



THE PURPOSES OF PROPHECY

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comes (Lk 19:13). This involves, among other things, being used of the Holy Spirit to be a restrainer of evil (2 Th 2:6-7).

The mission statement of Southwest Prophecy Ministries is as follows: “The purpose of Southwest Prophecy Ministries is to equip end-time saints by providing biblically accurate prophetic information, as well as timely and truthful patriotic information.” This is a two-fold mandate. On the one hand, we are to be *looking* for the imminent return of Jesus Christ to Rapture the Church and deliver us from the wrath to come (1 Th 4:13-5:9; Titus 2:13). At the same time, we are to be *occupying* until He

In sum, our two-fold emphasis is *prophecy* and *liberty*. We believe that these subjects go hand-in-hand. It is my view that an understanding of Bible prophecy about the waning moments of the Church Age informs us that liberty of every kind will be under attack in our day. The liberty of property, the liberty of religion, the liberty of conscience, the liberty of travel, and even the liberty of life itself will be under severe and unrelenting attack as Satan and his minions attempt to impose their “New World Order,” the Antichrist system of global government, religion and commerce. It seems to us that it would be negligent, and, indeed, cowardly, to address prophetic issues without exploring the need for resistance against this wicked system as it is being imposed on the world. In other words, prophecy is not a “polite hobby” like bird-watching or collecting stamps. It literally shouts to us about the latter day wiles of the devil so we can resist him with the whole armor of God (Eph 6:11).

All that to say this: We at Southwest Prophecy Ministries take prophecy very seriously and very literally. For example, when the Apostle Paul states in 2 Timothy 3:1: “This know also, that in the last days perilous time shall come.” This word “perilous” literally means “difficult, dangerous...not merely the outward danger that might be involved, but the evils that mark them” (Ellicott). We are warned in Scripture that the last days will be marked by difficult, dangerous and evil times, *insane* times. These are the days in which we live, and the headlines remind us of that daily. So understanding Bible prophecy is vital in being equipped as end-time saints.

Not everyone shares this same perspective. There are many Christians who do not feel it is important to study Bible prophecy. They feel it is too complex and controversial, so they stay away from it. Increasingly, churches avoid taking a position on prophetic issues, such as the timing of the Rapture or the nature of the Millennium. Some claim to be “panmillennial,” stating that they believe it will “all pan out in the end.” While it is true that, because God is sovereign, it will all “pan out in the end,” that is no excuse for neglecting such a large portion of the Word of God.

We read in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is **profitable** for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” This means that every area of Scripture is profitable, including prophecy. The profitability of prophecy is the greatest reason to understand God’s plan for the future. God intends to do some very important and specific things in the lives of unbelievers and believers alike through the study of prophecy! This article will explore those “profits.”

Prophecy's Purposes for Unbelievers

EVIDENCE OF JEHOVAH'S DEITY: Many times in Scripture, prophetic utterance is used as a convincing proof that Jehovah is the one and true God, who alone perfectly controls and reveals the future. Notice Jehovah's challenge to the dumb idols who neither speak nor hear in Isaiah 41:21-24: "Produce your cause, saith the Lord: bring forth your strong reasons, saith the king of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them: or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods: yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together. Behold, ye are nothing and your work of nought: an abomination is he that chooseth you." In this passage Jehovah has placed Himself in opposition to the heathen gods, as the God of history and prophecy. He challenges the idols to speak, to prove their deity. They respond with silence. Not only are they silent, but they cannot speak. Therefore, Jehovah breaks out into words of wrath and contempt: "Behold, ye are nothing and your work of nought: an abomination is he that chooseth you." Prophecy is thus used as a strong evidence to unbelievers that their idols are as nothing, and that only Jehovah God perfectly knows and reveals the future.

WARNING TO THE UNGODLY: This purpose is revealed quite forcefully in Ezekiel 3:17-19: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul."

