

# You Can Understand Bible Prophecy!

*What is prophecy? Why is it recorded in the Bible? How can we understand it?*

**E**veryone is interested in the future.

We want to know if it is going to rain, so we can take our umbrellas when we go out. Investors want to know what is going to happen on the stock market. Sports fans want to know whether their favorite teams will win the championships. Parents want to know how their children will turn out when they grow up.

And what about the big issues on the world scene today?

Scientists want to know how much longer our polluted environment can support life. National leaders want to know if their governmental policies will produce progress or more problems. People in general want to know whether the world will at last find peace, or whether devastating hydrogen-bomb and chemical warfare will wipe all life from the earth!

Futurists postulate. Psychics have visions. Crystal-ball gazers and fortune tellers make predictions. But is there any one perfectly authoritative source of knowledge about the future?

Yes. Bible prophecy!

What is Bible prophecy? It is history written in advance. The Bible clearly forecast many of history's major events long before they happened. And the Scriptures plainly show as well that many cataclysmic events will occur in this very age!

About one third of the Bible is prophecy, and most of that prophecy pertains to this end time. Those who believe God's prophecies can take appropriate action and not be caught in the horrors soon to come to pass.

We need to examine the vital keys that unlock Bible prophecy. How can we know the meaning of these prophecies whose fulfillment will soon shake this whole earth?

## **The sure word of prophecy**

When rightly understood and interpreted, Bible prophecy is an infallible guide to the future.

"We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place . . . knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved [inspired] by the Holy Spirit" (II Pet. 1:19-21).

Note these important points:

- The Bible reveals God's "sure word of prophecy." God designed Bible prophecy to shine as a light, so we are not left in darkness about what is going to happen.

- No prophecy is of any private interpretation. What does this mean? First, no human should interpret the Word of God. Only God Almighty, who inspired the Bible, knows how to interpret — how to understand and explain — His Word. Second, Bible

verses must be coupled with each other to be properly understood. Everything the Bible says on any one subject must be viewed together to see the whole meaning.

- Bible prophecies were not the result of mere human thoughts or impulses. God directly moved or inspired His prophets with His Holy Spirit.

## **God the great Revealer**

God Almighty is not only the Creator and Ruler of the entire universe, but He is also the great Educator — the great Revealer. He and He alone can truly comprehend what will happen in this planet's climactic future.

All knowledge and understanding (including that of future events) resides with God: "Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147:5).

But how does God today reveal Himself to mankind? In the past, He revealed Himself through His holy prophets. Today He reveals future events through the prophecies of His written Word, the Bible. He enlightens His true servants so they can understand and spread the news of coming events.

"Surely the Lord God does nothing [will not allow any major calamity to befall this earth], unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). Moffatt translates this verse: "The Lord Eternal never does anything without telling his servants the prophets."

Many professing Christians fail to comprehend the simple fact that since God inspired His holy men to write the Bible, only He can truly understand, interpret and reveal the truth about what they recorded.

This fact was illustrated in the experience of the prophet Daniel. God revealed various dreams and visions to Daniel, but told him:

“‘But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end, many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase’” (Dan. 12:4).

Daniel says: “Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, ‘My lord, what shall be the end of these things?’ And he said, ‘Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end’” (verses 8-9). Daniel recorded many marvelous prophecies, but did not understand what he wrote. God did not intend him to! But God does intend for us today, living in “the time of the end,” to understand.

The last book of the New Testament, Revelation, is not “The Revelation of St. John the Divine,” as many Bibles erroneously entitle it. The very first verse clearly reveals who inspired this book: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God [the Father] gave Him to show His servants — things which must shortly take place” (Rev. 1:1).

Jesus Christ is the Revelator, not John. Christ promised to show John and the other apostles “things to come” through the Holy Spirit they received on the day of Pentecost (John 16:13).

Though the book of Revelation remains a complete mystery to most, in that book (and in other books of the Bible) God reveals many detailed prophecies. He wants His people to understand those prophecies — that’s why He called the entire book “The Revelation.”

It is not God’s will that mankind be ignorant of important events about to befall the earth. Ominous signs show that this world is hurtling toward a horrible catastrophe, but most people are oblivious to these portents. They prefer to “eat, drink and be merry — for tomorrow we die”!

What, then, are the vital keys that will enable us to discern the signs of

the times? How can we come to really understand the prophecies of the Bible?

### **Reverence God and His Word**

The most basic key to understanding Bible prophecy is to reverence God and His Word, the Bible. Not many today really stand in awe of the great God and His holy Book.

God says, “But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isa. 66:2).

King David, a man after God’s own heart, said, “Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him” (Ps. 33:8). And, “My heart stands in awe of Your word” (Ps. 119:161). Furthermore, David said, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding [this includes understanding Bible prophecy] have all those who do His commandments” (Ps. 111:10).

