

Introduction to **PROPHECY**



Introduction to Prophecy

*Why look at
prophecy today?
Was it all written
centuries ago, for a
people long-
vanished? Or were
these prophecies
written for our time?*

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But Prophecy Doesn't Make Sense!

This booklet introduces you to an important subject—one that you may never have thought was important. This subject is prophecy—the messages revealed to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and the other prophets.

Their writings make up a large part of the Bible. And they wrote long ago.

What have they got to do with you—American, Canadian, English, French, German, Italian, Nigerian or whoever—living in the closing years of the 20th century?

Prophecy seems old fashioned, obscure, and impossible to understand. “It doesn't make sense!” some will say. We hope this booklet will change your view.

What do you see when you think of a prophet? A rather odd man dressed in a robe, probably? He has long hair and an even longer beard. One arm is stretched out—in the other he holds a scroll. His eyes have a frenzied gleam. What is he saying? “Doom! Woe! The end is nigh! Repent or perish! Prepare to meet thy God!”—things like that. His audience is either jeering at him, or covering their ears. No one is taking him seriously, but he doesn't care. He is driven by his passions—a man obsessed with purpose. He *must* get his message across to wicked, sinful people.

That is the traditional view, and frankly, it doesn't look like it has much to do with us today. The prophet seems to belong to another age, when a stern and vengeful God rained down fire and brimstone, or plagues and pestilence, on those who would not obey.

Today, people believe God is more tolerant. Now he pleads with a disinterested world to acknowledge him. He—and his religion—are rather like vitamin pills. You don't *need* them to survive, but you never know—they just may make you feel

better. Doesn't that view of God fit our needs so much better in this sophisticated age?

Why Prophecy Today

So why look at prophecy today? Because, as we will show you, understanding prophecy changes the way you look at history and answers important questions about the present and the future.


Especially the future. We are all concerned about that. There never has been another age quite like ours. Whereas other times have been called “the age of enlightenment” or the “age of progress,” ours may well be remembered as the “age of anxiety.”

On the one hand, we have made incredible progress. Most of us (or at least, most of us who are able to read this booklet) live at a standard that our forefathers would have considered the height of luxury. The average North American, European, or Australian today enjoys a level of comfort much greater than even the kings and emperors of 200 years ago. We take for granted running water, electric light, education, adequate medical care, public and private transportation, books, magazines, radio, television, the telephone, clothing, food and fuel. We have, in the twentieth century, solved most of the problems that once made daily living for the overwhelming majority a backbreaking round of drudgery.

On the other hand, we have given ourselves a set of problems our forefathers never had to worry about—pollution of the environment, decline and breakdown of the traditional family and new, dreadful diseases. Will the economy collapse? Will there be a third world war? Our modern world, for all its progress, is a fragile, uncertain place.

Some futurists tell us the next century will be a high-technology wonderland where even more dramatic advances make life easier and easier for everyone. Biotechnology, they insist, will cure diseases and lengthen lives. Computers and robots will do all the hard work. We'll abolish poverty. We'll have universal peace. We'll colonize space! We'll . . .

Others aren't so sure. They see a world where greed and shortsightedness have caught up with us. The battered environ-



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ment will give up the struggle. Agriculture will collapse. The oceans will die. Prosperity will vanish. There will be too many people—and not enough of anything else. Life may once again become a grim struggle for survival—if we still exist.

Modern technology has made the prophets' words accessible to everyone.

The gloomiest of the doomsayers think that we may destroy ourselves before we even make it to the next century.

Who's right? The optimist or the pessimist? We *hope* it is the optimist because most of us are at heart also optimists. But a quick glance through the daily newspaper often swings the odds in favor of the pessimist. Does *anyone* know for sure?

The prophets of the Bible did. They were a special breed of optimists—in spite of their rather grim reputation. But they were *realistic* optimists. They saw what was wrong—and they saw how it could be put right. Most of them wrote at a time when their nations were floundering in moral and spiritual darkness, and they tried to shine a light into that darkness.

Preserved for Today

The prophets knew they were inspired by God, who had said, **“There is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done...”** (Isaiah 46:9-10).

