

Course taught by:

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I. GOD PREDICTS THE FUTURE -- An Introduction

The word "eschatology" is the theological term used to describe the Bible's prophetic doctrine about the Last Days ("eschatos" = last [end]; "logos" = word or teaching). Hence, "eschatology" is teaching about the last days of this age and about the glorious eternity to follow.

"The study of Bible prophecy is fascinating and profitable. God has seen fit to draw aside the curtain of the future and to reveal enough of His heavenly plan to inspire His children with confidence and hope. Let us approach our study with joyous expectation" -- Charles Woodbridge

A. The Importance of Studying Eschatology

What is the purpose for studying prophecy?

1. To teach us what God's plans are

A knowledge of Bible prophecy "provides the believer with an optimistic philosophy if history" (Alva McClain)

2. To inspire us about the greatness of God (Is. 46:9-11)

(He is omniscient [He knows all] and He is sovereign [He controls all])

3. To assure us of the unity and reliability of Scripture

A vast portion of the Bible is given to predictive prophecy. It is said that 333 distinct prophecies were literally and exactly fulfilled at the first coming of Christ (the chances of this happening by accident have been computed as 1 in 87,000--plus 90 more zeros).

For every verse speaking of Jesus' first coming in Scripture, there are eight which speak of His second coming.

4. To encourage us to be faithful to God and His Word

God's future program is a source of:

- a. Comfort to the sorrowing Christian (I Thess. 4:13-14; John 14:1-4)
- b. Strength to the Christian enduring testing (II Cor. 4:14-18; Rom. 8)
- c. Warning to the lazy, unfaithful Christian (II Cor. 5:9, 10)
- d. Correction to the Christian who places too much value on this life (II Peter 3:10-12)
- e. Reproof to the Christian who becomes doctrinally careless (II Thess. 2:5; II Pet. 1:19)
- f. Cleansing for the Christian who keeps his eyes on Christ and His future glory (I Jn. 3:2-3)
(cp. W.E. Blackstone, Jesus is Coming, p. 180)

5. To wake us up to realize the extreme urgency of the hour in which we live (Rom. 13:11-12). God's longsuffering is so that others might be saved (II Pet. 3:8-9, 15)

6. To prepare us for the most dreadful time of persecution in human history -- the 70th week of Daniel (commonly called "The Tribulation Period") (Rev. 14:12)

7. To bless us with God's revelation about the future (Rev. 1:3)

B. The Method of Studying Bible Prophecy

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit to teach you His Word
2. Allow the Bible to formulate your system of beliefs (your theology), rather than forcing your pre-supposed beliefs into the Bible (SEE: Appendix: "A Biblicist's View Toward the Bible")
3. Interpret the Bible literally

(Take God's Word for what it says, rather than allegorizing the Bible and dreaming up a deeper, hidden meaning that cannot be proven by the context, grammar, or by an accurate comparison with other Scripture)
4. Remember that God has not necessarily revealed all the details of His plan yet (Rev. 10:4)
5. Understand the unique features of Bible prophecy
 - a. Not all prophetic passages are chronological (cp. Rev. 11 with 12:1-5)
 - b. Often there are time gaps in prophecy (that were not discernable to the prophet himself) (Is. 9:6-7, 61:1-2; cp. Lk. 4:18-20; Dan. 9:24-27)
 - c. Often, future events are recorded as if they had already occurred (EX: Is. 9:6, 5:13, 53:12). Why?
 - 1) To express the certainty of fulfillment (Is. 46:10)
 - 2) To express the viewpoint of the prophet who was seeing the vision of the future (EX: Rev. 20:15)

C. The Amazing Accuracy of Bible Prophecy

Only God can predict the future!

1. The Omniscience of God has foretold His plan (Is. 14:24; 44:28-45:1, 13; 46:9-10)
2. The Soveriegnty of God will accomplish His plan (Is. 46:10b-11)
3. The Inspiration of the Holy Spirit has recorded His plan (II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:20-21)