PANORAMA OF PROPHECY

DR. DAVID JEREMIAH
When a stranger asks me, “When is your birthday?” I become a little suspicious. I don’t believe they plan to send me a present. They probably want to figure out my horoscope. Nowadays, it’s not unusual to meet people who use astrological predictions to plan the future. Others actually spend money on psychics or New Age books. It seems that people will do almost anything in their quest to know the future.

In reality, there is only one place to look for a glimpse into our tomorrows: the Word of God. Unlike the fortunetellers of our day, God foretells the future with inerrant accuracy. He knows the end from the beginning. He’s given us a snapshot of things to come. The book of Revelation paints a picture of the events that will bring the world as we know it to a finale. The word “revelation” itself means the unfolding of that which was previously hidden or unknown.

Sadly, the book of Revelation has remained hidden and unknown to many Christians. Prophecy’s pages are often left shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding. I know pastors who have never preached about Bible prophecy from the pulpit because they fail to see the relevance of the book of Revelation in everyday life.

Have you ever wondered if prophecy is really all that important? After all, if we can’t know exactly when Christ is returning, then what is the point of studying biblical prophecy? Or maybe you’ve avoided the study of prophecy because it seems too difficult to understand. Perhaps, if you were honest, you would admit you are simply uninterested in the future. The present has you completely preoccupied and overwhelmed. I read once that sometimes we treat the book of Revelation like the priests and the Levites treated the Samaritan who was wounded on the road. We pass by it on the other side. Why do we avoid the study of prophecy? Or perhaps a better question would be, why should we study the panorama of prophecy found in Scripture?

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The Prominence of Prophecy

Out of the 216 chapters found in the entire New Testament, did you know there are 318 references to the Second Coming of Christ? That means if you were to omit passages about prophecy, you would have to remove one out of every thirty verses in the New Testament. You would also have to skip 23 of the 27 New Testament books,
which mention prophecy. For every prophecy about the birth of Christ, there are eight about His Second Coming. In light of prophecy’s prominence, can we really say, “Well, prophecy is just not relevant”?

Jesus not only spoke many times about the future, He also rebuked people who didn’t seem to recognize the significance of the events taking place around them. He scolded those who could read the sky for weather, but were unable to read the signs of the times. In Luke 12:56, Jesus said, “Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?” It was no small thing to Jesus that the people of His generation remained ignorant to God’s prophetic Word. Jesus wants us to investigate what the Bible has to say about the future, and ask God to help us determine the day and hour in which we live.

The Protection of Prophecy

Jesus knew that an understanding of prophecy would protect us from future deceptions. In Matthew 24:4-5, He said,

“Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.”

This instruction is so important that it is recorded for us again in Mark 13 and Luke 21. We are living in a day when men and women are being deceived left and right. Almost every week, I receive an advertisement for some new doctrine or method of understanding the Bible. You and I should not be surprised to witness the spread of false teaching. Jesus said in John 16:1, “These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble.” In others words, if you know what Jesus says about the future, you won’t fall into the trap of panic or distress.

While God wants to get you under prophecy’s umbrella of protection, the devil wants you to keep out. Satan knows that if you read Revelation, you’ll learn of his coming doom. You’ll see that the adversary who is tempting you every day has already been assigned to a new location: the Lake of Fire. If you see Satan as a defeated foe in the future, that helps you to be victorious over him today. Prophecy will protect you from Satan’s attacks in the present.
The Preparation of Prophecy

Jesus told many parables to illustrate the importance of being prepared for His coming. One such parable was about a master of the house who had been robbed. If the master had known the hour the thief would come, he would have surely watched to prevent the robbery. The lesson of the parable is simple: Be prepared. Always be ready for the Lord’s return, which will be as unpredictable as a thief in the night. First Thessalonians 5:4 says, “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.” Prophecy prepares us to meet the Lord anytime.

Prophecy also prepares us for future events. Hardly a day goes by that we don’t read about wars or rumors of wars, natural disasters or lawlessness in the newspaper. These grim headlines can discourage and worry us. Yet Jesus told His disciples to look for these signs of the end of the age. World calamities never take God by surprise. In John 16:4, Jesus said, “These things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them.” By reading Biblical passages about prophecy, you will be prepared for the days ahead. For even though the time of sorrows is coming, that means the day of redemption is drawing near.

The Practicality of Prophecy

Some Christians treat prophecy as a purely intellectual pursuit with no practical applications. If we just walk away and feel smarter than when we started, or we have a pile of manuscripts and can boast of our academic studies, what difference does that make? The book of Revelation is not only for understanding—it is for application. It’s possible to get on a prophetic kick that is so future minded that we forget that for each prophetic message, there is a present day application.

For instance, if you are aware of Christ’s imminent return, that will impact your desire to witness to others about the Gospel. If we take prophesy seriously, it will affect the way we live. Some of the most energetic people I know in the church have been transformed by their study of prophecy. They’re ministry oriented, reaching out to the lost because they understand what will happen in the future. Prophecy is intensely practical—it is the driving force behind evangelism and righteous living.

In chapter two of the book of Revelation, you will notice a phrase that is repeated over and over: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” In today’s vernacular, it might translate into, “If the shoe fits, wear it.” Prophecy has a practical application for every Christian.
The Prize of Prophecy

There’s something else special about the book of Revelation: it’s the only book in the Bible that motivates its readers by promising a prize. The prize is revealed at the beginning and the end of the book. Revelation 1:3 says, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.” The blessing is reiterated in Revelation 22:7, “Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.” I don’t know about you, but when God tells me specifically how to receive a prize of blessing, I want to get in on it. Read the book of Revelation, taking the time to understand it. If you follow the instructions in the book, God has promised a prize of blessing for you.

Prophecy’s Panorama

Prophecy gives us a glimpse into the future, so that we will know how to live in the present. That’s why prophecy is so prominent throughout the pages of the Bible. It protects us from deception and prepares us for Christ’s return. Prophecy is not only an academic exercise; it’s practical for everyday living. Then at the end of our lives, we will receive a great prize of blessing if we heed prophecy’s instructions.

The book of Revelation is not an imaginative piece of spiritual fiction to tickle our fancy. Instead, it is a guidebook to teach us the sequence of events leading up to the return of Jesus Christ.
Information based on the book *Agents of the Apocalypse* by Dr. David Jeremiah.

For more information, visit DavidJeremiah.org.