Their immediate concern was *their* present—and the problems of *their* time. But they realized their message was bigger than that—some of their words seemed to reach out across time—to generations yet unborn. The prophets believed passionately in their mission—and that fervor kept them going in the face of ridicule, rejection, and martyrdom. Others treasured their words, lovingly preserving, stoutly defending, laboriously copying and recopying them by hand on fragile scrolls, or (in translation) in the great chained Bibles of the Middle Ages. Because of this labor of love and faith, we still have the words of the prophets today.

Modern technology has now made

those words available—in millions of Bibles—in all the major and most of the minor languages of mankind. No longer are the words of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel hidden away in desert caves or monastery libraries.

But they might as well be! Most of us know very little about the prophets or their messages.

Do you have a copy of the Bible handy? Take a look at it. The books of prophecy make up about 200 pages. Do they look as if they have been used much?

But then, to be honest, do they look very usable? Reading a book of prophecy can be a frustrating, bewildering experience. It seems to be full of strange antics, visions and confusing and convoluted language. What is it talking about? You mean to say this is important to *me*—now?

Yes, that *is* what we are saying.

We want to show why this apparently obscure subject is important—to you—*now*. We want you to see that it is not so obscure. Prophecy *can* be understood. Oh, you have to know some basics—it's rather like a foreign language. When you first see it, it seems a total mystery. But once you have learned a few rules of grammar and some vocabulary, you can begin to make sense of it. Prophecy is like that.

So let's see if those bewildering words of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and company, have anything to do with us today. Let's look at them more closely. To do this, we must make a quick survey of the “rags-to-riches-to-ruin” story of ancient Israel.

As You Begin

This booklet is designed to be “user friendly”—to quote a modern expression. We will need to refer to the Bible frequently—you can't write about prophecy without doing that. On first reading you may not want to stop from time to time to find the scripture in what may be unfamiliar parts of the Bible. So we will print all essential scriptures in full, right in the text.

Other less essential references will be listed, but not quoted. It is not necessary to check every one of these references as you first read this brochure. We hope you will find this brochure interesting, and will want to go back and read some of the chapters again. That is the time to look up these scriptures. By then you will have gained an overview, and you will be surprised to see how apparently obscure parts of the Bible become full of meaning. All scriptures quoted in this booklet are from the *New King James Version* of the Bible.

The Background

Who were the prophets? When did they live, and why did they do and say what they did? They spoke long ago to a world that was very unlike ours, before the age of newspapers, radio, satellites and around-the-clock news reports from all corners of the earth. Their way of communicating a message was very different. We need to see the prophets in the context of their time.

What motivated these men to preach their somber messages? To understand, we must go back to "Bible times," when the events recorded in the Scriptures were actually happening.

If you have a Bible handy, turn to the table of contents at the front, where the books of the Old and New Testament are

listed. This is the order that most of us are used to. If you were to look at a Bible published for those of the Jewish faith, you would see a different order and there would be no New Testament.

This difference in order is not really important for the average non-Jewish reader, except for one very important detail: the books are divided into categories. First there are the five books of "the law." Next comes a section labeled "the prophets." The books of "the writings" complete the order of the Hebrew Bible.

The main difference between this order and the one in most other versions is in the

prophets. It includes the books of Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel, and First and Second Kings. Christians usually think of these as the *historical* books,

because they tell the story of ancient Israel from the time they came out of the wilderness to about 850 years later when the historical record ends. But the Hebrew canon of Scripture includes these books in the prophets. They are often called the "former prophets."

Why "Former" Prophets?

Why should these books be called the "former prophets"? The *latter* prophets, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, whose messages are recorded in the Bible, did not come on the scene until the history of ancient Israel was nearly over. Yet, from the beginning, *long* before they wrote, God's hand determined the fortunes of this people.

Ancient Israel was a "chosen people." They had entered into a very special relationship with God. He was their "head of state," and he gave them his laws to live by. If they obeyed those laws, they would be blessed above all people. However, if they disobeyed, God would withhold his

Ancient Israel's history is a unique record of a people's relationship with God.



