't you remember that I told you this when I was with you? (2 Thessalonians 2:5 NLT).

This letter to the Thessalonians was written early in the history of the church. In it, we discover that Bible prophecy was such an important subject that Paul not only taught it when he was present with the Thessalonians, he also wrote to them about it in his first letter.

Shortly before his death, the apostle Paul told Timothy that he was basing his hope on the coming of the Lord. He said:

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (2 Timothy 4:8 NIV).

He longed for the day that the Lord would return. His hope was based upon the prophetic Scripture.

Thus, the first written words from Paul to the Thessalonians, as well as the last written words we have to Timothy, stress the importance of Bible prophecy.

7. The Study Of Prophecy Has Practical Benefits For The Believer

Bible prophecy does not consist of merely having an intellectual knowledge of what is going to occur in the future. It is so much more than that. Indeed, there are many practical benefits in studying prophecy.

The Bible says prophetic study will bring us confidence in His Word:

We also have the prophetic word strongly confirmed, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Peter 1:19 CSB).

This is so important to appreciate. When we realize that it is the Lord Himself which controls the future, we can have supreme confidence about coming events. He knows the future and He is in control of the future.

Consequently, the study of the future gives us reasons to have the utmost confidence in the Lord.

We know that we can trust what He has promised because, time and time again, His prophetic words have come to pass exactly as He predicted they would.

8. There Is A Special Blessing To Those Who Study And Obey This Subject

Bible prophecy is the only subject in Scripture where a special blessing is pronounced on those who study it, as well as those who obey what is written. John wrote the following words at the beginning of the Book of Revelation:

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep what is written in it, because the time is near (Revelation 1:3 CSB).

It is essential that we understand John's statement here. It is not enough to study the subject; we must obey the things which we learn. Hence, we learn what the Bible says and then obey what it says. This is His message to each of us.

9. The Subject Can Bring Comfort To Believers

The study of Bible prophecy also provides comfort to the believer. After speaking of Christ's coming back to earth for His people, the Apostle Paul said:

Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:18 NIV).

Indeed, believers in Christ can comfort one another with the fact that the Lord has told us what the future holds. We do not have to be like others who have no hope.

10. A Very Practical Reason: Human Beings Are Blind To The Future

The last reason for the importance of prophetic study is obvious. While all human beings would like to know what is going to occur in the future, we are not able to know.

Indeed, as finite, limited creatures we are blind to the things which will happen tomorrow. We can estimate, we can guess, we can hope, but we cannot know. Such is the nature of the human race. We can study the past, we can evaluate the present, but the future is the "great unknown."

This is why the study of Bible prophecy is of the highest importance for us. We have a clear Word from someone who does know what will occur, someone who is in control of the future.

Thus, we do not have to be blind with respect to what is going to occur, we can know. God has seen to this!

Therefore, we have no excuse about being ignorant of "things to come."

Conclusion: There Is Much Value In Studying Bible Prophecy

As we can now appreciate, the study of Bible prophecy has considerable value for the believer. However, some people object by saying that the study of prophecy leads Christians to become dreamers about the future instead of becoming involved in the daily work of the ministry.

In other words, the study of the prophetic matters somehow halts genuine Christian service. It retards personal Christian growth. Yet, if this were the case, then we should remove all of the texts from the Bible which deal with the future.

But as we have seen, this is not what should be done. Indeed, the study of Bible prophecy should be a great motivator for godly living.

John emphasized this when he wrote to the believers of his day. He said:

Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1 John 3:3 NIV).

This genuine hope that the Lord has given to us should cause us to purify ourselves, to act more like Him.

If the Lord thought the subject was significant enough to commit it to writing, then obviously it was important to Him. In fact, we have been commanded to study that which has been written. Bible prophecy is indeed an important subject for each and every one of us to study.

Summary To Question 2

Why Is It Important To Study Bible Prophecy?

It is important for believers to make a serious study of the topic of biblical prophecy. There are a number of reasons as to why this is so.

For one thing, we are commanded in Scripture to study *all* of the things which the living God has revealed in His Word. Bible prophecy is one of those subjects which has been covered in Scripture. Therefore, it must be studied.

We are also told that *all* Scripture is profitable for us. There are a number of ways we can profit in the study of His Word.

For example, we can use what we learn in Scripture to teach others. We will also be convicted of our sin when we study His Word. In addition, we will be able to correct our own faults through discovering what the Bible says.

Finally, we will be instructed in the ways of righteous, or godly, living.

Therefore, as part of Scripture, the things written on the subject of Bible prophecy will be beneficial in all of these areas.

Furthermore, a huge segment of the Bible is devoted to this topic. Indeed, over 25% of the Scriptures deals with prophetic matters. Since a large portion of the Word of God is dedicated to the subject of Bible prophecy, it is important that we pay attention to the things which have been written. It is not coincidental that so much space is dedicated to this topic.

In addition, as we look at the ministry of Jesus Christ, we discover that He spent considerable time dealing with future events. He thought they were an important topic of instruction. If they were important to Him, then, of course, they should also be important to us.

We also find that the Apostle Paul was interested in Bible prophecy. Indeed, in the very first letter that he wrote to the believers in Thessalonica, as well as the last letter we have from him, to Timothy, the subject of the future is highlighted.

Consequently, we find that this subject was a significant part of his preaching and teaching. Since Paul was designated by the Lord to unveil many truths about the purpose of the coming of Christ, his emphasis on future events should be taken seriously.

Scripture also says that the study of Bible prophecy has great spiritual value for believers. Indeed, a special blessing is pronounced upon those who study this subject and obey the things written about it. This is another reason as to why we should give our attention to this topic. We are commanded to know about prophetic matters, and then become obedient to what we have learned.

The study of biblical prophecy also brings comfort to the believer. We are comforted to know that this life is not all that there is. A great and glorious future awaits those who have put their faith in the God of the Bible. Furthermore, this same God, who knows everything about the future, is also in control of all coming events. These truths bring comfort and confidence to Christians.

Finally, there is a very practical reason as to why we should study the subject. Human beings, by definition, cannot know what tomorrow brings. While people guess about the future, nobody can be certain. It is not in our control. Though we would like to know what will occur, we are not in a position to know. We can know the past to some degree, as well as the present, but the future remains as something unknown to each of us.

The good news is that we can know! God has revealed some aspects of the future to us in His Word. We do not have to be blind to the things which are to come. There is no excuse, therefore, of being ignorant about the future. The Lord has told us what is going to occur.

Therefore, when all is said and done, we find that there is much value in the study of Bible prophecy. Contrary to the teaching of some, the study of the future does not cause people to neglect Christian service. Instead, it encourages us to follow Christ and proclaim the message of His coming kingdom. It also encourages us to holy living.

He gave us these truths for a reason. Let us not neglect their study!

Question 3

What Are Some Of The Extremes That We Should Avoid In Prophetic Study?

This question follows the previous one. While the subject of Bible prophecy is found in a large part of Scripture, there are two extremes that we should avoid when conducting a study of the subject. They can be summed up as follows:

Extreme One: Overemphasize The Subject Of Bible Prophecy

While the subject of prophecy is certainly important, it must always be studied in the context of the overall teachings of the Bible. In other words, merely studying Bible prophecy, especially predictive prophecy, by itself, misses the main message of Scripture.

Unhappily, many Christians spend their time examining the passages concerning future events while neglecting the main teachings of Scripture. The Person and work of Jesus Christ becomes secondary to their attempt to discover what the Bible says about the future.

The Bible Warns Of Endless Debates And Speculation

Unhappily, many Christians spend way too much time engaging in endless debates as well as speculation about the specific details of coming events, many of which New Testament Christians will not be around to observe!

Paul wrote about certain issues in his day that caused endless speculation:

Don't let them waste their time in endless discussion of myths and spiritual pedigrees. These things only lead to meaningless speculations, which don't help people live a life of faith in God (1 Timothy 1:4 NET).

He also said:

But reject foolish and ignorant controversies, because you know they breed infighting (2 Timothy 2:23 NET).

The same advice holds true today for those engaging in endless questions and speculation about certain aspects of the future which we cannot know anything about. We should avoid doing this!

People Add More Details Than The Scripture Provides

There is also the tendency to go beyond what the Scripture clearly says in order to find more details than the text of the Bible provides. This always results in guesswork as well as unnecessary speculation. We should never try to add more details than the Bible itself gives. Paul wrote:

I have applied these things to myself and Apollos because of you, brothers and sisters, so that through us you may learn "not to go beyond what is written," so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of the one against the other (1 Corinthians 4:6 NET).

This cannot be emphasized enough! We must not go beyond that which was written.

Extreme Two: People Neglect The Study Of Bible Prophecy

As a reaction to this first extreme, there are those who neglect the subject entirely. Indeed, many Christians, when hearing about the various views and all the never-ending debates, decide to give up and ignore entirely the subject of Bible prophecy. This is tragic.

The Key Is To Find A Balance

As we have emphasized, Bible prophecy is an important subject to study. But it should always be examined in the light of the totality of Scripture. However, to many, a balanced understanding seems unattainable, so some Christians abandon careful study of the end times entirely.

This is unfortunate. We should give attention to this most-important of subjects but always in context of the overall teaching of Scripture.

Summary To Question 3: What Are Some Of The Extremes That We Should Avoid In Prophetic Study?

We should study the subject of Bible prophecy since it is contained in a large part of Scripture. Furthermore, we are commanded to study all of God's Word.

However, many Christians go to one of two extremes with respect to this subject.

On the one hand, there are those who ignore the subject entirely, while on the other hand, there are those who make it the central focus of their biblical studies.

Neither position is biblical, or desirable. The key is to find a balance. This is accomplished by studying the totality of Scripture. In this manner, the subject of Bible prophecy can be put in its proper context.

Question 4

What is the Proper Way Of Dealing With Those Who Have A Different View Than Ours About Coming Events?

As we mentioned, Bible prophecy is not merely about “last days” events. Indeed, many predictions about the future have already been fulfilled in the past.

When it comes to the subject of events that are “still to come” there is disagreement among Bible-believers concerning how to interpret them. Therefore, it is important to know how to deal with others who hold a different view than ours.

Put The Issue Into Perspective

Above all, when engaging with other Christians about the end times, we must always keep the proper perspective. While the study of coming events is important, it is not something that we should allow to divide us from other Christians. In other words, it is not the most important topic that Bible-believing Christians can and should discuss.

Try To Understand Where The Other Person Is Coming From

Furthermore, it is important to understand what the other person believes, as well as why they believe it. Consequently, instead of confrontation, there should be engagement with other Bible-believers. Indeed, there is much that we can learn from others.

Be Open To Update Your View Based Upon Further Information

This is crucial. None of us have all the answers. As we learn more about the subject, we should have the freedom to update our view based upon new information.

Indeed, we always want to be teachable:

So a church leader must be a man whose life is above reproach. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exercise self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2 NLT).

The Greek word translated “able to teach” can also be translated as “teachable.” May the Lord help us all to be “teachable” when it comes to this subject, as well as all others.

Summary To Question 4:

What Is The Proper Way Of Dealing With Those Who Have A Different View Than Ours about Coming Events?

There is a renewed interest in the study of “last days” events. Consequently, with modern technology, all of us can be exposed to a variety of different views on the subject. What are we to do when confronted with a differing perspective of end-time events?

As we mentioned, we need to put the matter into proper perspective. While important, the subject of Bible prophecy, especially “end times” prophecy, is not the gospel.

Second, we need to understand where others are coming from when they put forth their perspective. In fact, we can often learn much from listening to the viewpoint of others who have a different understanding of coming prophetic events.

Finally, we should all be “teachable.” Indeed, each of us has much that we can learn about this important subject. In fact, we may have to adjust our understanding after examining the views of others.

The key is to have an open mind as well as a heart that wants to know the truth.

Question 5

What Are The Essential Truths About The End Times That All Christians Should Believe?

While Bible-believers do disagree as to the meaning, or the timing, of certain end-time events, there are many things that all believers have in common with respect to the coming of the Lord.

Lest we forget, all Christians can agree concerning the following truths about events that will take place at the time of the end:

Jesus Christ Will Return

While differing in the understanding of the details, all Christians agree that Jesus Christ is coming back to the earth. Indeed, from the earliest creeds, believers in Christ were united in their belief that the Second Coming of Christ will eventually take place. Jesus Himself declared the following to His disciples on the night of His betrayal:

Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am (John 14:1-3 NLT).

He will indeed return to this earth. This promise of Jesus has been universally believed by Christians for the last two thousand years.

He Will Return Bodily

Another point of agreement concerns the nature of His return—it will be literal and bodily. In other words, the same Jesus who left this earth will return in like manner.

This was emphasized to His disciples at the time that the Lord ascended into heaven. Scripture explains what took place:

After saying this, he [Jesus] was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!" (Acts 1:9-12 NLT).

The Lord will return in the same manner as He left the earth; this will be physically as well as visibly.

Everyone Will See Him

The Book of Revelation also records this promise that everyone will see Him upon His return:

Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven. And everyone will see him—even those who pierced him. And all the nations of the world will mourn for him. Yes! Amen! (Revelation 1:7 NLT).

Everyone upon the earth will see His return!

There Will Be NO Secret Coming Upon His Return To The Earth

Jesus Himself emphasized this truth about His return to the earth:

Then if anyone tells you, 'Look, here is the Messiah,' or 'There he is,' don't believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform great signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God's chosen ones. See, I have warned you about this ahead of time. "So if someone tells you, 'Look, the Messiah is out in the desert,' don't bother to go and look. Or, 'Look, he is hiding here,' don't believe it! For as the lightning flashes in the east and shines to the west, so it will be when the Son of Man comes (Matthew 24:24-27 NLT).

Therefore, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will be an event that everyone sees. There will be no secret return!

Having said this, we must make the distinction between the rapture of the church, when He comes *for* the believers, and His Second Coming, when the Lord returns *with* His saints. We explain the differences in great detail in our book *The Rapture*.

He Will Return As The Judge Of All Humankind

Furthermore, when Christ does return it will be in the position of a Judge. The dead will be raised and all humanity will be judged. Jesus also spoke about this:

But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left (Matthew 25:31-33 NLT).

Those living at the time of His return will be judged. The living believers will enter His kingdom while the unbelievers will be sent away to be punished. We go into great detail in explaining this in our book *Resurrection and Judgment*.

Those Who Have Believed In Christ Will Spend Eternity With Him

Finally, those who have believed in the God of the Bible will spend eternity with Him:

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. . . [then] the righteous will go into eternal life (Matthew 25:34,46 NLT).

Such is the glorious future for those who have put their faith in Him.

Everything That Has Been Predicted Will Be Fulfilled

In sum, all that is prophesied about the return of the Lord will eventually be fulfilled. Peter emphasized this in a message that he gave to the people of his day:

Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah. For he must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his holy prophets (Acts 3:19-21 NLT).

All of these things that the Lord has promised will indeed be fulfilled when He returns.

These Truths Have United Christians Since Jesus' Ascension

These truths have been consistently held by all Christians since the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven. Indeed, it has been the hope of believers for the last two thousand years that someday Jesus Christ will return to the earth as Judge and King. It is still our hope today!

Summary To Question 5:

What Are The Essential Truths About The End Times That All Christians Should Believe?

As we have noted, with respect to the coming of the Lord, there are a number of different views as to the sequence of end-times events. However, there are also a number of things to which all believers agree.

They include the fact that Jesus Christ will return to the earth. When He does return it will be both bodily and visibly. In fact, everyone living upon the earth will see it; there will be no secret coming where only a few people will be aware of His return.

Furthermore, the dead will be raised and judged. This judgment will include those who are living upon the earth at that time.

The great news is that those who have believed in Him will spend all eternity with the Lord! This is the destiny of all believers.

To sum up, everything that has been predicted about the return of the Lord to the earth will be literally fulfilled! The Lord has promised this and He always keeps His promises.

Question 6

Who Were The Biblical Prophets?

It is vital that we have a proper understanding of the identity of the biblical prophets. Who were they? How did a person become a prophet? What does the Scripture say about their responsibility?

A number of things should be noted in answering this question. They include the following:

1. People Did Not Become Prophets By Heredity

Scripture is clear that the office of a prophet was not something that a person inherited from their parents. In other words, one was not born into a family of prophets.

While kings and priests usually received their position through inheritance, no person ever became a prophet because their father or mother was one.

In sum, it did not matter who were the relatives of a prophet. Heredity had absolutely nothing to do with holding the prophetic office.

2. No One Could Learn To Be A Prophet

In addition, a person did not go to school to learn how to be a prophet. It was not an occupation which one could be taught to do. A person either had the gift or they did not. It's that simple. No amount of training or schooling could make a person a prophet of God. None.

3. No Human Organization Could Bestow The Prophetic Gift

Neither was there any human organization with the ability to bestow the title of "prophet" upon an individual. Humans had no say-so as to who could become a prophet, and who could not. It was not a popularity contest. In fact, the prophets were often the most unpopular people in the country!

4. Prophets Were Called By God Himself

Scripture is clear on this. It is the Lord Himself who called people into the prophetic ministry. Nobody could volunteer for the job.

We find that the Lord told Jeremiah about his special calling to be a prophet:

But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD. Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth" (Jeremiah 1:7-9 NIV).

The Lord was going to put His words in the mouth of Jeremiah. Therefore, the words of Jeremiah would ultimately be the very words of the Lord. Indeed, Jeremiah could not help but speak these words:

If I say, I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name, there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot (Jeremiah 20:9 ESV).

He could not contain himself. He had to speak God's truth. This is something we find over and over again with all of the prophets. They testified that they were compelled to proclaim God's truth.

For example, the religious leaders wanted the apostles Peter and John to keep quiet about the message of Jesus. They could not. They said:

For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:20 ESV).

It was impossible for them to keep quiet! They had to preach what they knew to be true.

The Lord Jesus, in His public ministry, emphasized that the work of God must be done. He said the following words to His disciples:

As long as it is day, we must do what the one who sent me wants me to do. When night comes, no one can work (John 9:4 CEV).

The work of God the Father must be completed. It was not possible for the prophets of God to remain silent.

The Apostle Paul wrote about the necessity for him to proclaim the good news about Christ. He wrote the following to the Corinthians:

For if I preach the gospel, I have no reason to boast, because I am compelled to preach — and woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Corinthians 9:16 CSB).

He had to preach God's Word. It was something he was compelled to do.

Therefore, we can see that the prophetic calling was a special calling. Each of these people who spoke for God had this unique call on their lives. Indeed, they were specially chosen by the Lord for this task.

5. The Prophets Were A Special Class Of People

When all the evidence is considered, we discover that the prophets of God were a very special class of people. Indeed, they were like no other individuals who have lived upon the earth. We should appreciate the one -of-a-kind responsibility they were given.

6. The Prophets Did Not Always Understand The Predictions They Were Giving

Finally, Simon Peter wrote about the desire of the prophets, as well as angels, to understand the things that were predicted, but they could not:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who predicted the grace that would come to you searched and investigated carefully. They probed into what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating when he testified beforehand about the sufferings appointed for Christ and his subsequent glory. They were shown that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things now announced to you through those who proclaimed the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things angels long to catch a glimpse of (2 Peter 1:10-12 NET).

In this context, we notice that Peter said that the prophets, who predicted the coming of the Lord, did not comprehend exactly what they were writing about. Indeed, they wrote about the Messiah's suffering as well as the glory that He would receive.

Looking back, we now understand what they did not—that there are two comings of Jesus Christ. The first time He came as the Lamb of God who would suffer and die for the sins of the world...

John the Baptist explained it this way:

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29 NLT)

And when He returns it will be as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. We read about this in the Book of Revelation:

But one of the twenty-four elders said to me, “Stop weeping! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David’s throne, has won the victory (Revelation 5:5 NLT).

Therefore, the prophets wrote of Christ who will come to earth on two separate occasions.

This sums up some key things which we should know about the biblical prophets. As Scripture testifies, they have been instrumental in proclaiming God’s message to this world.

Summary To Question 6 Who Were The Biblical Prophets?

If we are going to understand the subject of Bible prophecy, then we need to know what the Scripture has to say about the prophets of God. We can learn much about these individuals. This includes the following: For one thing, we find that a person was not born into a family of prophets. Unlike kings and priests, who had their descendants follow in their footsteps, the children of the prophets did not become prophets. Only God could call someone to be His prophet. Heredity played no part.

Thus, a prophet received a special calling from the Lord and from Him alone. No human being conferred the status of a “prophet” on another human being. Indeed, no human being has been given such authority by the Lord.

This means that a person could not join a school to learn how to become a prophet. The prophetic ministry was a gift—a gift from God—and it was not something one would ever seek after. The reason why this is true is that the words of the prophet were ultimately the words of the Lord. They did not originate with the prophet or from his or her own mind. They were God’s words spoken through a human instrument.

In fact, the Lord emphasized that He was the One who would put His words in the mouth of a prophet. Thus, it was the Lord alone who determined who was going to speak for Him. No human could determine this. No human being should attempt to, either. We thus find a number of times in Scripture the prophets of God testifying to the necessity of their speaking forth God’s truth; they could not help themselves. They were compelled to deliver God’s Word to others.

The prophets of God, therefore, were a special class of people whose calling and ministry was directed by God alone. They were answerable only to Him.

Finally, we discover that the prophets themselves did not always understand the predictions that the Lord inspired them to make. In fact, Peter wrote that they would try to understand their predictions about how, on the one hand, Christ would suffer when He came, while, on the other hand, He would receive eventual glory.

We now understand what they did not: Christ came the first time, as the Lamb of God, to suffer for the sins of the world, and He will also come again to the earth a second time, to rule and reign as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. This sums up some of the basic truths about the biblical prophets who were chosen by Lord.

Question 7

Were There Female Prophets?

While the biblical prophets are usually thought of as rugged males, often dressed in some type of unique outfit, we also find that Scripture speaks of female prophets.

Indeed, in both Testaments the Bible attests to the existence of females who were given the prophetic gift. This being the case, it is important for us to know what Scripture has to say about females who had the gift of speaking forth God's Word.

The Women Who Prophesied For The Lord

Several women are referred to in Scripture as having this gift of prophecy. They are as follows:

1. Miriam

We find that Miriam, the sister of Moses had the prophetic gift. We read of this in the Book of Exodus. It says:

Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine and led all the women in rhythm and dance (Exodus 15:20 NLT).

Miriam is specifically called a prophet.

We also discover something that she said. The Bible says:

And Miriam sang this song: "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; he has thrown both horse and rider into the sea" (Exodus 15:21 NLT).

Miriam recounted the deliverance of the people of Israel from the armies of Egypt. This is also known as the "song of Moses."

2. Deborah

Deborah, the Judge, was also called a prophetess. We read the following description of her in the Book of Judges:

Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophet who had become a judge in Israel (Judges 4:4 NLT).

We have some of her prophetic words recorded for us in Holy Scripture.

We read the following in the Book of Judges:

One day she sent for Barak son of Abinoam, who lived in Kedesh in the land of Naphtali. She said to him, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: Assemble ten thousand warriors from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun at Mount Tabor. I will lure Sisera, commander of Jabin's army, along with his chariots and warriors, to the Kishon River. There I will give you victory over him" (Judges 4:6-7 NLT).

According to Deborah, the Lord promised to give victory over the army of their enemies, in particular, a man named Sisera who commanded the armies of Jabin.

It seemed that Barak was afraid to go without Deborah! We continue with the story:

Barak told her, “I will go, but only if you go with me!” “Very well,” she replied, “I will go with you. But since you have made this choice, you will receive no honor. For the LORD’s victory over Sisera will be at the hands of a woman.” So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh (Judges 4:8-9 NLT).

Deborah then proclaimed that the victory of the Lord would be at the hands of a woman. This is a specific prediction.

The predictions of Deborah the prophetess then became even more specific. The victory of the army of the Lord was going to occur that same day. We read:

Then Deborah said to Barak, “Get ready! Today the LORD will give you victory over Sisera, for the LORD is marching ahead of you.” So Barak led his ten thousand warriors down the slopes of Mount Tabor into battle (Judges 4:14 NLT).

She proved to be a true prophet of the Lord—her words came to pass exactly as she said. The nation of Israel won the victory that very day, led by Deborah herself.

We also find that the entire fifth chapter of the Book of Judges records the song of Deborah after the great victory over the enemies of Israel. She was indeed a genuine prophet of God.

3. Huldah

During the time of the good King Josiah of Judah, about 620 B.C., there was a female prophetess named Huldah. She was acknowledged in the Bible as a prophet. Scripture says:

So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the newer Mishneh section of Jerusalem to consult with the prophet Huldah. She was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah and grandson of Harhas, the keeper of the Temple wardrobe (2 Kings 22:14 NLT).

In fact, she gave a very important prediction about King Josiah and the future of the city of Jerusalem. The Bible tells us what occurred when King Josiah sent a number of messengers to this prophet:

She said to them, “This is what the Lord God of Israel says: Say to the man who sent you to me, ‘This is what the Lord says: I am about to bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants, fulfilling all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read, because they have abandoned me and burned incense to other gods in order to anger me with all the work of their hands. My wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched.’ Say this to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the Lord: ‘This is what the Lord God of Israel says: As for the words that you heard, because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and because you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I myself have heard’ — this is the Lord’s declaration. ‘Therefore, I will indeed gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your grave in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster that I am bringing on this place.’” Then they reported to the king (2 Kings 22:15-20 CSB).

There are a number of significant things we discover from her prediction. They can be summed up as follows.

First, the Lord was going to judge the inhabitants of Jerusalem for their sins against Him. This would occur because the people had abandoned the living God. The city of Jerusalem would be desolated as a result of God’s judgment.

However, because King Josiah humbled himself and called upon the name of the Lord, he would die before the disaster took place. This good king would not see the judgment that was about to take place.

History tells us that all of this occurred exactly as Huldah predicted. The good King Josiah died before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. Huldah was indeed a genuine prophet of God.

4. Noadiah

A woman named Noadiah was also called a prophet. We read about her in the Book of Nehemiah. It says:

Remember, O my God, all the evil things that Tobiah and Sanballat have done. And remember Noadiah the prophet and all the prophets like her who have tried to intimidate me (Nehemiah 6:14 NLT).

She was one of a group of people who tried to “intimidate” Nehemiah. This, however, would seemingly make her a *false* prophet. Beyond this, we know nothing about her.

The fact that she may have been a false prophet is not surprising. Scripture speaks of a number of false prophets. We should not be shocked if there were false prophets among women who claimed to speak for the Lord.

5. The Daughters Of Philip

We also find female prophets in the New Testament. The Book of Acts records that Philip, the evangelist, had four daughters that prophesied. We read the following:

And he had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied (Acts 21:9 RSV).

Nothing is recorded for us about any of their specific prophetic messages; only the fact that they had the gift of prophecy.

Thus, we find that Scripture speaks of several female prophets. A number of them were central characters in the Bible.

Therefore, the Lord used both males and females to proclaim His truths to the world.

Summary To Question 7: Were There Female Prophets?

