

CONNECTING

the

DOTS:

A HANDBOOK OF
BIBLE PROPHECY



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Part I - Are These the End Times?

Chapter 1

What In The World Is Happening? An Overview of Things to Come



Approximately one-third of the Bible contains prophecies. The book of Revelation is devoted entirely to the subject. It is amazing that so little attention is paid to the great prophetic passages in the Bible from many of the pulpits of the land. The aim of the prophets is to enlighten, to awaken hope, and to turn people from their destructive ways so God may bless them. Knowledge of what the future holds is the best way to prepare us to be ready.

Because of all the problems that threaten the world today, there is intense interest in this subject. A new poll from the Pew Research Center indicated that 41% of Americans expect Christ to return by the year 2050.¹ What an amazing fact! Undoubtedly the influence of the "Left Behind" series a few years ago can take some credit for this high percentage.

The subject of biblical prophecy is very interesting to most people for a number of reasons. The Bible has been shown to be the only book in history to predict the future with one hundred percent accuracy. In a world full of wrong answers and laughable predictions on every side, an accurate, reliable source of infallible information should be welcome news.

Undoubtedly, there is also interest in prophecy because of the constant barrage of bad news that this generation has suffered. Here is a short list of the troubling issues of our time.

First, there is the breakdown of family values. This has led to divorce, fatherless families, poor discipline, homosexuality, promiscuity, and other family problems.

Then there is apostasy and deception in the Church. This is a "falling away" of believers from a close relationship with The Lord and from a vital life-changing faith that draws other people to Christ and sets a high moral standard for society.

Corruption in government and greed in big business has caused the worst recession since the Great Depression, and has raised questions about how the country's mushrooming debt can ever be repaid. By some calculations, nearly 20% of the workforce is unemployed, resulting in unprecedented bankruptcies, foreclosures, and other financial calamities.

These conditions make the concept of a world government more desirable to some people. Shrinking borders, immigration problems, loss of national sovereignty, the apparent need for a world police force, common trade areas, and international banks and currency all push us toward a socialistic globalism.

Ignorance about the ideals of our Founding Fathers is causing many to wonder if our freedoms and Christian beliefs will soon be lost. Our history has been rewritten for school textbooks to downplay the importance of Christianity in our nation.

Unprecedented disasters, like the tsunami in 2004, the AIDS epidemic, drug-resistant superbugs, massive storms like Hurricane Katrina, and the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico remind us of our inability to cope with the natural and man-made catastrophes.

And, of greatest concern, is what Jesus' foretold about "wars and rumors of wars" in the End Times. The threat of major wars, even world wars is greater now because of the existence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

The 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington D.C. literally changed the way we see our world because of the new threat of Islamic terrorism. This growing ugly reality seems to have no means of control.

Furthermore, the fountainhead of terrorism is the festering tensions in the Middle East. The whole world hopes for peace in that region so that there might be peace in the rest of the world.

There have been many years of negotiations, and numerous different peace plans and promoters, trying to bring peace to Israel and her neighbors. But tensions have just continued to grow, and now Iran is on the brink of deploying nuclear weapons. That country's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, wants to destroy Israel and bring about the Islamic version of the Apocalypse in order to prepare the way for their messiah, the Twelfth Imam.

We will discuss this issue more fully later in the light of Bible prophecies about the rebirth of Israel, the rapture of the Church, and the coming Tribulation.

There is a peculiar development in our generation. In spite of the interest in prophecy by the public, there is a lack of teaching about prophecy in the pulpits. This may be caused in part by disappointments in the past. After becoming excited about Jesus' soon coming, many have reacted to the fact that he hasn't come yet. For other pastors this lack of end-times interest may be a result of false teaching that the Church has replaced Israel. But more likely, it is part of the reluctance by today's pastors to engage in any controversial subject, whether it is a moral issue or a difficult passage of Scripture. We fear for the average pastor of our age when he faces his Lord and has to explain why he did not teach the whole Bible! (Acts 20:26-27)

In his farewell address, "The Whole Counsel of God," evangelist C.G. Finney said,

But see the unfaithful minister in the Day of Judgment, he comes on to his trial, but he cannot look up. Those who sat under his ministry have caught sight of him, and they say to each other that is our minister; you remember his pretty tastes, his dazzling oratory, his graceful amblings, and his captivating blandishments; you remember about his pretty sermons, and you recollect how afraid he was to say hell, or let us know there was such a place; you recollect how he trimmed and truckled, how opposed to this thing and that thing, because it was not genteel, and was against all reform or progress in religion--do you remember all that: well that was our minister; see him looking down: he is speaking, what does he say? What does he say? See the eye of the judge looking through and through that unfaithful minister, that man who pretended to preach the gospel, and dealt deceitfully with souls. How much guilt there is upon him! What an awful thing that must be! How dreadful his position.²