A message of impending judgment is a message of prophecy, because it sets forth a future event that will surely happen. Most of the great prophets of the Old Testament, from Moses to Malachi, gave warnings of impending judgment to those who persisted in rebellious unbelief. Based on Ezekiel's use of prophecy as a warning to the wicked, it is quite valid in proclaiming the gospel to share prophetic warning of judgment to come with unbelievers. The Holy Spirit will use this kind of witness, because He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and JUDGMENT (Jn 16:9-11). Prophetic preaching is a desperately needed element in evangelism in these last days, for the unsaved need to be brought face to face with the reality that they are sinners, condemned, under the wrath of God and facing His judgment. This judgment is not only eternal but impending, as the wrath of God will soon be poured out on the lost during the Tribulation. Bible prophecy is not only profitable for the lost, but also *and especially* for the saved as well.

Prophecy's Purposes for Believers

DISCERNMENT OF THE TIMES: Most people today, including many believers, do not understand the times in which we live. They may be very knowledgeable about current events but do not have the foggiest notion as to the biblical significance of those events, nor where they are leading.

It is a very serious matter not to have discernment of the times. Jesus rebuked the religious crowd of His day when He said: "When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather; for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times" (Mt 16:2, 3)?

Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem ". . . because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (Lk 19:44). There is an ignorance that is innocent, but there is also an ignorance that is culpable. The Israelites of Jesus' day were guilty of the latter. They had all of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Christ, as well as their long history of preparation for the coming of Messiah, but yet they did not recognize ". . . the day of their visitation."

An understanding of God's prophetic outline of world events will help us to be more discerning in regard to current trends, and will enable us to be more strategically useful in light of present circumstances. Ephesians 5:16 makes this link between discernment of the times and strategic action: "Redeeming the time (strategic action)...because the days are evil" (discernment of the times).

DIRECTION AND FOCUS TO CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR: A proper understanding of the progression of end-time events will keep us from the mistaken idealism of thinking that the world will gradually be Christianized and that the church will eventually usher in a golden age of righteousness on the earth. The Scriptures present no such scenario. In fact, Paul characterized the end of the church age in exactly the opposite terms: "This know also, that in the last days . . . evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse . . ." (2 Tim 3:1, 13). The Bible predicts that in the closing days of the Church Age, world conditions will become "worse and worse," not "better and better."

So the Christian message and mission is not primarily that of societal improvement, or bringing in millennial conditions. Rather, God's program for the church age is declared in Acts 15:14: "...God at the first did visit the Gentiles (nations), to take out of them a people for his name." God's purpose in this age is that of calling out individuals from all nations to Himself, but the Scriptures are equally clear that the overall moral direction of these nations will continue to gravitate downward, toward eventual judgment from God.

MENTAL SATISFACTION: All people, whether they are believers or not, have a natural interest in the future, both their personal destinies and the world's future as well. This interest is built in by God the Creator as we read in Ecclesiastes 3:11: "...he (God) hath set the world (lit. "eternity") in their heart..." This verse reveals that God has established in man an impulse leading him beyond that which is merely temporal toward the eternal. It lies in his nature not to be content with knowledge of the temporal, but to console himself by directing his thoughts toward eternity.

Jesus recognized that this curiosity is a natural and legitimate part of our mental makeup. This is seen in The Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:3 when the disciples made inquiry regarding the future: "And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?'" Jesus did not rebuke the disciples for their inquiry, but rather answered in great detail their questions regarding future events. In like manner, the Lord does not rebuke us in our quest for knowledge concerning future events, but rather invites us to study and be encouraged by our understanding of these events, which provide mental satisfaction in these troubling times.

PEACE OF MIND: Jesus makes an amazing statement in the midst of his dire predictions concerning the calamities of the Tribulation: "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet" (Mt 24:6). What an audacious thing to say! Sandwiched between horrendous predictions of unparalleled bloodshed, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecutions and false prophets, the disciples were told not to be troubled. Why? Because shadows of approaching end-time travesties point us to the Blessed Hope of Christ's soon return for His saints. The certainty of Christ's return is the remedy for troubled hearts and minds.

Jesus said at the beginning of his Upper Room Discourse in John 14: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye maybe also" (Jn 14:1-3). Why did Jesus say that their hearts were not to be troubled? Because "... I go to prepare a place for you . . . and . . . I will come again."

