

The Benefit of Studying Biblical Prophecy

Part 1

By Steve Schmutzer

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I was dismayed to see a reader's feedback to one of my articles, but it was not because he disagreed with my position or disliked the things I had to say. In fact, he was complimentary about how I'd arrived at my conclusions and how I'd expressed my views. What troubled me were his comments on the study of Biblical prophecy itself.

He stated that he *"...also used to be passionate about prophetic issues,"* but he has since *"wised up and realized the distraction it had become"* to him. His conclusion was *"...we need to focus on the issues of greater importance like reaching the unsaved, and teaching them the essential doctrines that are most vital to their faith."* He had a couple of creative ways to tell me I was majoring on the minors - and for good measure he tossed in his academic credentials to assure me he knew what he was talking about.

It's not the first time I've received this sort of feedback. Usually, the rebukes are more direct and coarse. While it's probably not a viable statistical assessment, I've noted that many of those who discount the importance of Biblical prophecy also discount the importance of tact in explaining their views.

But – maybe it's just me. Maybe I'm the one who's misled here!

Maybe I *have* come down with a case of the "prophecy bug" and I'm just resisting proper treatment. Maybe the apocalyptic themes of Biblical prophecy have so captured my affection for superficiality that they are keeping me from the issues I really *should be* emphasizing. Maybe my keen interest in the future is keeping me from being effective in the present.

Maybe if I matured more in my faith I'd see that God is focused on the church and any support I have for Israel is misguided. Maybe every part of God's Word really is "all about the Gospel." Maybe - just maybe, I should focus on Jesus' first coming and forget about His second coming. Maybe I'm exactly where Satan wants to keep me.

Or maybe not.

I've heard all this and much more like this many times. There is a constant stream of self-appointed advisors and experts who are happy to wax unendingly about all the things I'm doing incorrectly.

While I'm no authority on Biblical prophecy – I regularly follow those who deserve to be called that – I *do* confess to doing my part to evaluate prophetic issues constantly and carefully. I take seriously the command to *"Study to show (myself) approved unto God..."* (2 Tim. 2:15). As I do that, I share what I'm learning to the best of my abilities, and I leave the results of that to God.

I don't seek detours around the truth that *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"* (2 Tim. 3:16). As I responsibly place the

prophetic Scriptures on an equal plane with other parts of God's Word, I see the mockers and doubters of Biblical prophecy for being the last days' indicators that the Bible declares them to be (2 Peter 3:4).

But let's get back to the primary issue here and ask ourselves, "Does the Bible have anything to say about the benefit of studying prophecy?" You bet it does! Let's go through some of those things:

IT URGES US TO LIVE GODLY

It's popular in many western churches to sing deliriously about near revivals. A sizeable portion of the modern church believes its calling is to usher in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ by continually growing its ministry. They see things getting better and better on *their* watch.

The assumptions behind such positions are often incompatible with Biblical truth. The prophetic Scriptures teach that societies and cultures will deteriorate as the end times get closer, and Jesus Himself said it would become more and more "...like the days of Noah" (Matt. 24:37-39). According to Jesus, "...the love of many will grow cold" leading up to the time of His return (Matt. 24:12), and He even wondered if He would "...find faith on the earth" (Luke 18:8). Call it all what you will, but none of that is a positive trend and it seems to me much of the church is out of touch with the truth.

That's why the study of prophecy urges us to Godly living. It helps us to see the present and pending times accurately, and it exhorts us to see ourselves as "*aliens and strangers*" (1 Peter 2:11) to this world and its ideas. As we eagerly look for the Lord's return, and as we regard the moral decay around us, we should be motivated to walk faithfully with our Lord and Savior (1 Peter 4:7; Romans 13:12-14).

IT GIVES US COMFORT AND HOPE

In the movie "*The Shawshank Redemption*," Morgan Freeman's character, Red, says, "*Hope is a dangerous thing. Hope can drive a man insane.*" It made for a great movie line at a pregnant moment of the script, but Red is wrong.

Make no mistake - this world is a very sick place. I've felt physically ill by some elements of the news and the expressions of sin. The spiritual darkness in America alone is palpable, and merchants of depravity are "locked and loaded." They want a great deal more evil to be unleashed.

Hope, therefore, is a good thing - and the hope of leaving this planet and being with Jesus Christ keeps me going as it does for many people like me. For many of us, that real hope is centered on a wonderful theme of the prophetic Scriptures: our imminent rapture (Titus 2:13). Until such time, there is also real hope in properly understanding our true status in this life and the one to come (Philippians 1:21).

IT PROVIDES A BLESSING

Revelation 1:3 is straightforward: "*Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.*"

This is the first of the "seven blessings of Revelation," but the emphasis here is on the proper study and application of the prophetic Word of God. You cannot get much clearer than this. God places a direct link between a right response to Biblical prophecy and receiving a spiritual blessing.

God grants a special favor on those who hear *and also* "take to heart" what is read. You can read the prophetic Scriptures to your cat, but your cat cannot take those things "to heart." But we can! And if we

do, and if we properly value them and permit them to have their divinely-intended effect in our life, then we will be recipients of God's blessing.

IT GIVES US STABILITY

We are instructed to be Christians which are not "tossed to and fro" by false teachers and deceptive schemes (Eph. 4:14). While this is an important instruction concerning the entirety of God's Word, it seems especially applicable to prophetic themes.

One can take nearly any issue pertaining to the end times and find all sorts of interpretations and wild imaginations about it online. I've come to the conclusion that many people would rather embrace fiction than fact. I think it appeases something within their carnality that the accountability of truth does not.

It is terribly important to acquire the stability that comes from a responsible and reverent study of Bible prophecy. When loons proclaim the next date and time of the rapture, it is the sound study of God's Word that tells us we cannot know this information. When blustery preachers pound the pulpit and proclaim that God has no more plan for the Jews, it is the calm assurance of God's covenant relationship with His chosen people that keeps our hearts firm in the faith.

Many examples of what it means to have stability in the midst of "*the cunning of men*" could be stated, but one point rises as self-evident here. The disciplined study of God's prophetic Scriptures provides a sure foundation to withstand the floods of deception that run rampant within the church today.

In the next installment of this article, I will explain some more benefits to the study of Biblical prophecy. Till then, keep your attitude humble, your eyes lifted up, and your mind and heart secure in Christ.