JACOB BESTOWS BIRTHRIGHT

The Holy According to the Hebrew Canon:

THE LAW

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

THE PROPHETS

Joshua
Judges
I Samuel
II Samuel
I Kings
II Kings
Isaiah

Jeremiah

Ezekiel
The Twelve
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah

Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

THE WRITINGS

Psalms
Proverbs
Job
Song of Songs
Ruth
Lamentations
Ecclesiastes
Esther
Daniel
Ezra
Nehemiah
I Chronicles
II Chronicles

blessing, and the nation would begin to experience difficulties.

Thus, Israel's history is a unique record of a nation's ongoing relationship with God. When things went wrong, other nations might say it was bad luck, or blame the government, or the ebb and flow of

history. In Israel, many knew better. They **knew**, if their national affairs weren't going right, that they were not living up to the standard God expected. They also **knew** what they must do to make things right. If they refused to do right, they could **expect** God to continue to punish them. In that sense, the course of their history was predetermined—or *prophe-sied*—long before the “latter prophets” began their work. It is important to understand this point if you are to see what prophecy has to do with today.

In the Beginning

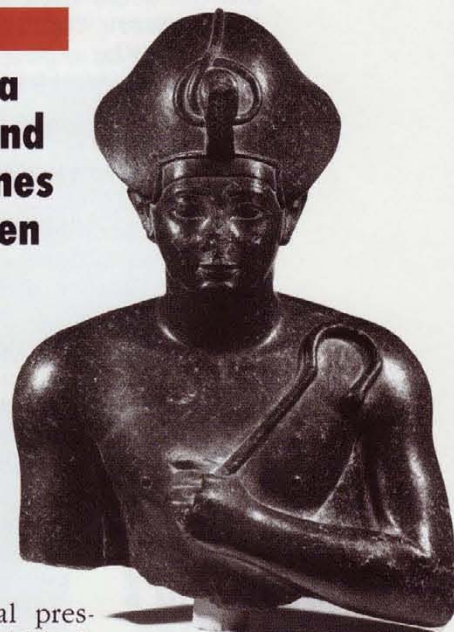
The story of ancient Israel really begins even before the “*former* prophets.” In the first book of the Bible—Genesis—we learn that the ancestor of the Israelites was Abraham. He was an unusual man. He was not perfect, but he was strong in character and faithful in his devotion to God at a time when most people were not. God was looking for such a man.

It had become quite obvious that the

would bless them above all the people of the earth—as an example to others.

They would become a role model for God's way of life. He would settle them in the Promised Land. There they would

God took a personal hand in the fortunes of the chosen people.



THE PHARAOH OF THE EXODUS

show all nations that God's way worked. As they obeyed, the blessings would increase. They would achieve international prestige. All nations would look to them for leadership. They would occupy some of the most abundant and strategic areas of the earth. Even the Messiah would come from them.

Abraham agreed to God's proposal, and a partnership began (Genesis 12:1-3). God reconfirmed the promise with Abraham's son Isaac, and later Isaac's son Jacob, whom God renamed Israel. Israel had 12 sons, whose descendants eventually became the 12 tribes of Israel (Genesis 26:3-5; 35:10-12, 23). Jacob eventually passed the name and birthright *specifically* to two of his grandchildren, the two children of his favorite son Joseph. But *all* the descendants of Jacob's sons were to be collectively known as the children of Israel.

You may already know the story of how Jacob (Israel) made his favorite son Joseph a coat of many colors, and how later Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers (Genesis 37).

He was taken to Egypt, where, due to his remarkable ability to interpret dreams, he eventually became the second most powerful man in the country. Later, his brothers and old father sought refuge in Egypt when a drought ravaged their land. Joseph forgave his brothers for the wrongs they had done to him and settled them and their families in Egypt (Genesis 39 through 47). At first the children of

Scriptures...