Not only do we find male prophets in Holy Scripture we also find a number of female prophets mentioned. We learn the following about them:

Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, was called a prophet. She, like her brother Moses, had the gift of prophecy. The words of one particular song of Miriam are recorded for us in the Book of Exodus. In it, she recounts the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian army.

The Judge Deborah also had the gift of prophecy. The fact that this was mentioned about her, with no accompanying explanation, shows that this was not something unusual, or abnormal. Like Miriam, we have some of her prophetic words recorded.

She predicted a victory for the nation of Israel over their enemies. When leading the army, herself, she further predicted the victory would occur that day.

Her prophetic words came true. Israel won the victory that very day. Furthermore, an entire chapter, Judges 6, records the song of Deborah after this great victory. She truly had the prophetic gift. Her specific predictions came to pass exactly as they were given.

There was a very important prophetess named Huldah. She was the one who told King Josiah a number of things about the coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the captivity of the people to Babylon.

The fact that she was given such an awesome privilege of delivering this message shows that female prophets were regarded with the same respect as their male counterparts. They were certainly not considered to be lesser figures.

In the Book of Nehemiah, we have the mention of Noadiah the prophet. However, no specific words of prophecy were attributed to her. We are only told that she, along with other prophets, “intimidated” Nehemiah. This seems to indicate that she was a *false* prophet.

This is consistent with the rest of Scripture. Since there were women who were true prophets of God, we should also expect false prophets to arise. Just as there were false prophets among the men, we find false prophets among the women.

In the New Testament, we are told that the four daughters of Philip the evangelist had the gift of prophecy. Nothing further is said about them.

Again, the fact that they were mentioned as having the prophetic gift, without any further explanation, tells us that this was not considered unusual.

This sums up what we know about female prophets from Scripture. From what we can determine from a study of God’s Word, it seems obvious that female prophets, the prophetesses, had an important role in delivering God’s Word to His people.

Question 8

What Are The Biblical Tests For A Prophet?

How could the people in biblical times tell the difference between a genuine prophet of God and a fraud? The mere claim that someone had the prophetic gift certainly did not make it so. How would the people know which person spoke for God and who did not? What were they to do?

The Lord made provisions for this problem. The Bible lists certain tests for a genuine prophet of God. Moses recorded God as saying:

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death. You may say to yourselves, “How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?” If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him (Deuteronomy 18:18-22 NIV).

There are a number of things we can learn from what the Lord has said about who had the prophetic gift and who did not.

1. They Were To Speak In The Name Of The Lord

From this passage, we observe that a prophet of God must speak in the name of the Lord. The prophet shall not encourage the people to follow after false gods.

No matter how correct, a prophet may seem to be, if he, or she, does not encourage people to follow the Lord, the God of Israel, then that person cannot be considered a prophet of God. Merely getting some future events correct is not enough to be considered a genuine prophet of God. This is primary.

2. They Were 100% Right 100% Of The Time

Another characteristic of Bible prophecy is that the biblical prophet must be 100% right 100% of the time. If a prophet is representing the Lord, then their predictions will always be without error.

As soon as a so-called prophet makes one mistake, then that person is no longer able to be called a prophet of the true and living God. God's prophets did not make mistakes! The prophet Habakkuk wrote:

The LORD answered me: Write down this vision; clearly inscribe it on tablets so one may easily read it. For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it testifies about the end and will not lie. Though it delays, wait for it, since it will certainly come and not be late (Habakkuk 2:2-3 CSB).

The words of the Lord, through the prophets, will indeed truly come to pass, and they will not be late! Indeed, when the Lord predicts the future what He says always comes to pass.

3. They Had To Give Evidence Of Authenticity Of Their Gift In Their Lifetime

A practical question arises. How would the people know if a particular prophet was sent by God? Anyone could claim to have the prophetic gift. What if someone claimed to be God's prophet, yet predicted events that would not be fulfilled for hundreds of years? How could the identity of the prophet be established?

God provided a simple method so that the people would know if this person was actually speaking for the Lord. Their authenticity, as a genuine prophet, would be demonstrated by making a specific prediction of something locally that would happen *in their own lifetime*.

In other words, before that person could be received as God's prophet to the people, they had to give supernatural evidence of their calling. This would be evidence which everyone could weigh and evaluate.

An Example: The Local Prediction Of Isaiah

For example, Isaiah the prophet spoke to King Hezekiah about the possible attack of the Assyrian army. He made the following prediction:

Therefore, this is what the LORD says about the king of Assyria: He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow there or come before it with a shield or build up an assault ramp against it (Isaiah 37:33 CSB).

The prophecy was clear. Although the city of Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrian army, there would be no destruction whatsoever.

Furthermore, there would not even be one arrow shot into the city by the enemy. This specific prophecy was literally fulfilled. The Bible says:

Then the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. When the people got up the [next] morning—there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and left. He returned [home] and lived in Nineveh (Isaiah 37:36-37 CSB).

Therefore, we have an immediate fulfillment in the lifetime of the prophet Isaiah that demonstrated he was speaking for God. His words came to pass exactly as he said that they would.

The same test held true for other biblical prophets. They had to make a specific, local prediction which would be literally fulfilled in their lifetime before they could be considered as one of God's true prophets.

Consequently, the people of God would never have to wonder who was truly speaking for Him. A genuine prophet would always be right, would encourage the people to follow the Lord, would command them not to follow other gods, and would accurately predict some event in their own lifetime. Those who passed all of these tests would qualify as a true prophet of God.

The Prophet Could Not Play Any Part In The Fulfillment Of His Or Her Prediction

We should also emphasize that those men and women who gave the divinely-inspired prophecies, the biblical prophets, could not play any part in their fulfillment.

In other words, the predictions they made had to be completely fulfilled apart from anything that they said or did. Consequently, the genuine prophet of God could have absolutely nothing to do with the precise fulfillment of their predictions. This had to be the work of the Lord and of Him alone.

This sums up the tests that the biblical prophets had to pass.

**Summary To Question 8:
What Are The Biblical Tests For A Prophet?**

While many people in the ancient world rose up and claimed to be prophets of God, the Lord provided a way in which their claims could be tested.

Indeed, there were a number of tests the Scripture gave to identify a genuine prophet of God. These tests made it clear who was speaking for the Lord and who was not speaking for Him. We can summarize them in the following manner:

According to the Lord, a true prophet of the living God would always be correct in everything that he or she predicts. They could not make any mistakes when making predictions of the future in the name of the Lord. If they made a mistake, then they could not be speaking for Him, for God does not make mistakes. This test must be passed.

In addition, the biblical prophet must encourage the people to follow after the Lord. This is crucial. It is not enough for the prophet to correctly speak of “things to come.” The prophet must also urge the population to serve the God of Scripture. Otherwise, he or she could not be considered as a genuine prophet.

Furthermore, a prophet could not claim to be sent from God and then make predictions which would only be fulfilled hundreds, or thousands, of years from his or her time.

Instead, a biblical prophet had to provide specific, supernatural evidence of his or her authenticity within their own lifetime. They had to predict something which would come to pass while they were still alive—some local occurrence. This way the genuineness of a prophet could be determined. If they were able to do such a thing, then they would be accepted as a true prophet of the God of Scripture.

We find examples of the true prophets of God making predictions which were fulfilled in their own lifetime. This assured the people that they were indeed speaking for the God of Scripture.

In addition, the prophet could not have anything to do with the fulfillment of the prophecy. In other words, it had to come pass completely apart from any interference on behalf of the biblical prophet.

These are the simple tests which would be applied to anyone who claimed to speak for the Lord. In this way, there would be no doubt as to the identity of God’s prophets.

Question 9

Who Were The New Testament Prophets?

As there were prophets during the Old Testament era, there were also prophets during the time of the New Testament. Scripture speaks of a group of people in the New Testament known as the prophets. John wrote:

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!” (Revelation 22:8,9 NRSV).

It is clear that the New Testament recognizes the existence of prophets. There are a number of things which we learn about them:

1. The New Testament Prophets Spoke God’s Truth

As was true in the Old Testament period, the main job of the New Testament prophets was to speak forth the Word of God. The words of the New Testament prophets carried the same authority as the words of the Old Testament prophets.

Jesus The Prophet

Lest we forget, one of the titles of Jesus was that of a prophet! Indeed, He was God’s spokesman while here upon the earth.

To the point, Jesus said His words were given by God the Father. We read the following in John’s Gospel:

Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews there were amazed and asked, “How did this man get such learning without been taught?” Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me” If anyone chooses to do God’s will, they will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own (John 7:14-17 NIV).

Jesus also said:

For I have not spoken from my own authority, but the Father himself who sent me has commanded me what I should say and what I should speak (John 12:49 NET).

Jesus’ words were derived from God the Father. Therefore, among His many other titles, Jesus was a prophet—a spokesman for the Lord.

2. The Prophets Were Leaders In The Early Church

The prophets were also among the leaders of the first Christians. Paul wrote of their importance:

It was he who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11,12 NET).

The ministry of the prophets was to equip the believers for the work of the ministry.

The prophets also spoke for edification, exhortation, and comfort as Paul wrote elsewhere:

For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation (1 Corinthians 14:2,3 NRSV).

Therefore, the New Testament prophets spoke God's truth to the church for the purpose of building up, or of strengthening, the body of Christ.

3. The Church Was Built Upon The Foundation Of The Apostles And Prophets

The Bible says that the church has been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Paul wrote:

So then you are no longer foreigners and non-citizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household, because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19,20 NET).

The Message puts these verses in the following way:

That's plain enough, isn't it? You're no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone (Ephesians. 2:19-20 MsgB)

These individuals, the apostles and prophets, were foundational to the building of the church of Jesus Christ on the earth.

4. There Is An Important Distinction Between The Prophets And The Role Of The Church

The Bible does not say that the apostles and prophets were built upon the church, but that the church was built upon the apostles and prophets. This is an important distinction.

In other words, the church did not bestow apostolic and prophetic authority upon certain people; it was the Holy Spirit who chose certain people to receive and deliver the truth of God. The church could never authorize a prophet; they could merely recognize a prophet.

Neither the congregation of Israel, during the time of the Old Testament, nor the church, during the New Testament era, could ever ordain anyone to the prophetic ministry. This was the job of God alone! Therefore, like their Old Testament counterparts, the New Testament prophets derived their authority from the Lord and only from Him.

Summary To Question 9: Who Were The New Testament Prophets?

As there were prophets during the Old Testament era, there were also prophets during the time of the New Testament. In fact, they were foundational to the ministry of the early church. The job of the New Testament prophets was similar to that of their Old Testament counterparts. They were to speak forth the Word of God to the people. As was true in the Old Testament, their authority came from the Lord and from Him alone. In other words, nobody could volunteer for the job; neither was the office of a prophet based upon hereditary. The choice of who would be a prophet was up to God and to Him alone.

Question 10

What is The New Testament Gift Of Prophecy?

One of the spiritual gifts that God has given to the church is the gift of prophecy. Paul wrote about this gift in his letter to the Romans. He said:

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith (Romans 12:6 NIV).

According to Paul, there is a certain spiritual gift known as the gift of prophecy.

The Gift Of Prophecy Defined

The gift of prophecy is a special ability to speak forth the message of God. As we have noted, the prophet is basically a spokesman for God. Prophetic utterances can deal with certain individuals, the church, or a larger context.

Furthermore, it does not always refer to the future. The word is used far more to proclaim the Word of God, rather than to predict the future.

There are a number of observations that we can make about this gift:

Prophecy Is Mentioned More Often Than The Other Gifts

This gift is mentioned more than any of the other spiritual gifts. We find it referred to in Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; 13:1-3, 8; 14:6, and in Ephesians 4:11.

While the New Testament does not necessarily list the spiritual gifts in order of importance, we usually find the gift of prophecy near the top each time it is listed. For example, we read the following in the Book of First Corinthians about the gifts:

And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:28 NKJV).

In this instance we find the prophets listed right behind the apostles. In Ephesians, we again read of the prophets immediately after the apostles:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11 ESV).

Obviously, the prophet was an important person in the early church.

The Gift Of Prophecy Was Highly Regarded

This importance is confirmed by Apostle Paul who put a special emphasis on this gift. He said to the Corinthians:

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1 NIV).

Notice that Paul said that prophecy was a desirable gift.

He also said that believers should be eager to prophesy. He wrote:

So, dear brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and don't forbid speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:39 NLT).

This further indicates the importance of the gift.

A Prophet Is Distinct From A Preacher

In a general sense, a preacher who proclaims the Word of God acts in a prophetic role. He or she is speaking for God.

But New Testament prophecy is not the same thing as preaching. Prophecy may involve foretelling something that will happen in the future. This, of course, must come by divine revelation, since nobody, apart from God, knows what will take place in the future.

Prophets Were Active From The Beginning

When the New Testament church was born on the Day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter let it be known that prophecy was going to be a reality for believers in this age. He quoted the prophet Joel as follows:

No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams (Acts 2:16,17 NIV).

From the very beginning of the New Testament church, God gave His prophets a special ability to proclaim His truth.

There Are A Number Of Prophets Mentioned

The New Testament mentions a number of people who possessed the gift of prophecy. They include: Agabus who predicted a coming famine. He also warned Paul of his sufferings. Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Paul were mentioned among prophets and teachers at Antioch:

The church at Antioch had several prophets and teachers. They were Barnabas, Simeon, also called Niger, Lucius from Cyrene, Manaen, who was Herod's close friend, and Saul (Acts 13:1 CEV).

There seem to be many who possessed this gift in the apostolic age. While not specifically stated, it is likely that all the apostles had the gift of prophecy.

Both Men And Women Exercised The Gift Of Prophecy

The Bible speaks of both men and women exercising the gift of prophecy. Scripture speaks of the four daughters of Philip that had the gift. We read of this in the Book of Acts:

Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9 NKJV).

The gift was given to both men and women.

The Prophets Were Not Necessarily In Leadership

Those who were given this gift were not necessarily in leadership in the church. In the Book of Acts, Judas and Silas were called prophets. Scripture says:

Then Judas and Silas, both being prophets, spoke extensively to the Christians, encouraging and strengthening their faith (Acts 15:32 NLT).

However, these two men are not described as church leaders. The Bible further says that the people in the local assemblies were to judge the prophecies. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Let two or three prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said (1 Corinthians 14:29 NLT).

This seems to show that a person could exercise the gift without necessarily being a leader in one of the churches.

There Is A New Testament Example Of A Prophet Predicting The Future

We have an example in the New Testament of a prophet predicting the future. This is found in the Book of Acts with a man named Agabus. The Bible says:

One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) (Acts 11:28 NIV).

This is a New Testament example of predictive prophecy.

Prophets Instructed And Encouraged The People

However, the basic ministry of the prophet was to instruct and encourage the people in the local congregation. Paul wrote:

For you can all prophesy one by one, so that everyone may learn and everyone may be encouraged (1 Corinthians 14:31 CSB).

God gave the prophets and their prophetic words to instruct and encourage the people.

The New Testament Prophet Was Similar To The Old Testament Prophet

There are similarities between prophets of the Old Testament and the New Testament prophets. Both spoke the Word of God to the people, both warned of judgment, both spoke on current issues, and both could predict future events.

There Were Differences Between The Old Testament And New Testament Prophets

However, the Old Testament prophet was different in a number of senses.

To begin with, the Old Testament prophet usually delivered their message to the nation Israel, while the New Testament prophet gave a universal message.

The Old Testament prophet often had the characteristics of a leader in the nation of Israel. The New Testament prophets had no such position in any nation.

While the Old Testament prophet usually gave a message that dealt with an entire nation, the New Testament prophet delivered personal messages to individuals.

These basic facts sum up what the New Testament has to say about the gift of prophecy which God gave to His church.

**Summary To Question 10:
What Is The New Testament Gift Of Prophecy?**

The New Testament prophet had a unique gift to speak God's message to the people. This was done by means of direct revelation. From the Scripture, we learn a number of things about this gift.

First, prophecy is most often mentioned among the spiritual gifts. Furthermore, it is also at the top of the list of spiritual gifts. It was highly regarded by the believers.

However, it must be distinguished from the gift of preaching. Prophecy was the result of direct revelation while the teacher, or preacher, explained divine revelation.

This gift was active from the Day of Pentecost—the birthday of the church. Indeed, Simon Peter spoke the prophetic word on that very day.

There are a number of New Testament prophets who are mentioned by name. We also find that both men and women had the gift of prophecy.

We discover that the prophets were not always the leaders in the church. Indeed, there were believers in the congregation of Corinth who had this gift while not being in leadership.

If necessary, the New Testament prophet could foretell the future. However, the main reason for the gift was the instruction and encouragement of the church.

Finally, we discover that the New Testament prophets were in some senses similar to, and in other senses different from, the Old Testament prophets.

Question 11

Were The New Testament Prophetic Messages Given Without Error?

There is a question as to whether the messages given by New Testament prophets were error-free. The traditional view is that when the prophets spoke forth the Word of God, they did so in an inerrant manner—the Lord directed every detail.

However, there is another view that does not understand their prophetic words as being completely without error. This perspective believes that the message of the New Testament prophets was a mixture of truth *and* error. It was up to Christians to help separate what was true from what was false.

What does the Bible have to say about this issue?

The Case For New Testament Prophecies Containing Truth Mixed With Error

There is the viewpoint that when New Testament prophets spoke their messages to the people, they contained a mixture of truth and error. The following observations can be made concerning those who hold this view:

Observation 1: The Prophetic Message Was To Be Evaluated

We know that the people were commanded to evaluate each prophetic message. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:20,21 NLT).

The people in the congregation were to test the messages. Indeed, they were to test everything which was said.

Paul emphasized the same thing to the church at Corinth—the people were to weigh carefully what was said by the prophets:

Let two or three prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said (1 Corinthians 14:29 NLT).

The messages from these people were not to be blindly accepted.

Observation 2: The People Were To Test The Details, Not The Message

In this view, it is argued that the believers in each local assembly were to listen to the prophecies, and then judge what was true and what was not.

Therefore, it was up to the people in each congregation to separate the true from the false. This is what Paul meant by “judging what was said.”

Paul also said to “test all things.” This includes every detail of the prophecy. Paul also said to “hold fast to that which is good.” This assumes that some parts of the message were not from the Lord.

Therefore, when people are prophesying today in the name of the Lord, the believers in the local assembly are to determine which part of the message is true, and which part is not. Thus, from this perspective, there is truth mixed with error.

Observation 3: The New Testament Prophets Were Not Equivalent To The Old Testament Prophets

This perspective also sees a difference between the New Testament prophets and the Old Testament prophets. From this viewpoint, the Spirit of God infallibly directed the words of the Old Testament prophets. There is no doubt about this. However, this is not the case with the New Testament prophets.

The fact that Paul could tell the believers to “test everything” that these prophets said and to “hold on only to that which was good,” it is argued, shows the difference between the New Testament prophets and the prophets of the Old Testament—no biblical writer dared question the authority of anything that was said by an Old Testament prophet.

There is something else this view argues. During the Old Testament period, if someone prophesied falsely in the name of the Lord, God ordered that person to be put to death.

We have no such command for the New Testament prophets. This is because their words did not carry the same authority.

Observation 4: It Was The Apostles, Not The Prophets Who Composed The Scripture

This view also argues that the men who composed the New Testament were not the prophets—rather they were the apostles. It was to them alone that Jesus made special promises about being guided into “all truth.” They had the authority to teach doctrine, to be the leaders in the church, and to write Holy Scripture. Their written words were infallible.

However, the same guarantee cannot be made with those who were New Testament prophets. While they spoke forth the Word of God, there was no assurance that the end result would be error-free. This is why all of their words needed evaluating by the local assembly of believers.

Modern Day Prophecies Also Contain Truth Mixed With Error

The fact that the New Testament prophets gave a message of truth, mixed with error, has important ramifications for the church today.

Indeed, when people exercise the gift of prophecy, we should not expect everything they say to be infallible. Rather, mature Christians in each assembly of believers should carefully weigh and evaluate everything that they say. In other words, they are not to be blindly followed because they have the gift of prophecy.

In addition, those with the spiritual gift of distinguishing of spirits have the God-given ability to separate the truth from error. Their gift should be used in the evaluation of modern-day prophecies within the church.

An Example Of Truth Mixed With Error: Agabus

This view points out that there is an example of a New Testament prophet predicting something which did not exactly come to pass as he said it would. The account is as follows:

While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles’” (Acts 21:10-11 ESV).

We find that this did not happen exactly as Agabus predicted. While the prediction was basically fulfilled—Paul was arrested in Jerusalem—it was the Romans, not the Jews, who carried this out.

This illustration shows that New Testament prophets could be incorrect in some of their details, while being correct in their general content. Again, it is stressed by this view that this would never have happened with the words of an Old Testament prophet.

Furthermore, the fact that Paul ignored the prediction by Agabus, and went to Jerusalem, shows that these words were not meant to be accepted on the same level as the words of the Old Testament prophets.

There Are New Testament Prophets Today

Those who hold this position usually assume that there are New Testament prophets today. However, they, like their counterparts, do not have the infallible ability to speak forth the Word of the Lord. This is why it is crucial for their words to be evaluated by the leaders of the local assembly. This sums up the case for New Testament prophecies containing truth mixed with error.

The Case For The Prophecies Being Error-Free

Traditionally, it has been assumed that the New Testament prophets were similar to the Old Testament prophets with respect to the content of their message—it was without error.

This perspective holds that it was the prophecies, and the prophets, that were judged, not the various details of each prophetic message.

In other words, the judgment was to separate the true prophets, from the false, not to judge each detail of the words of the prophets accepted as genuine. The arguments for this viewpoint are as follows:

Argument 1: Each Assembly Had A Number Of Prophets Who Spoke

To begin with, it seems that each assembly of believers had a number of prophets who gave messages to the group. Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, limited the number of these prophets who could speak to two or three per meeting. He wrote:

Let two or three prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said (1 Corinthians 14:29 NLT)

This indicates that more than one person could speak forth the prophetic word at a particular gathering. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians he also spoke of a plurality of prophetic messages. He explained it this way:

Do not treat prophecies with contempt (1 Thessalonians 5:20 NIV).

Therefore, it seems that in each case, more than one prophet was giving a prophetic message during the meeting.

Instead of Paul commanding the churches to sort out the truth from error in each prophecy, he is commanding the believers to judge among the various prophets and their prophecies that they would hear.

In other words, some prophecies were God-given, while others were not. The leaders were to separate the true from the false prophecies.

Argument 2: The New Testament Emphasizes Distinguishing The True Prophet From The False Prophet

This is consistent with the rest of the New Testament. We find a number of places where believers were warned to be aware of false prophets and their messages of deceit.

John wrote about distinguishing between the true prophets and the false prophets:

Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. This is the way to find out if they have the Spirit of God: If a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ became a human being, that person has the Spirit of God. If a prophet does not acknowledge Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist. You have heard that he is going to come into the world, and he is already here. But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won your fight with these false prophets, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world. These people belong to this world, so they speak from the world's viewpoint, and the world listens to them. But we belong to God; that is why those who know God listen to us. If they do not belong to God, they do not listen to us. That is how we know if someone has the Spirit of truth or the spirit of deception (1 John 4:1-6 NLT).

There is a simple test that is to be applied to anyone who claims to speak for God. The true prophet acknowledges that Jesus is the Christ, the genuine Messiah. Those who deny that Jesus is the Messiah cannot be authentic prophets of God.

Earlier, Jesus had warned about false prophets and their words. In the Sermon on the Mount, He gave the following words of warning:

Watch out for false prophets! They dress up like sheep, but inside they are wolves who have come to attack you. You can tell what they are by what they do. No one picks grapes or figs from thornbushes. A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. Every tree that produces bad fruit will be chopped down and burned. You can tell who the false prophets are by their deeds (Matthew 7:15-20 CEV).

They will disguise themselves as true prophets in an attempt to deceive. Consequently, believers must always be on guard.

Paul had earlier warned the Corinthians about people prophesying falsely. He explained it in this manner:

Now I want you to know that if you are led by God's Spirit, you will say that Jesus is Lord, and you will never curse Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:3 CEV).

Nobody can call Jesus accursed, or curse Jesus, if the Lord is speaking through them.

Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians, also warned about false words that claim to be from the Lord:

Please don't be so easily shaken and troubled by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Even if they claim to have had a vision, a revelation, or a letter supposedly from us, don't believe them (2 Thessalonians 2:2 NLT).

Paul had a concern about false prophecy which was circulating in the churches. Hence, the command was given to the elders to discern the true from the false.

Argument 3: They Used The Same Criteria In Evaluating Prophecy As Did The Old Testament Believers

There is something else. The New Testament believers used the same standard as their Old Testament counterparts when evaluating prophecies. They include the following:

Was It A Message From The Lord?

The believers were supposed to evaluate the content of the prophecy to discover if it was from the Lord or if it was from another source.

We read in Deuteronomy about the difference between God's Words and the words of false prophets:

If a prophet or someone who has dreams arises among you and proclaims a sign or wonder to you, and that sign or wonder he has promised you comes about, but he says, 'Let us follow other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us worship them,' do not listen to that prophet's words or to that dreamer. For the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul. You must follow the Lord your God and fear him. You must keep his commands and listen to him; you must worship him and remain faithful to him. That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he has urged rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the place of slavery, to turn you from the way the Lord your God has commanded you to walk. You must purge the evil from you. (Deuteronomy 13:1-5 NIV).

It is clear that the Old Testament prophets did not ever prophesy falsely in the name of the Lord, either. Again, we read in Deuteronomy:

But the prophet who presumes to speak a message in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods — that prophet must die.' You may say to yourself, 'How can we recognize a message the Lord has not spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the Lord's name, and the message does not come true or is not fulfilled, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him (Deuteronomy 18:20-22 NIV).

The penalty was death for a false prophet. This fact, that these prophets, who spoke falsely in the name of the Lord, were to be put to death, demonstrates how important God's words were to Him.

Indeed, the Lord does not tolerate false prophets in the midst of believers.

Was It Consistent With His Office?

The conduct of the prophet had to be consistent with their message. In the days of Jeremiah, the Lord spoke out against the prophets of Jerusalem:

For the land is full of adultery, and it lies under a curse. The land itself is in mourning--its pastures are dried up. For the prophets do evil and abuse their power. The priests are like the prophets, all ungodly, wicked men. I have seen their despicable acts right here in my own Temple, says the LORD. Therefore, their paths will be dark and slippery. They will be chased down dark and treacherous trails, where they will fall. For I will bring disaster upon them when their time of punishment comes. I, the LORD, have spoken! I saw that the prophets of Samaria were terribly evil, for they prophesied by Baal and led my people of Israel into sin. But now I see that the prophets of Jerusalem are even worse! They commit adultery, and they love dishonesty. They encourage those who are doing evil instead of turning them away from their sins. These prophets are as wicked as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah once were. Therefore, this is what the LORD Almighty says concerning the prophets: "I will feed them with bitterness and give them poison to drink. For it is because of Jerusalem's prophets that wickedness fills this land" (Jeremiah 23:10-15 NLT).

