

Understanding the Basics of Bible Prophecy

Session 1: Understanding the Basics of Bible Prophecy

(Exploring Purpose, Relevance, and Biblical Method)

Introduction: *In this lesson we are going to...*

- 1) Discover the **Purpose** of Bible Prophecy
- 2) Look at the **Importance** of Bible Prophecy, and
- 3) Examine the **Biblical Method** for **Understanding** Bible Prophecy

You may already have some *ideas* about the purpose of prophecy, its level of importance, and the proper biblical method for understanding it. Most of us who are at least somewhat acquainted with the Bible and its prophecies have general opinions on these matters.

However, consider this:

- Most Jewish leaders and people in the 1st Century AD embraced popular notions of Bible prophecy that were **WRONG**. Everyone *thought* they were right. But most were either wrong or at least partially so. For this reason, many rejected Messiah at His 1st advent.
- After 3.5 years of training with Jesus, His closest disciples, the new apostles, still had *misconceptions* about Bible prophecy. And Jesus had explained much to them after their *great disappointment* from a wrong understanding of prophecy (Luke 24:25-27, 44).
 - “6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (Acts 1:6-7).
- An accurate understanding of Bible prophecy is something Satan hates, and seeks diligently and actively *to destroy*. (Matthew 24:11,24; Rev 12:17; 19:10)
- Even if we *do know* Bible prophecy well, it pays richly to *review and reaffirm* the essentials and basics, especially in Christ-centered manner, that they will be **FRESH** in our minds for 1) growing and acting from, and 2) sharing freshly with others.
 - Paul says of the gospel truths, “I will that thou *affirm constantly*...” (Titus 3:8)
 - “...put them in remembrance of these things” (1Tim 4:6; 2Tim 2:14).
 - “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you...” (1Pet. 3:15)

For all these reasons we **do well** to study this subject together.

Our first point of exploration is:

I. Discovering the **Purpose** of Bible Prophecy

What is the purpose of Bible Prophecy? *I'll give you 4 biblical purposes (not exhaustive)*

Purpose 1: Prophecy gives an accurate picture of the future (God wants us to know)

This is part of His excellent leadership! Leaders cast vision for their people.

- a. God *promises to* tell us in advance for our benefit (See **Amos 3:7**)
- b. “Where there is no vision the people perish” (**Prov. 29:18**) (dangerous to have no direction from God). **Ex.** Israel running out to Battle when God didn't tell them to, or told them not to. (ref. Judges 17:6; 21:25; Num. 14:42,44)
- c. Revelation points out the **past** (as in **Rev. 12:7**), the **present** (as in John's day, during the nation of Rome when the divided kingdom didn't exist “as of yet” - Rev. 17:12), and the **future**. (See **Rev. 1:19**)

Purpose 2: Prophecy prepares us to work in harmony with God's purposes

- a. God wants us **READY** and working in **HARMONY** with Him.
- b. Daniel **“understood by books”** the **TIME** he was living in. It was time to go home. This led him to seek the Lord and work to that end. He took action in *harmony* with God's purpose. His *faith deepened*. See **Daniel 9:1-3**.
- c. Noah built a ship, preaching an accurate message, because of prophecy. **Heb 11:7**
- d. We should “understand by books” too. **“Fear God and Give glory to Him, BECAUSE...hour...HAS come.”** (**Rev. 14:7**).

Purpose 3: Prophecy strengthens our faith (*God intends this*)

- a. “That you may believe” once it has happened. (**John 14:29**)
- b. To help us grow closer to Jesus. (**2 Pet 1:19**) “until the day dawns”

Purpose 4: Prophecy reveals truth, while exposing error.

- a. **It reveals Christ and His truth!** Revelation 1:1 says, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” “to show His servants things that would shortly come to pass”
- b. **It unveils Satan and his errors (i.e. lies)** (Rev 12:9,12,17, 13:2)

Now for **our second point**, and this is obviously related to the first:

II. Looking at the **Importance** of Bible Prophecy

Some people, even pastors and leaders, will say that Bible prophecy is not really important to understand well. However, that's not what Jesus said (**Matt. 24:15**). We've seen from scripture already that Bible prophecy *carries great purpose!*