The Wonder of Fulfilled Prophecy ***Coming of Messiah as Savior***

Unlike all other claims of foretelling the future, biblical prophecy is 100% accurate in all of the events that should have already come to pass. Josh McDowell, in his classic book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, lists sixty-one categories of fulfilled prophecies about the coming of Messiah. All of them were fulfilled by the life of Jesus Christ. He quotes figures from Peter Stoner's earlier book, *Science Speaks*, to demonstrate the astronomical odds against just eight of these prophecies being fulfilled by coincidence.

Stoner wrote, "We find that the chance that any man might have lived down to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in 10¹⁷." To illustrate that number, Stoner then suggested that the reader visualize that many silver dollars spread across the whole state of Texas. They would cover the state 2 feet deep. Then, if one silver dollar were marked and buried, the chances of a blindfolded man picking that one marked silver dollar with his first attempt would be the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies down and then having them all come true in one person.³

Now, since the prophecies of Jesus' first advent were fulfilled perfectly, we can expect the ones that still await fulfillment to also come true.

Major Prophetic Events Yet To Be Fulfilled ***Restoration of Israel***

Restoration of the scattered Israelites was a common theme among the Bible's prophets. In Ezekiel 36 and 37 we read detailed predictions about the Lord's plans to regather his dispersed people from all over the world, and bring them back to the mountains of Israel. At long last, they would have control of their own nation again. Please refer to Appendix C - *Harmony of Prophecy Chart* as you continue this overview of prophecy.

These prophecies were partially fulfilled in 1948. After one-half of all Jewish people were killed in the prison camps of World War II, most of the nations of the world recognized the right of Jewish immigrants to the Holy Land to declare their independence.

Ezekiel's prophecies had depicted the event as a valley of dry bones. The bones started shaking and joining together into a skeleton. Then the skeleton was covered by muscles and skin. The rebirth of the nation of Israel is a stark fulfillment of this vision.

However, the last part of that vision has not yet been fulfilled. Just as God had first formed Adam and then breathed life into him, in Ezekiel's vision, God also breathes new life into Israel, and gives her a new heart. These are pictures of spiritual birth, but most of the people of Israel have not yet experienced this spiritual transformation. It will happen in time, according to this and other prophecies about God's Chosen People. Multitudes of Jewish people have already turned to Jesus as their Messiah in our generation!

Emergence of a Final Evil World Empire

In any overview of prophecy it is necessary to review the Bible's predictions about future world empires, leading to a final evil world government just before Christ returns to Earth as King of Kings.

These world kingdoms are depicted in a series of dreams and visions in the Book of Daniel. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream about a giant statue (Daniel 2). He asked his wise men to interpret the dream, but they could not. However, Daniel, a devout young Hebrew captive, was given the ability to declare the dream and its interpretation to the king. The statue had a head of gold that represented the Babylonian Empire and King Nebuchadnezzar.

The chest and arms were silver, and stood for the next world empire, which would have two parts. This was fulfilled by the Medo-Persian Empire that eventually conquered Babylon.

A bronze waist and thighs stood for another powerful empire that would arise. This was a preview of Greece.

The legs were of iron, stronger than the other metals, and they symbolized Rome, the strongest of all empires, and the last world empire to reign over the known world.

The final aspect of the statue was the composition of the feet. They were partly of iron, and partly of clay. Then a rock fell from heaven, symbolizing the coming of Messiah to reign, and broke the feet, causing the whole statue to fall and break apart. The rock then grew into a great mountain, representing the coming righteous reign of Christ (Messiah). This subject will be developed more thoroughly in Chapter 8.

Several other portions of Daniel's prophecies (Daniel Chapters 7-9) and the Book of Revelation (Revelation Chapters 12-18) predict the same drama. The end result is the destruction of the final evil empire by the coming of Jesus to reign as King of King and Lord of Lords.

Time of Jacob's Trouble/ Tribulation

The Prophet Jeremiah gave a strong warning about a terrible time in the future for Israel.

These are the words the LORD spoke concerning Israel and Judah: ⁵ "This is what the LORD says:

" 'Cries of fear are heard—
terror, not peace.

⁶ Ask and see:

Can a man bear children?
Then why do I see every strong man
with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labor,
every face turned deathly pale?