There are a number of strong denunciations against the character of the false prophets. These prophets were evil people who had abused their power. They are called adulterers who love dishonesty, as well as ones who turn people from good to evil.

This rebuke of these prophets indicates the importance of consistent, godly behavior on behalf of those who claim to speak forth God's words.

Did They Receive The Message By Godly Means?

It was also important to know the means in which the prophet received the revelation. Certain practices were prohibited for a prophet of God. Moses warned the people that they should not practice heathen ways:

When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God. The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so (Deuteronomy 18:9-14 NIV).

It was essential that the message of the Lord would be given to the people in the correct manner. In fact, the believers were commanded to reject, outright, any messages which came from these occultic means. This is not the way the Lord communicates to His people.

Argument 4: Some Had the Gift Of Distinguishing Between The Spirits

One of the spiritual gifts which was given to the church was the ability to distinguish among the spirits. Paul wrote the following to the Corinthians about this particular gift:

He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and to another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to know whether it is really the Spirit of God or another spirit that is speaking. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, and another is given the ability to interpret what is being said (1 Corinthians 12:10 NLT).

This gift helped separate the true prophets from the false ones.

These criteria were used by the church in determining if the prophecies had their source in the Spirit of God, or if they were from some other source.

How Can Anyone Be Certain What Is True?

There would also have been a practical problem which would arise if it was the details of the prophecy, and not the prophecy itself, that was being judged.

What if the members of the church did not agree among themselves as to which part of the prophecy is true, and which part is error? Who then decides? Do they take a vote and the majority wins?

Or does it have to be two thirds of the people who agree on the details?

As we clearly see, there are enormous practical problems with this position of attempting to evaluate each and every word of the prophet.

Argument 5: Agabus Did Not Prophecy Incorrectly

This brings us to the situation with the New Testament prophet Agabus. While it is argued that his prediction of Paul's arrest contained truth mixed with error, such is not the case. His emphasis is that the Jewish religious leaders would cause Paul's arrest. This is exactly what happened.

The fact that the Romans took Paul into custody is not the point. The point of the prediction is that Paul would be arrested if he decided to go to Jerusalem and that this arrest would be at the instigation of the Jewish religious leaders. In fact, Paul later explained that this is exactly what happened to him. We read:

After three days he [Paul] called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans (Acts 28:17 ESV).

Paul stressed that he was "delivered as a prisoner" at the instigation of the Jews at Jerusalem. This is exactly the thrust of the prediction by Agabus.

Furthermore, we are told of an earlier prediction by Agabus which, like the one just mentioned, also came to pass exactly as it was given. The Bible says:

Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius) (Acts 11:27, 28 ESV).

The fact that this first prediction came to pass, precisely as it was given, certainly infers that his other prediction was also viewed as being fulfilled as predicted.

There is one more thing which should be stressed. Agabus introduced his prophetic words with the phrase, "These things the Holy Spirit says."

This formula is the same one that Jesus used in His words to the seven churches as recorded in the Book of Revelation! Thus, by accusing Agabus of error, the prophet of God, one is also accusing the Holy Spirit of error! Certainly no Bible-believer wants to do this.

Argument 6: The Gift of Prophecy May Not Still Exist In The Church

There is something else. Many Christians believe that the gift of prophecy no longer exists in the church. The gift was only given to the church on a temporary basis until the New Testament was completed. Once the Scriptures were complete, then God withdrew the gift.

Therefore, according to this perspective, any discussion about the exact nature of the New Testament gift of prophecy is not relevant for the church today, seeing that the gift has been withdrawn.

Conclusion On The Possibility Of Error In New Testament Prophetic Messages

This is a brief summation of two views which are used to claim that prophetic messages were either error-free, or truth mixed with error. There are good Bible-believers which hold each of these positions.

However, the traditional view, that the New Testament prophets spoke God's infallible truth when exercising the gift of prophecy, is certainly more consistent with the evidence.

**Summary To Question 11:
Were The New Testament Prophetic Messages Given Without Error?**

There is a difference of opinion among Christians as to whether New Testament prophets spoke with absolute accuracy. Some feel their messages were basically true, but that the details may contain errors.

Others believe that the entire message was from the Lord. Therefore, it cannot contain any errors.

Those who see errors in the messages of the New Testament prophets argue as follows:

The prophetic words given in the churches were to be evaluated. This refers to the details of the message—not the truth of the message itself. The prophets gave messages of truth mixed with error. While the general content may have been true, the details of their predictions had to be evaluated.

The New Testament prophets, while successors to the Old Testament prophets, were not the equivalent to them. Indeed, these New Testament prophets could not write, or speak error, in the name of the Lord. It was the apostles that were the equivalent of the Old Testament prophets—their messages were always error-free.

Consequently, the people in each assembly of believers were called to separate the true from the false. Those with the gift of distinguishing of spirits should be relied upon to help sort out what is from the Lord, and what is not.

An example of a prediction of truth mixed with error comes from the New Testament prophet Agabus. He correctly predicted that Paul would be arrested if he went to Jerusalem, but incorrectly said that it would be the Jews who bound him over. The Book of Acts records that the Romans did this. This supposedly illustrates the fallibility of New Testament prophets.

Consequently, it is argued that the gift of prophecy remains in the church, but New Testament prophets do not infallibly speak God's Word.

This view has been vigorously challenged. The traditional position is that the New Testament prophets, like their Old Testament counterparts, could not speak a message from the Lord that contained errors. The following points are usually made in response to the truth mixed with error view:

It is argued that Paul is not advocating testing each detail of a prophecy but rather the prophecy itself. This is because each church had a number of prophets who spoke.

Some of them were genuine prophets while others were not. The leaders in the church were to decide if *the message*, not each detail, was from the Lord. This is consistent with the rest of the New Testament where believers are warned about false prophets.

Furthermore, the New Testament believers would have used the same criteria that were used in the Old Testament to evaluate a prophet's message.

First, the content of the message was evaluated to see if it was a message from the Lord. The message of the prophet could not contradict anything that had been previously revealed.

In addition, the conduct of the prophet had to be consistent with their message. Indeed, a prophet must be someone who lived consistently with his or her calling.

Finally, the prophet was not to use non-biblical methods of receiving their revelation. Any so-called prophet who used occultic means to receive his or her message was to be marked out as a false prophet. God did not speak to His people in this manner.

Those in the early church who had the gift of distinguishing between the spirits could evaluate if the message of the prophet was truly from the Lord.

There is something else which must be considered. To say that the local church must still evaluate the details of each prophetic message is difficult, if not impossible, to enforce. There are no provisions given in the New Testament of what to do when the believers cannot agree on which details are from the Lord, and which ones are not.

Finally, the example of Agabus does not prove that New Testament prophets gave messages of truth mixed with error. Indeed, his prophecy was correct—Paul was arrested in Jerusalem. The fact that the Romans were the ones who bound him is not relevant, because his arrest was at the instigation of the Jewish religious leaders.

This basically sums up the issue as to whether the New Testament prophets spoke error-free or gave messages of truth mixed with error.

Question 12

What Rules Does The New Testament Give For Prophesying At A Worship Service?

The Apostle Paul set down rules regarding prophesying at a worship service. Furthermore, he made it clear that these rules were set down by God Himself. He stated it this way:

If you think of yourself as a prophet or a spiritual person, you will know that I am writing only what the Lord has commanded (1 Corinthians 14:37 CEV).

The rules include the following:

Self-Control Must Be Exercised In Prophesying

The first rule states that the prophet must exercise self-control. Those who give prophetic utterances are not to act with an uncontrolled frenzy.

This is consistent with what Paul emphasized about true Christian character when he wrote to the Galatians:

God's Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled. There is no law against behaving in any of these ways (Galatians 5:22,23 CEV).

Notice that the fruit of the Spirit includes self-control. When the Spirit of God is working through one who prophesies, they will exercise self-restraint.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit will not lead anyone who prophesies to become in some uncontrollable state.

Indeed, a genuine prophet led by the Spirit of God will not lose self-control. Paul said:

For you can all prophesy one by one, so that everyone may learn and everyone may be encouraged. And the prophets' spirits are subject to the prophets, since God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints (1 Corinthians 14:31-33 CSB).

This passage suggests that ecstatic frenzy is a sign of either a false prophecy, or that the prophetic message is a result of the imagination of the person giving the prophecy.

There Are Limited Numbers Who Can Speak

The second rule states that prophecies should be limited to two or three per meeting. Paul wrote the following:

Let two or three prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said (1 Corinthians 14:29 NLT).

There were not unlimited numbers that could speak a prophetic message.

They Are To Be Evaluated By Others

A third rule says the prophecies are to be judged by others in the assembly. This was the job of the leaders.

Thus, the New Testament does not encourage believers to blindly follow anyone who claims to prophesy in the name of the Lord. A genuine prophet would have no problem with their words being judged.

On the other hand, the false prophet would not want their words evaluated by the people of God—those who are led by the Spirit of God.

Prophecies Must Be Consistent With Past Revelation

Most important, the prophecies must be consistent with what God has already revealed. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

If you claim to be a prophet or think you are spiritual, you should recognize that what I am saying is a command from the Lord himself. But if you do not recognize this, you yourself will not be recognized (1 Corinthians 14:37,38 NLT).

God does not disagree with Himself. If a prophet brings forth a message that contradicts what the Scripture says, then we can be assured that the prophecy is not from God. Indeed, God cannot lie or give some contradictory message. Paul wrote:

This truth gives them the confidence of eternal life, which God promised them before the world began—and he cannot lie (Titus 1:2 NLT).

The prophet of God, if he or she is speaking from God, will always tell the truth, since they are representing the God of truth with their message.

These Were The New Testament Rules

These are the rules that we find that the New Testament sets down for exercising the gift of prophecy. Any prophesying that was to take place had to conform to these rules. For those who believe the prophetic gift is still being exercised in the church, these same rules apply.

Is The Gift Still Given?

However, there is still the question as to whether this gift remains in the church today. In fact, many Bible-believers assume that it was withdrawn at the end of the first century A.D.

If this is the case, then the rules would no longer apply, since God is not speaking to His church today in this manner.

Summary To Question 12: What Rules Does The New Testament Give For Prophesying At A Worship Service?

In the early days of the Christian church, when a person spoke words of divine prophecy in a gathering of believers, it always was to be done within certain guidelines. The Bible gives the following rules regarding prophetic utterances.

For one thing, the Bible says that the prophet will be in control of his or her senses. They will not be in an uncontrolled state when giving the Word of the Lord. In fact, if one speaks in an out-of-control manner, this is evidence that their message is not coming from the Lord.

Prophetic messages were also limited to two or three per meeting. In other words, this particular manner of speaking forth God's truth could not go on endlessly.

The prophecies which were uttered were to be judged by the leaders of the church. This means that someone supposedly speaking in the name of the Lord was not to be blindly followed. Instead, the mature believers were to evaluate the message.

Furthermore, any prophetic message that was given had to have been in conformity with what God had already revealed in Scripture. God would never contradict Himself. Thus, a true prophet of God would only speak truth.

All of these criteria have to be met for the prophetic Word to conform to the rules of the New Testament. These rules were given to be obeyed—they were not merely suggestions!

Consequently, those who believe this gift still exists must exercise it according to these stated rules.

However, this is an issue in which there is much controversy. Indeed, many Bible-believers think that this gift was only temporary, and was withdrawn by the Lord once its goal was accomplished. If this is the case, then this sort of practice should not be exercised in the church today.

Question 13:

Is the Gift Of Prophecy Still Available For The Church?

The question as to whether or not the gift of prophecy is still to be exercised in the church today is one that has divided believers.

Indeed, there is no agreement among Bible-believing Christians as to whether this particular gift of the Holy Spirit should still be exercised in the church today.

There Are Two Major Views With Respect To The Continuation Of Prophecy

There are two major positions on this issue. The first option holds that the gift of prophecy is still to be exercised by the church today. It is a gift that God has given to be used throughout the entire church age.

There is another position that believes the gift of prophecy is no longer to be exercised by the church. It is contended that the gift was only given for a short time, and for a specific purpose. Those who hold this position are often called “cessationists.” Those who believe that the gift still exists are known, among things, as “non-cessationists.”

We must emphasize that there are good, Bible-believing Christians that hold each of these positions. The basic arguments for each of these views are as follows:

Option 1: The Gift Is Still To Be Used Today

The first option says that prophecy is still a valid gift for the church today. There are a number of reasons as to why this is the case.

The Gift Of Prophecy Was Not Limited To Giving New Revelation

The cessationist assumes that the gift of prophecy was solely for the speaking forth of the Word of God, but only until the New Testament was finished.

The non-cessationist believes this definition is too restrictive. Prophecy can be used for revelation, or the explanation of the revelation.

For example, we read in Luke’s gospel about Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, issuing a prophecy. Scripture says:

And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying (Luke 1:67 ESV).

The passage says that Zechariah was filled with the Spirit, and he prophesied. The content of what he said was not new revelation, but rather the announcement that certain promises found in the Old Testament were about to be fulfilled.

Hence, this prophecy was for the purpose of informing, building up and consoling the people—it was not new truth which had previously been unrevealed.

The gift of prophecy basically consisted of speaking forth God’s truth. It did not have to be new revelation, neither did it have to be predictive. For example, Paul said:

On the other hand, the person who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement, and consolation (1 Corinthians 14:3 CSB).

Upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation does not necessarily mean that new revelation is being given.

The Gift Of Prophecy Was Not Limited To Church Leaders

There is something else which must be considered. Not all of these people who prophesied were leaders of a local assembly. Paul wrote the following command to the Corinthians:

Let two or three prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said (1 Corinthians 14:29 NLT).

Note that he makes the distinction between the prophets, and the leaders.

This is further evidenced by the daughters of Philip the evangelist. We are told that they had the gift of prophecy:

He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9 NIV).

Philip's daughters, while being given the prophetic gift, were not leaders in the church.

We also find that Judas and Silas were called prophets. Scripture says:

Judas and Silas were prophets, and they spoke a long time, encouraging and helping the Lord's followers (Acts 15:32 CEV).

Yet, there is no indication that they were in leadership. This indicates that the gift of prophecy was not reserved for only church leaders.

There Is Nowhere Where The Bible Says The Gift Of Prophecy Will Cease With The Apostles

Furthermore, we do not find any specific verse that says the gift of prophecy will cease once the original apostles have died. In fact, the Scripture seems to teach that all the gifts will continue until Christ returns. Paul wrote:

So that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:7-8 NET).

Scripture does not specifically say that prophecy will cease.

Scripture Seems To Say Prophecy Will Last Until Christ Returns

What the Bible seems to teach with respect to the gift of prophecy, is that it will continue until Christ returns. Paul wrote:

But when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears (1 Corinthians 13:10 NIV).

The imperfect, spiritual gifts will continue until Christ returns. This includes the gift of prophecy.

For these reasons, a number of Bible-believing Christians hold that the gift of prophecy is still to function in the church.

Option 2: The Gift Of Prophecy Is No Longer Necessary

While many people believe the gift of prophecy remains in the church, there is also the view that this spiritual gift was meant for only those in the early church.

Indeed, this gift was given as a supernatural ability to speak forth God's Word and give direct revelation until the time the New Testament was written.

Once the New Testament was composed, the gift was no longer necessary. Since the completion of the New Testament, this gift has no longer been operating. The arguments for this position include the following:

Prophecy Was A Foundational Gift

The gift of prophecy was a foundational gift given to the church. It was necessary as long as there was no final standard of authority to which people could turn. While the early Christians had the written Old Testament as their divine authority, they did not have a completed New Testament.

The doctrine of Jesus Christ was taught orally for a time. Eventually, the teaching about Jesus became committed to writing. Paul wrote about the apostles and prophets being foundational:

You Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens with everyone else who belongs to the family of God. You are like a building with the apostles and prophets as the foundation and with Christ as the most important stone. Christ is the one who holds the building together and makes it grow into a holy temple for the Lord (Ephesians 2:19-21 CEV).

We do not need to build upon the foundation again.

Prophecy Is Spoken Of As Revelation

The nature of the gift of prophecy is found in First Corinthians. Paul wrote:

Two or three persons may prophesy, and everyone else must listen carefully. If someone sitting there receives a message from God, the speaker must stop and let the other person speak. Let only one person speak at a time, then all of you will learn something and be encouraged. A prophet should be willing to stop and let someone else speak (1 Corinthians 14:29-32 CEV).

Prophecy is divine revelation. God stopped giving divine revelation when the New Testament was completed. Therefore, the gift no longer exists.

The Bible Does Not Promise That Prophecy Will Continue

There is no place where the Bible promises that the gift of prophecy will continue until Jesus Christ comes. In fact, the very nature of the gift demonstrates that it would only have a limited duration.

These facts have caused many to conclude that the gift of prophecy was given to a limited group of people for a limited duration. It has since been withdrawn.

As we indicated, there are good Bible-believing people that hold each of these views.

**Summary To Question 13:
Is The Gift Of Prophecy Still Available For The Church?**

There is a disagreement among Christians as to whether the gift of prophecy is still to be exercised in the church.

Those who argue for its continuance say that the gift was not limited to giving new revelation. Therefore, we should not assume that it contains things never before revealed.

Neither was it limited to those in authority in the church. In fact, a number of people who prophesied were not in a leadership capacity.

Nowhere do we find the Scripture stating that the gift of prophecy will cease. On the contrary, when the perfect comes, Jesus Christ and His kingdom, then the imperfect gifts will pass away. Therefore, the gift of prophecy should continue to be used.

Those who argue against the continuation of the gift believe that it was foundational to the church. Since the foundation has already been built, the gift is no longer necessary.

In addition, prophecy is spoken of as divine revelation—something that has ceased with the writing of the New Testament. This is where there is disagreement between the two positions.

If prophecy consisted solely of divine revelation, then it will be admitted that this gift is now unnecessary. However, those who argue for the continuance of prophecy, claim that Bible prophecy consisted of more than infallible divine revelation.

Finally, it is argued, there is no promise in Scripture that prophecy will continue. Whether or not the gift still exists must be determined by the evidence, and those with the view that prophecy has ceased claim that the evidence leads us to believe the gift is no longer necessary, because there is no more need for divine revelation.

There are good Bible-believers on both sides of this issue.

Question 14

If There Are Modern-Day Prophetic Utterances, Then How Can They Be Tested?

If the gift of prophecy is to be exercised in the church today, as some claim, then believers must have guidelines to determine whether or not a particular prophetic utterance has come from God. How can these words be tested?

The Bible has the following things to say about this subject:

Prophecies Must Conform To God's Word

The first thing by which prophetic utterances should be tested, is the revealed Word of God. Is the prophecy in harmony with Scripture? The Apostle John encourages us to test the prophets. He wrote the following:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1 NKJV).

It is clear that any alleged prophetic teaching that contradicts what God has previously revealed demonstrates itself to be from another source.

Therefore, a prophetic utterance must first be in harmony with what God has previously revealed. The Bible says to be on guard against false prophecies:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6-8 ESV).

The words given by a prophet must conform to what God has revealed.

The Prophecies Must Testify To Jesus

The second test is similar to the first. The Scripture is clear that prophecy should reveal truth about the Person and work of Jesus Christ. John wrote:

Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said, “No, don’t worship me. For I am a servant of God, just like you and other brothers and sisters who testify of their faith in Jesus. Worship God. For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus” (Revelation 19:10 NLT).

Jesus is the theme of all Bible prophecy.

Some People Were Cursing Christ With Their Prophecies

It seems that some were prophesying at Corinth, and cursing Christ in the name of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote:

So I want you to know how to discern what is truly from God: No one speaking by the Spirit of God can curse Jesus, and no one is able to say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3 NLT).

The Holy Spirit does not lead a prophet to curse Christ.

The Content Of A Prophecy Is Crucial

The content of the prophet's message is crucial. John again wrote:

This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God: If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body, that person has the Spirit of God. But if someone claims to be a prophet and does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard is coming into the world and indeed is already here (1 John 4:2,3 NLT).

Prophetic utterances should magnify Jesus Christ, and Him alone. If the one giving the prophecy denies that Jesus was fully divine and fully human, then that person is a false prophet. Thus, the way the prophets view Jesus' character and teaching is another test that can be applied.

There Must Be Moral Consistency With The Prophet

There is also a moral test that the prophet must pass. Is the person giving the prophecy exhibiting moral character consistent with his office? Jesus warned of these false prophets:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (Matthew 7:15,16 ESV).

The fruit that people exhibit is the fruit of their doctrine and the fruit of their lives. Both of these must be in harmony with God's Word.

Does the prophet live a life glorifying to God? Are they in submission to the authority of God's Word? Those who do not conform to God's standards should not be regarded as genuine prophets.

Paul wrote about the proper lifestyle of those who minister:

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake (2 Corinthians 4:5 ESV).

The prophet must live a consistent life.

Meeting These Criteria Does Not Necessarily Mean A Supernatural Message

If, however, someone meets all these criteria, are we to assume that their message is supernaturally given? Not necessarily. Apart from false prophecy, there are other types of messages that may seem worthy, but are not sent directly from God.

In other words, someone can meet all these criteria and give a message, believing that it was from God, yet the source can be that professed prophet's own personality and thoughts.

The People Are To Judge The Prophecy

The ones who are to judge whether a prophecy is God-given are the people in that particular assembly where the prophecy is uttered:

Let two or three prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said (1 Corinthians 14:29 NLT).

The prophecies should not be spoken without the people commenting upon them. The basis of their judgment is a supernaturally given discernment by God.

Prophecies Should Be Allowed, But Tested

The Bible says that prophetic utterances should be allowed in the churches. Paul wrote the following to the Thessalonians:

Do not scoff at prophecies (1 Thessalonians 5:20 NLT).

Prophecies should not be despised. In other words, they should be allowed. Yet these prophecies should always be tested. Paul emphasized:

Put everything to the test. Accept what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21 CEV).

The Bible says that we should hold on to “the good.”

These Are The Criteria The New Testament Gives

These criteria are what the New Testament sets for testing a prophetic message. The tests have not changed over time. Any prophetic message today has to be evaluated according to the biblical rules—there are no exceptions.

The Gift Of Prophecy May Not Exist Today

However, we must note that it is not certain that the gift of prophecy is still meant to be exercised in the church today. There are many believers who think the New Testament teaches that prophecy was only a temporary gift for the church.

Now that divine revelation is complete, and the Scriptures are written, there is no more need for the prophetic gift. This being the case, there is no need to test prophetic utterances because God is not speaking His infallible truth through prophets today.

Summary To Question 14:

If There Are Modern-Day Prophetic Utterances, Then How Can They Be Tested?

Christians are divided as to whether God is still giving the gift of prophecy to the church. If the gift still exists, then there are certain tests that should be applied to modern-day prophetic messages. They include the following:

A prophet’s message must not contradict anything God has previously revealed. This is primary. The God of the Bible does not contradict Himself. Thus, He will not say something today, which contradicts that which He has earlier stated.

Furthermore, any prophetic message that is given must exalt the Person of Jesus Christ. Unless the prophetic word exalts Christ, it is worthless.

A prophet’s life must be consistent with the prophecy that he or she gives. In other words, they must practice what they preach.

Because someone meets these above criteria does not necessarily mean that the message is from God. Indeed, with the best of intentions, someone can speak what they believe to be a prophetic word when, in actuality, it is nothing more than their own human words.

Finally, it is the leaders of each particular assembly of believers which should be the ones who make the determination. Prophecies should be tested, and if they hold true, they should not be despised.

We must, however, note that there is the view that the gift of prophecy, as it is found in the New Testament, is no longer functioning in the church. It was given for a specific time, to fulfill a specific purpose. Since the purpose has now been fulfilled, the gift has been withdrawn. Thus, there is no such thing as prophetic utterances today.

Question 15

If There Are Modern-Day Prophetic Utterances, Should They Be Given The Same Authority As Scripture?

When someone gives a prophecy invoking the name of the Lord, are we to place it on the same level as Scripture? How should we treat modern day prophetic utterances?

There Are Two Basic Positions On This Subject

There are basically two positions held by Bible-believing Christians on this subject. The first position believes that there is an ongoing ministry of prophecy in the church today. A second position holds that all prophecy has ceased, so that this question is not relevant.

Option 1: There Are Modern Day Prophetic Messages

This first position accepts the idea that God still gives prophetic messages to the church. This being the case, it is important to understand how these messages should be received.

Modern Day Prophecies Are Not Scripture

While there have been certain people who have taught that modern-day prophetic utterances have the same authority as Scripture, almost all non-cessationists, those who believe that the gift is still around, reject this idea. They do not give modern-day prophecies the same authority as the Bible.

Modern-day prophecies are for the building up of the church—not for adding to the Word of God. This is an important distinction which they make.

Though some modern-day prophecies may prove to be supernaturally given, and helpful to those who receive them, they are not to be placed on the same level as the Bible. Indeed, we are not to add to that which God has previously revealed.

There Is A Difference In Scope In Modern-Day Prophecies

The difference between modern-day prophetic utterances and Scripture is a matter of scope. The words set down in the Bible have a universal and eternal application.

Today, those who have a genuine message from the Lord will have its application in a limited, and often localized application. Such messages relate to individuals, or a small number of people, and are not to be placed on the same level as Scripture. Indeed, the Scriptures are complete.

God Has Already Spoken

The writer to the Hebrews said that God has spoken to humanity in the past through the prophets. He put it this way:

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe (Hebrews 1:1,2 NIV).

While God spoke in the past through prophets, His ultimate revelation was through Jesus, God the Son.

The Faith Has Been Once-And-For-All Delivered

The teachings of Jesus Christ have been proclaimed. The faith has been once-and-for-all revealed to us by God. Nothing further needs to be added.

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3 ESV).

The faith has been once-and-for-all given.

We Are Not Bringing New Revelation

Therefore, we should not expect someone who has the gift of prophecy in our modern age to add to Scripture. Their message does not have that universal application. The Scripture is the final judge of all matters of faith and practice, not someone's prophetic message.

Option 2: There Are No Modern-Day Prophecies

Not everyone agrees that the gift of prophecy is still functioning. There is the viewpoint that all attempts at modern-day prophecy are futile, since the gift is no longer to be exercised in the church. Therefore this is an irrelevant question. Nobody has the New Testament gift of prophecy today.

This includes messages which would have a limited application. In fact, it is argued that there is no such category of limited prophetic messages in the New Testament.

Indeed, when the prophet spoke their words, the message was intended for all believers in Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, since they were the words of the Lord the message was infallible.

Thus, it is contended that those who believe the gift of prophecy still functions today in the church cannot have it both ways. If God is still speaking through prophets, then the words are infallible and binding for all believers. There is no such thing as "limited prophecies."

Therefore, according to this perspective, anyone who claims to be delivering a message directly from the Lord is mistaken, no matter how sincere or godly the person may be.

This briefly sums up the various positions with respect to modern-day prophetic messages.

