



Daily Verse and Comment

Amos 3:7

(7) Surely the Lord God does nothing,
Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.

Matthew 24:36

(36) "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

1 Corinthians 13:8

(8) Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away.

New King James Version

Bible students know that Scripture is about thirty percent prophecy, and preachers have cautioned that prophecy should take no more than the equivalent percentage of our study time. With some people, though, prophecy *is* their Bible study, and that, frankly, is a shame.

The Bible divides itself neatly into thirds: one-third doctrine, one-third history, and one-third prophecy. History, of course, gets short shrift from most, who remember Mrs. Jones' tenth-grade history class as a collection of names and dates and boring lectures on various monarchs and wars. Doctrine is just not very stimulating; studying it brings up visions of long and involved passages in dusty commentaries written by long-dead theologians, intricate studies of unpronounceable words in ancient languages, and saccharine devotional passages with little application in the real world.

Prophecy, though, is cool. Its imagery and symbolism are fascinating with its strange beasts, lurid women, armies and battles, plagues and destruction, conquering kings, and even a red dragon. It is infused with a sense of mystery and expectation. There are enigmatic numbers to ponder and riddles and word plays to solve. Beyond all this, many prophecy buffs believe that the preponderance of the Bible's predictions will come about soon, heightening the excitement.

For evangelists, prophecy makes a wonderful hook to get people interested in God's Word. For years, the Worldwide Church of God's most-requested literature had prophetic themes: "The U.S. and Britain in Prophecy," "The [Book of Revelation](#) Unveiled at Last," "Who or What Is the Beast?" etc. These booklets were most often requested by those hearing the radio broadcast or seeing the television broadcast for the first time because the program itself frequently dealt with prophetic subjects. As a hook, prophecy works well, but as a staple in our spiritual diet, it produces deficiencies in spiritual health.

Yes, we should know the Bible's prophecies. Yes, we should be watching world events. Yes, we should be speculating to see how current events might fit the Bible's scenarios. But none of these things should be done at the expense of doctrine and Christian living.

What is the purpose of prophecy? Ultimately, it is to glorify [God](#). Through prophecy, we can [see God](#) at work in His plan over millennia (for instance, the many [Old Testament](#) prophecies of Jesus Christ's first coming). We see proof of God's existence and power in fulfilling the Bible's prophecies ([Isaiah 40:12-29](#)). Prophecy exhibits for all to see that God is sovereign in the affairs of men ([Daniel 4:17](#)), and what He desires He brings to pass ([Isaiah 55:11](#)).

Is prophecy in the Bible so we can know what is going to happen? Yes, but not to the degree most people think. "Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" ([Amos 3:7](#)), but this does not mean that we will have a complete or precise foreknowledge of events. Jesus Himself warns us, "But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" ([Matthew 24:36](#)), and just a few verses later, He tells His own disciples, "Therefore you also be

ready, for the Son of Man is coming *at an hour when **you** do not expect Him*" (verse 44).

This is a massive hint that our understanding - as much as it has expanded over the last few decades - will still not be enough to remove the surprise from [Christ's return](#)! Paul also warns us in [I Corinthians 13:9](#), 12, "For we know in part and we prophesy in part. . . . For now we see in a mirror, dimly." This should convince us that we do not know for certain how things will work out as the end approaches. We understand in part, meaning we have a vague idea of the course of events, but we cannot honestly be dogmatic about any speculative scenarios we devise. Every interpretation of end-time biblical prophecy should be accompanied with a proviso such as, "This is where things seem to be headed from what we understand right now."

It is good for us to remember what the apostle Paul writes in [I Corinthians 13:8](#): "[Love](#) never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; . . . whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away." The point of Christianity is not to know the final score before everyone else does. God has called us to glorify Him by putting on the image of His Son ([II Corinthians 3:18](#)). We must be careful that we do not let ourselves be distracted from what is most important.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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