We previously noted that the prophet Daniel was told to “shut up the words” and “seal the book” of his prophecies until “the time of the end.”

But when “the time of the end” arrived, it was not everyone who would understand: “Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand” (Dan. 12:10).

God will reveal His Word only to those who reverence Him — those who stand in awe of Him and the Bible.

### **Bible interprets itself**

Another important key to understanding Bible prophecy is to remember that “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation” (II Pet. 1:20). Only by letting God interpret His Word — only by “rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15) — can we ever know what the prophecies mean.

The Bible was written in such a way that it is like a picture puzzle. All of a picture puzzle’s pieces must be put together, and in the right way, to reveal the picture. Likewise, we must get all the verses in the Bible and put them together in order to fully understand any particular pas-

sage in the Bible. In other words, no man should privately interpret God’s Word. He should let it interpret itself by taking all of the verses on any given subject and putting them together, “here a little, there a little” (Isa. 28:10-13).

### **Bible symbolism**

Another important key needed to unlock Bible prophecy is an understanding of Bible symbolism. Many woefully misunderstand the Bible because they don’t know when the Bible is speaking literally and when it is speaking symbolically. When symbols are used, many misunderstand because they don’t let God interpret His own symbols.

What does a “woman” symbolize in Bible prophecy? In Revelation 17 we read of a “woman” called “the great whore” (verse 1). What does this “woman” depict in symbol?

Paul reveals that just as a husband is to love his wife, so “Christ also loved the church. . . . This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the [true] church” (Eph. 5:25-32).

This virgin Church is to be “a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle . . . but that it should be holy and without blemish” (verse 27). This Church is also referred to in Revelation 19:

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give Him glory: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready” (verse 7).

Clearly, the true Church of God is described as a virgin woman to be married to Christ at His Second Coming.

Now we can begin to see the identity of the “woman” or “great whore” of Revelation 17. There are many false churches masquerading as Christ’s churches, but there is only one true Church — only “one body” [of Christ] (Eph. 4:4).

Many do not realize that there are “false apostles” (II Cor. 11:13). “And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his [Satan’s] ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness” (verses 14-15).

Do Satan’s ministers have their own churches? Yes!

Revelation 17 depicts the whole

false church system Satan has devised in order to deceive the whole world (Rev. 12:9). The "great whore" of Revelation 17 refers to a great church that has daughter churches, for she is called "THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS" (verse 5).

Even secular sources employ symbols similar to the Bible's, as revealed by this quote from the *Encyclopedia Americana*: "While dangers were rife at Rome, a band of Roman missionaries carried Christianity to the distant English, and in England was founded a Church which owes its existence to the zeal of the Roman bishop (the Pope). Success beyond all that he could have hoped for attended Gregory's pious enterprise. The English Church spread and flourished, a dutiful daughter of her mother-church of Rome" (article, "Papacy").

When the Bible uses a "woman" in symbol, it refers to a church. The true Church of God is compared to a virgin bride who will marry Christ, but the false church is called "the great harlot" and her daughter churches are called "harlots" (Rev. 17:1, 5).

The "woman" (false church) sits upon "many waters" (Rev. 17:1). What do the "many waters" represent? "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are [represent] peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues" (verse 15).

Revelation 12:15 informs us that the serpent (Satan — verse 9) sends out "water like a flood after the woman [the true church]" to try to destroy her. What does the "flood" depict in that verse?

This "flood" refers to peoples massed into an army; Jeremiah 46 uses this same symbolism. "The army of Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt" (verse 2) would come up like a flood of water: "Who is this coming up like a flood, whose waters move like the rivers? Egypt rises up like a flood" (verses 7-8).

#### Important Bible symbols

The Bible uses many different symbols to convey various meanings. Here are a few:

*Serpent* and *dragon* are symbols for "the Devil, and Satan" (Rev. 12:3, 9).

*Stars* are often used to symbolize angels: "The seven stars are [represent] the angels" (Rev. 1:20). (See also Job 38:7, where *stars* refers to the holy angels, and Revelation 12:4, where the term *stars* represents the fallen angels or demons.)

*Candlesticks* or *lampstands* represent churches: "And the seven lampstands [candlesticks — Authorized Version] . . . are the seven churches" (Rev. 1:20).

*Beasts* often symbolize rapacious nations or kingdoms:

"And four great beasts came up from the sea. . . . The first was like a lion. . . . And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. . . . and there was another, like a leopard. . . . After this I saw . . . a fourth beast. . . . Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which arise out of the earth" (Dan. 7:3-7, 17).