Summary To Question 15: If There Are Modern-Day Prophetic Utterances, Should They Be Given The Same Authority As Scripture?

There are Christians who believe that the New Testament spiritual gift of prophecy remains with the church today. Therefore, we should expect prophetic utterances from those which have this particular gift.

This being the case, what authority should we give them? Is every Christian supposed to listen and obey their words? With respect to the idea that there are modern-day prophetic utterances, we can say the following:

It is usually claimed that those who exercise the gift of prophecy in the present day are doing so in a limited scope. Christians who believe the gift of prophecy is still operating in the church generally acknowledge this.

For the most part, they do not claim that modern-day prophetic messages would have universal appeal to all believers in every place.

Indeed, they insist that Scripture makes it clear that God has spoken to humanity through Jesus Christ, and that the faith has been once-and-for-all delivered to the saints. There is no need to add anything else to Scripture.

Thus, any modern-day message could not be accepted with the same authority as Holy Scripture.

Not everyone agrees that the prophetic gift remains. There is also the perspective that God has told us everything that we need to know; and, therefore, we do not need modern-day prophets. The prophets served a specific purpose while the New Testament was being composed.

Once the Scripture was committed to writing, the need for the prophetic word has ceased. Furthermore, the words of the New Testament prophets were the words of God. Consequently, they were binding on all Christians.

Therefore, if one claims that the gift still functions today, then they should be consistent and claim that the words of the modern-day prophets are binding on all believers.

Since very few people wish to do this, it gives further evidence that the prophetic gift, as revealed in the New Testament, has been withdrawn.

Question 16

Who Are False Prophets?

A genuine prophet of God had to have a number of specific credentials. First, a true prophet must be 100% right 100% of the time—they could never be mistaken in their predictions.

Next, they were to always speak in the name of the Lord, not in the name of other gods. Finally, they had to predict something that would occur in their lifetime. If this prediction came to pass, then the people would know who was, and who was not, a genuine prophet of the living God.

Those who had these credentials were the true prophets. Consequently, the people of God could know who spoke for the Lord.

1. False Prophets Exist

However, the Bible also speaks of the existence of false prophets. A false prophet can be defined as one who pretends to be a genuine prophet of God but, in reality, is not representing the God of Scripture. The Bible warns us of such people. We read in Peter:

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves (2 Peter 2:1 NIV).

False prophets, as well as false teachers, would be infiltrating among God's people. They will introduce things which are contrary to the truths which God has revealed. In other words, they will bring in false doctrine. It was true in Peter's day and it remains true today.

Jesus Himself spoke of false prophets who would actually claim to be the promised Messiah. We read of His words in Matthew's gospel:

Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5 NIV).

According to Jesus, many people would believe the claims of these false prophets and false Christs; their deception would convince scores of people.

2. They Do Not Testify Of Jesus

What is the message of the true prophet? The Scripture plainly says that the spirit of prophecy is testimony of Jesus Christ. We read of this in the Book of Revelation. John states it in this manner:

At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to Jesus' testimony. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10 NIV).

A false prophet will *never* magnify Jesus Christ. Indeed, they will never encourage people to follow the Jesus which is recorded in the New Testament. However, they will encourage people to follow false Christs.

Paul warned the Corinthians that they were being deceived by these false prophets who were preaching "another Jesus:"

For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. . . such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:4,13 NRSV).

Therefore, we too should be aware of people who do not preach the genuine Jesus. They existed in Paul's day and they still exist today.

3. They Make Mistakes

False prophets will never be accurate in their predictions. Never.

For example, during the time of Jeremiah there was a false prophet named Hananiah. He falsely told the people that God would not judge the nation for their sin. This was contrary to the message of Jeremiah, the true prophet. Jeremiah then pronounced judgment upon Hananiah. We read of his words:

Then Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah, "Listen, Hananiah! The LORD has not sent you, but the people believe your lies. Therefore, the LORD says you must die. Your life will end this very year because you have rebelled against the LORD." Two months later, Hananiah died (Jeremiah 28:15-17 NLT).

Not only did Hananiah's false prophecy not come true, but he also died for making such phony predictions and giving the people such false assurance.

A false prophet will also make statements that are untrue with regard to God's Word.

Consequently, the Lord commanded that we are to investigate, or check out, what they have said to see if it lines up with what God has revealed.

We read about this in Isaiah:

"Check their predictions against my testimony," says the LORD. "If their predictions are different from mine, it is because there is no light or truth in them" (Isaiah 8:20 NLT).

There is no truth in these people whatsoever—no light in them. They are in total darkness. That's why we are told to check out what they say.

In sum, we are not to blindly follow someone who claims to speak in the name of the Lord.

4. They Should Be Avoided

False prophets, by the very nature of who they are, should be avoided. They are cancerous. Fortunately, they can be avoided because Scripture gives us the biblical tests of a prophet. Knowing these tests will save the people of God a lot of grief.

Summary To Question 16: Who Are False Prophets?

A genuine prophet of God will always be accurate in his or her predictions. They will speak in the name of the Lord and in doing so they will encourage the people to follow Jesus Christ. These are the marks of a true prophet.

While the Bible says that true prophets of God exist, we also find there are such things as *false* prophets. We learn a number of things about them from the Scriptures. We can make the following observations:

For one thing, false prophets do truly exist. Indeed, Scripture continually warns us about them. Peter warned about the counterfeit prophets in his day which brought in false doctrine. These teachings were contrary to the truths which the Lord has revealed.

Jesus clearly said that false prophets would continue to exist during this entire age—especially at the time of the end. They will always be around to deceive people.

Some of them will actually claim to be the Christ! Jesus' words certainly have come true. False prophets exist to this day with people making outlandish claims in the name of the Lord.

We also find that false prophets never testify about Jesus. This is crucial. The Book of Revelation says that the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus Christ. The New Testament prophet must testify to Him. False prophets never do this.

What false prophets do is testify to a different Jesus, a false Jesus—a Jesus which never existed. While they use the name Jesus, they are not accurately reflecting the genuine Jesus who lived, died, and rose from the dead.

Therefore, the mere fact that someone may use the name of Jesus when claiming to speak for the Lord does not make them a true prophet of God. It has to be the real Jesus, the New Testament Jesus, to whom they are testifying.

One of the telling marks of a false prophet is that they make mistakes. They cannot accurately predict future events! They have no knowledge of what will occur. This is why they are known as “false prophets” or “counterfeit prophets.” Their predictions are all lies.

We have an example of this at the time of Jeremiah. There was a false prophet named Hananiah who assured the people of Jerusalem that the Lord would not let their city and temple be destroyed, and would not allow the entire nation to be brought into captivity in Babylon. These words were contrary to those of Jeremiah, the true prophet of God.

As expected, the words of Jeremiah came true. The words of Hananiah, the counterfeit prophet, did not. This is always the case when a true prophet of God is pitted against a false prophet. It inevitably becomes clear who the genuine prophet of God truly is.

Through Isaiah the prophet we find that the Lord has instructed His people to “check out,” or investigate, any so-called prophecy. Believers are not to follow blindly someone who claims to speak in God's name.

As Scripture says, we should beware of them, test what they say, and avoid any and all false prophets. They are like a cancer; they can only destroy.

In sum, false prophets exist and we should beware of them!

Question 17

What Do We Learn About God And His Word Through A Study Of Fulfilled Prophecy?

The study of fulfilled Bible prophecy teaches us many things about the existence and character of the God of the Bible and His written Word. We can list them as follows:

1. Fulfilled Prophecy Shows That God Exists

One of the results of fulfilled Bible prophecy is that it can demonstrate God's existence. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus said the following to His disciples:

I have told you these things before they happen so that when they do happen, you will believe (John 14:29 NLT).

The Lord tells us what will happen ahead of time, so when the predictions in Scripture come to pass, we will believe in Him.

Peter emphasized the importance of paying attention to the message of the prophets:

Moreover, we possess the prophetic word as an altogether reliable thing. You do well if you pay attention to this as you would to a light shining in a murky place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:19-20 NET).

God's prophetic Word is indeed an altogether reliable thing. We do have greater confidence in the Lord because of fulfilled Bible prophecy.

2. Fulfilled Prophecy Demonstrates That God Is In Control

Not only do we learn from Scripture that God exists we also find that He is in control of all events. How do we know this? We can be certain that the God of Scripture is in control of history by looking at the subject of fulfilled Bible prophecy.

When we see so many events accurately predicted hundreds of years before they occurred, it demonstrates that history is not just a series of unrelated events.

To the contrary, history has a purpose; it is actually going somewhere. It is the outworking of a great divine plan—the plan of the God of Scripture. Among other things, the study of fulfilled Bible prophecy shows that all things are under His control.

3. Fulfilled Prophecy Demonstrates That God Is All-Knowing

In addition, we learn a number of things about the nature, or character, of God from the subject of fulfilled Bible prophecy. We find, for example, that the God of the Bible is all-knowing, or omniscient. He not only sees all things that happen in the present, and knows everything which has happened in the past, He also knows everything that *will* happen, or even could *possibly* happen, in the future.

To accurately predict so many future events with such precise detail could only be possible for a Being who has all knowledge. This Being is the God of the Bible!

4. Fulfilled Prophecy Demonstrates That God Is All-Powerful

Fulfilled Bible prophecy further teaches us that God is all-powerful, or omnipotent. He is able to bring to pass all His purposes for the human race. Nothing can stop His plan from being accomplished. Nothing. This is another truth we learn from a study of fulfilled Bible prophecy.

5. Fulfilled Prophecy Demonstrates That God Is Faithful

The precise fulfillment of the predictions found in Scripture proves that the Lord is a faithful God. What He says He will do; what He has spoken He will make good. He is the unchanging, faithful, God.

Therefore, He is the proper object of our trust and confidence. The prophet Jeremiah said:

The LORD's kindness never fails! If he had not been merciful, we would have been destroyed (Lamentations 3:22,23 CEV).

He never fails, His Word never fails. This is the God of Scripture.

6. Fulfilled Bible Prophecy Gives Us Confidence In Scripture

The study of fulfilled Bible prophecy gives the believer confidence in the Bible as the written Word of the living God. In fact, fulfilled prophecy confirms God's divine revelation to humanity in a plain manner.

In addition, the Word of God opens itself to all serious, honest inquirers that wish to discredit its infallible evidence. Indeed, people are encouraged to check out the evidence. Any attempt to discredit it is doomed to failure.

7. Fulfilled Prophecy Demonstrates That The Bible Is Our Trustworthy Guide For The Future

Fulfilled Biblical prophecy also helps the believer as a guide to the future. We know there is hope for a better existence after this life because God has revealed to us what will happen in the days to come. The study of Bible prophecy gives us hope for the future. The Bible says:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those that are revealed belong to us and our descendants forever, so that we might obey all the words of this law (Deuteronomy 29:29 NET).

He knows what will happen in the future and He tells us about many of these coming events. His written Word is a trustworthy guide.

8. Fulfilled Bible Prophecy Vindicates God's Messengers

Predictive prophecy also vindicates any messenger of God who utters a prophecy. The biblical prophets are shown to be trustworthy in their office by the predictions they have made and the fulfillments that have resulted. Since their prophetic statements have been shown to be true, their other statements should also be considered trustworthy.

These are some of the many things we can learn about the God of Scripture from a study of fulfilled Bible prophecy.

**Summary To Question 17:
What Do We Learn About God And His Word Through A Study Of Fulfilled Prophecy?**

The study of the subject of fulfilled biblical prophecy teaches us a number of important things about the God of the Bible and His Holy Word. Indeed, we learn many essential things about Him from an examination of this topic.

For one thing, it tells us that there is a God which exists. Indeed, only God could tell us what will occur in the future because the future is unknown to all other beings. God's existence is thus made plain to everyone who studies the subject of Bible prophecy.

We also learn that the Lord is in control of the future. He not only knows what is going to happen before it occurs, He is in control of everything that will happen. This is crucial.

It is one thing to know what will occur, but it is something entirely different to know what will happen and be in control of the outcome. The God of Scripture knows the future and is in control of it.

Furthermore, we can learn much about the character of God from a study of Bible prophecy. This includes the following truths:

First, we find out that the Lord is all-knowing. Indeed, only an all-knowing, or omniscient, God could make the sort of predictions we find recorded in Scripture. To know exactly which nations will rise and fall or the birthplace and family line of the coming Messiah, takes a Being which has all-knowledge. This is one of the characteristics, or attributes, of the God of Scripture.

We also discover that the God of the Bible is all-powerful. Indeed, so many factors have to be brought together for these predictions to come to pass as the Bible says they will. It is only an all-powerful being who could achieve what has been accomplished through Bible prophecy. The God of Scripture is truly all-powerful.

Furthermore, biblical prophecy shows us that the all-powerful God which exists is faithful. He has made countless predictions and all of them have come to pass exactly as predicted!

The practical result is this: we can trust everything which God says because time and time again He has shown Himself to be faithful.

Thus, each and every promise of God which we find in the Bible, and is directed toward us, can be completely relied upon. Prophecy shows that the God of the Bible is a faithful God.

All of these facts about the subject of Bible prophecy gives us further confirming evidence that the Bible is what it claims to be—the Word of the living God. It also tells us much about the character of the God of Scripture.

Question 18

Do Other Religions Have Fulfilled Prophecy?

While some people may think that non-Christian religions have some sort of predictive element that gives evidence of their genuineness, such is not the case. Bible prophecy is unique. We find nothing like it in other religion.

In fact, this subject of Bible prophecy sets the Christian faith apart from all other religious systems. The following points must be stressed:

There Are No Claims Of Fulfilled Prophecy By Those In Other Religions

To begin with, no other religion claims to have anything like the predictive prophecy which is found in Scripture. In other words, they do not base the truth of their claims on the ability of one of their prophets to accurately predict the future.

While there may be an instance, here or there, in which some type of prediction was claimed to have come to pass, the documentation is sadly lacking.

Any so-called fulfilled prophecy in these religions cannot be compared to what we find in Scripture.

A number of things must be observed:

1. Biblical Prophets Must Past Certain Tests

A prophet of God had to be able to pass certain tests. If they did not pass these tests, then they could not be considered a true prophet of God. It's that simple.

We find nothing comparable in other religions where the prophet had to pass some sort of test to prove their prophetic office.

Thus, the biblical prophets are in an entirely different category from any so-called "prophet" in another religion. The biblical prophets had to prove their genuineness.

2. Biblical Prophets Had To Be Specific In Their Predictions

The predictions of the biblical prophet must be specific. In other words, they had to make predictions which would be able to be falsified if their prediction did not come true. The specific prediction must come true for the individual to be acknowledged as a genuine prophet of the God of the Bible.

Again, there is nothing in other religion which requires the prophet to make specific predictions which must come to pass.

Furthermore, there are no examples of these "prophets" in other religions making specific predictions which have come to pass. Indeed, they cannot come to pass because they are not speaking for the only God who exists—the God of Scripture. He is the only One who knows what will happen in the future.

3. Biblical Prophets Had To Predict Events Nobody Could Foresee

There is another crucial element in determining genuine prophecy. The predictions had to be something which nobody could foresee. If an “educated guess” could be made about a certain event which may take place, then we cannot consider that to be a genuine prophecy. A genuine prophecy must deal with an event which nobody could foresee.

While Scripture contains countless examples of genuine prophecy, we find nothing like that whatsoever in other religious systems.

Again, we see the wide gap between the biblical prophets and the prophets of other religions. There is really no comparison between them.

4. In Theory, The Prophecy Had To Be Able To Be Proven False

This brings us to our next point. A prophecy had to be of such a nature that it can theoretically be proven to be false. In other words, it must contain specific elements that can be either proven to be true or untrue. Unless a prophecy can potentially be falsified it is meaningless.

In an example we earlier gave, we noted that Jeremiah prophesied the following about the false prophet Hananiah:

Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, “Listen, Hananiah! The LORD has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. Therefore, this is what the LORD says: ‘I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against the LORD.’” In the seventh month of that same year, Hananiah the prophet died (Jeremiah 28:15-17 NIV).

It is important that we note this very specific prediction; Hananiah was to die within a year of Jeremiah’s prediction. If Hananiah lived longer than one year from the time that Jeremiah’s prophecy was given, then he could have been proven false making him a false prophet.

However, as the Bible informs us, Hananiah did die that year. Therefore, the specific prediction of Jeremiah was proven to be true although it had the possibility of being proven false had it not come true.

Given the above facts, we can see the immense differences between the Bible and the sacred books of other religions. The Scripture is indeed in a class by itself!

Summary To Question 18: Do Other Religions Have Fulfilled Prophecy?

While some people may assume that non-Christian religions have something similar to Bible prophecy, the evidence says different. Indeed, we do not find any such thing as predictive prophecy in other non-Christian religions. Predictive prophecy is unique to the Old and New Testaments of the Bible alone. In fact, this is one of the many things which sets apart the Bible from all other so-called “holy books.” They have nothing like the predictive prophecy that is found in the Bible.

To be a genuine prophet of the God of the Bible, a number of tests must be passed. If the person could not pass these specific tests, then they would be considered a false prophet. We find nothing remotely like this in non-Christian religions. No objective tests were given to determine the true from the false.

Furthermore, to be a genuine biblical prophecy, the prediction had to be specific. It had to have enough details so that it can be falsified. This is crucial. For a prediction to be accepted as valid there had to be the possibility of falsifying it.

Again, all other religions and so-called prophets fail at this point. They do not give us specific predictions which are capable of being falsified.

In addition, the prediction had to be more than a mere educated guess. The event had to be something that nobody would expect to happen. There are numerous examples of this in Scripture but none whatsoever in the sacred writings of other religions.

The biblical prophets met all of the above tests. They predicted events which nobody could possibly foresee. They also did it with specific detail in such a way that these predictions could be falsified.

All of their predictions have come true while none of the predictions from other religious figures, or so-called “prophets,” have come true. Thus, the evidence demonstrates who was speaking for God and who was not.

Since only an all-knowing God would be able to accurately foretell these things, we conclude that the God of Scripture not only exists, but He also knows what will occur in the future.

This is not true of prophets from other religions. They have no ability to foretell what will happen in the future. Only the Lord can do this.

Question 19

How Did The Biblical Prophets Receive Their Messages?

The Bible records a variety of different ways in which the biblical prophets received their messages. They include such things as dreams, visions, and hearing an audible voice. We can list them as follows:

1. An Audible Voice

The Scripture says that God spoke by means of an audible voice to the young boy Samuel. We read about this in First Samuel. It says:

And the LORD said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle” (1 Samuel 3:11 NIV).

In this instance, and others like it, God spoke in a language that was understandable to the person to whom He was communicating. They understood exactly what He said because the Lord spoke to them in their native language.

2. Dreams

Daniel the prophet interpreted the dreams of King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2). On another occasion, God gave Daniel a look at the future by means of his own dream. The Bible explains it as follows:

Earlier, during the first year of King Belshazzar’s reign in Babylon, Daniel had a dream and saw visions as he lay in his bed. He wrote the dream down, and this is what he saw (Daniel 7:1 NLT).

He, the Lord, used a dream to communicate His Word to the prophet. This special dream contained divine truths which had not been previously revealed.

3. Visions

Sometimes a prophet of the living God would receive a vision from the Lord. The prophet Isaiah wrote of the visions he received:

The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (Isaiah 1:1 CSB).

Daniel the prophet also received visions. He recorded the following:

That night the secret was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven (Daniel 2:19 NLT).

Visions, as opposed to dreams, occurred while the prophet was awake.

4. Opening The Prophet's Eyes

The Bible lists two occasions where God “opened” the eyes of the prophet. In other words, He showed them things which could not be seen with their ordinary eyes. The first example involves the prophet Balaam. The Bible explains what occurred:

Just then, the LORD let Balaam see the angel standing in the road, holding a sword, and Balaam bowed down (Numbers 22:31 CEV).

Nobody else but Balaam would have seen the angel. At that moment, Balaam was allowed to see that which is unseen by human eyes.

The second instance was to the servant of the prophet Elisha. We read this story in the Book of Second Kings. It says:

When the servant of the man of God got up early the next morning and went outside, there were troops, horses, and chariots everywhere. “Oh, sir, what will we do now?” the young man cried to Elisha. “Don’t be afraid!” Elisha told him. “For there are more on our side than on theirs!” Then Elisha prayed, “O Lord, open his eyes and let him see!” The Lord opened the young man’s eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire (2 Kings 6:15-17 NLT).

Though it is not stated, it is assumed that Elisha could also see the angelic host around the enemy. Obviously, the enemies of Elisha could not see the angels surrounding them!

5. There Was No Holy Spot Where They Stood

In contrast to other religions, there was not a holy spot where the prophets had to go to receive the Word of God.

For example, the prophet Ezekiel wrote his work while held captive in Babylon. The Apostle Paul wrote some of his letters from prison in Rome. Jeremiah was in the dungeon while he was composing his work. John, the beloved Apostle, wrote while a prisoner banished to the Isle of Patmos.

The fact that these authors wrote from different geographical locales shows that God could, and would, reveal His Word wherever He wished. There was no special spot to where His prophets had to go.

Thus, it was not a situation similar to what we find in other religions—where a person had to be in one particular place to receive the word from the gods, or God.

Indeed, the God of the Bible has revealed Himself to His prophets in a variety of different places. This is one of the many ways in which He is distinct from these other so-called “gods.”

6. The Prophets Did Not Use Occultic Devices

Not only is it important to discover what means God has used to communicate to the biblical prophets, it is also important to discover what means He did *not* use.

As we look at the Scripture, we will find that God’s prophets did not employ devices when predicting the future. There were no crystal balls, tarot cards, use of astrology or any occultic devices.

In fact, using these types of devices was strongly condemned by God. The prophetic Isaiah records the Lord sarcastically saying:

Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror. All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame. These are not coals for warmth; this is not a fire to sit by. That is all they are to you—these you have dealt with and labored with since childhood. All of them go on in their error; there is not one that can save you (Isaiah 47:12-15 NIV).

Note the emphasis that none of these astrologers, or stargazers, could save the people since all of them were in error.

In another instance, the prophet Daniel specifically rejected the counsel of the Babylonian astrologers. This is especially noteworthy since Babylon was the cradle of ancient astrological worship. We read of this in the Book of Daniel. It says:

Daniel answered the king and said, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these” (Daniel 2.27,28 ESV).

In addition, the biblical prophets did not go into trances or have some spirit inhabit their body. This heathen idea finds no place in Scripture.

This sums up how the genuine prophets of God received their messages. Furthermore, it also highlights the distinction between them and false prophets of other religions.

**Summary To Question 19:
How Did Biblical Prophets Receive Their Messages?**

As we search the Scriptures, we find that the manner in which God spoke to the biblical prophets varied. We can sum them up as follows:

A number of times the Lord spoke to a prophet through a vision. A vision is defined as something the prophet saw while he or she was still awake. The truths of God were communicated by these visions.

The prophets were also spoken to by the Lord through dreams. Obviously this occurred while the person is asleep as opposed to a vision which occurs during the waking hours. Dreams were used a number of times to communicate God’s message.

There were times a biblical prophet heard the Lord speak with an audible voice. These messages were communicated in the prophet’s own language. Thus, they clearly understood what the Lord was communicating.

At times, it was merely a matter of opening the eyes of a prophet to the truth of the message. There are a couple of recorded examples where this happened.

Contrary to the false prophets in other religions, the biblical prophets were not allowed to use any type of devices to receive the Word of God. Such things as crystal balls, tarot cards, or any other type of prop was not allowed. In fact, using these types of devices received the strongest condemnation from the Lord.

In addition, the biblical prophets received their messages in a variety of different geographical locations. There was no “sacred spot” where they had to go so that the Lord could speak to them. Indeed, the God of the Bible could speak to the prophet at any place, or at any time. In other words, nothing limited Him.

This gives us a general idea of how the biblical prophets received their messages. God was certainly not limited in the way in which He communicated to His prophets.

Question 20

Should Bible Prophecies Be Interpreted Literally?

When we come across a prophetic passage in Scripture how should it be interpreted? Should we interpret it literally or figuratively? This is a point of contention among Bible-believers.

However, when we examine the evidence, it seems clear that the best way to interpret Bible prophecies is the same way as we interpret other parts of the Bible—literally, when possible.

The Case For Literal Interpretation

The reason why we first seek to interpret predictive prophecies in Scripture in a literal manner concerns the way prophecies in the Bible have been fulfilled in the past. We discover this by carefully observing passages that make predictions in both Testaments and how they have become fulfilled.

One clear example consists of the predictions concerning the coming Deliverer, or Messiah. These were literally fulfilled when He came the first time to the earth.

We can make the following observations:

Jesus Literally Fulfilled The Predictions Of The Messiah

At His first coming, Jesus literally fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies written about the Messiah.

1. Jesus Was Born In Bethlehem

The Old Testament predicted that the coming Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. We read of this prediction in Micah. It says:

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village in Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past (Micah 5:2 NLT).

The New Testament records the same expectation of the people as to where the Messiah would be born:

He [Herod] called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law. “Where did the prophets say the Messiah would be born?” he asked them. “In Bethlehem,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote” (Matthew 2:4,5 NLT).

In the Gospel of John, we read something similar. When the people were discussing whether Jesus could be the promised Messiah we read the following:

Don’t the scriptures say that the Christ is a descendant of David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?” (John 7:42 NET)

Therefore, it is clear that they expected that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

As we can observe, the Scripture tells us that this prophecy was literally fulfilled:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? (Matthew 2:1 NIV).

Jesus was born in the right place.

2. He Was A Literal Descendant Of King David

The Old Testament prophesied that the coming Messiah would be an actual descendant of King David. We read about this in Samuel:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12 ESV).

Matthew records that Jesus was a literal descendant of David. At the beginning of his gospel he wrote the following:

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1.1 ESV).

The people acknowledged that the Christ was to be the Son of David. Matthew records the following incident:

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David” (Matthew 22:41,42 ESV).

As we mentioned in our previous point, the people expected the Messiah to not only be born in Bethlehem, but also to be a physical descendant of King David (John 7:42).

To sum up, there was no doubt that the expectation was that the promised Messiah was to have King David as His ancestor. Again, we find the Scripture literally fulfilled.

3. He Was Killed Before The Temple And The City Of Jerusalem Were Destroyed A Second Time

The Scripture predicted the death of the Messiah. After He would die, the city of Jerusalem, as well as the Temple, would be destroyed for a second time. We find this in the writings of Daniel the prophet. Scripture says:

After this period of sixty-two sets of seven, the Anointed One will be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing, and a ruler will arise whose armies will destroy the city and the Temple. The end will come with a flood, and war and its miseries are decreed from that time to the very end (Daniel 9:26 NLT).

This is an extremely important prediction! When Daniel wrote this, the Temple in Jerusalem, as well as the city, had already been destroyed the first time.

Consequently, Daniel’s prophecy assumed that the people would return to Jerusalem, rebuild the Temple, and then the Messiah would come on the scene of history, and die, before it was destroyed again.

This literally occurred. The people returned from Babylon and rebuilt the city and the Temple.