⁷ How awful that day will be!

None will be like it.
It will be a time of trouble for Jacob,
but he will be saved out of it." - Jeremiah 30:4-7

This Tribulation is described in the book of Daniel as one "week" or seven-year period of time in the future, following 69 "weeks" or 483 years leading to the time that Messiah would be cut off (Daniel 9:24-27). Between the 69 "weeks" and the 70th "week" there would evidently be an indeterminate period of time. We now know that this interval is the period of the Church Age in which we are now living. The Apostle Paul called it a "mystery". The Church Age and this mystery are explained more fully in Chapter 3.

The time of trouble begin with a seven-year peace treaty from the future prince, whom most prophecy scholars expect will be the end-times dictator.

In the middle of the seven-year peace treaty the dictator will break the agreement by setting up a statue of himself in the newly-rebuilt Temple (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13). His associate, The False Prophet will require people to worship the image, and will impose a financial dictatorship on people everywhere, requiring them to receive the "Mark of the Beast" (Revelation 13). Chapter 11 develops this aspect of the Great Tribulation.

Coming of Messiah as King

At the end of the seven years of the Tribulation, the Beast will gather his forces from all over the earth to do battle against The Lord. This will be the dreaded Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 19:11-21). Jesus will appear as a rider on a white horse, followed by the armies of heaven. But he will do all the fighting, by use of his powerful words. He will come as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The Old Testament is full of visions of this great day and of the restored Earth over which Messiah will reign. In addition to these passages in the Major Prophets, we have other pictures of the event as well. As mentioned earlier, Christ's coming is depicted by Daniel 2:44-45 as a rock from heaven, landing on the brittle feet representing the final evil world empire, smashing the image, and then growing into a great mountain.

In Jeremiah 30:8-11, after the "Time of Jacob's Trouble," there is a promise of freedom and happiness. God's people will be brought back from distant places and will live in peace and security.

From Jesus' own teaching in Matthew 24:29-31, there is a promise of his return in power and great glory, gathering the faithful together to enjoy His restored kingdom.

Finally, in the last several chapters of the Bible (Revelation Chapters 19-22), details are given about how Jesus will return with His saints to win the Battle of Armageddon and deal with Satan, the Beast, and the False Prophet. Jesus will reign over the restored Earth for 1000 wonderful years, and then usher in the New Heaven and the New Earth, where there will be no tears or sorrow forever!

Jesus' Own Outline of the Future - The Olivet Discourse Four Periods of Time - Matthew 24:9-14

We mention this key passage here even though some of the same information has already been given above. It holds special importance because it was Jesus' own explanation of things to come.

Beginning of Birth Pains (Matthew 24:4-8) - Jesus warns about false messiahs, predicts an increase in wars and rumors of wars, as well as famines and earthquakes before the beginning of the Tribulation. The list of signs given in the parallel passage in Luke's Gospel includes plagues, fearful events, and signs in the heavens (Luke 21:9-11).

In the later writings of the Apostle Paul, after the mystery of the Church Age had been revealed, he added another facet of the final days. He said the times would be characterized by apostasy, the "falling away" of the Church from its devotion to the Lord and to its commitment to biblical principles. As a result of the Church's failure to be the champion of morality, the culture will slip into greater sin (1 Timothy 4:1-4; 2 Timothy 3:1-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 6-7; 2 Timothy 3:1-8). The Revelation given to the Apostle John agrees that the Church at the end of the Church Age--the Laodicean Church--will be "lukewarm" and ineffective (Revelation 3:12-22).

The apostasy in so many churches in the past 50 years is shocking. In many cases it appears that only a small remnant is aware of what God is doing in history. This was the state of affairs in Israel when the Lord came the first time. There are many more false teachers running around now, and wilder legends and folklore are being taken seriously--as the fabric of our civilization collapses and as all truth appears to be relative. Breakouts

of anarchy and revolt in the world are easier to understand when the things men once believed disappear. True Christianity is increasingly marginalized and a false world religion appears necessary to help hold the fragile world culture together.

The Tribulation (Matthew 24:9-14) - The first half of the seven years of turmoil will be characterized by a growing polarization between good and evil, with believers being severely persecuted. You might notice that Jesus does not explain the rapture of the Church because the subject of the Church was a mystery not revealed in the Old Testament. It was gradually explained by Jesus and his Apostles in the days to come. Several chapters are devoted later to the explanation of the Mystery of the Church, its history and the rapture (See Chapters 3 through 6).

The Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:15-28) - Jesus gave a preview of the horrifying events at the middle of the seven years of the peace treaty. According to the Book of Revelation, the first half would have already been a time of distress since true believers would have been persecuted and driven underground or killed. But then, the Beast will have an image of himself set up in the "Holy Place" in the newly rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem. This is the "Abomination of Desolation" predicted by Daniel, and it will lead to the institution of a world-wide economic dictatorship and the dreaded "Mark of the Beast." *See Chapter 11 -The Great Tribulation.*

As mentioned above, there is a promise of Jesus' return in power and great glory, gathering the faithful together to enjoy His restored kingdom.

Are We There Yet?

Where is the Promise of His Coming?

First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." - 2 Peter 3:3-4

Skeptics in our day are already saying this. "Where is the coming he promised?" In the following verses Peter explains that it is like it was in Noah's days. A flood had not come during the hundred years it took for Noah to build the ark. They mocked him for believing in a flood. But, as Peter says, to the Lord, "One day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day." And besides, he doesn't want people to perish if they would believe, so he is giving them every opportunity to repent (1 Peter 3:5-8).

Here are some of Jesus' answers to the problem of doubt about prophecy...

Jesus' Guidelines

- We should be able to interpret the signs of the times.

Jesus said that His listeners should be able to recognize the obvious signs of the times. There is something wrong with them if they miss the obvious proofs that the end of this age is near.

The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

²He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' ³and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times." - Matthew 16:1-3

- It is futile to try to pin down exact dates and details about how the prophecies will be fulfilled.

About date-setting, Jesus simply said, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36).

This makes a great deal of sense if you think about his first coming into the world. Even though some sixty different categories of prophecy were fulfilled by his birth and life, it would not have been possible for even the strongest believer and best student of prophecy to have written His Story in advance. Every detail matches the prophecy, but no one could have imagined all the richness of his story, including exact dates of his advent or of his death.

-Most people will ignore the facts until it is too late for them.

³As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. - Matthew 24:37-39

The amazing thing about Noah's days is that, in spite of his work on the Ark, and his preaching to people for 100 years, his generation did not want to hear the truth until it was too late! In our days, many, even of the 41% who expect Jesus to return by the year 2050 still do not live like they believe it is true.

-The Lesson of Fig Tree shows that we are living in the last generation.

Could this really be the last generation before the end of this age? Look at what Jesus said:

"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ³³Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁴I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." - Matthew 24:32-35

The word for "generation" (Gr. *genea*), can have several meanings. Some think it means the Jewish people will not become extinct before these prophecies are fulfilled. However, the most obvious meaning is the generation of people who are living when these events begin to come to pass in startling succession. The first and most amazing fulfillment is the rebirth of the nation of Israel. The fig tree is one of the symbols of Israel.

Since Israel became a nation in 1948, we have every right to consider ourselves the last generation of this age. But how long is a generation? Thirty-five years? Forty years? There are various biblical possibilities. It has now been more than 60 years since this great event. But notice that Jesus said this generation will not *pass away* until all these things have happened! If the rebirth of Israel is the starting point, this generation will not have passed away until the last person living at that time has died. That gives another 60 years or so! But we can seriously expect His return any day. Some of us have believed this for many years now, but in any case, his return is nearer now than it ever was before!

Now let's take a quick look at the violence in the Middle East that is top news day after day. This information will be expanded in *Chapter 7 - Historical Developments*.

War and Peace in the Middle East

Current Events

This is the word of the LORD concerning Israel. The LORD, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares: ² "I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. ³ On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves." - Zechariah 12:1-3

Various versions of this passage translate the expression about the cup as "a cup of reeling," "a cup of staggering," or "an intoxicating drink." There are other prophecies in the Bible that compare God's wrath to the stupefying effects of drunkenness (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:22). It is a fitting picture of the confusion that faces world leaders today over the tensions in the Middle East.

Israel and Her Neighbors - Multiple Wars

On May 14, 1948, Israel declared her independence. For more than 50 years before that date Jewish people had been moving back to their homeland. This area, known as Israel in the Bible, had been subject to foreign control since before Jesus was born. In later years the Romans called the land "Palestine" (from the Philistines, who were earlier enemies of Israel). This was an insult to the Jewish people who had been driven away from their God-given land.

The land was sparsely occupied by mostly Arab settlers, who were called "Palestinians" by virtue of living in Palestine.

After the horrors of World War II, and the death camps of the Nazis, which destroyed 6 million Jews, the sympathy of much of the world was with them when they declared their rebirth as the nation of Israel in 1948.