In Most English-Language Versions:

Genesis	II Chronicles	Daniel
Exodus	Ezra	Hosea
Leviticus	Nehemiah	Joel
Numbers	Esther	Amos
Deuteronomy	Job	Obadiah
Joshua	Psalms	Jonah
Judges	Proverbs	Micah
Ruth	Ecclesiastes	Nahum
I Samuel	Song of Solomon	Habakkuk
II Samuel	Isaiah	Zephaniah
I Kings	Jeremiah	Haggai
II Kings	Lamentations	Zechariah
I Chronicles	Ezekiel	Malachi

human race did not know how to live successfully in prosperity and peace. Only a way of life based on God's laws and statutes could ensure this. So God called Abraham and proposed a special agreement. If Abraham and his descendants would live according to God's laws, God

Israel grew and prospered in their new home. But a pharaoh who did not know of Joseph's reputation came to power. He feared the growing numbers of Israelites and enslaved them (Exodus 1:8-14). It did not seem then as if the children of Israel were "chosen"—rather, they seemed to be a people without a future. But God knew what he was doing.

To the Promised Land

If you have ever read the story of the Exodus, or remember the epic film *The Ten Commandments*, you know how God sent Moses to deliver the Israelites out of bondage. With a series of miracles, God led them out of Egypt and into the wilderness. There he gave them his laws and promised to lead them to the land "flowing with milk and honey." The children of Israel were a stubborn race, and their persistent rebellion and lack of faith

postponed the fulfillment of this promise.

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, but eventually stood at the gates of the promised land. There Moses handed over the leadership to his faithful second in command, Joshua (Deuteronomy 34:9). That brings us to the first of the "former prophets." What happened next shows how

During David's 40-year reign, Israel was established as a major power.



HEBRON, KING DAVID'S FIRST CAPITAL

the future of these people was predetermined—or "prophesied."

Joshua's first task was to lead the children of Israel into the promised land (Joshua 1:1-9). God reminded the new leader of the very special relationship they had with God. If they obeyed God's laws, they would be blessed in their

promised land above all the people of the earth. If they disobeyed, they would suffer calamity after calamity until eventually they would be banished from their inheritance. Clearly, there was a great responsibility in being the "role model" for God's way of life.

The book of Joshua recounts the battles fought and the lessons learned as the people entered the promised land under his leadership. At first they met with success. With God's miraculous intervention, the Israelites easily took the frontier city of Jericho, as you can read in Joshua 6. Full of confidence, a small force marched against the next objective—the much smaller city of Ai. They expected to take it easily. Instead, they suffered a humiliating defeat (Joshua 7:2-9).

What had gone wrong? Were Joshua's tactics wrong? No—the Israelites should have easily won, except that God was not with them on this occasion (verse 1). *ONE* family, the family of Achan, had looted a statue from Jericho—something that God had expressly forbidden. He had to teach them a lesson—they must learn that he *meant* what he said. Israel's experience was not to be like any other people's. Other nations might not have been able to take the strongly fortified Jericho, but would have easily defeated Ai. Israel could only expect success if God was with them. If God *was* with them—as at Jericho—no power on earth could withstand them.

Thus, in the first few days of entering the promised land, the "chosen people" learned an important lesson. God was taking a *personal* hand in deciding their history. It set the pattern of what would happen over the succeeding centuries. Obey and succeed. Disobey and fail utterly. What happened to ancient Israel at Jericho and Ai is an important lesson in understanding prophecy. That is why it is recorded in the "former prophets."

The Time of the Judges

Joshua was a strong leader, and generally speaking, the people did obey during his lifetime, and also during the lifetime of the leaders he had trained (Joshua 24:31). But after they died, things began to go wrong.

The second book of the former prophets—Judges—tells us what happened. It records a series of events that was repeated several times in the next 300 or so years.

The people would drift away from God. To correct them, God would allow them to be oppressed by one of the nations who lived around them and who also coveted the “promised land.” In their affliction, the chosen people would cry out to God, and he would send them a deliverer—one of the *judges*. Directed by God, the judge would lead the people to victory. It was usually a relatively short-lived lesson, and soon Israel would be sinning again. This dreary cycle repeated itself many times.