Some five hundred years later Jesus arrived and was eventually put to death at the time when Jerusalem and the Second Temple were still standing.

About forty years after His death, the Temple, as well as the city, was destroyed for a second time.

Therefore, He fulfilled the prediction—the Messiah would arrive and die before Jerusalem, and the holy Temple, would be destroyed for a second time.

4. He Literally Rode Into Jerusalem On A Donkey

The prophet Zechariah wrote about the Messiah, the King, coming into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. We read about this prophecy as follows:

Everyone in Jerusalem, celebrate and shout! Your king has won a victory, and he is coming to you. He is humble and rides on a donkey; he comes on the colt of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9 CEV).

Matthew records the fulfillment of this “kingly prediction.” He wrote:

So God’s promise came true, just as the prophet had said, “Announce to the people of Jerusalem: ‘Your king is coming to you! He is humble and rides on a donkey. He comes on the colt of a donkey’” (Matthew 21:4,5 CEV).

As predicted, Jesus fulfilled this exactly as written. This was a deliberate act on His part. In doing so, Jesus was clearly claiming to be the long-awaited Messiah.

5. He Was Conceived Of A Virgin

We also find the angel Gabriel announcing to the Virgin Mary that she was going to supernaturally give birth to a Son. The Bible records the conversation as follows:

You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end! Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.” The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. (Luke 1:31-36 NLT).

The Bible records that Jesus was born of a virgin. Indeed, His supernatural conception is emphasized in Scripture. We also read in Luke:

She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger because there wasn’t any room for them in the inn (Luke 2:7 God’s Word).

Thus, we have seen that God intended that this prophecy should be understood in the most plain and obvious sense. We also see that it was exactly accomplished in that manner. A virgin, called Mary, did conceive and bear a son. Literal fulfillment.

6. Jesus Literally Performed Miracles

The miracles which Jesus performed were plainly foretold. We read about this in the Book of Isaiah where we find the following predictions of what will occur:

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unplugged. Then those who are lame will leap like deer, and those who cannot speak will shout for joy. Water will gush out into the desert, and streams will gush out into the wilderness (Isaiah 35:5,6 God’s Word).

According to this prediction, the Messiah would be a miracle-worker; He would do miraculous deeds. This would be one of the ways in which He could be identified.

The gospels record the exact fulfillment of these predictions. Luke writes:

Then John called two of his disciples and sent them to ask the Lord, “Are you the one who is coming, or should we look for someone else?” The men came to Jesus and said, “John the Baptizer sent us to ask you, ‘Are you the one who is coming, or should we look for someone else?’” At that time Jesus was curing many people who had diseases, sicknesses, and evil spirits. Also, he was giving back sight to many who were blind. Jesus answered John’s disciples, “Go back, and tell John what you have seen and heard: Blind people see again, lame people are walking, those with skin diseases are made clean, deaf people hear again, dead people are brought back to life, and poor people hear the Good News” (Luke 7:18-22 God’s Word).

These prophecies were not only fulfilled exactly as predicted, Jesus actually referred to His miracles as one of the proofs, or evidences, of His divine mission. Therefore, He confirmed that these predictions were to be literally fulfilled.

The Predictions About Christ Were Literally Fulfilled Though Some Seemed Impossible

The evidence is clear. The various predictions concerning the First Coming of the Messiah, or Christ, have been literally, and exactly, fulfilled. This is despite the fact that many of them seemed highly unlikely and some of them looked impossible. Amazingly, everything was fulfilled exactly as predicted.

There Are Future Predictions Which Will Be Literally Fulfilled

There are also predictions in Scripture with respect to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. As was true when He came the first time, we should expect that these predictions will also be literally fulfilled. There is every reason to assume that they will come to pass exactly as predicted. Indeed, the Lord has set the precedent—literal fulfillment of the predictions.

This Is Not Denying There Are Spiritual Truths

It must be emphasized that interpreting the Bible in a literal manner is not a denial of a spiritual sense of the text. There are indeed spiritual lessons to learn with every prediction which has been given. However, no hidden spiritual meaning, or some type of mystical interpretation, should cause us to set aside the literal sense of the prediction.

Therefore, when we understand the prophecies as literally as possible, we are being consistent with the general sense of Scripture. Otherwise we are left with uncertainty and confusion as to the exact meaning of the prediction.

Furthermore, with so many different people giving us their understanding of the “hidden meaning,” no one can ever be certain what is truly meant. This is not how the Lord intended it to be. He means what He says and He says what He means. Let us always remember this!

Summary To Question 20: Should Bible Prophecy Always Be Interpreted Literally?

When we come across a prediction in Scripture that has yet to be fulfilled, how should we interpret it? Should we interpret it literally and look for the specific details to be fulfilled?

The answer is, “Yes.” Indeed, there is a simple rule we should always apply to biblical predictions: “If the literal sense makes good sense, then seek no other sense, lest you come up with nonsense!”

Therefore, we should expect to find an exact fulfillment of the literal sense of the specific prediction. This should always be the primary way in which we interpret biblical prophecies.

The reason that we look first for the literal interpretation of biblical predictions that have yet to be fulfilled, is that past prophecies of Scripture were fulfilled in a literal manner.

Indeed, as we look at the life of Jesus Christ, we find that He literally fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah.

For example, Jesus was born in the predicted city of Bethlehem; He was a descendant of the predicted family, David; He came at the right time in history, before the city of Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, and Christ was supernaturally conceived by a virgin. In other words, everything was fulfilled exactly as it had been predicted.

These examples should teach us something about predictions which remain to be fulfilled. As has been the case with past predictions in Scripture, we should also expect to find them literally fulfilled at some time in the future.

Finally, the fact that we interpret prophecy in a literal manner does not mean that there are no spiritual lessons to be learned. There are indeed lessons for us in all of the predictions that are found in Scripture.

However, the spiritual truths that we learn are the result of the literal fulfillment of the prediction—it is not from finding some hidden meaning in the text, or coming up with some mystical interpretation. The predictions are straightforward and will be fulfilled in a straightforward way.

Therefore, we should always approach and interpret the truths revealed in God’s Word in their normal or literal sense unless something in the context shows us to do otherwise. God expects us to understand His Words at face value.

Question 21

Does The Bible Ever Use Cryptograms, Or Codes, In Prophetic Messages? (*Atbash*)

It is important that we interpret the prophecies of the Bible in a literal manner, if it is indeed clear that this is what the author intended. However, there are a couple of examples where Scripture uses a cryptogram, or a code, in announcing what would take place in the future. This is called an *atbash*.

An *atbash* is based upon the letters of the alphabet where the first letter is used to replace the last letter, the second letter is used to replace the next to the last letter, and so on.

How Does An Atbash Work?

We can give an example of an *atbash* in English: the first letter of the alphabet “a” would substitute for the last letter “z,” the second letter “b” would substitute for “y,” and the third letter “c” would substitute for “x,” etc. Turning it around the other way, “z” would be substituted for “a,” “y” for “b” and “x” for “c,” etc.

Biblical Examples Of An Atbash

We have a couple of clear examples of this “code” in the book of Jeremiah.

In Jeremiah 25, the prophet is predicting how God’s wrath would be poured out on a number of nations. He sums up these predictions by stating the following:

And all the kings of the north, near and far, one after the other—all the kingdoms on the face of the earth. And after all of them, the king of Sheshak will drink it too (Jeremiah 25:26 NIV).

Note that he says that the king of Sheshak will drink it too. The Hebrew word *Sheshach* is an *atbash*. It is made up of three consonants in Hebrew which we can transliterate in English as “sh,” “sh,” and “ch.”

The Hebrew letter, transliterated “sh” here, is the second from the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and it represents “b,” or *beth*—the second letter in the alphabet in the *atbash*. The same would be true of the second use of these consonants in the word.

The “ch” is a transliteration of the eleventh letter in the Hebrew alphabet, pronounced *cheth*, and represents “l,” or *lamed* in Hebrew. It is the eleventh letter counting back from the last letter.

So the three Hebrew letters “sh, sh, and ch,” when used as an *atbash*, give us the Hebrew letters b, b, and l, or Babel, the Hebrew word for Babylon.

Interestingly, the New English Bible translates the *atbash* as the king of Babylon, rather than the king of Sheshach:

All the kings of the north, whether near or far from one another; and all the other kingdoms which are on the face of the earth. After all of them have drunk the wine of the Lord’s wrath, the king of Babylon must drink it (Jeremiah 25:26 NET)

Another Use In Jeremiah

Another *atbash* cryptogram is found later in Jeremiah:

How Sheshak will be captured, the boast of the whole earth seized! How desolate Babylon will be among the nations (Jeremiah 51:1 NIV)

In this case, it is obvious that Sheshak refers to Babylon, since the second line of the verse make this clear.

The Net Bible translates the cryptogram “Sheshak” as Babylon:

See how Babylon has been captured! See how the pride of the whole earth has been taken! See what an object of horror Babylon has become among the nations! (Jeremiah 51:41 NET)

Why Use The Atbash?

This brings up an obvious question: Why use the *atbash* in these verses instead of simply saying “Babylon”?

While we do not know the answer, it has been suggested that perhaps it was unsafe to speak directly against Babylon during the time the people of Judah had been exiled to this foreign land. Therefore, an *atbash* was used for safety reasons for the people living in Babylon.

It is clear from this context of Jeremiah that the Lord would eventually judge Babylon after He judged the other nations.

Other Examples?

Interestingly, in a verse preceding our first example, Jeremiah prophesies against the “king of Zimri:”

All the kings of Arabia who live in the desert; all the kings of Zimri; all the kings of Elam; all the kings of Media; all the kings of the north . . . (Jeremiah 25:24 NET).

Since there is no known city, or country, in the ancient world with the name Zimri, some scholars suggest that this term is an *atbash* for Elam.

Others disagree, noting that Zimri is simply a derogatory term, a summary insult to the kings mentioned in 25:21–24.

Another Use Of An Atbash Is in Jeremiah

We find another use of a cryptogram in Jeremiah 51:

This is what the Lord says: “See, I will stir up the spirit of a destroyer against Babylon and the people of Leb Kamai (Jeremiah 51:1 NIV).

The Hebrew expression *Leb-kamai* can be translated as “heart of my adversaries.” However, it is an *atbash* for Chaldea—another term for Babylon, or the Babylonians.

The consonants for “heart of my adversary,” when reversed in the Hebrew alphabet, spell “Chaldea.” The prediction is that foreigners sent by God to devastate Babylon will completely destroy her army.

The NET Bible translates this Hebrew phrase as Babylonia:

The Lord says, “I will cause a destructive wind to blow against Babylon and the people who inhabit Babylonia” (Jeremiah 51:1 NET).

The NET Bible then has an extended note explaining that this Hebrew expression is a code word for the Chaldeans, the Babylonians.

In sum, in contrast to almost every other prediction we find in Scripture, we have a few illustrations of the Lord using a cipher, or a code, in informing His people what will take place. As to exactly why these ciphers are used there is no consensus of opinion.

Summary To Question 21

Does The Bible Ever Use Cryptograms, Or Codes, In Prophetic Messages? (*Atbash*)

While it is evident from the context, Bible prophecy should be understood in a literal sense: Bethlehem means Bethlehem, Israel means Israel, Jerusalem means Jerusalem, and so on.

However, there are a few examples of Scripture using a code word for another country.

Jeremiah used the Hebrew word *Sheshach* as a cryptogram for Babylon. He uses another term to refer to the Chaldeans, or the Babylonians.

There are at least three examples of this in the Book of Jeremiah (25:26; 51:1; 51:41).

There may be another example in Jeremiah 25:24 where a code word is used for Elam.

As to exactly why this was done, there is no real consensus.

Question 22

Are Any Of The Biblical Prophecies Conditional?

While most of the prophecies in Scripture are unconditional—meaning, they are not based upon anyone’s future behavior or any other circumstances—there are a few predictions that are indeed conditional. We can give the following examples of conditional prophecies:

The Lord Allows For Repentance To Change The Predicted Future

In Jeremiah, the Lord clearly stated the conditional aspect of one of His predictions:

There are times, Jeremiah, when I threaten to uproot, tear down, and destroy a nation or kingdom. But if that nation I threatened stops doing wrong, I will cancel the destruction I intended to do to it. And there are times when I promise to build up and establish a nation or kingdom. But if that nation does what displeases me and does not obey me, then I will cancel the good I promised to do to it (Jeremiah 18:7–10 NET):

In this context, the Lord states that certain predictions about the future may be changed depending upon the behavior of the people. If a nation repents after the Lord promises punishment against them, the Lord will then cancel His predicted judgment. This is His promise.

Jonah

We find an illustration of this in the Book of Jonah. The prophet Jonah told the people of Nineveh that destruction was imminent:

When Jonah began to enter the city one day’s walk, he announced, “At the end of forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!” (Jonah 3:4 NET).

However, we read that the people of Nineveh responded to Jonah’s prediction by believing him and repenting of their deeds:

The people of Nineveh believed in God, and they declared a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them (Jonah 3:5 NET).

The Lord then responded to their actions with compassion by canceling the prophesied, imminent destruction:

When God saw their actions—they turned from their evil way of living!—God relented concerning the judgment he had threatened them with and he did not destroy them (Jonah 3:10 NET).

Therefore, the original prediction did not come to pass because of the sincere repentance of the people of Nineveh.

Hezekiah

There is another example of conditional prophecy in the life of King Hezekiah. Isaiah the prophet informed the king, who was terminally ill, that he was about to die:

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, “This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover . . . (2 Kings 20:1-2 NIV).

Hezekiah then fervently sought the Lord for healing:

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, “Remember, Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly (2 Kings 20:2-3 NIV).

Consequently, before the prophet had even left the premises, the Lord came to Isaiah and told him to reverse what he had just said:

Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: “Go back and tell Hezekiah, the ruler of my people, “This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the Lord. I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.” (2 Kings 20:4-6 NIV).

Hezekiah was allowed to live another fifteen years because of the mercy of the Lord. Hence, the prediction of his imminent death was not fulfilled.

A Valuable Lesson Learned

These three examples from Scripture teach us a valuable lesson. God’s mercy and compassion, accompanied by repentance and prayer, can cause the cancellation of His pronounced judgment.

How great indeed is His mercy to those of us who sincerely call upon His name!

Summary To Question 22: Are Any Of The Biblical Prophecies Conditional?

When the Lord tells us something will happen in the future, it will indeed take place. There are, however, exceptions to this, based upon the behavior of the people.

For example, Jonah the prophet predicted doom to the citizens of the evil city of Nineveh. However, the genuine repentance of their sin stopped the Lord from fulfilling this prediction. Indeed, He showed them mercy.

In another instance, earnest prayer from Hezekiah caused the Lord to extend his life for another fifteen years. This occurred after the prophet Isaiah told him that he was about to die.

These instances illustrate the graciousness and goodness of God. Judgment is not something that He prefers to do. Prayer and repentance can indeed withhold the judgment that the Lord has promised to send. This is a valuable lesson for each of us to learn.

Question 23

Are There Time Gaps In Prophetic Passages? (Prophetic Perspective)

On occasion, we find that there was a gap of time between the events given in a particular prophecy and the actual fulfillment of them. Even though the events are spoken of together, or are found in close sequence, they are not fulfilled at the same time. Among other things, this is known as “prophetic perspective.”

The Prophecy Of The Coming Messiah

Probably the best illustration of prophetic perspective is Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah recorded the Lord’s saying:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn (Isaiah 61:1-2 NIV).

This passage lists the deeds the coming Messiah was to perform. It provided His credentials so that the people at that time will be certain of His identity.

On a Sabbath Day, Jesus read this prophecy from the scroll of Isaiah. Luke recounts the event in the following manner:

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:17-19 NIV).

Jesus confirmed that this prediction had been fulfilled in their presence—He was indeed the long-awaited Messiah:

Then he said, “This Scripture has come true today before your very eyes!” (Luke 4:21 NLT).

What is remarkable about this fulfillment is that Jesus stopped reading and put down the scroll while in the middle of a sentence. He fulfilled the first part of the prediction, but He left out the part concerning the fulfillment of “the day of vengeance of our God.”

This part of the prediction was not fulfilled at this time even though it is found in the very same sentence in the prophecy!

Each Coming Has A Different Mission

Why wasn’t that part of the prophecy fulfilled? The reason is that Jesus’ mission, the first time, was not to bring vengeance upon the people. He made that very clear during His ministry:

And I, the Son of Man, have come to seek and save those like him who are lost (Luke 19:10 NLT).

The purpose of Jesus’ first coming was to save the lost.

On another occasion, we read the following about Jesus' coming into the world:

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3.17 ESV).

Jesus' mission, at His First Coming, was one of salvation, not judgment. He came to save the world, not to condemn it.

He Is To Return As Judge

While judgment is part of the Jesus' office as King, it was not the purpose of His First Coming to the world. When Jesus returns, the second part of that prophecy of Isaiah will be fulfilled. The Apostle Paul wrote about this to the Thessalonians. He put it this way:

And God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power when he comes to receive glory and praise from his holy people. And you will be among those praising him on that day, for you believed what we testified about him (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 NLT).

The Second Coming of the Lord will be in judgment. At that particular time He will judge those who do not trust in His promises.

Jesus Himself also illustrated this:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate people one from another like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:31-34 NET).

It is clear that the second half of that sentence, found in the Book of Isaiah, will be fulfilled when Jesus comes a second time.

We Learn An Important Lesson

The fact that Jesus stopped reading the prophecy in the middle of a sentence, and then declared it to be fulfilled, teaches us an important lesson. There can be a gap of time between the details of a certain prediction and its ultimate fulfillment. The gap can last a long period of time, possibly thousands of years.

Therefore, we should allow the possibility that all of the details of a particular prophecy in Scripture may not find their ultimate fulfillment at the same time. This sums up the doctrine of prophetic perspective.

Summary To Question 23:

Are There Time Gaps In Prophetic Passages? (Prophetic Perspective)

In Scripture, sometimes there is a gap of time as to when certain parts of the same prophecy are fulfilled. This is also known as prophetic perspective. We can simply explain this as follows:

Prophetic perspective is when we find two prophetic events spoken of together, or in close sequence, but their fulfillment does not occur at the same time.

This means that whenever we find two events spoken of together in Scripture, it does not necessarily mean that they will take place at the same time, or even in succession.

Unless the Bible specifically tells us this is so, we should not assume that these events will follow one after the other.

An example of this is found in Isaiah 61. There is a prediction of the coming of the Messiah and His ultimate judgment that He will bestow upon unbelievers.

According to Luke 4, when Jesus read this passage in a synagogue in Nazareth, He stopped reading in the middle of a sentence. This was right after the part about the deeds of the coming Messiah. He then said the passage was fulfilled that day in their hearing.

However, He did not read the part about judgment, even though it is in the same sentence. The first half of the sentence was, therefore, fulfilled at the First Coming of Christ, while the remaining part of the prediction will be fulfilled when Christ comes again.

This example clearly demonstrates that not every single part of a biblical prediction must be fulfilled in the exact same time frame. Thus, the doctrine of prophetic perspective is something that should be reckoned with when studying the subject of Bible prophecy.

Question 24

What Is Double Fulfillment In Prophecy? (Double Reference)

In Scripture, there is the principle of double fulfillment, or double reference. This means that a particular prophecy may have a fulfillment during the lifetime of the prophet, as well as a future fulfillment in the Person of Jesus Christ, or perhaps even in the establishment of His kingdom. There are a number of examples of this in the Bible.

The Sign Given To The House Of David

One illustration of double fulfillment is found in a prophecy given by the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah gave a sign to King Ahaz and to the entire house of David. This prophecy had both an immediate and a future fulfillment. We read the following prediction:

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14 ESV).

The prediction stated that an unmarried young woman within the royal house of David would shortly marry and then conceive a son. Her son would be called “Immanuel” or “God is with us.”

We should not assume she named the son Immanuel because she heard of Isaiah’s prophecy. This is something which occurred without her knowledge. The prediction goes on to say the following:

By the time this child is old enough to eat curds and honey, he will know enough to choose what is right and reject what is wrong. But before he knows right from wrong, the two kings you fear so much—the kings of Israel and Aram—will both be dead. “The LORD will bring a terrible curse on you, your nation, and your family. You will soon experience greater terror than has been known in all the years since Solomon’s empire was divided into Israel and Judah. The mighty king of Assyria will come with his great army!” In that day the LORD will whistle for the army of Upper Egypt and for the army of Assyria. They will swarm around you like flies. Like bees, they will sting and kill. They will come in vast hordes, spreading across the whole land. They will settle in the fertile areas and also in the desolate valleys, caves, and thorny places (Isaiah 7:15-19 NLT).

We learn that judgment was coming to the people. Before this predicted child grew to a mature age there would be a curse upon the nation. In fact, the king of Israel and the king of Aram would be dead.

Furthermore, Assyria would come to the land of the northern kingdom of Israel and settle in it. This punishment would be the result of the people not obeying the commandments of the Lord.

While this child was still in his early years, the Assyrians did indeed lay waste to the land of Aram and to the land of Israel. The kings of Israel and Aram did die as the prophecy stated. The prophecy of Isaiah was literally fulfilled! Among other things, this is further confirmation that Isaiah was a genuine prophet of God.

The Ultimate Realization Of The Prophecy In The Birth Of Christ

While this prediction of the prophet Isaiah was fulfilled a few short years after it had been delivered, this did not exhaust the meaning of what was prophesied. Indeed, there was to be another fulfillment.

Matthew records the ultimate realization of this prophecy with the coming of Jesus Christ. He cited the prophecy and the fulfillment as he related the following words which the angel of the Lord said to Joseph, the husband of Mary:

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us" (Matthew 1:21-23 NIV).

Matthew quotes the passage from Isaiah and says that the birth of Jesus fulfilled this prediction.

Thus, we have a double fulfillment of this particular prophecy of Isaiah. As is true with many prophecies of double reference, the ultimate fulfillment was found in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Observations About "Double Reference" Prophecy

There are a couple of observations which we can make with respect to "double reference" prophecy. They are as follows:

To begin with, the initial fulfillment of the prophecy is frequently found in some person, or event, which existed close in time to the prophecy. However, the ultimate, or double, fulfillment is not necessarily close in time to the initial fulfillment.

In addition, usually the initial fulfillment only partially fulfills the message of the prophet. In other words, the entire prediction is not fulfilled in the initial fulfillment.

Almost always the ultimate fulfillment of the prediction is found in the Person of Jesus Christ. In other words, these predictions, ultimately, looked to Him. This fact accords well with what John wrote in the Book of Revelation:

Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Revelation 19:10 ESV).

Ultimately, all prophecy testifies to Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself made this clear. John records Him saying:

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me . . . If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me (John 5:39,46 NIV).

The entire Scripture testifies of Him!

More Predictions Remain To Be Fulfilled

Given the above truths, we can conclude that there may be predictions in Scripture which still fall under the double reference category. In other words, there has already been a fulfillment in the past, but there still awaits another fulfillment in the future. Recognizing this truth is important.

As we have stated, most of these double reference prophecies find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Some were fulfilled at His First Coming but others may be fulfilled when He comes again to the earth. This is essential that we understand this as we go about interpreting the prophetic portions of Scripture.

Hence, when we speak of double fulfillment in prophecy, it may refer to predictions which have already been fulfilled on two separate occasions, which may be hundreds of years apart, or it may speak of a prediction which has been fulfilled but another fulfillment of this same prediction will still occur in the future.

We Must Distinguish Between Interpretation And Application

There is something else which we must mention. The law of double reference, or double fulfillment, is a legitimate method for interpretation of Bible prophecy. Scripture itself testifies to this.

However, this does not mean that we now open the door to all kinds of fanciful notions as to the hidden meanings that *might* be contained in a prophetic passage.

The law of double reference deals with how we interpret a Bible prophecy, not how we apply it. It is one prediction which will find its fulfillment with two audiences which are separated in time. It is not something which allows the interpreter to find multiple meanings or applications in each prediction. This distinction must be understood.

The predictions given in Scripture are to be literally fulfilled as given. Double fulfillment merely says that the fulfillment may occur more than once to different people at different times. It is important that we correctly understand this concept.

Summary To Question 24:

What Is Double Fulfillment In Prophecy? (Double Reference)

There is a principle in Scripture known as “double reference” or “double fulfillment.” When we speak of double reference, or double fulfillment, in Bible prophecy, it can be simply stated as follows.

Basically, it can mean one of two things. First, it can mean that some of the prophecies recorded in the Bible have been already fulfilled in more than one historical situation. In other words, there was an immediate fulfillment as well as a fulfillment later in history.

Secondly, it can mean that one of the predictions has been fulfilled in the past, but there is still a situation where the prophecy will again be fulfilled at some time in the future. Double reference, or double fulfillment, can also refer to this.

An example of double fulfillment is the sign the prophet Isaiah gave to King Ahaz. Isaiah spoke of a child who was to be born. The initial fulfillment occurred shortly after the prediction—that child was born.

Yet the ultimate fulfillment of this prediction occurred with the birth of Jesus Christ. Matthew cites the prophecy of Isaiah and says that the birth of Christ fulfilled the prediction.

Therefore, each child was the sign which Isaiah spoke of. There was an immediate fulfillment in the child, who was born in the days of Ahaz, as well as a final fulfillment in the birth of Christ. This is a clear example of double reference, or double fulfillment.

Usually when we find a double reference in Bible prophecy, the first fulfillment was fairly close in time to the actual prediction while the second one would come long after the death of the prophet.

In almost every instance, the ultimate fulfillment occurred in the life of Christ. As He Himself clearly stated, the entire scope of Scripture is about Him.

There is also the possibility that the second fulfillment of a particular prediction has not yet taken place. In other words, it will occur at the time of the Second Coming of Christ to the earth. We must allow for that possibility.

In sum, the law of double reference speaks of predictions that have had a near fulfillment as well as a later fulfillment, and possibly a fulfillment that is still future.

Question 25

What Objections Have Unbelievers Made To Bible Prophecy?

When Christians point to predictive prophecy as objective evidence to demonstrate the existence of the God of Scripture as well as the supernatural character of the Bible, they are often met with objections from unbelievers. The most common objections to predictive prophecy in Scripture are as follows.

1. Others Have Done The Same Thing

One common objection against biblical prophecy is that other religions and individuals have done the same thing as the biblical prophets. The simple answer to that assertion is, “No they have not!” There is a world of difference between the prophets of God and other so-called prophets.

To be a true prophet of God, a person had to be 100 percent right 100 percent of the time. The biblical prophets always passed this test. No other person, or religious organization, has ever come near meeting this standard. The biblical prophets simply did not make mistakes.

Bible Prophecy Is Unique

Biblical prophecy is indeed unique. There is nothing remotely like it either in non-Christian religions or in certain non-Christian cults. Many religious groups have set dates for the end of the world. Yet the world did not end. There are those non-Christian cults which have set dates for the return of Christ. Each and every time they, too, have failed. The biblical prophets have never failed!