The big problem was that this act displaced many of the Palestinians who had lived there. Actually, the Palestinians were given the choice of staying and becoming Israeli citizens. Or they could move to the Gaza or West Bank areas. Some of them tried to move to nearby Arab countries, but were not permitted to do so. Therefore, they found themselves living in the difficult environment of refugee camps.

On the very day that Israel declared their independence they were attacked by all of their neighboring countries. Miraculously, by God's grace, they won that war. Since then they have had to fight several other wars to retain their existence.

During the Six-Day war in 1967 Israel acquired additional areas, including the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and parts of the Sinai Peninsula.

The Islamic Revolution - Iran 1979

In 1979 Iran experienced a revolution, exiling the reigning leader, the Shah, and installing an Islamic government. This, in fact, became the Islamic Revolution. It was a reaction to the successes of the new nation of Israel, and signaled a rebirth of Islamic aspirations to rule the world that had been stopped by World War I.

The Islamic Revolution also provided the environment that eventually gave rise to modern terrorism all over the world. Iran itself has not produced many terrorists, but the government of Iran encourages and sponsors terrorist groups like Hezbollah and Hamas.

It must be noted that not all Muslims agree with this radical, militant view of Islam. It is generally claimed that only about 10% of them hold this position, but the majority do little or nothing to stop the rise of this dangerous trend.

Iranians are not generally Arabs. They are mostly of Persian descent and are proud of their ancient history.

These deep enmities go all the way back to Old Testament times. Modern nations that are descendants of Israel's ancient enemies are at the heart of this struggle. There has always been tension between the descendants of Abraham's older son, Ishmael and his

younger son, Isaac. Isaac, of course, was the father of Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Ishmael's large family became a significant portion of the Arabs--inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula. Joktan and Esau became patriarchs of many other Arab tribes in the same area (Genesis 10:25-30; 25:1-34).

9/11 and Islamic Terrorism

Islamic terrorism shook the United States unexpectedly on September 11, 2001, when three hijacked airliners executed simultaneous attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC. A fourth plane, heading for either the Capital Building or the White House was forced to crash by the brave passengers aboard.

Afghanistan and Iraq

The sneak attack was planned by a fringe group of Islamic terrorists called Al-Qaeda, who were led by a Saudi Arabian zealot named Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden's group was in Afghanistan, so the U.S. soon invaded that country.

During this time Saddam Hussein, the dictator of Iraq (the ancient land of Babylon and Assyria), ignored numerous United Nations resolutions to stop development of nuclear weapons. It is still debated today whether or not they actually had nuclear weapons, it was known that they had and used other weapons of mass destruction to destroy their own Kurdish countrymen.

After much debate, the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003 and is still there today, having high hopes of producing a free democratic nation in the area.

Threat from Iran

Now, again, a Middle Eastern nation is developing nuclear weapons, and doing so against the various resolutions that have been made by the United Nations. Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has engaged in the most hateful rhetoric against Israel, claiming they have no right to exist, and vowing to destroy them. And in his case, if they really do obtain nuclear weapons, they will probably use them, because he believes he is the forerunner of the Islamic Messiah, whom they call The Twelfth Imam. According to their worldview there must be an apocalypse first, and then their messiah can step forward to restore order.

The Quest for Peace

During the past several decades, terrorism has become a major problem in Israel and the surrounding nations. American Presidents and many other world leaders have taken the initiative of proposing various peace plans that would hopefully settle the tensions between Israel and the Palestinians that is at the heart of the problem.

The whole world is eager to see peace in the Middle East because only then can they hope to see the decline of world-wide terrorism.

One after another these various plans have failed to bring agreement and/or implementation.

A Two-State Solution?

Peace talks continue from year to year. One proposed solution is to establish a separate Palestinian state existing beside Israel in harmony. The Palestinians want all of the land they lost in the 1967 war, but Israel feels that those exact boundaries would leave them vulnerable to future attacks. For that reason they have established numerous Jewish settlements, presumably with the idea in mind that when a peace proposal is accepted, some settlements would be kept for security reasons and others could be traded with the Palestinians for certain areas necessary to Israel's defense.

There is also the question of whether or not to allow displaced Palestinians to return to Israel. The Palestinians insist on "the right of return." Israel's position has been that this is not negotiable because it would alter its Jewish character. So far the Palestinians have not been willing to recognize Israel as a Jewish state.

What about Jerusalem and the Temple Mount?

