



"He who lives up to a little knowledge shall have more knowledge."
—Thomas Brooks

03-Nov-23

Prophecy's Place

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 instruction, 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. To many, 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 considering how current events may 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 will 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 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](#); emphasis ours throughout), 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 sure how things will work out as the end approaches. We understand in part, meaning we have a vague idea—an outline—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 by a proviso such as, "This is how 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 not to let ourselves be distracted from what is most important.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

New Transcripts

[FT23-00: Handwriting on the Wall: Without Natural Affection](#)

Given by Richard T. Ritenbaugh on 29-Sep-23

[FT23-01PM: Jesus and the Feast \(Part One\): Alignment With God](#)

Given by Richard T. Ritenbaugh on 30-Sep-23

[FT23-05B: Carrying Water for Jesus Christ](#)

Given by Ted E. Bowling on 04-Oct-23

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Prophets and Prophecy \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)

Through Biblical contexts, we learn that a prophet is one who speaks for God, expressing His will and purpose in words and signs. The office of a prophet is to forth-tell God's purpose through His Law and tell people God's words. A true prophet, never losing sight of the law of God, deals with local situations, events of the Messiah, events of the future, and events that are dual in application. The prophet, described as coming from outside the system (who brings new truth building it upon the foundation of old truth) is contrasted with the priest who conserves old truth (given to them by a prophet). A prophet goads people to urgently commit themselves to a righteous course of action, forcing them to make clear and often painful choices. Elijah and John the Baptist clearly fulfilled the role of prophet.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[What Is a False Prophet?](#)

by David C. Grabbe

The Bible warns us that a great False Prophet will soon arise to sway mankind into idolatry. In addition, numerous passages speak of other false prophets and false teachers in the church and in the world. David Grabbe, in exposing the differences between false prophets and true ones, explains what we need to look out for as the end nears.

Featured Audio Schedule

Friday Night Bible Study

The next Bible Study (Friday 03-Nov-23) will be **John (Part Eighteen)**, given by **John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)**. The Bible Study will be featured on the [CGG homepage](#) from **6:00 pm Friday (EST)** and all day Saturday.

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