2. It Was Written After The Events Had Occurred

This is a popular objection. The contention is that certain events occurred and then *after* they transpired, they were written down as predictions and not as the history which they truly were. Yet this argument against the Bible is not possible to sustain when one looks at the evidence.

Response: Jesus Made Predictions Fulfilled Long After His Lifetime

This particular objection is easy to refute. The Lord Jesus made a number of predictions which have been fulfilled since His ascension into heaven!

For example, the Lord predicted that the city of Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed for a second time. This occurred about 40 years after He gave this prediction.

He also predicted that the people would then be led away as captives to all nations. Likewise, this prediction has literally come to pass.

However, He also predicted that the people would return some day to their Promised Land. Remarkably, this occurred almost two thousand years after His prediction!

Humanly speaking, there is not any way which these could have come to pass; yet they did. The only way these can be logically explained is that a supernatural God is behind the predictions in Scripture.

There Are Many More Examples Of This

We give a number of illustrations of biblical predictions that were fulfilled, long after they were made, in our next book in this series: *God's Work in History: 50 Biblical Predictions Made and Fulfilled*.

3. They Are Not That Specific

Another objection is that the prophecies contained in the Bible are too vague. Supposedly they are so general and non-specific that anything that happened could be pointed to as their fulfillment. Thus, biblical prophecy would not prove anything.

Response: Scripture Is Very Specific

Again, this objection has no value. The Bible is very specific in its predictions. For example, there is a prediction that a king name Josiah will arise and will overthrow the idolatrous worship instituted by King Jereboam I. The Bible records it in this manner:

A man of God from Judah had come to Bethel. When he arrived, Jeroboam was standing at the altar to offer a sacrifice. By a command of the LORD, this man condemned the altar. "Altar, altar! This is what the LORD says: There will be a son born in David's family line. His name will be Josiah. Here on you Josiah will sacrifice the priests from the illegal worship sites who offer sacrifices on you. Human bones will be burned on you" (1 Kings 13:1,2 God's Word).

This was literally fulfilled hundreds of years later. We read about it in Second Kings. It says:

The king also tore down the altar at Bethel, the pagan shrine that Jeroboam son of Nebat had made when he led Israel into sin. Josiah crushed the stones to dust and burned the Asherah pole. Then as Josiah was looking around, he noticed several tombs in the side of the hill. He ordered that the bones be brought out, and he burned them on the altar at Bethel to desecrate it. This happened just as the LORD had promised through the man of God as Jeroboam stood beside the altar at the festival. Then Josiah turned and looked up at the tomb of the man of God who had predicted these things (2 Kings 23:15-16 NLT).

King Josiah fulfilled this prophecy in minute detail when he wiped out the idolatry that Jereboam instituted hundreds of years earlier.

4. There Was Deliberate Fulfillment

It is also alleged that the prophecies given in Scripture were contrived or deliberately fulfilled. Jesus is accused by some people of being part of some diabolical plot to deliberately fulfill certain well-known prophecies. He supposedly did this to make the people believe that He was the predicted Messiah.

There are two obvious problems with this view that Jesus deliberately fulfilled the predictions to deceive the people.

Response: This Is Not Possible In Many Instances

First, this idea would involve Jesus in a gigantic hoax. He would have had to contrive knowingly and willingly to fulfill these prophecies. If this were true, that would make Him a deceiver.

This, however, is contrary to everything that we know about Him—how He lived His life and what He taught to others. Indeed, there is no indication that Jesus ever lied about anything. Thus, this objection does not fit any of the facts that we know about the life and ministry of Jesus.

Second, many of the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled at His First Coming were beyond any human manipulation or fulfillment. For example, a person has no control over his time of birth, the city of his birth, the family to which he is born in, etc.

There were predictions in the Old Testament of where the Messiah would be born, to what family He would be born in, as well as the time in history which He would come upon the scene.

Jesus was born in the predicted city, in the predicted family line, and at the correct time in history. Thus, by the mere fact of His birth, Jesus fulfilled many prophecies that, humanly speaking, were beyond His control.

5. It Is Merely A Coincidence

It is sometimes argued that the prophecies fulfilled from Scripture are nothing but a matter of coincidence. In other words, these events predicted just “happened” to be fulfilled after they were predicted. Nothing divine, merely coincidence.

Response: Coincidence Cannot Be Used To Explain Bible Prophecy

Again, the facts speak otherwise. Coincidence is ruled out when one examines the specific nature of the numerous predictions; they could not be considered an educated guess. In fact, nobody would have been expecting any of them to occur.

All in all, the objections made against Bible prophecy do not stand. All the negative arguments have powerful responses.

Indeed, it takes more faith to believe in these objections than it does to believe the evidence of Scripture! Biblical prophecy gives clear testimony that an all-knowing, all-powerful God exists—the God of Scripture.

Summary To Question 25:

What Objections Have Unbelievers Made To Biblical Prophecy?

Predictive prophecy provides one of the strongest lines of evidence for the truthfulness of Scripture. This is obvious to all who have looked at the facts.

Those who do not accept that the Bible accurately predicts the future offer a number of objections to biblical prophecy. We can sum up the main ones as follows:

It is often alleged that others have done the same thing. In other words, predicting the future is not unique to the Bible. Yet, this is simply not true. There is nothing in the sacred books of other religions which have anything like Bible prophecy. Nothing.

There is also the charge that the prophecies are too vague. It is alleged that, they are so general in nature, they can mean anything one wants them to mean. Therefore, they are meaningless.

Yet again this is simply not true. Bible prophecies are specific in nature. Indeed, they can be falsified because they contain elements which can be proven to be either true or false.

Sometimes it is contended that the prophecies were written after the fact. Again, this is simply not true. The Old Testament was completed some four hundred years before the time of Christ. The prophecies He fulfilled were thus written long before He was born.

In addition, Jesus made a number of predictions which have been fulfilled since His time here upon the earth. It is not possible to argue that they were written “after the fact.”

Deliberate fulfillment of prophecy is also charged by some people. It is alleged that Jesus could have been part of some plot, some hoax, to deceive the people into believing He was the promised Messiah. This would account for these predictions being fulfilled.

The problems with this particular objection are many. However, two stand out.

First, this would make Jesus Christ a deliberate deceiver, a knowing liar. Everything about His life and ministry would be a lie. Yet everything we know about Him says just the opposite. There is no indication He lied about anything. Indeed, His message was that He always told the truth of God. Furthermore, many unbelievers reject the idea that Jesus lied about who He was, or why He was here upon the earth.

There is an even bigger problem. Specific predictions were given concerning the place of birth, family of birth, and time in history of the Messiah. He would be born in a certain city, at a certain time, to one particular family.

How could Jesus determine where He was going to be born, to whom He was going to be born, and when in history that He was going to be born? Humanly speaking, Christ could not. Yet by the fact of His birth, He fulfilled these predictions. How do we explain that?

There are those who attempt to say that all of this was merely a coincidence. This objection cannot be taken seriously. The Bible contains specific predictions by numerous authors written down hundreds of years before they were fulfilled. Coincidence? Hardly!

When all the evidence is considered for predictive prophecy, the verdict becomes clear. The biblical prophets were unique in their ability to predict numerous future events precisely and in great detail. There is no possible way that this could be attributed to coincidence, lucky guessing, or that they were written after the fact. The prophets demonstrated that it was God Himself who divinely inspired them and gave them prophetic insight into the future.

In sum, only an all-powerful, all-knowing God would be able to predict the future in such specific detail. This is the God of the Bible—the only God who exists!

Question 26

What Are Some Of The Dangers Involved In Studying Bible Prophecy As It Relates To The Future?

The study of Bible prophecy can be, and should be, very rewarding for everyone, in particular, when the study deals with events that are still to take place.

For the believer who wants to know what will occur in the future, a study of prophecy will encourage them on a number of levels. It will demonstrate the truthfulness of Scripture, as well as providing confidence that God is still in control of all events (we document this fully in our book *25 Signs We Are Near the End*).

For the unbeliever who is sincerely seeking the truth, the study of Bible prophecy, both past and present, will make it clear that the God of Scripture truly exists and that He is in charge of the future. They will learn why the God of Scripture should be trusted.

In other words, everyone can benefit from studying this subject.

There are, however, certain dangers that must be avoided when the subject of “last days” prophecies is addressed. Some of these dangers include the following.

1. People Often Replace The Gospel With Bible Prophecy

As we have emphasized, the study of Bible prophecy looks at predictions that have been made and fulfilled in the past, as well as what the Bible says about the future.

While it is an important subject to know and understand, what the Scripture says will take place in the future, it is not the gospel which believers are to proclaim.

The gospel, or good news, consists simply of this: Jesus Christ dying for our sins and then rising from the dead three days later. We must be careful to remember that this is the message we are to tell the world. Unfortunately, the gospel is replaced in some circles by speculation concerning events that are still to come. This is very wrong.

2. They Are Missing The Real Message: Jesus

Another thing we need to be careful of is that we don't miss the real message of predictive prophecy, Jesus Christ. The Apostle John wrote that the testimony of Jesus is the true spirit of prophecy. He put it this way:

I bowed at his feet to worship him. But he told me, “Don't do that! I am your coworker and a coworker of the Christians who hold on to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God, because the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy!” (Revelation 19.10 God's Word).

Bible prophecy is all about Jesus. Thus, when we study about coming events from a biblical perspective, we must do it in the light of Jesus Christ. If we forget to make Him central to our study, then we have missed the point.

3. People Make Their View Of Future Events A Test Of Fellowship

Sadly, there are those who make their own particular interpretation of future events as a test of fellowship with other believers. They see this issue as critical for Christians. Since they feel so strongly that their view of the

“last days” is the correct one, they will not even associate with other Christians who hold a different view of coming events.

Add to this, there are some prophecy specialists who call those who disagree with their views of the end times as “false prophets.” Indeed, they charge them with heresy and warn others to avoid them!

This is really a tragic way of dealing with this subject. The basis of our faith, and of our togetherness, is the Person of Jesus Christ—not on how we interpret a particular prophetic passage that remains to be fulfilled. We should disagree agreeably on these matters.

The truth is that sincere men and women of God can interpret the same prophetic passages differently. We should never make our view of future events as a test of whom we will associate with.

4. There Is Unwarranted Sensationalism On The Part Of Some

There has been a tendency on the part of certain people, especially some Bible teachers, to sensationalize biblical prophecy. When some major world event occurs, there always seems to be someone who steps forward and shows how it fits into God’s plan for the future. They see it as a sign of the imminent coming of Christ.

Of course, people eventually become disillusioned when Christ does not immediately appear as this Bible teacher claimed that He would.

Interestingly, this is nothing new. In the New Testament church at Thessalonica the people were so excited about certain prophetic events, that Paul actually had to write them a second letter to calm them down! He put it this way:

And now, brothers and sisters, let us tell you about the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ and how we will be gathered together to meet him. Please don’t be so easily shaken and troubled by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Even if they claim to have had a vision, a revelation, or a letter supposedly from us, don’t believe them (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 NLT).

The Thessalonians had to be calmed down. Evidently, they were getting some incorrect teaching about future events that caused them much concern.

Simon Peter put the matter in proper perspective. He wrote:

The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:7,8 NIV).

We are to be clear-minded and self-controlled when thinking and studying about end-times. This is the correct attitude which we should have. Peter also wrote:

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat (2 Peter 3:11,12 NIV).

Since all material things are going to burn, we should live our lives in a serious, sober way. This means we do not sensationalize every world event or try to make it fit into some prophetic scheme we have devised. Instead, we should live a balanced life.

5. It Is A Matter Of Curiosity Only

Another danger of studying prophecy is that it can become a matter of curiosity only. When the Apostle Paul went to Athens, he discovered a group of people who loved to discuss “some new thing.” Scripture puts it this way:

It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas (Acts 17:21 NLT).

Unfortunately, many individuals study the future only because they are curious about what is going to occur. It is not because they want to know God better, or are interested in His program for the human race.

Curiosity Is Not A Bad Thing

To be curious about the future is not a bad thing. We find that Jesus’ disciples were curious as to what would occur in the future. The Bible records them asking Him the following question:

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age (Matthew 24:3 NIV)

Jesus then answered their questions in great detail. He did not rebuke them for showing curiosity about the future.

We again find the disciples of Jesus showing their curiosity about the future. After His resurrection from the dead, but before He ascended into heaven, they asked Jesus a question about the coming kingdom. The Bible says:

Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6 NIV)

We find that Jesus did not rebuke them for asking about the future. Instead He gave them the following reply:

He [Jesus] replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:7,8 NLT).

He told them they did not need to know the answer to this particular question. However, He did not rebuke their curiosity. Therefore, to have a curiosity about the future is not wrong.

6. Some People Have The Wrong Priorities

There is the tendency in some individuals to have the wrong priorities when it comes to studying Bible prophecy. Some people study prophecy because it makes them proud.

Indeed, they have their prophecy charts and they can proudly tell anyone who asks them about the exact sequence of future events. However, knowing the minute details of future events does not mean one is more spiritual than a person who has not studied the matter in as much detail. Pride, or arrogance, is certainly not one of the desired results of studying prophetic issues.

In fact, we are told that the Lord hates pride above any other sin:

These six things the Lord hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue (Proverbs 6:16 NKJV).

Obviously, personal pride, or arrogance, should never be the result of our study of Scripture.

These are some of the dangers which are associated with the study of Bible prophecy as it relates to future events. We should all be aware of them and refrain from making the same mistakes that others have made.

Summary To Question 26:

What Are Some Of The Dangers Involved In Studying Bible Prophecy As It Relates To The future?

The subject of Bible prophecy, particularly when it speaks of the coming events, has a number of dangers which believers should be aware of.

For one thing, we should understand that Bible prophecy is not the gospel. Too often the first message believers proclaim is a prophetic message rather than the good news about Jesus Christ. We should never make the mistake of exchanging the gospel with future events.

Our main message is that Jesus Christ came into the world to die for our sins, that He rose from the dead, and that He offers eternal life to all who will trust in Him as Savior. Those who reject Him will have to spend eternity apart from God. This is the gospel message.

There also needs to be a balance when delving into prophetic issues. While Bible prophecy should be diligently studied, it should not be overemphasized. Too often this is the case. To some Christians, there is the constant interest on the sensational. Doing this misses the reason as to why this subject is revealed in Scripture.

Others only study the subject out of curiosity. This is also unfortunate. The events predicted in Scripture need to be taken seriously and then acted upon in a godly manner. God did not speak of future events merely to satisfy our curiosity. While curiosity is not condemned in Scripture, our curiosity about the future should lead us to live godlier, more productive lives.

To some, the knowledge of future events as the Bible unfolds them is a matter of pride. They proudly display their prophecy charts and boast about their knowledge of the future.

Again, this misses the entire point. Knowing these things should encourage us to godly living. Among the godly attributes we should seek to develop is that of humility. There is no place for pride.

Finally, there is the matter of holding to a particular prophetic position without much charity for others with different views. This is tragic. Even if we think that we are right about what will occur in the future we are wrong if we belittle the views of others. There is always the possibility that we are wrong on these issues!

These are the dangers which are common to believers. They should be avoided at all costs.

Question 27

Why Do Some People Avoid Prophetic Study?

While there are indeed dangers associated with the study of biblical prophecy, there is also the opposite problem among Bible-believers—lack of concern about the future events which are predicted in God’s Word.

There are several reasons as to why Christians avoid studying Bible prophecy. They can be listed as follows:

1. It Is Too Hard To Understand

Some people stay away from the study of prophecy because they believe that nothing about predicted events can be understood with any degree of certainty. Bible prophecy seems too hard to understand.

The symbols used in the Book of Daniel, as well as what we find in the Book of Revelation are confusing. Frustration sets in when they attempt to interpret what exactly is meant. Therefore, they give up. It’s just too difficult to understand.

However, while it does take some work to understand Bible prophecy, as it relates to the future, it is not that difficult to understand if a person merely puts in a little effort to do so. Indeed, the plan of God is remarkably clear. Consequently, nobody should neglect the study of the Word of God because it is too difficult.

2. It Is Viewed As Irrelevant For Daily Living

The events predicted in the Bible are seemingly irrelevant to the daily lives of some believers because they deal with events far into the future. These people are mainly concerned with living today. They cannot spend their time thinking and speculating about things which will never happen in their lifetime. Consequently, the study of Bible prophecy has no interest to them because it does not meet their immediate needs.

This is the wrong way to look at this subject. For one thing, we do not know that these events will take place at some distant time in the future. Indeed, the coming of Christ could be at any minute. If there ever was a subject which would be practical for daily living, it is the subject of biblical prophecy.

As we watch God’s plan unfold in front of our eyes we are reminded that He is faithful to His promises. This gives us an incentive to proclaim the good news about Jesus as well as live a holy life.

3. There Is A Fear Of The Future

One of the things which keep believers from studying the subject of Bible prophecy is an actual fear of the future. For whatever reason, thinking about the future is frightening for them—they do not want to know what will happen. Therefore, the subject of Bible prophecy is taboo.

This is tragic since Scripture speaks of the glorious future believers will have. In fact, Paul says we have a “blessed hope.” He wrote to Titus:

While we wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13 NIV).

We do indeed have a wonderful hope for the future. Believers should have this forefront in their minds.

Immediately before his death, the Apostle Paul wrote the following:

I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me-- the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return (2 Timothy 4:7,8 NLT).

This is a statement of victory! He was looking forward to seeing his Lord! Believers should never fear the future.

4. Many People Interpret Prophecy Allegorically

Part of the problem with why people avoid prophetic study has to do with their understanding about the nature of Bible prophecy. The subject of coming events is not an issue to a number of Christians because they believe that most, if not all, of the prophecies relating to the future will not be literally fulfilled.

They take the position that these predictions have already been fulfilled in the past, or will be fulfilled in a non-literal manner in the future. In other words, literal fulfillment of these biblical predictions in the future will never occur.

Indeed, a number of Christians do not interpret Bible prophecy in a normal or literal sense. Instead, they either spiritualize or allegorize the events which are predicted to occur in the future. This being the case, there is nothing really concrete, or objective, to look forward to if the unfulfilled prophecies are not going to be fulfilled in the literal manner in which the Bible states them. Therefore, the entire subject is neglected.

While there are many good Bible-believers who take this stance, we believe it is unfortunate. The predictions in Scripture which have already been fulfilled demonstrate that Bible prophecy is not to be taken allegorically.

Believers who do not think that these predictions will be literally fulfilled are missing out on the excitement of seeing the future unfold exactly as Scripture predicts. This is a real tragedy.

This sums up some of the main reasons as to why Christians avoid prophetic study.

Summary To Question 27: Why Do People Avoid Prophetic Study?

While many people go overboard in their study of Bible prophecy, there is also the opposite problem—indifference to the biblical predictions of coming events. There are a number of factors which lead to this type of indifference among Christians. They are as follows:

Many find the subject too difficult and much too confusing. All the symbolism in Daniel and Revelation seems overwhelming for some people. Frustration sets in and thus the topic of Bible prophecy is avoided.

This, however, should not stop people from studying the subject. While it does take some work to understand prophetic truth, the rewards from such a study are great. The difficulty of the topic should not stop anyone from investigating what Scripture says about the future.

Others see it as irrelevant. After all, it's been two thousand years since the last of these predictions were made. The events which are prophesied seem so far off and remote. It is, therefore, meaningless to their daily lives.

This objection is also without merit. The study of prophecy is one of the most relevant matters a person can study. Furthermore, who knows when these things will be fulfilled? Christ could return at any moment! We always need to be prepared. This is the biblical message.

There is also the fear factor. Some folks are fearful of the “things to come.” This keeps them from looking into what the Scripture has to say.

Yet God’s Word tells us not to be afraid. We can face the future without fear because we know the One who holds the future. Indeed, it is only those who know Jesus Christ that can face the future without genuine fear.

There also seems to be so many different prophetic options that genuine Christians hold. With good Bible-believing teachers differing on the subject, the layman may think that nothing can be known for certain about the future. If the experts cannot agree upon these things, what then should the layperson think?

While it is certainly true that good Christians disagree upon prophetic matters this does not mean that an answer cannot be found to these questions. God placed these predictions in His Word for a reason. These issues need to be studied.

Add to this, there are Christians who interpret Bible prophecy in an allegorical or spiritualized manner. This perspective, by definition, holds predictive prophecy to be somewhat irrelevant since most of the events will be fulfilled in some non-literal manner.

However, we do not think this is the best way to view the predictions which remain unfulfilled. Instead, we should view them as things which will literally occur in God’s timing. They are not to be ignored or spiritualized away. They will literally come to pass.

When people see Bible teachers setting dates about the future events which do not come to pass, they then become disenchanted with the subject. Excitement is built up, but then the person is let down.

This again should not stop anyone from studying Bible prophecy. Indeed, a simple study of Scripture will inform the believer that Christians should not be about setting dates with respect to coming events. We do not know when they will happen and we should not speculate.

These things have unfortunately caused many good Christians to avoid prophetic study. We trust that once believers understand the benefit of such a study, they will take the time to discover what the Bible has to say on these most important of matters. Indeed, the rewards for such a study are truly great.

Question 28

Should We Look For Astronomical Signs In The Heavens That Fulfill Bible Prophecy?

It has become popular today in some Christian circles to look for “signs in the heavens” for a fulfillment of specific predictions found in Scripture. Is this a correct way of interpreting the Bible? As we draw nearer to the coming of the Lord, are we to look for signs in the sky as a direct fulfillment of what Scripture predicts?

There Are End-Time Forecasts Of Signs In The Sky

The Bible does indeed speak of certain signs in the heavens occurring at the time of the end of this age. In fact, the Old Testament lists images that will occur at the time of the end.

The Old Testament

For example, we read in the Book of Joel that the sun will be darkened and the moon will turn to blood in the last days:

I will produce portents both in the sky and on the earth—blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sunlight will be turned to darkness and the moon to the color of blood, before the day of the Lord comes— that great and terrible day! (Joel 2:30-31 NET).

The Gospels

As we examine the gospels, we also find predictions of heavenly signs at the time of the coming of the Lord. Indeed, Jesus said the following would occur:

Immediately after the suffering of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man arriving on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:29-31 NET).

We read similar statements by Jesus in Mark 13:24–27 and in Luke 21:25-28.

Signs In The Sky Are Prophesied In The Book Of Revelation

We also find examples of predicted signs in the sky in the Book of Revelation. They include the following:

Stars Falling To The Earth And The Moon Turning Into Blood

Then I looked when the Lamb opened the sixth seal, and a huge earthquake took place; the sun became as black as sackcloth made of hair, and the full moon became blood red; and the stars in the sky fell to the earth like a fig tree dropping its unripe figs when shaken by a fierce wind (Revelation 6:12-13 NET).

Burning Fire From Heaven

Then the second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain of burning fire was thrown into the sea. . . . Then the third angel blew his trumpet, and a huge star burning like a torch fell from the sky; it landed on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water (Revelation 8:8, 10 NET).

Darkening Of The Sun, Moon, And Stars

Then the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. And there was no light for a third of the day and for a third of the night likewise darkening of the sun, moon, and stars (Revelation 8:12 NET).

A Great Sign In Heaven

Then a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet, and on her head was a crown of twelve stars (Revelation 12:1 NET).

Clearly Scripture predicts that those living upon the earth will see signs in the sky at the time of the end of this age. These that we have just mentioned are merely some of the predicted heavenly signs that the world will experience.

The Question Is, When Will They Occur?

From an examination of Scripture, there is no doubt whatsoever that heavenly signs will occur. However, this is not the question we are examining here.

It is not *whether* or not signs will appear, because they will. The issue that must be examined has to do with the *timing* of the signs. When, in God's program for time and eternity, should humans expect to see these signs in the sky? This is the real issue.

Mistakes have been made by those who believe that these heavenly signs will appear during the present age of the church. We will provide two illustrations.

Revelation 12 Was To Be Fulfilled On September 23, 2017

There were a number of people who predicted that the "great sign" mentioned in Revelation 12:1-6 would be fulfilled on a precise date: September 23, 2017. The text reads as follows:

Then a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet, and on her head was a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was screaming in labor pains, struggling to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: a huge red dragon that had seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadem crowns. Now the dragon's tail swept away a third of the stars in heaven and hurled them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. So the woman gave birth to a son, a male child, who is going to rule over all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was suddenly caught up to God and to his throne, and she fled into the wilderness where a place had been prepared for her by God, so she could be taken care of for 1,260 days (Revelation 12:1-6 NET).

Citing unique astronomical events that were to take place on September 23, 2017, it was claimed that Revelation 12:1-6 would be fulfilled on that very day!

Obviously, it did not take place. What, then, were some of the problems with this prediction?

Context, Context, Context

The problem of doing this, in the present age in which we live, is found in the context of Revelation 12.

Earlier, Scripture speaks of three “woes” that are to come upon the earth in the future:

As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: “Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!” (Revelation 8:13 NIV).

After the first woe was completed:

One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things (Revelation 9:12 NKJV).

There were still two “woes” to come.

Likewise, Scripture tells us that the second woe had also passed and the third woe was predicted to come soon thereafter:

The second woe has come and gone; the third is coming quickly (Revelation 11:14 NET).

The Context Of Revelation 12

We now move to the context of Revelation 12:1:

Then a great sign appeared in heaven (Revelation 12:1 NET).

The great sign in heaven appears *after* the aforementioned two woes have already taken place. In fact, it will come quickly after the second woe is completed.

Therefore, if we think about it logically, if the predicted first woe has not yet come to pass in our world, and neither has the second woe, then it is *not* possible that we are going to see the third woe before we see the other two!

Add to this Revelation 11, the second woe, tells us of the appearance of two witnesses who will arrive upon the earth and proclaim the message of Jesus Christ for three and one half years. After which, they will be put to death by the Final Antichrist who has, at that time, arrived on the scene.

Their bodies will lie unburied in the city of Jerusalem. Three and one half days later they will rise from the dead in full view of the entire world! After this, a great earthquake will take place in Jerusalem, destroying part of the city, and the Ark of Covenant will then be seen in heaven.

Do we really need to tell anyone that these events have not happened yet? However, Revelation 12:1-6, and its “great sign,” appears *after* all these things have taken place.

Indeed, if we look at the predicted events that are to take place before the “great sign” in Revelation 12, it will become obvious that none of them has yet occurred. Therefore, it is unbiblical to look for this sign before any of the other events take place.

We could also add to this that the heavenly phenomena associated with Revelation 12 occurs at an unknown time in the future. The date of September 23, 2017 was a time when a “known” astronomical phenomenon took place! In other words, the date could be determined ahead of time.

The So-Called Sign Of The Blood Moons

Another example of incorrectly claiming that “heavenly signs” would fulfill Bible prophecy can be found in the so-called “blood moons” that occurred in 2015.

Basically, this series of “blood moons” were supposed to have hailed the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. His Second Coming, or some other last days event, was supposed to coincide with these “blood moons,” or eclipses. They were given the name blood moons because of the reddish tinge that an eclipse would have on a heavenly object.