Of greatest importance to both Israel and the Palestinians are the issues of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. Both countries would want their capitals in Jerusalem. This might be accomplished by a division of the city, but numerous Israeli leaders have promised their people they would not give up any of Jerusalem in the future. However, there are indications that they might be willing to give up portions of East Jerusalem, which is populated primarily by Palestinians.

The Temple Mount is sacred to both Jewish and Muslim people. This is undoubtedly the most difficult aspect of the peace process. A new Temple could be built for Jews without destroying the existing Islamic shrines there, but would either side ever agree to such a thing? *See Chapter 10 - The Rebuilt Temple.*

A Temporary Peace

Everyone is hopeful that a peace agreement can eventually be hammered out between the Israelis and the Palestinians. It should be added here that there could be more than one peace agreement before people would proclaim that "peace and safety" have finally prevailed. But when that effective agreement has been signed, it will be a shaky peace.

While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. - 1 Thessalonians 5:3

The scene will then be set for the opening acts of the Tribulation, according to Revelation Chapter 6. Without being dogmatic about the details, here is one possible sequence that could lead from the signing of a peace agreement to the events of the Tribulation.

The first major development of the Tribulation is the opening of the First Seal.

I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!"² I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest. - Revelation 6:1-2

The rider will be the coming world dictator, though he may not be recognized as such at the beginning. Riding a white horse symbolizes the fact that he will be accepted as some kind of messiah. (Jesus, the true Messiah will come on a white horse at the end of the Tribulation - Revelation 19.)

As a military victor, this rider of the white horse may be the one who facilitates the peace process. But even if he does, this will probably not yet be the seven-year covenant predicted in Daniel 9:27. The reason for this is shown by the event that takes place when the Second Seal is opened.

When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!"⁴ Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword. - Revelation 6:3-4

This war takes peace from the earth. It is a world war. But it is not the Battle of Armageddon, which comes at the end of the Tribulation. This war is at the beginning of the Tribulation, and is different than the Battle of Armageddon in many ways. Many prophecy scholars relate this war to the one described in Ezekiel, Chapters 38 and 39. That war is said to begin after Israel has been supernaturally restored as a nation (Ezekiel Chapters 36 and 37). It will take place at a time when it could be said, of Israel that it is, "a land of unwalled villages," and "a peaceful and unsuspecting people" (Ezekiel 38:11).

The battle itself involves nations from many places. It is over quickly because The Lord intervenes by sending "fire and brimstone," which could be literally the same as what happened to Sodom, or it could describe a nuclear war. Great wars are normally ended by a peace treaty, and since Israel is the object of the war, the treaty would be between Israel and her enemies. That might very well be the seven-year pact of Daniel's vision.

Before or After the Rapture?

Will this temporary peace be before or after the rapture? It could be either before or after the signing of a peace agreement. This is one reason we live in any-moment anticipation of the rapture. There is no exact sign that accompanies this great event. It comes suddenly, so we should always be ready for it (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:10; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58).

Understanding the Times

What we need now is to be people like the men of Issachar," who understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chronicles 12:32).

You might wonder if a person can really hope to know the meaning of the prophecies. The Wise Men found the Newborn King because of the accuracy of prophecy that he would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:4-5); and those who followed The Messiah did so because they recognized that his life and message were the fulfillment of specific prophecies (Matthew 1:22-23; 8:17; John 1:41; 7:41-42; Acts 9:22). God is always eager to teach his children, to shine new light on his Word, and to help them sort out the relevance of events in the modern world. He does not want us to be ignorant but well-informed.

Other Prophecies

This book is about biblical prophecy. Little notice is taken of prophecies that were not recorded in God's Word. Biblical prophecies were spoken by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21; Hebrews 1:1-2). The Old Testament penalty for giving a false prophecy was death (Deuteronomy 18:18-20). Jesus himself warned that there would be false prophets in the End Times (Matthew 24:10-13, 24).

There is, however a "gift of prophecy," described in the Bible. This is the supernatural ability that is given to some people at certain times to reveal God's will or to predict future events. It is explained by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 through 14 as one of the ways that the various members of the body of Christ work together for the benefit of the whole Church. Strict rules are given about the use of this gift so that it is not abused. One of the main restrictions is that any prophetic statement should be approved by the others in the group who also had that spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 14:32-33).

It is not the purpose of this book to consider these "other" prophecies. Individual Christian groups should weigh such utterances carefully and not tolerate any abuse of this gift.

