

# Prophecy

Predictions! Which do you trust? The weather report? Tabloid headlines? Whether silly or serious, predictions are intriguing. Why? Because our knowledge of events is normally restricted to the past and present. The future is a mystery.

Prophecy isn't prediction. Prophecy is divine communication, the revelation of God's truth. Some Bible prophecies contain predictions, which fall into four categories: fulfilled in the past, fulfilled in the present, fulfilled in the future, and dual fulfillment (partial fulfillment with more yet to come).

## THE "LAST THINGS"

Eschatology is the "study of last things;" events which have to do with the end of human history. Since earliest predictions have been fulfilled with astounding accuracy, the remainder seems certain (2 Peter 1:19-21). Prophecy has been called, "history written before it happened" because God knows "the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10).

## A PROPHETIC CALENDAR

The prophecy of Daniel contains a time-line of prophetic events. Within the framework of "seventy sevens," an outline of history moves toward the fulfillment of all "vision and prophecy" (Daniel 9:24-27). This time-line depicts a succession of world governments up to God's eternal kingdom under "Messiah the Prince" (Daniel 7:13-14). But the time-line is broken by a space Jesus called the "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 24:21) during which salvation is offered to the world (see Romans 9-11, especially 11:25). When the time-line resumes, God will return His favor to Israel and history will quickly come to a close. When Israel became a nation in 1948, many people felt it marked the beginning of the last period of history.

## END TIME EVENTS

**The Great Tribulation.** The Old Testament refers to a final "judgment day" bringing an end to evil but, also salvation to God's

people ("The Day of the Lord," Joel 3:14-17). Though judgment days occurred in history (Isaiah 13:6,9), an ultimate day became a central theme. During this day of darkness and disaster (Ezekiel 30:3; Amos 5:18-20), described by Jesus as "great tribulation" (Matthew 24; 2 Thessalonians 2; Revelation 6-13 & 15-18), the whole world suffers and God's people are severely persecuted. Another feature of this time is widespread deception (Matthew 24:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:3), culminating in a blasphemy called "the abomination of desolation" -a shrine to the evil world leader, or "Antichrist"(Matthew 24:15; Revelation 13; 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12).

**The Rapture.** Christians who are alive when Jesus returns will be "caught up" to meet Him "in the clouds" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This is a sudden event and instant transformation (1 Corinthians 15:50-54; Philippians 3:20-21). Much speculation shrouds the "rapture" and there's debate among Christians as to when it will occur. Biblical evidence supports a "pre-tribulation" rapture.

**The Return of Christ.** Jesus' promise to return for His followers is the New Testament hope (John 14:3; Acts 1:9-11;etc.). This is His *parousia* ("coming" like the arrival of a king), *apokalupsis* ("unveiling," Revelation 1:7), and *epiphania* ("appearing" in which He "shines forth," 2 Thessalonians 2:8). It is also the day of resurrection for all believers (1 Corinthians 15:21-23) and judgment on unbelievers (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8).

**The Millennium.** When Jesus returns He will begin a thousand-year reign. The earth will be a paradise without violence or sorrow. At the end of the millennium sin resumes briefly, and then is abolished forever (Revelation 20:1-10).

**The Judgment.** At the end of time, all humanity appears in God's court (Revelation 20:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Those who know Jesus as their Savior are listed in His "Book of Life," but the actions of everyone else are found in His "books" (Revelation 20:12). Though

believers in Jesus escape judgment, the quality of our work is tested (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

### **APPLICATION TO OUR LIVES**

When studying prophecy, it's easy to misuse and misinterpret scripture. Too often people believe they've found a match between predictions and specific, current events. We shouldn't be dogmatic about our discoveries and we shouldn't exploit the fear people feel when hearing about these things for the first time. Christians need to be humble; there's more to the end times that we don't know than what we do know.

Peter asked, "What kind of people ought you to be," knowing the world will come to an end? He answers, " You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God..."(2 Peter 3:11-12). This is the message of prophecy; worship God (Revelation 19:10), live "upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:11-14), and keep watching for Jesus' return (Matthew 24:42-44).

We have more information available on Bible prophecy and would be happy to share it with you when you call or write.