This fulfillment of Bible prophecy was supposed to occur during the Feasts of Passover and Tabernacles in 2015. Obviously, it too failed.

Problems Galore With The Idea Of Blood Moons

There were a host of problems concerning this theory of the blood moons. We will merely cite a few of them.

Problem 1: Matthew 24:29 Is At The *End* Of The Great Tribulation

One of the biggest problems was citing Matthew 24:29 to coincide with the coming celestial phenomena:

Immediately after the suffering of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken (Matthew 24:29 NET).

This moon turning into blood marks the *end* of the Great Tribulation period. At that time, the Lord will return to earth. This is a seven-year period, also known as the “time of Jacob’s trouble” or the “seventieth week of Daniel.” The problem with claiming the blood moons to be a sign of the end is that this seven-year period has not yet begun!

Problem 2: Nobody Knows The Day Or The Hour

A second problem is that these blood moons were to arrive at a certain date. However, Jesus said nobody knows the day or the hour of his return:

But as for that day and hour no one knows it—not even the angels in heaven—except the Father alone (Matthew 24:36 NET)

Yet, these so called “blood moons” were an astronomical phenomenon that took place on a known date. What kind of sign takes place at a time when everyone is expecting it to happen?

Problem 3: The Moon Turning Into Blood Happens With Other Heavenly Phenomena

Furthermore, according to Matthew 24:29, as well as what we read in the Book of Joel, Joel 2:30-31, the moon becoming blood takes place at the same time that the sun is darkened, and stars fall from the sky!

Problem 4: There Is Only One Blood Moon

Finally, the moon only turns into blood once! Biblically, there is no such thing as blood moons. There is only one time that the moon will turn blood-like: not *many* times!

These are just a few of the many problems that are associated with the attempt to make “blood moons” as a sign of the end.

The Context Of These Heavenly Signs Is The Time of the End

The main problem with any prediction about heavenly phenomena being a biblical sign, is a misunderstanding of the timing of these prophesied events.

Indeed, these events take place during the last seven years before the Lord returns. The period known as the “70th week of Daniel,” the “time of Jacob’s trouble,” or the “Great Tribulation,” begins with a certain covenant, or agreement, made by the coming Antichrist with the nation of Israel:

He will confirm a covenant with many for one week. But in the middle of that week he will bring sacrifices and offerings to a halt. On the wing of abominations will come one who destroys, until the decreed end is poured out on the one who destroys” (Daniel 9:27 NET).

Since this has not happened yet, none of the heavenly phenomena attributed to that period, could not, by definition, have happened yet!

Therefore, we can conclude that all future predictions about specific signs in the sky will be incorrect. By definition, they cannot occur until this final seven year period begins.

Consequently, in our present age, we should not be looking for signs in the sky in fulfillment of Bible prophecy.

Two Things We Must Always Remember

To sum up, there are two important things that we must always remember in interpreting Bible prophecy. First, we are not to go “beyond that which is written.” Paul wrote:

Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying: “Nothing beyond what is written.” (1 Corinthians 4:6 CSB).

In the Scriptures, God has revealed everything that is necessary for us to know about Him and His plan for time and eternity. Jude wrote:

But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people (Jude 3 NLT).

The faith has been once and for all delivered. Therefore, we derive our information from the Bible and from it alone. We do not go elsewhere to discover what will happen in the future.

Second, we are to read the Bible at face-value. In other words we do not have to read between the lines to find hidden messages. Paul wrote:

Our letters have been straightforward, and there is nothing written between the lines and nothing you can’t understand (2 Corinthians 1:13 NLT)

The Amplified Bible puts it this way:

For we write you nothing other than what you read and understand [there is no double meaning in what we say]. And I hope you will [accurately] understand [divine things] until the end (2 Corinthians 1:13 Amplified Bible)

To sum up, we go to the Bible alone for our information about the future and in doing so we read the Scriptures in a straightforward manner. There are no hidden messages or any double meanings in the text.

Summary To Question 28:

Should We Look For Astronomical Signs In The Heavens That Fulfill Bible Prophecy?

Today, should the human race look for signs in the heavens in fulfillment of predictions found in the Bible? Many people believe that we should indeed expect to see such predicted signs. In fact, they point to Scripture and its predictions of heavenly signs at the time of the end.

However, as we have just demonstrated from Scripture, it is fruitless for anyone to do this until certain events have taken place here upon the earth. Since these prophesied events have not happened yet, it is not possible for any of these supernatural signs in the heavens to appear as of yet.

Consequently, all previous attempts, as well as all future attempts, to claim astronomical events will fulfill Bible prophecy are doomed to failure.

Question 29

Is It Biblically Possible To Set Dates For The Return Of Christ?

Since the time Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, there have been sincere Christians who have set dates for His return—all of them have been wrong in their calculations! Sadly, the predictions by those who claim to “know” when certain predicted biblical events will take place continues to this day.

Indeed, almost every year we find people making headlines by telling us they know the exact year, or even the precise day, when these events, prophesied long ago in Scripture, will literally take place. But, as we have emphasized, they have all been wrong!

Mistake After Mistake

In fact, there was a certain Christian radio broadcaster in 1971 who did a series of broadcasts as to why he believed that Christ was coming back in that very year. During the commercial break, however, he was promoting his Israel trip in 1972!

There was also the infamous book *88 Reasons Why Christ is Returning in 1988*. It goes without saying that this book has not been reprinted!

Not only have people attempted to tell us the precise year that the Lord would return, others have predicted the exact day that this would happen. Harold Camping of *Family Radio* predicted the rapture of the church to happen May 21, 2011. Many people believed him.

Yet, as he had previously predicted that 1994 would be the “year” that Christ would return, he was also incorrect in his prediction of the precise day.

The list of unfulfilled predictions goes on and on.

Can Anyone Know The Day Or The Year?

This brings up an obvious question: Can we, or should we, attempt to set dates for future events such as the rapture of the church and the return of Jesus Christ to the earth? Is it even biblically possible to do this?

We Should Pay Attention To The Words of Jesus

With respect to biblical predictions not yet fulfilled, we are clearly told by Jesus Himself that date setting is not possible. He said:

No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father (Matthew 24:36 NIV).

Based upon the words of Jesus, we should ask the date-setters to answer this question: What part of “no one knows” do you not understand? If the Lord Jesus said, nobody knows, then the matter is settled, nobody knows. End of story.

Yet, there are those who tell us that nobody knew during Jesus’ time when He would return but we can now know either the year or the day. The problem with this idea is that Jesus did not limit the time when nobody would know the time of His return. In other words, nobody knew then and nobody can know now.

This being the case, none of us should attempt to set dates for the fulfillment of particular Bible prophecies. If we do so, we contradict the specific words of the Lord Jesus!

Do Not Say Christ Is Coming Back Soon!

Finally, we should never claim that Christ is returning soon! There are a couple of reasons why this is so. They are as follows:

First, we do not know when He is coming back to the earth. While the signs are obviously setting the stage for His return this does not mean that it will happen in our lifetime. There is nothing in Scripture that compels the Lord to return in any particular time frame.

In other words, He has not limited Himself as to the time of His return. What He does tell us is that we do NOT know when He is coming!

There is also the problem of what someone means by “soon.” Is it days, weeks, months, years? Sadly, when many hear that Christ is coming back soon they assume it will be a matter of days or months. While that may not be the intention of the person who makes the claim, there will be people who interpret it in this way.

There is something else to consider. This type of behavior of date setting, or saying the Lord will return soon, causes the unbelievers to mock Christians and their faith in the Bible. Indeed, it gives the wrong impression that the Bible somehow is incorrect. Supposedly Scripture gives an incorrect prediction of the return of the Lord when it does no such thing.

In sum, these types of predictions and statements should never be made! Never!!

Summary To Question 29

Is It Biblically Possible To Set Dates For The Return of Christ?

It seems that hardly a year goes by without someone claiming to know either the year that Christ will return, or the exact day that it will take place. This all-too-familiar story is tragic.

Basically, all it does is cause unbelievers to scoff at Christians as well as cause certain Christians who had believed these predictions to lose faith in the Lord.

Nothing like this should ever happen. Jesus Himself said nobody knows the day or hour of His return. That should settle the matter.

Unhappily, there are those who think they know more than Jesus and thus, try to tell us, that nobody knew *then* when He would return, but *they* know *now*!

Consequently, there is a long list of people who have not listened to the warnings of Christ and have miscalculated the date of His return.

Unfortunately, these types of false predictions will continue until the Lord returns.

Question 30

What Confidence Can We Have That The Remaining Unfulfilled Biblical Predictions Will Be Fulfilled?

There are a number of predictions which are contained in the Bible that have yet to be fulfilled. Can we be confident that these various prophecies will come to pass at some time in the future? The answer is a resounding, “Yes!”

Many Past Predictions Have Already Been Fulfilled

As we have noted, there are many predictions in Scripture that have already been fulfilled. In fact, the second volume in our series *God's Work in History: 50 Biblical Predictions Made and Fulfilled* documents 50 major prophecies which have already been literally fulfilled in the past.

We must stress that the 50 predictions documented is, by no means, exhaustive. Indeed, many of the prophecies that we document have a number of specific points that go along with them.

For example, when we documented what the Scripture said about the destruction of Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire, we found 14 specific things fulfilled in the prediction.

With respect to the prediction of the rise and decree of the Persian King Cyrus, we found six specific predictions about him and his life literally fulfilled. This list goes on and on.

Therefore, easily, we have over 100 specific predictions in the Bible about the future that has been literally fulfilled.

We concluded from that evidence that there is a God who knows the future, who is in control of the future, and has told us certain things about the future that have already come to pass.

We can add further evidence for the reliability of Scripture, and that these future predictions will, indeed, come to pass, from our series *Ancient Mysteries of the Bible Solved*. In this series, we document the historical accuracy of the Bible as we discover that certain “mysteries” have now been solved. This includes what happened at Jericho during the time of Joshua, the existence of David and Solomon and the extent of their kingdoms, the evidence that the prophets Daniel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah lived during the time of the Bible places them in history, and more.

These examples not only testify to the accuracy of Scripture with respect to the events of the past, they also demonstrate that the God of the Bible exists, and that He has accurately predicted the future!

Ancient Mysteries of the Bible Solved, emphasizes that, if Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel lived at the time when the Scriptures said they lived, then there is irrefutable evidence that the God of the Bible exists.

Why? It is because each of the prophets predicted a number of specific events that took place long after they lived. And, as we documented, these predictions were literally fulfilled.

The fact that many predictions have already been fulfilled in the past, as well as the historical record of Scripture being verified by the science of archaeology, gives us confidence that the remaining predictions will indeed be fulfilled. But there is still further evidence.

The Miraculous Fulfillment Of Prophecies Of The End Times

As we look at the various predictions which the Scripture makes about the future, we can put together an outline of what we would expect the world to be like at the time of the end. Miraculously, this is precisely what we see today!

In our third book of this series *25 Signs We Are Near the End*, we document the various predictions which the Bible says will characterize the time of the end, as well as the specific fulfillment of them. Again, we find amazing fulfillments of the biblical predictions as to what the world will look like in the “last days.”

In sum, from the evidence of past predictions fulfilled, from the testimony of archaeology that the biblical characters lived when the Bible said they did, and with the current signs we see in the world fitting perfectly with the predictions of the time of the end, we can be completely confident that everything that has been predicted about coming events will certainly be fulfilled in God’s timing.

Question 31

Living In Light Of The Last Days: Lessons To Be Learned

How should we conduct our lives in light of the times in which we are living? What does the Lord expect from us?

In other words, what practical steps should believers take as the coming of the Lord draws near? What lessons should we learn from our study of Bible prophecy?

There are, indeed, many lessons that we can learn about how to live successfully in light of these last days. They include the following:

Lesson 1: We Can Understand The Times In Which We Are Living!

This first lesson is primary! The Bible itself emphasizes that we *can* know, and we *can* understand the times in which we are living. Therefore, we should take the time to understand precisely where we are in God's prophetic timetable. We read about this promise in the Book of Daniel:

But you, Daniel, close up these words and seal the book until the time of the end. Many will dash about, and knowledge will increase (Daniel 12:4 NET).

The New Living Translation puts it this way:

But you, Daniel, keep this prophecy a secret; seal up the book until the time of the end, when many will rush here and there, and knowledge will increase (Daniel 12:4 NLT).

This passage should be highly instructive for us. Daniel was told to “seal up the book *until* the time of the end.” Though many people would attempt to understand the meaning of these things which were predicted, they would not be able to.

Indeed, the prophet was told that it would only be “at the time of the end” that believers will understand what is taking place with respect to the events of the “last days.” This is because “knowledge shall increase.”

Specifically, it is talking about knowledge of Bible prophecy which includes the predictions contained in the Book of Daniel.

Therefore, those who would live at the time of the end would be in a unique position to make sense out of what was going on in the world.

The Question From The Heavenly Being

Furthermore, in this context, there was also a question from one heavenly being to another heavenly being about the things that Daniel was told:

One said to the man clothed in linen who was above the waters of the river, “When will the end of these wondrous events occur?” (Daniel 12:6 NET).

In this instance, we find that one of these heavenly beings was ignorant as to when these predicted events would take place, so he had to ask another one of the heavenly beings about the timing. The point is this: this heavenly being wanted to know what the Lord had in store for the future and we should want to know, too.

Daniel Did Not Know

Daniel himself admitted that he did not understand the things he was hearing:

I heard, but I did not understand. So I said, “Sir, what will happen after these things?” (Daniel 12:8 NET)

This is profound. To put this into perspective, let us precisely recall the ministry of Daniel the prophet.

This man was given more prophetic insight into the future than any other man who has ever lived, with the possible exception of John in the Book of Revelation.

For example, Daniel interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (Chapter 2) which told of four successive Gentile kingdoms coming to the earth, to eventually be replaced by the fifth kingdom, the kingdom of God.

Daniel also received his own vision of these kingdoms in (Chapter 7) with further information given about each of them, particularly the last one.

In the Ninth Chapter, Daniel was given specific information on the exact time of the Messiah’s First Coming to the world.

These are just some of the many predictions that Daniel recorded in his book.

Daniel Would Not Be Able To Understand

Yet, Daniel was told that he would *not* be able to understand the meaning of these predicted future events:

He said, “Go, Daniel. For these matters are closed and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made clean, and refined, but the wicked will go on being wicked. None of the wicked will understand, though the wise will understand (Daniel 12:9-10 NET).

The New Living Translation puts it this way:

But he said, “Go now, Daniel, for what I have said is kept secret and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, cleansed, and refined by these trials. But the wicked will continue in their wickedness, and none of them will understand. Only those who are wise will know what it means (Daniel 12:9-10 NLT).

It would only be those living at the time of the end that would understand what was taking place.

We should pay close attention to what is said here—it is again emphasized that these truths about the last days are closed up and sealed “until” the time of the end! At that time, the “wise will understand” what is taking place, but the wicked will never understand.

In other words, at the time of the end, the wise—those who take the Bible seriously—will understand the significance of many of the major world events. These particular events that we read about, the things that we see happening, will all make sense in light of what the Scripture has to say about the “last days.”

Consequently, the lesson for us is this: We can understand the times in which we are living *if* we take seriously what the Bible has to say about this subject.

Lesson 2: We Should Be Thankful and Humbled By The Privilege Of Living In These Times

This brings us to another lesson—we should truly appreciate the fact that we are living at the time of the end of this present age!

The Testimony Of Jesus

Jesus' words to His disciples should inspire us. He testified that what they saw and heard fulfilled the desire of all of those who came before them:

But your eyes are blessed because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it (Matthew 13:16-17 NET).

Therefore, the generation that heard the words of Jesus, and saw the miraculous things which He did, was a special generation. Indeed, there has been none other like it, either before or since.

In the same way, since the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven some two thousand years ago, each generation has been longing to see the signs of the “last days,” but has not seen them.

The fact that they are happening today, right in front of our very eyes, should cause us to be thankful, as well as humbled.

As with the disciples of Jesus, we are seeing things that no previous generation was allowed to see or experience. Therefore, the second lesson that we should learn as we study the subject of Bible prophecy and begin to understand the times in which we are living, is that we should appreciate the honor and privilege that all of us have in living at this time in history.

Indeed, we are seeing the sorts of things that people in the last two thousand years have longed to see but did not see, and we are hearing things that these individuals have longed to hear but did not hear.

Consequently, we should be both thankful, as well as humbled, for the privilege of living in these last days.

Lesson 3: We Should Interpret The Prophetic Passages At Face Value

At His First Coming, the Lord expected the people to understand the words of the Hebrew Scriptures as well as His words, at face value, or literally. We read about this in a conversation Jesus had with the religious rulers:

Now when the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus, they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He said, “When evening comes you say, ‘It will be fair weather, because the sky is red,’ and in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, because the sky is red and darkening.’ You know how to judge correctly the appearance of the sky, but you cannot evaluate the signs of the times (Matthew 16:1-4 NET).

The signs were there for everyone to see. Jesus fulfilled them precisely as they were written. Everything that was predicted about His coming was fulfilled and it was fulfilled literally.

Consequently, there was no excuse for ignoring these signs. However, the people of Jesus' day missed the “signs of the times.”

In fact, as Jesus was entering Jerusalem during the last week of His life, He wept over the city for not understanding the events that were taking place:

Now when Jesus approached and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you had only known on this day, even you, the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes (Luke 19:41 NET).

Since the people did not pay attention to the clear teaching of Scripture, with respect to the fulfillment of the events that were transpiring right in front of their eyes, these truths would now be hidden from them. Instead of the blessings they could have received, judgment would be coming!

The Basic Rule Of Bible Interpretation

This brings us to a very simple rule of Bible interpretation:

If the literal sense, makes good sense, then seek no other sense, lest you come up with nonsense.

In other words, if we can interpret a passage in Scripture in the normal, literal sense, then we should do so.

Indeed, when a person examines the Bible and interprets what is written, including predictions about the future, in their normal, literal sense, then they will appreciate the fact that the God of the Bible, and He alone, has accurately predicted hundreds of events that have already taken place.

Therefore, the lesson here is that the Lord means what He says and says what He means!

There Is Nothing Hidden Between The Lines

Furthermore, when we are to read the Bible, we are to read it at face-value. In other words we do not have to read between the lines to find hidden messages. Paul wrote:

Our letters have been straightforward, and there is nothing written between the lines and nothing you can't understand (2 Corinthians 1:13 NLT)

The Amplified Bible puts it this way:

For we write you nothing other than what you read and understand [there is no double meaning in what we say]. And I hope you will [accurately] understand [divine things] until the end (2 Corinthians 1:13 Amplified Bible)

To sum up, we go to the Bible for our information about what the Lord has to tell us. In doing so, we read the Scriptures in a straightforward manner. There are no hidden messages or any double meanings in the text.

Consequently, if the past predictions have been fulfilled exactly as they were written, then we have every reason to believe that those predictions that are yet to be fulfilled, will, likewise, be done so in a literal manner.

Lesson 4: We Are Not To Go Beyond That Which Is Written

This next lesson is especially important: Paul wrote the following to the Corinthians:

I have applied these things to myself and Apollos because of you, brothers and sisters, so that through us you may learn “not to go beyond what is written,” so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of the one against the other (1 Corinthians 4:6 NET).

It is so crucial that we understand this truth. So many foolish and ridiculous claims are made about the Bible and the “last days.” This happens because people go beyond that which is written.

In other words, they look outside of Scripture to find examples of the fulfillment of prophetic events, including so-called “signs in the heavens,” or they make “mathematical calculations” that supposedly tell us specific truths about the exact time of the coming of the Lord.

In doing so, they are basically saying that the Bible, the Word of God, is not enough. In other words, we need these outside signs or calculations to tell us when the Lord will appear again.

This is dangerous because such an idea contradicts an important biblical concept—the doctrine of the “sufficiency of Scripture.”

Explaining The Doctrine Of The Sufficiency Of Scripture

The sufficiency of Scripture can be simply defined as follows: In the Bible *alone*, God has given humanity all things that are necessary for the proper understanding of who He is, who we are, how He has acted in the past, what exactly He expects from us, as well as all we need to know about coming events.

The basic idea behind the sufficiency of Scripture is that nothing else needs to be revealed to humanity about God, or His plan for the human race. The Bible is the record of all of the things that God believed humanity needed to know about Him.

In other words, the Scriptures are complete and sufficient for belief and behavior. Nothing needs to be added to them!

The following points need to be made about the sufficiency of Scripture, in particular, with respect to predictions in the Bible about the time of the end.

1. Scripture Alone Has The Answers To Life’s Most Important Questions

The Bible contains the things which God thought that we humans should know on a number of different topics of His choosing. Consequently, His teaching on *any* subject is sufficient for us.

Indeed, we do *not* have to go elsewhere to find answers. In fact, the Scripture says the faith has been once-and-for-all entrusted to believers. Jude wrote:

Dear friends, although I have been eager to write to you about our common salvation, I now feel compelled instead to write to encourage you to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints (Jude 3 NET).

Therefore, people are able to search the Bible for themselves and find out these important truths about God in its pages, and in them alone. His Word is enough.

To the point, the Scriptures provide us with everything that we need to know about the central questions of life: past, present, and future. It is where we go to find the answers.

2. Everything That We Need To Know About God Has Already Been Revealed To Us

While the Scriptures contain everything humanity needs to know about God, it does not reveal everything that we may desire to know. The truth that God has revealed is sufficient, but it is certainly not exhaustive. There are many things that God has not told us. Moses wrote:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law (Deuteronomy 29:29 NIV).

Therefore, many things about God are still unknown to humanity. In fact, there are countless questions that we will not be able to have answers to in this life.

Consequently, when we are attempting to understand Scripture; and, in particular, events relating to the “last days,” we must understand our limitations.

Indeed, there are things that the Lord has not seen fit to reveal. We must accept this. We are not to try to add to that which has already been revealed.

3. We Do Not Need Some Religious Authority Or Prophecy Specialist To Interpret Scripture For Us

Sometimes it is argued that the Scriptures are not clear in-and-of-themselves. Thus, believers need some type of external authority to properly interpret and understand its teaching. This may come from some church, a creed, or the teaching of some church leader.

However, the facts say otherwise. The Bible is able to be understood by the great majority of the people. Hence, every believer should study the Scriptures for themselves.

In fact, nowhere do we find the Scripture telling believers that they should only listen to some special spiritual leader to know the truth.

This is especially true when it comes to end-times issues. We do not need some individual, or some prophecy specialist, to give us “the true explanation” of things that the Scripture has not revealed. The Bible is a sufficient source.

4. The Lord Would Not Give Humanity A Confused Revelation About Any Subject It Covers

There is something else. It is unreasonable to say, as some have done, that God would give humanity a revelation of Himself that could not be understood by the masses.

To the contrary, the Bible is written in such a way that people in every age are able to understand it. Jesus made this point clear when He compared the nature of human fathers to that of our heavenly Father:

You fathers—if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him (Luke 11:11-13 NLT).

He does indeed give us good gifts. Hence, our heavenly Father would not give us a confusing revelation about Himself that we could not understand.

Therefore, the lesson to be learned here is that the Bible itself is a sufficient source for human beings for everything that we need to know about events that will take place in the future. Only the Bible reveals what will occur—we do not need to “go beyond that which is written.”

Consequently, nothing needs to be added to Scripture for us to understand the times in which we are living. (We deal with this issue about the “sufficiency of Scripture” in much more detail in our book *What Everyone Needs to Know About the Bible*.)

Lesson 5: We Should Be Teachable About Prophetic Issues

As we wait for the coming of the Lord, and we study the Scriptures about the events surrounding His return, all of us need to be teachable.

In fact, Paul wrote about the qualifications of those in leadership in the church. They must be. . . “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2).

My good friend and world class Greek scholar, David Black, emphasizes that the word translated here “able to teach” can also mean “teachable.”

This applies to every believer in Jesus Christ. None of us “have arrived.” In other words, each of us should be teachable with respect to that which the Lord has revealed concerning the things to come.

May the Lord help each and every one of us learn the lesson to be teachable when it comes to understanding the truths of the biblical predictions of the “last days,” as well as how we should live in light of these truths.

Lesson 6: We Are To Be Watchful And Ready For His coming

Once we begin to understand the times in which we are living, we are to be watchful for the things that are to come. Being watchful means to be ready—to be alert. Jesus said:

Therefore stay alert, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have been alert and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him (Matthew 24:42-44 NET).

This is another lesson that needs to be emphasized, especially in our day and age. We are to pay attention to the signs that we see with respect to the coming of the Lord.

Again, no believer should be ignorant about these things.

Lesson 7: We Are To Wait Patiently For His Coming

This logically brings us to our next point. While we are to be watchful, and always alert, we are also to be patient.

Undoubtedly, this is particularly problematic in light of the conditions of the world in which we live. James wrote about the need for such patience in light of the present circumstances:

Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord’s return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near (James 5:7-8 NLT).

We should indeed “take courage.”

In fact, when we look at the events around us, we sometimes feel like the martyrs that cry out in the Book of Revelation:

They shouted to the Lord and said, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?” (Revelation 6:10 NLT).

How long indeed!

The lesson to learn is to be patient. God's program is right on schedule.

Lesson 8: We Should Resist Doubting and Disillusionment As We Wait For His Return

One particular lesson that we must learn is not to doubt that the Lord is truly returning. Jesus warned about this problem:

But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk (Luke 12:45 NIV).

Unhappily, too many people in our day have been caught up in doubt and disillusionment about the return of the Lord.

However, we must recognize that this is not something new. Indeed, Peter wrote about the doubters and scoffers in his day:

Dear friends, this is already the second letter I have written you, in which I am trying to stir up your pure mind by way of reminder: I want you to recall both the predictions foretold by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles. Above all, understand this: In the last days blatant scoffers will come, being propelled by their own evil urges and saying, "Where is his promised return? For ever since our ancestors died, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:1-4 NET).

The scoffers ridiculed believers in the first century for trusting in the promises given in the Word of God about the return of the Lord.

This is all the truer today. Especially when so-called "Bible experts" make predictions about the precise time of the coming of the Lord; and, of course, their predictions turn out to be untrue.

Since the predictions of these date-setters always turn out to be wrong, this causes some people to make a tragic mistake—they reject all biblical prophecy.

Unhappily, some people have gone so far as to list an exact date when Christ will return. They claim to have calculated the precise moment that He will come back to the earth. These claims have led many people astray, as well as disillusioned others.

And, of course, the scoffers are there to continually remind us of these mistaken predictions by "Bible experts."

The lesson to be learned is that we should not allow false claims by certain "biblical authorities" to cause us to be disillusioned about the return of the Lord. Neither should we be bothered by the continual reminders from scoffers that the Lord has not yet returned as He promised some two thousand years ago.

Indeed, the Lord is coming back to our world and He is returning on His schedule. May this particular lesson sink deep into our hearts!

Lesson 9: We Are To Encourage One Another As The Time Draws Near

Believers should be encouraging one another as the time of the Lord's coming approaches. In fact, the Bible commands us to do just that:

And let us take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works, not abandoning our own meetings, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and even more so because you see the day drawing near (Hebrews 10:24-25 NET).