My friend, if you are a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, you can have an untroubled mind in troubled times! You can have the peace of God that passes all understanding when everything around you is anything but peaceful! Though the course of this present age grows increasingly dark and calamities more numerous, Bible believing Christians can experience peace of mind in the knowledge that we are not only on the right side of history, but that we also on the winning side of history as well.

COMFORT AMIDST SORROW AND SUFFERING: Paul says in I Thessalonians 4:13: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." Paul then goes on to detail the hope of the believers; that of being "snatched up" from the earth to be with Christ forever. In light of this hope Paul states: "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Th 4:18). We have a marvelous comfort in the midst of loss and sorrow, knowing that one day we will be gloriously and eternally reunited with our believing loved ones who have preceded us to heaven.

Prophecy is given, not to confuse, but to *comfort*! It is our aim at Southwest Prophecy Ministries to teach the prophetic Word of God in a way that you can be *comforted* and *encouraged* by it. These are days in which to rejoice, because our redemption draws near. Jesus said to those who would become Christians during the Tribulation: "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for

the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Lk 21:26-28). If Tribulation saints can rejoice and persevere in anticipation of the Second Coming, saints in the church age should certainly be able to look up and lift up our heads as we look for the ". . . blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

The comfort of Christ's return also extends to suffering as well as sorrow. 1 Peter 4:12, 13 states: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings: that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." So the hope of Christ's soon return offers great comfort in the midst of sorrow and suffering.

INSPIRES WATCHFULNESS: Jesus said in Matthew 24:42-44: "Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." Jesus is indicating that His Second Coming will be at an unexpected time, interrupting the course of normal events. This uncertainty as to the exact time of His coming is to serve as a strong stimulus to unceasing watchfulness.

ENCOURAGES DEEPER COMMITMENT TO OTHER BELIEVERS: Hebrews 10:24, 25 states: "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another: and so much the more, AS YE SEE THE DAY APPROACHING."

Notice that the need for assembling and exhorting one another as believers becomes more imperative as "the day" approaches. I believe "the day" refers to the day of Christ's coming for the saints, which is drawing ever nearer. The writer of Hebrews is basically saying this: As times become worse and worse, and persecution against believers increase, it becomes more and more essential for Christians to stand together and to be committed to helping and encouraging one another.

INDUCES SELF-PURIFICATION: There is a clear linkage between understanding prophecy and self-purification in I John 2:28 which says: "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." This is amplified and clarified in I John 3:2, 3: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

One of the primary purposes of prophecy in the life of the believer is to serve as a strong motivation to live a life of purity and godliness. When we are tempted to sin we should ask ourselves, "Would I want to be doing this when Christ comes for me in the clouds?" "Would this behavior cause me to be ashamed before Him at His coming?" The hope of Christ's soon return should be a purifying hope!

STIMULATES DILIGENT SERVICE: 1 Corinthians 15 deals extensively with the subject of the resurrection of the saints and its resultant victory over sin and the death. The chapter concludes with verse 58: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Notice that this verse begins with "therefore," informing the reader that this verse is the logical result of all that which precedes it. Paul is saying that our hope of resurrection should motivate us to steadfast service. This word "steadfast" carries the thought of "stable purpose, something that will not easily be disturbed, for the man's whole bent is behind it." This is underscored by the following word: "unmoveable." Once a believer gets a firm grip on the glorious certainty of living eternally in an incorruptible resurrected body, that one will not be easily moved away from a life of wholehearted service for the Savior.

Conclusion

We have seen that there are many specific “profits of prophecy,” both for the unbeliever and for the child of God. For the unbeliever, prophecy serves as indisputable proof of Jehovah’s deity and as a warning to flee from the wrath to come. For the believer, prophecy gives us discernment of the times, direction and focus to Christian endeavor, mental satisfaction, peace of mind, comfort amidst sorrow and suffering; it inspires watchfulness, encourages deeper commitment to other Christians, induces self-purification and stimulates diligent service to Christ.

Prophetic study is not a “take-it-or-leave-it” option for the believer. It is a mandatory area of theology for serious study, first, because it is such a major portion of the Scripture and secondly, because it is PROFITABLE! We would, therefore, be wise to heed Peter’s admonition in 2 Peter 1:19: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”

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