Astrology and Fortune-telling

There are many other non-biblical prophecies that can not be taken seriously, and are therefore not considered at length in these pages. Astrology is probably the most obvious of these non-biblical methods of telling the future. Astrology is an occult perversion of

the true science of Astronomy. Astrology is strictly forbidden by the Scriptures (2 Kings 17:16-17; 23:5; Psalm 81:12; Isaiah 47:13; Jeremiah 10:1-2; Daniel 1:20, 2:27; 4:7; 5:7).

However, the Bible does say that the lights in the heavens were to be used for signs and seasons (Genesis 1:14), and it indicates that God, who created them, calls the stars by name (Isaiah 40:26; Psalm 147:4). Psalm 19:1-6 says that the heavens tell of the glory of God. According to John 1:14, Jesus revealed the glory of God. Therefore, this could mean that the heavens foretell the coming of Christ.

Some respected Bible scholars believe that, before there were written Scriptures, God may have used the clustering of stars that we call constellations as object lessons about his future plans for salvation and other prophetic subjects. This theory is sometimes called, "The Gospel in the Stars."⁴ There is a fascinating correlation between these cosmic images and the biblical story of the birth, life, and work of Christ. This theory has merit because it relates only to biblical prophecies, and gives a more meaningful and coherent story than the mythological imaginations of astrology. There is no connection between this concept and the modern attempt by astrologers to predict the course of events of living individuals.

Fortune-telling and occult practices of predicting the future are usually phony theatrics to separate gullible people from their money. Worse yet, they may be evil messages, sometimes containing half-truths, revealed by demonic mind-control. Séances, use of Ouija boards, Tarot cards and other methods of telling the future apart from the Bible should be avoided at all costs.

Some new age writers claim that their messages are "channeled" by supposed "ascended masters", or avatars. If these spirits really exist, they too must be demons.

Nostradamus and Other Psychics

Michel de Nostredame (Nostradamus) was a French chemist who wrote a book of prophecies. His "quatrains" contained mysterious and apocalyptic elements that have frequently been cited after some important historical event as proof that he could foretell the future. One example of this is a hoax spread on the Internet that he had prophesied the destruction of the World Trade Center. The truth is that his prophecies were too vague, and could be twisted to mean almost anything after the fact. None of his prophecies have been used to accurately predict something important before it happens.

Edgar Cayce and Jean Dixon claimed to be psychics. They often made predictions about near future events, and were sometimes right; the same way a good political analyst could list probable world developments, and sometimes be correct. Benjamin Creme has been predicting the imminent appearance of Maitreya, a supposed messiah who has been living secretly in London since 1977. These and many other psychics of our generation were predicted by Jesus:

At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹²Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. - Matthew 24:10-12

Mayan Prophecies and the Year 2012

Students of Mayan culture in South America have always known that the unique dating technology of the Mayans included a “Long Count” calendar that ends on Dec. 21, of the year 2012. It is doubtful that the Mayans themselves thought that this end would bring great disasters. Mayan scholars think they just expected a new beginning. But later speculation, New Age teaching, and some prophecies have led to unrealistic claims about the destruction of the earth in 2010. Without scientific evidence, some have claimed that the magnetic poles of the earth will reverse at that time. This, of course, could cause unimaginable consequences, but we need much more scientific proof before believing this will happen.

In 2009 Sony Pictures released “2012,” a major movie, with a production budget of \$150,000,000. In the movie, neutrinos from a massive solar flare cause the earth’s core to overheat, triggering a catastrophic chain of natural disasters. Ironically, the movie chose to portray the survival of some 400,000 people aboard huge “arks.” that could survive the cataclysm and allow the human race to start over. See the discussion of coronal mass eruptions in Chapter 13 – *The Plot Thickens*.

Many New Age devotees see this date as the beginning of their “golden age,” or “the Age of Aquarius. A Google search returns millions of matches for a Google search of “new age” and 2012. One site claims to channel a message from “Master Quetzalcoatl” claiming that this date will mark the official return of the Christ / Imam Mahdi / Buddha Maitreya and other ascended masters. This interest in the year 2012 is a windfall for New Age authors, who have many different ideas about the importance of the coming date. See the discussion of New Age spirituality and the Age of Aquarius in Chapter 5 - *Satan's Final Empire: Global Governance and Religion*.

Bible students can agree that there are dreadful events ahead, but there is no logical or biblical connection between the prophesied disasters of the Tribulation and the imagined events of 2012.

Islamic Prophecies

Islam has a highly-developed belief in End Times events. To the surprise of many Christians, there are important correlations between their prophecies and our own biblical revelations. For example, they believe in an end-times battle between good and evil, and Jesus (Isa) will return to help Muslims overthrow the false messiah (Dajjal).⁵ But it must be remembered that Mohammed lived hundreds of years after Christianity had become a major influence in the world. He had access to the Jewish Scriptures (Old Testament) and the Christian Scriptures (New Testament). He and his later followers could borrow

freely from these sources, changing things as necessary to predict a favorable outcome for Islam.