These four beasts also represent the four kingdoms these four kings ruled over: "The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom upon earth" (verse 23). (See also Daniel 8:3-10, 20-22 and Revelation 13:1-11, 14:9, 19:19-20.)

*Mountains* are often symbolic of nations in Bible prophecy: "'And I will repay Babylon and . . . Chaldea for all the evil they have done . . . ' says the Lord. 'Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain,' says the Lord" (Jer. 51:24-25).

Also in the book of Daniel we read, "the stone [Christ] that struck the image [representing four kingdoms] became a great mountain [kingdom] and filled the whole earth" (Dan. 2:35). This represents the Kingdom of God, which Christ will establish at His Second Coming (see also verses 36-45).

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain [kingdom] of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains [big nations], and shall be exalted above the hills [smaller nations]" (Isa. 2:2).

*Locusts* are used symbolically to represent armies possessing modern military weaponry. "Then out of the smoke locusts came. . . . And the shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads were crowns [or helmets] of something like gold. . . . They had hair like women's hair . . .

"And they had breastplates, like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. . . . And they had a king over them . . . whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon [destroyer]" (Rev. 9:3, 7-11).

What are these locusts? They symbolize some kind of military forces. They are armor plated, have "wings," make a great roar like that of modern jet engines ("like . . . horses running into battle") and have "stings in their tails" (perhaps representing the destructive firepower of modern weaponry).

Interestingly, during World War II, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill used this same figure of speech ("locusts") to describe Hitler's three-million-man army as it invaded Russia June 22, 1942:

"I see advancing in hideous onslaught the Nazi war machine, with its clanking, heel-clicking, dandified Prussian officers, its crafty expert agents fresh from the cowering and tying down of a dozen countries. I see also the dull, drilled, docile, brutish masses of the Hun [German] soldiery plodding on like a swarm of crawling locusts."

Winston Churchill used the term *locusts* to describe the Nazi war machine, just as John had used similar imagery approximately 2,000 years earlier!

#### Prophetic time lapses

Understanding prophetic time lapses also helps illuminate prophecy.

Notice, for example, Isaiah 61. The first three verses of this chapter refer to Christ's commission during His first coming to this earth. But the latter verses of this chapter refer to events yet to be fulfilled, after His glorious Second Coming.

"So He [Christ] came to Nazareth. . . . and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the broken-

hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Then he closed the book" (Luke 4:16-20).

Why did Christ stop reading in the very middle of the second verse of Isaiah 61?

He did not quote the rest of the second verse because that part of the verse was to be fulfilled about 2,000 years later, after His spectacular Second Coming to this earth to rule all nations as King of kings and Lord of lords. In other words, there was to be a prophetic time lapse of about 2,000 years before the last part of Isaiah 61:2 was fulfilled.

On the day of Pentecost in A.D. 31, Peter quoted from Joel 2:

"But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My servants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days and they shall prophesy. 'I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass, that whoever calls on

the name of the Lord shall be saved' " (Acts 2:16-21).

Even though Peter quoted this entire section of Joel, it is clear that the miraculous phenomenon mentioned in Acts 2 only fulfilled the section of Joel's prophecy up to and including the phrase "I will pour out My Spirit in those days" in verse 18.

The events mentioned in Acts 2 did not include the prophetic fulfillment of verses 19 and 20, which mention "wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke."

There was to be a 2,000-year prophetic time lapse between the fulfillment of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in A.D. 31 and the terrible events of the soon-coming Day of the Lord, which will be a time of blood, fire and smoke, the sun being turned into darkness.

#### **Identities of nations**

God has given many prophecies about various nations on this earth today. But why? So they, too, can hear and, if willing, heed and therefore escape the prophesied crises about to occur.

But most people on this earth do not grasp the meaning of many Bible prophecies (those directed against various nations) simply because they either misunderstand or reject another vital key of prophecy — the biblical identities of the various nations.

The Bible mentions many of the modern nations but, generally, does not use the modern names of those nations. Instead it uses their ancient, biblical names.

For instance, the English-speaking nations of this earth are repeatedly mentioned in Bible prophecy, but not under such names as Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia or New Zealand. Where are the English-speaking, Anglo-Saxon-Celtic peoples mentioned in Bible prophecy? For a complete biblical explanation of the ancient origins of these peoples, request a free copy of our book, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*.

Without this vital prophetic key, the biblical identity of the English-speaking peoples is lost.

#### **Apply these keys**

Only the upright in heart will be able to understand Bible prophecy: "None of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand" (Dan. 12:10).

If you will diligently apply these vital keys, then you, too, can understand the important prophecies being fulfilled now and those that will be fulfilled in the very near future.

You need to grasp the truths contained in biblical prophecy. By understanding and heeding these important prophecies, you may save yourself and your family from impending calamity!