- a. **Revelation 1:1-3** gives important information about the nature of Bible prophecy.
 - i. *Rejecting prophecy is rejecting a message from Jesus.*
 - ii. *Neglecting or ignoring prophecy is despising a gift and blessing of His.*
- b. Eternal salvation of multitudes is put in great jeopardy by failing to understand and heed God's prophetic warnings (**Rev. 14:8-11; 13:8**). Who's "Babylon"? the Beast? The Mark? *Doesn't God want us to know, since it is revealed, to save us?*
- c. Somewhat related to this discussion is the question of biblical prophets. Two great errors are outlined in scripture on this point. **1) Rejecting a true prophet from God is a great sin, a dangerous error** the devil leads people into. **2) Embracing a false prophet is a dangerous error** Satan leads people into. **Bottom line is deception:** Rejecting or ignoring a true message (blind). Embracing false (deceived). Therefore, the Bible warns against BOTH errors or extremes. *This is true in understanding Bible prophecy.* "Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Test and hold fast what is good" and true (**1 Thess. 5:19-21**). That is, don't hate or ignore, and don't believe everything you hear either (1 John 4:1).

We should value Bible prophecy as Jesus did and taught. He gave it for a reason!

This brings us to our third, and final point.

III. Examining the **Method** for **Understanding** Bible Prophecy

Who can understand Bible prophecy? (No, you don't have to be some theologian with a fancy degree to understand Bible prophecy.) It is really NOT hard once you understand the symbols.

The Bible gives *clear principles* for understanding prophecy. We'll examine **4 areas** of overarching biblical principles for clearly understanding prophecy. They are: 1) The Right Spirit, 2) Right Will and Action, 3) Right Conceptions, and 4) Right Methods (as defined by scripture)

Principle 1: Only those approaching with the right spirit will grasp prophecy correctly

- a. Prophecy is understood by those who surrender themselves to God
 - i. "the wise shall understand" (**Dan. 12:10**)
 - ii. "the fear of the lord is the beginning of..." (**Prov. 9:10**)
 - iii. "If any will do his will, he shall know..." (**John 7:17**)

Principle 2: Only those with a sanctified will to understand prophecy, will understand it

- a. Those who desire to understand, while seeking to understand prayerfully, appealing for His help, for His glory and honor, will begin to understand.
 - i. **Proverbs 2:1-7** outlines the active desire and path to understanding.
 - ii. Proverbs 18:1-2. Desire and application. Apply yourself to learn.
 - iii. Again, "If any will do his will, he shall know..." (John 7:17)

- iv. Be *willing* to “walk in the light,” as revealed (**John 12:35**; 1 John 1:7)
- v. **“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).**

Principle 3: Only those with right conceptions of truth will understand prophecy

- a. **Truth must be *biblically defined*.** Assumptions will not do. Popular conceptions will not do (be willing to dispense with if necessary). Answers from popular figures will not do. We must go back to scripture for truth. (*truth will always be truth no matter how closely we investigate it*)
 - i. Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6)
 - ii. God’s word “is truth.” In John 17:17, Jesus says, “thy word is truth.”
- b. **Misconceptions must be *surrendered*.** Too often we have *misconceptions of truth* (errors) which lead us into frustration and misunderstand of Bible truth.
 - i. Jesus’ disciples had this problem. **Luke 9:43-45**
 - ii. Example: If you try to build a wall on a bad or erroneous foundation, that wall will fall, fail, or look funny and be dangerous.
 - iii. Lies and errors must be given up.
 - iv. **Many buy the LIE that they cannot understand prophecy.** Fail to try.
 - v. Satan wants us to buy the lie – he coats it in “white light” (**2 Cor 11:14**)
 - vi. But the Bible is for the common man. All of us should **study** and understand it, especially in the last days (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Cor 10:11)
 - vii. **Some think Daniel and Revelation are SEALED BOOKS** which cannot be known. That’s another lie.
 - viii. **Daniel WAS sealed**: (Dan. 12:4, 5-9) “till the time of the end” (1798)
 - ix. **Revelation never was sealed**:
 - i. It’s called a *revealing*.
 - ii. Blessed for reading, *understanding*, and keeping it (Rev. 1:3)
 - iii. God told John **not** to seal the book (**Rev. 22:6, 7, 10**)
 - x. **YOU CAN UNDERSTAND BIBLE PROPHECY** (and should)
 - xi. Let’s give up the misconceptions!
- b. **Truth must be *believed and acted upon*.**
 - i. God’s Servants ARE to read, study, and apply. See Revelation 1:3.
- c. **Truth is not speculation. It’s revelation!**
 - i. God has given us some things to understand. Other things, He has not given us. Rest there. **Deuteronomy 29:29**
 - ii. It is not of “private interpretation” (2 Peter 1:19-21)