This is another timely truth. Discouragement can easily set in as we look at the world around us and the spiritual battles that we are facing.

In fact, as we get closer to the time the Lord will return, the battle will be more difficult than ever.

Consequently, each one of us should learn the lesson to be an encourager to one another.

Lesson 10: We Are Not To Be Conformed To This World System In These Last Days

If we are to stand out as a witness to this world, especially in these difficult times, then we should not be conformed to this ungodly world system in which we live. Paul wrote:

Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God - what is good and well-pleasing and perfect (Romans 12:1-2 NET).

Indeed, in our present environment, the temptation to compromise and to be conformed to this evil world system, is like never before. We must resist this temptation. We have been made for a purpose: to glorify the Lord in all that we do. The Lord has said:

For I will honor those who honor me (1 Samuel 2:30 NET).

We Have Nowhere Else To Go

In fact, the answer of Simon Peter to the question of Jesus is appropriate here. We are told that many people walked away from Jesus when He taught some difficult things. The Lord then asked His disciples if they were going to leave also. Peter gave this answer:

Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God (John 6:68,69 NLT).

Where indeed? This evil world system has nothing for those who believe in Jesus Christ, lest we forget.

Lesson 11: We Are To Work For The Lord As We Wait For His Coming

The time of waiting is a time of working. In other words, we should not sit idly by as the time of the Lord approaches. Jesus made this clear:

We must perform the deeds of the one who sent me as long as it is daytime. Night is coming when no one can work (John 9:4 NET).

We must work before the night comes. Paul wrote about this to the Thessalonians:

So then we must not sleep as the rest, but must stay alert and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But since we are of the day, we must stay sober by putting on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet our hope for salvation. For God did not destine us for wrath but for gaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that whether we are alert

or asleep we will come to life together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, just as you are in fact doing (1 Thessalonians 5:6-11 NET).

Every believer needs to be busy in the work of the Lord.

We Are To Be Faithful To Our Calling

Consequently, as we are living in the light of the coming of the Lord, each of us has a calling, a responsibility, that we are to live up to. Paul wrote:

Now what is sought in stewards is that one be found faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2 NET).

The New Living Translation puts it this way:

Now, a person who is put in charge as a manager must be faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2 NLT).

No matter the circumstances, we are to “stay the course.” We are not to forget the calling that we each have. In other words, as we look for His coming, we are to fulfill the calling that the Lord has given to us.

The lesson is clear: the time of waiting is a time of working!

Lesson 12: We Are To Live With Eternal Values In View

Since we are living in the light of eternity, we must live with eternal values in view. Paul wrote about this to the Philippians:

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us (Philippians 3:12-14 NET).

Like a runner with their eyes upon the finish line, we are to be constantly moving toward that goal as we press on toward eternity. Each day that we live is one day closer to His Coming.

We all need to live in the light of eternity with the values of eternity constantly on our mind. This is another important lesson to learn.

Lesson 13: We Are To Be Constantly Looking For His Appearing!

Interestingly, in the last section of the last letter that the Apostle Paul wrote before his impending death, he emphasized to Timothy about the necessity for believers to be looking for the return of the Lord:

For I am already being poured out as an offering, and the time for me to depart is at hand. I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith! Finally the crown of righteousness is reserved for me. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will award it to me in that day—and not to me only, but also to all who have set their affection on his appearing (2 Timothy 4:6-8 NET).

When someone writes a letter, knowing that they are soon to die, it would be fair to call it a “dying declaration.”

Hence, they will obviously emphasize the things they believe are the most important since this is the last thing that they will ever write.

Therefore, it is telling that Paul wrote this at the end of his last letter.

His point: the coming of the Lord should be something that is constantly on our mind. In fact, Paul says that we are to “love” His appearing—to “set our affection” on His coming back to the earth.

Therefore, each of us needs to ask ourselves these questions: Have I set my affection on the coming of Christ? Is this something that is forefront in my mind?

According to Scripture, it should be.

Lesson 14: We Are To Remember That Our Message To The World Is The First Coming Of Christ

Finally, and most important of all, the message that Christians are to take to the world is not the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to the earth but rather His First Coming to our world! We cannot emphasize this enough.

While we are living at the time of the end, and we see the signs that are pointing to the coming of the Lord, we should always remember that our message is the same one which Jesus told us to bring to a lost world. Paul wrote about this:

The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. As the Scriptures say, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.” So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world’s brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it’s all nonsense (1 Corinthians 1:18-23 NLT).

The gospel of Jesus Christ, His death on the cross, His resurrection from the dead, and His offer of forgiveness of sins, remains our message to this lost and dying world. We should never stray from proclaiming these truths first and foremost.

Therefore, when we talk about the subject of Bible prophecy it should always be centered around the Person of Jesus and what He has already accomplished for us. As John wrote in the Book of Revelation:

The testimony about Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Revelation 19:10 NET)

In conclusion, these are some of the lessons that we should learn as we study the subject of Bible prophecy; and, in particular, the things concerning the last days. May we always keep them in the forefront of our minds as we seek to serve and follow Him in this very exciting time in which we are living.

Appendix 1

Unlocking the Prophetic Key, A Lesson From Daniel: God's Way Of Interpreting Bible Prophecy

Daniel 9:1–2 stands as the prime example of an Old Testament prophet interpreting another Old Testament prophet. The significance of this passage should not be lost on Bible students.

In fact, these first two verses in the ninth chapter of Daniel introduce a number of implications for Bible believers in terms of how we should interpret Scripture, especially last days Bible prophecy:

In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus, who was of Median descent and who had been appointed king over the Babylonian empire—in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, came to understand from the sacred books that, according to the word of the LORD disclosed to the prophet Jeremiah, the years for the fulfilling of the desolation of Jerusalem were seventy in number (Daniel 9:1-2 NET).

This recognition of the importance of Daniel 9:1–2 cannot be overstated. In fact, Daniel's divinely inspired interpretation logically establishes for us a divine standard for the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy.

In other words, this passage will show us how Scripture interprets Scripture.

Question: How Did Daniel Understand Jeremiah's 70 years?

The main issue is Daniel's interpretation of Jeremiah's "seventy years." How did the prophet understand the nature of these seventy years, and in what sense were these seventy years significant to Daniel and his purpose?

This is the issue before us.

Our Conclusions That We Will Make

Well, when we examine the totality of the evidence, we will make a number of conclusions:

First, Daniel the prophet was a student of Scripture. He obviously believed that the Book of Jeremiah, written by another biblical prophet, was divinely inspired of the Lord. There is no doubt about this.

Therefore, after Daniel carefully studied Jeremiah's writings, he specifically quoted the prophet. The purpose was to inform his readers that the predicted seventy-year period of the desolation of Jerusalem was about to be completed.

Hence, Daniel understood Jeremiah's prophecy about the future in a literal manner.

Why This Is Important?

Ultimately, Daniel's inspired interpretation provides for us a standard concerning how we interpret Old Testament prophecy in general, but also specifically Daniel 9:24-27.

Daniel Recognized An Exact Duration Of The Seventy Years

This "literal view" of interpreting Scripture shows us this: when Daniel cited Jeremiah's prophecy, he expected an exact fulfillment of the Lord's predicted seventy years of the desolation of Jerusalem.

This Literal Interpretation Leads To Daniel's Prayer And Then To The Prophecy Of The Seventy Sets of Sevens

In the context of Daniel chapter 9, Daniel recognized that the enthronement of Darius the Mede was evidence of the conclusion of the Babylonian captivity. Hence, he cited Jeremiah as evidence of the coming end of the seventy years exile and of the desolation of the city of Jerusalem.

Context, Context, Context

Why is Daniel's understanding of the coming end to the Babylonian captivity so important in this context? Well, the divinely inspired interpretation prompts Daniel's prayer (verses 3–19) and follows with the angel Gabriel's response with the revelation of the new prophecy of the seventy sets of seven (verses 20–27).

Daniel Knew Of The Symbolic Form Of Divine Revelation

Daniel was fully acquainted with the symbolic form of divine revelation, such as Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel Chapter 2 and his own vision in Daniel Chapter 7. He realized that God sometimes used symbolism to portray prophetic events.

Daniel 2: The Metallic Statue Of Nebuchadnezzar

Indeed, in Daniel Chapter 2 the statue of the four metals which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream represented four successive kingdoms Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Daniel not only told Nebuchadnezzar what he had dreamed, but more importantly he explained what the statue of the four metals represented prophetically.

Daniel 7: The Vision Of The Four Empires As Four Beasts

In a similar manner, Daniel had his own vision of the four kingdoms recorded in Daniel Chapter 7.

Contrary to Nebuchadnezzar this was God's point of view. Daniel saw them as four wild beasts. This was from God's perspective. Furthermore, from the perspective of the Lord the fourth kingdom, Rome, was the one that was highlighted. This will be an important clue as we look at Gabriel's prophecy later in this chapter.

In sum, Daniel was certainly acquainted with symbolic prophecy...but he did not interpret the 70 years in a symbolic manner.

Implications

Since Daniel interpreted Jeremiah literally, then what are the implications?

This passage illustrates that Daniel believed in the reality of predictive prophecy. Jeremiah had foretold the end of the exile some seventy years in advance, and Daniel fully expected this prophecy to be literally fulfilled. Again, we should note that Daniel did not "symbolize" these seventy years but took the prophecy at face value.

The Lesson For Us

Hence, this is the safest procedure for believers today. If we want to find the key from Scripture for unlocking the future, we must first ask the question, "Can we understand the particular passage in a literal manner?"

If the literal sense, makes good sense, then seek no other sense lest you come up with nonsense.

Something Else: There Is Always An Historical Context When Predictions, or Promises, of the Future Are Given

While predicting the Babylonian captivity, the Lord promised that the nation would always survive:

It is the LORD who provides the sun to light the day and the moon and stars to light the night, and who stirs the sea into roaring waves. His name is the LORD of Heaven's Armies, and this is what he says: "I am as likely to reject my people Israel as I am to abolish the laws of nature!" This is what the LORD says: "Just as the heavens cannot be measured and the foundations of the earth cannot be explored, so I will not consider casting them away for the evil they have done. I, the LORD, have spoken! (Jeremiah 31:35-37 NLT).

This promise would have given hope to the captives exiled in Babylon.

So, the historical context of any biblical prediction must always be kept in mind.

We Must Always Evaluate The Text In Its Historical Context

Thus, we start with our evaluation of the text of Daniel 9 in its proper historical context. In other words, Daniel 9:1–2 and its reference to the writings of Jeremiah did not occur in a historical vacuum. In fact, the passage itself clearly provides the context.

The Reign Of Darius And A New Chapter For Judah Begins

Because of its theme, Daniel 9 is likely the most important chapter in the entire book of Daniel. Indeed, it addresses the basic concerns that underlies the entire book, namely...

The concern of the people for the restoration of the holy city of Jerusalem

The return of the captives of Judah to their Promised Land

And the fulfillment of the promises of blessing that the Lord had made to them

The Important Chronological Note

We find that Daniel 9 begins this section with an important chronological note:

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans (Daniel 9:1 NET).

The appointment of Darius comes at the fall of the Babylonian Empire (5:30–31), the famous handwriting on the wall episode.

Let Us Not Miss This

The reference to Darius in this verse is the most detailed reference to any king in the book of Daniel. Indeed, only once in the entire book is a king designated with more than three elements and it is here, where Darius has five.

First, this particular king is identified by his *name*—Darius.

Second, Darius is also identified by his *descent*—the son of Ahasuerus.

Third, he is identified by *ethnicity*—he is from the seed of the Medes.

Fourth, he is identified by his *title*—he was made king.

Fifth, he is designated as to his *subjects*—he is the ruler over the kingdom of the Chaldeans (the Greek term for the Babylonians).

The designation of Darius in the introduction to this prophecy involves a total of five elements.

This Extensive Description Of Darius Is Deliberate

Daniel has drawn the attention of his readers to these designations of Darius. In doing so, the prophet has specified that a major transition had occurred; namely the change of rule from the Babylonian Empire to the Media-Persian Empire (which he himself predicted when interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2).

Verse 2 begins with the following claim: "In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books." The key verb in verse 2 is the Hebrew word (*been*) which is translated as "understand" or "discern."

This conclusion indicates that Daniel investigated Jeremiah's writing (included among "the books") and developed an interpretive position based upon a literal reading of the text.

The Completion Of Jeremiah's Seventy Years

That, according to the word of the LORD disclosed to the prophet Jeremiah, the years for the fulfilling of the desolation of Jerusalem were seventy in number.

The language used here is to indicate the "completion" or "fulfilling" of the seventy years. The form of the Hebrew verb, *piel*, frequently expresses the bringing about of a state.

Therefore, Daniel is saying that the Lord is bringing about a state of completion for the people.

The Desolations Of Jerusalem Will Be Over

Daniel's understanding of Jeremiah's seventy years derive from either Jeremiah 25:11–12 or 29:10:

This whole area will become a desolate wasteland. These nations will be subject to the king of Babylon for seventy years. But when the seventy years are over, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation for their sins. I will make the land of Babylon an everlasting ruin. I, the LORD, affirm it! (Jeremiah 25:11–12 NET).

Next is Jeremiah 29:10:

For the LORD says, Only when the seventy years of Babylonian rule are over will I again take up consideration for you. Then I will fulfill my gracious promise to you and restore you to your homeland (Jeremiah 29:10 NET).

A look at Jeremiah's prophecy in each of these passages reveals several important facts about the nature of the exile.

First, the people of Israel would serve Babylon for a specific total of seventy years (25:11).

Second, the Lord would punish the king of Babylon along with the land of Babylon (25:12).

Finally, following the rule of the Babylonians over Judah, the people would be allowed to return to their homeland (29:10).

Given these three facts, Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years correlates with the rise and fall of the Babylonian Empire.

And each of these predictions would be literally fulfilled.

Our Conclusion

The literal view of Bible prophecy provides students of Scripture with "the" standard model for interpreting biblical prophecy.

Just as Daniel interpreted Jeremiah's seventy years as an actual seventy years, thus believers should also look to interpret other prophecies in a similar manner.

The Occasion

After his understanding of the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy, Daniel prays an extraordinary prayer. As he is seeking answers the angel Gabriel appears:

Yes, while I was still praying, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen previously in a vision, was approaching me in my state of extreme weariness, around the time of the evening offering. He spoke with me, instructing me as follows: "Daniel, I have now come to impart understanding to you. At the beginning of your requests a message went out, and I have come to convey it to you, for you are of great value in God's sight. Therefore consider the message and understand the vision (Daniel 9:21-23 NET).

Note what Gabriel says, that he has come to "impart understanding" to Daniel (verse 22) and that Daniel can understand the vision (verse 23)

Let's see what it says.

How To Interpret The Prophecy Of The 70 7's

It is important that we recall what we have just studied. Daniel has understood literally the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the end of the Babylonian captivity, the transitioning between the kingdoms of Babylon and Media-Persia, and the end of the desolation of Jerusalem. Now he, as well as we, will be ushered into the future for a glimpse of "things to come" and he, along with us, will be able to "understand" it.

Seventy weeks have been determined concerning your people and your holy city...

to put an end to rebellion,
to bring sin to completion,
to atone for iniquity,
to bring in perpetual righteousness,
to seal up the prophetic vision,
and to anoint a most holy place.

Seventy weeks have been determined to complete these 6 things.

The Hebrew term translated "weeks" by many Bible versions is a Hebrew word meaning "sets of seven."

These are not sets of seven days, or seven weeks, or seven months, but sets of seven *years*. Remember, Daniel had been thinking about years from the 70 *years* that the Babylonian captivity was about to end. So, 70 sets of 7 comes out to 490 years.

The New Living Translation puts it this way:

A period of seventy sets of seven has been decreed for your people and your holy city to finish their rebellion, to put an end to their sin, to atone for their guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to confirm the prophetic vision, and to anoint the Most Holy Place (Daniel 9:24 NLT).

490 years... now what's so interesting about that?

Well, the people have been out of the land for 70 years because for 490 years they had not obeyed the command of the Lord to work the land for six years, and then let it lay fallow on the 7th.... See Exodus 23:10-11.

Summing Up:

490 The number of past years leading up to the Babylonian Captivity
70 The number of years the people were in the Babylonian Captivity
490 The number of future years to bring God's Kingdom to the earth

So now there will be another 490 years directed toward Israel to, among other things, bring in everlasting righteousness.

Daniel Will Be Able To Understand

Gabriel further states:

So know and understand (Daniel 9:25)

Notice that three times Gabriel has told him to "understand" in verses 22, 23 and 25:

From the issuing of the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until an anointed one, a prince arrives, there will be a period of seven sets of seven and sixty-two sets of seven (Daniel 9:25)

Again We Emphasize: The Sevens Are Literal Years

There are 69 periods of 7's or 483 years that will elapse between the time a future decree will be made until the coming of the Messiah.

In other words, at some time, unknown to Daniel, when this particular decree is made, the prophetic clock will start and a total of 69 sets of 7 or 483 years will elapse.

So, The Question Is This: When Was The Decree Made?

This is a much-discussed question. There are two basic possibilities: one recorded in Ezra 6:14 or a later one in Nehemiah 2:1. The one recorded in Ezra would have been in 457 B.C. while the one Nehemiah recorded would have been in 444 B.C. The discussion as to which of these two should be the starting point is complicated so we will not look at it here.

Three Phases of The Decree

The first two phases consist of 7 7's or 49 years, and then 62 7's or 434 years. The 49 years begins with the order to rebuild Jerusalem.

This first period concerns the period of the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem.

The Second Phase Of The Prophecy

The next phase (434 years) continues consecutively after the first. So 483 years after this decree is made the promised Messiah will be upon the earth.

This puts it at some time in the ministry of Christ, either his baptism or His triumphal entry. In other words, it is at a significant event in His life.

Then The Clock Stops

But then the clock stops. Notice, what happens next, after the 483 years ... the clock stops:

After this period of sixty-two sets of seven, the Anointed One will be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing, and a ruler will arise whose armies will destroy the city and the Temple. The end will come with a flood, and war and its miseries are decreed from that time to the very end (Daniel 9:26 NLT).

We should also notice what takes place *after* the 62 sets of seven are completed (a total of 483 years from the time of the command). There will be an interval, an unknown period of time.

The following will happen during the interval:

First, an anointed one, the Messiah, will be cut off, He will be killed.

Second, the city and the sanctuary will be destroyed by the people of the coming prince, the Romans. We say the Romans are the people of the coming prince because this prince is the final Antichrist. His will rule the final kingdom before God's kingdom comes to earth. It will be a revival of the fourth kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the Roman Empire. This is where the Final Antichrist will hail from.

This has been fulfilled in history. Jesus died in A.D. 30 or 33 and the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Romans.

Now into the far distant future, a future that has not happened yet, one final set of 7 is left, the 70th 7. This is known as "The Seventieth Week of Daniel," "The Time of Jacob's Trouble," and "The Great Tribulation:"

The ruler will make a treaty with the people for a period of one set of seven, but after half this time, he will put an end to the sacrifices and offerings. And as a climax to all his terrible deeds, he will set up a sacrilegious object that causes desecration, until the fate decreed for this defiler is finally poured out on him." (Daniel 9:27 NLT).

The Final Antichrist confirms a covenant, or possibly makes a strong covenant, with the Jews for one set of seven (7 years).

This will begin the last 7-year period before the coming of the Lord.

The Final Antichrist breaks the agreement halfway through the final seven-year period. This event is known as the Abomination of Desolation. He stops the sacrifices and the offerings in the Temple. The Final Antichrist then attempts to destroy the Jewish people.

Matthew 24:21 tells us that this begins The Great Tribulation:

For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again (Matthew 24:21 NIV)

We deal with this subject in great detail in our book *The Jews, Jerusalem, and the Coming Temple*.

Summing Up

From a literal understanding of Bible prophecy, which we learn from how Daniel interpreted Jeremiah, we examine the prophecy of the 70 sets of seven and we understand that there is still one more period yet to be fulfilled, the seventieth week of Daniel, the time of Jacob's Trouble, or the Great Tribulation. At the end of this final 7-year period, Jesus Christ returns to the earth and sets up His kingdom. This is the glorious future for believers!

And the key to unlocking this discovery of the future can be found in Daniel 9:1-2 from the way in which the prophet Daniel interpreted Jeremiah's prophecy.

Appendix 2

What Are Some “Do’s” and “Don’ts” About Using Customs and Practices In Biblical Times In Our Attempt To Understand “Last Days” Bible Prophecy?

In our attempt to understand what the Scripture tells us about “last days” Bible prophecy, we must be careful about how we consider things that are found outside of the Scripture.

Indeed, we have already warned about looking for “signs in the heavens” for answers about coming events (Question 28). This includes “the great sign in heaven” (Revelation 12) and the so-called “blood moons.” As we emphasized, looking for information about the future from astronomical signs is not something that we should be doing.

In addition, there are other things, found outside of Scripture, that people use to claim special insight concerning predicted coming events. This includes certain customs and practices in biblical times.

It is sometimes claimed that we need to know the precise practices that were used in those days to be able to fully comprehend some of the teachings of Scripture, which includes our understanding of “last days” Bible prophecy.

Biblical Background And Customs

It is undoubtedly important that we attempt to understand, as best that we can, the background and practices of statements, events, predictions, and parables, etc., that are recorded in the Bible.

Though knowing the background of events, or certain statements in Scripture, may be helpful, there are some things that we should be concerned about.

This appendix relates to two basic principles which we talked about earlier in this book; principles that the Bible sets down for us as we seek to properly understand the Scripture. We will restate what we have previously said:

Principle 1: We Are Not To Go Beyond That Which Is Written

There are two important things that we must always remember in interpreting the Bible, which, of course, includes predictions about the future. First, we are not to go “beyond that which is written.” Paul wrote:

Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying: “Nothing beyond what is written” (1 Corinthians 4:6 CSB).

In the Scriptures, God has revealed everything that is necessary for us to know about Himself and His plan for time and eternity. Jude wrote:

But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people (Jude 3 NLT)

The faith has been once and for all delivered. Therefore, we derive our information from the Bible and from it alone. We do not go anywhere else to discover what will happen in the future.

There is also a second important principle.

Principle 2: We Do Not Need To Read Between The Lines Of What The Lord Has Revealed

We are to read the Bible at face-value. In other words we do not have to read between the lines to find hidden messages. Paul wrote:

Our letters have been straightforward, and there is nothing written between the lines and nothing you can't understand. I hope someday you will fully understand us (2 Corinthians 1:13 NLT).

The Amplified Bible puts it this way:

For we write you nothing other than what you read and understand [there is no double meaning in what we say]. And I hope you will [accurately] understand [divine things] until the end (2 Corinthians 1:13 Amplified Bible).

It is essential that we go to the Bible alone for our information about the future and, in doing so, we read the Scriptures in a straightforward manner. There are no hidden messages or any double meanings in the text.

With these two principles in mind, let us make some observations about using customs and practices in biblical times to supplement our interpretation of end time events.

Observation 1: Our Knowledge About Customs And Practices In Biblical Times Is Limited

At the outset, there is something that we must appreciate about our understanding of the customs and practices that are recorded in Scripture—namely, that our knowledge of them is fragmentary.

Limited Knowledge

Indeed, in our book, *Ancient Mysteries of the Bible Solved*, we made these statements about the current status of biblical archaeology and our access to the past:

Archaeology is a relatively new science, only operating in the last 150-200 years . . .

Only a small fraction of the ancient world has survived. Perhaps 1/10

Only a small fraction of what has survived has been surveyed. Perhaps 6/10

Only a small fraction of what has been surveyed has been excavated. Less than 2%

Finally, only a small fraction of what has been excavated has been published.

In fact, it has been estimated that only .006%, six one thousandths of one percent, of what took place in the ancient world is now available to us to study! (Don Stewart, *Ancient Mysteries of the Bible Solved*, pp. 20-21).

This shortage of information has led scholars to make admissions about our lack of knowledge of the times.

Observation 2: We Must Apply Our Two Principles To Any Conclusion About Coming Events

This leads us to our second observation. As we have previously noted, the Bible tells us that the faith has been once and for all delivered to the believers, that, in our interpretation of Scripture, we are not to go beyond that which is written, and we are not to look for some hidden meanings in the text.

Hence, God's revelation to us is understandable and sufficient. We do not need anything else to illustrate what He has already revealed unless the Scriptures specifically encourages us to do such a thing.

With this in mind, we must go to the Scripture, and to it alone, to determine exactly what we should expect to happen in the future. In sum, our starting point should always be the Scripture!

What We Should Not Do!

What we should not do is to promote some possible scenario that would add to the specific details that are already recorded in Scripture. This is true regardless of whether we have evidence that certain customs, occurred, or did not occur, in biblical times. We should not begin with our understanding of certain customs, explain them in detail, and then go to the Scripture to try to make our case for some type of end-time scenario.

If the case cannot be made from the Bible alone, then there is NO case to be made! In other words, there has to be something clearly spelled out in Scripture that would cause us to consider anything beyond that which is written.

If there is nothing found in Scripture, then the idea of going to a custom or cultural belief should never be considered in the first place.

Unfortunately, this is what too often happens.

So, what are we to make of those who do promote something like this, using customs or practices of biblical times to claim it fits a certain prophetic scenario? Are they "false prophets?"

Not at all!

All of us, at one time or another, the author included, have believed or promoted something with the best of intentions that eventually turned out to be invalid. When confronted with our mistakes, we should learn from them.

On the other hand, those who have some type of platform, where they can reach the masses, should be very careful about publicly making the specific claims about some revolutionary discovery, especially one that would settle a point of contention among believers concerning "last days" Bible prophecy!

James wrote:

Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly (James 3:1 NLT).

There is one final point we should make. Even if a discovery were made, that provided a list of everything that would take place in a wedding ceremony at the time of Jesus, what difference would it make?

If the Scripture itself does not encourage us, which it does not, to look at this specific wedding event so that we can have a clear answer as to the timing of end times events, then such a claim about what it reveals is completely worthless.

May we take to heart the commandments of the Lord to "not go beyond that which is written," and only proclaim the "faith that has been once and for all delivered, and not to seek to add to, or read into the Scripture, more than is actually there.

About The Author

Don Stewart is a graduate of Biola University and Talbot Theological Seminary (with the highest honors).

Don is a best-selling and award-winning author having authored, or co-authored, over eighty books. This includes the best-selling *Answers to Tough Questions*, with Josh McDowell, as well as the award-winning book *Family Handbook of Christian Knowledge: The Bible*. His various writings have been translated into over thirty different languages and have sold over a million copies.

Don is now a full-time missionary with GoinChrist Ministries. His website educatingourworld.com provides many free resources for those wanting to know what Christians believe, as well as why we believe.

Currently there are 64 books on the site in PDF form, totaling about 13,000 pages of material while answering over 1,900 questions. All of his books can be downloaded for free on his website www.educatingourworld.com.