Some Muslims claim that prophecies from the Qur'an (Koran) and the Hadith have come to pass. Examples include the invention of the light bulb and the establishment of Israel, but on close examination they fail to be convincing.⁶ David Reagan, from lamblion.com lists 18 end-times prophecies that are generally taught by Islam. They are mostly variations of biblical prophecies.

In the Shiite branch of Islam there is a prophecy about a coming messiah. According to their history, "The Twelfth Imam," Muhammad al-Mahdi, was hidden by Allah until the end of time. They believe that he will return to save the world when it is in a state of chaos.⁷ See "Nuclear Iran" in *Chapter 7 - Historical Developments*.

About the Name "Antichrist"

It is common practice in today's end-times literature to identify an "unholy trinity" of Satan, Antichrist, and the False Prophet. This evil trinity does exist in Revelation chapters 12 and 13. In chapter 12 the devil, or Satan, is symbolized by a red seven-headed dragon that persecutes Israel. In chapter 13 there are two other beasts. One of these is the second person of the "unholy trinity." He is a seven-headed beast from the sea. He receives his power from the dragon, and becomes a global military dictator. The other beast has two horns like a lamb, symbolizing his religious nature, but he speaks like a dragon. This third person of the ungodly threesome is called "the false prophet" (Revelation 16:13; 19:20; and 20:10).

In Revelation 16 the three entities are all mentioned together, but the name "Antichrist" is not applied here or anywhere else to any of them.

¹³Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. - Revelation 16:13-14

In his epistles, the Apostle John writes that there are already many antichrists. To him this word signifies deceivers who deny that Jesus is from God (1 John 2:18; 1 John 4:3 and 2 John 7). But in writing the Revelation, he does not use the word "antichrist" at all. Instead, he uses the expression "the beast" regularly from Revelation chapter 13 through 20.

There are many other biblical names for "the beast." In Daniel 7:8 he is called another (eleventh) horn that speaks boastfully. In Daniel 9:26 he is referred to as "the ruler who will come." In Daniel 11:21 he is described as "a contemptible person."

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 the Apostle Paul labeled him “the man of lawlessness,” and “the lawless one.” And in Revelation 6:1-2 he is seen as the rider on the white horse.

Everything considered, the person most prophecy writers call “Antichrist” is “the beast.” But from John’s perspective “the false prophet” would also be an antichrist. So, for the sake of accuracy, we have usually called this end-times dictator “the Beast” in this book.

In the next chapters we will consider biblical teaching about Israel and the Church. Unless we understand them we will not be able to make sense of the great prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled.

NOTES

¹ Life in 2050: Amazing Science, Familiar Threats: Public Sees A Future Full of Promise and Peril, The Pew Research Center For The People & The Press
<http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/625.pdf> (accessed July 17, 2010).

² C.G. Finney, "The Whole Counsel of God," The Gospel Truth
http://www.gospeltruth.net/1849-51Penny_Pulpit/510402pp_counsel_of_god.htm (accessed July 18, 2010).

³ Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972), 175; and Peter Stoner, *Science Speaks* (Chicago, IL, 1963).

⁴ Joseph A. Seiss, *The Gospel In The Stars* (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publishing Company, 1884); and E.W. Bullinger, *The Witness of the Stars* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1967). This theory has been endorsed today by such well known Bible teachers as Chuck Missler. Audio: *Signs in the Heavens*. (Coeur d'Alene, ID: Koinonia House); and

D. James Kennedy (Message televised from Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Jan. 7, 1996, and) *The Real Meaning Of The Zodiac* (Coral Ridge, FL: Coral Ridge Media Ministries); and by Dr. Henry M. Morris in his book, *The Long War against God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), 265-269.

⁵ Jewish, and Christian End-Times Prophecy Comparison, Contender Ministries
<http://www.contenderministries.org/prophecy/eschatology.php> Muslim (accessed September 20, 2010).

⁶ Islamic Prophecies, Wikiislam.net, http://www.wikiislam.net/wiki/Islamic_Prophecies (accessed September 20, 2010).

⁷ John von Heyking, Iran's President and the Politics of the Twelfth Imam, Ashbrook Center.com,
<http://www.ashbrook.org/publicat/guest/05/vonheyking/twelfthimam.html> (accessed September 20, 2010).