Principle 4: Only those with right methods (as biblically defined), will understand it

- a. **How do we rightly interpret Bible Prophecy? Guesswork? Sounds sensational or plausible? Make up a story we like?**

- i. Do we say, “That’s how you see it, this is how I see it?” Or did God have an intended meaning? (2 Pet. 1:19-21)
 - ii. **Prophecy has a Definite Message.** “no private interpretation.” It came by the “will of God,” not of men.
 - iii. **Key Principle: Let the Bible interpret itself** by comparing scripture with scripture (principle found in 2 Pet. 1:19-21 and Isaiah 28:9-10). The Bible identifies its own symbols. “*Interpretations belong to God*” (Gen. 40:8). *We will see this clearly in our next two Bible messages in this course.*
 - iv. **Prophecy reveals the great controversy between good and evil and is especially relevant to God’s people.** (keep this in mind)
 - i. God’s word stays *focused* on what counts most to God’s people and message. What affects us? What is a snare? What will give us hope and encouragement? Etc.
 - ii. Trust that prophecy will reveal this, when interpreted.
 - iii. Prophecy does speak of many nations throughout history. For example, Israel, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, Europe, and “the kings of the earth” (Rev. 16:14). As you can see, some **key players** are specifically mentioned by name. Others are not by name, but clearly by precise characteristics. Still others are not even mentioned at all by any specific measure (though large), but are included in broader terms like “kings of the earth.”
 - iv. Being relevant to God’s people, we can be sure Bible prophecy will point out specifically the **main players** we need to keep our eyes and ears on, to notice *revealed events, signs, and activities.*
- b. **Why is there so much confusion on Bible prophecy today? Why can’t Prophecy teachers come to agreement?**
- i. There are **3 Basic Models** for interpretation, in the world today.
 - ii. ONLY ONE of them is truly rooted in the Bible. They are:
 - iii. **ONE: Historicist interpretation of Bible prophecy:** This was used by nearly all the reformers and many other great Protestant leaders. To name a few: Wycliffe, John Huss, William Tyndale, Martin Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, John Knox, Ridley, Cranmer, John Bradford, John Wesley, Sir Isaac Newton, and even Roger Williams (founder of American Baptists).
 - iv. It states that there are some things that have BEEN fulfilled, there are some things BEING fulfilled right now, and there are others which are YET TO BE fulfilled. That scripture interprets scripture, and so forth.
 - v. **TWO: Preterist interpretation of Bible prophecy:** Concocted by Luis de Alcazar (a Jesuit scholar in 1569)—He taught that all of Revelation was fulfilled in the first 6 Centuries of the Christian Era (except ch.20,21,22). His book on Revelation was published in 1614, after his death.

- vi. **THREE: Futurist interpretation of Bible prophecy:** Francisco Ribera (another Jesuit scholar in about 1570) came up with a theory that put most all of Revelation's End-time events off into the *future* after Christ comes for the Church. The basis for *pre, mid, and post-trib* rapture teachings.
- vii. Two of these methods have very political agendas tied to them and running behind them rather than biblical concerns.
- viii. We're not going to say anything more about them right now. You simply need to be aware of the fact that these things exist. **We'll let the Bible be the judge.** Holy Scripture is what matters most in these regards.

We've now seen the purpose of Bible prophecy, its importance, and principles on the biblical method for understanding prophecy correctly.

Appeal: I hope that we will search our hearts, surrender them fully to Jesus, and seek Him in prayer with a sincere heart to know Him, to grasp His will, and to understand His prophecies correctly as He has intended for us to understand them. Let us question whether we are following truly and fully what God's word says or if we have been influenced by the assertions of men which do not hold completely true to the Bible's message (even as the 1st century believers and disciples of Christ, who we getting straightened out on God's true message by slow process).

Let's pray for the Lord's grace and guidance, and for His will to be known and done in all things!

Looking Ahead: In our next lesson we'll examine principles from dreams in Genesis.