The book of Judges makes somber reading. It ends on this sad note: “**Everyone did what was right in his own eyes**” (Judges 21:25). It seemed that this people chosen by God to be an example to all the other nations would never live up to their part. Then when things looked at their worst, Israel’s fortunes began to take a turn for the better.

The next two books of the former prophets—commonly called I and II Samuel—show us what happened.

At the beginning of the first book of Samuel, Israel is ruled by Eli—a sincere but ineffective ruler. Eli’s sons were corrupt (I Samuel 2:12), using their father’s office to enrich themselves. What would they be like when they inherited their father’s office? That is a situation that many other nations have had to face as they groan under the burden of incompetent and corrupt leaders. But God was in control of the destiny of Israel.

Eli’s sons were killed in battle before Eli died (I Samuel 4:11, 18), and his honest and God-fearing assistant Samuel became the judge in Israel.

Three Kings

Things went well during Samuel’s lifetime, but once again, his sons were not of his calibre (I Samuel 8:1-3). The people of Israel became concerned as Samuel grew older. They no longer felt secure with their system of government. They asked Samuel to appoint them a king so that they could be like the other nations

around. Samuel was distraught—he felt that the people had rejected him (verses 5-7). God reassured him—they have not rejected Samuel, but rather they have rejected God and *his* rule over them. So be it—they will have their king, and God would use these circumstances to teach

ASSYRIAN BATTLE SCENE



ASSYRIAN ARCHERS

To correct his chosen people God would allow them to be oppressed by other nations.

some important lessons.

Israel’s king Saul was tall and handsome—the popular choice (I Samuel 9:2).

Saul, however, lacked the most important characteristic of a leader—character. He may have been a physical giant, but he was a moral midget. God informed Samuel that Saul would have to be replaced (I Samuel 15:26-28). God had chosen in his stead a totally different kind of man.

This was David, the youngest son of Jesse who lived in Bethlehem. After Saul was slain in battle, David came to the throne (I Samuel 16). He was not perfect, he made some tragic mistakes, but he always repented deeply and tried hard to be a righteous ruler. Under his capable leadership, Israel prospered. During David’s 40-year reign, Israel was established as a major power in the ancient world.

When he died, he was succeeded by his son Solomon. The rest of the story is recorded in the last books of the former prophets—I and II Kings.

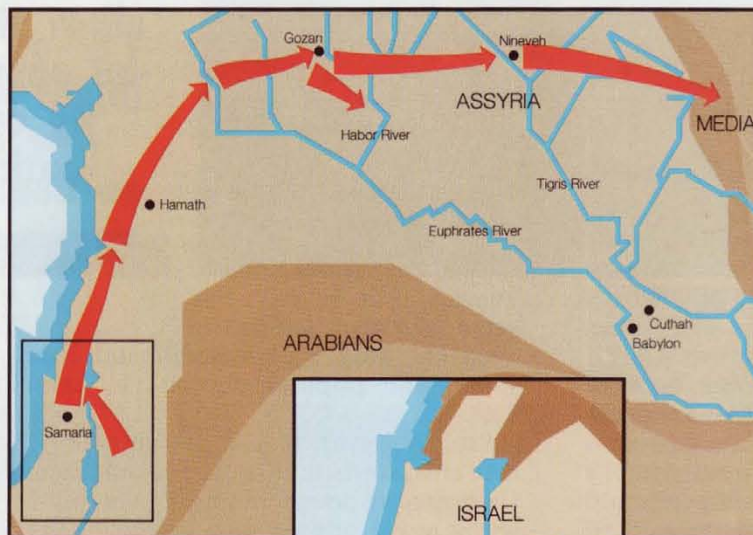
Solomon reigned during the golden days of ancient Israel (I Kings 1-11). Israel

controlled the major trade routes and became wealthy beyond measure. The great temple that Solomon built in Jerusalem was one of the wonders of the world.

In the reign of King Solomon, God fulfilled many (*but not all*—that is important, as we shall see) of his promises to Abraham and his descendants. They had inherited the promised land, and had power, prestige, and prosperity. God was ready to give them even more if they would obey. (I Kings 9:4-7).

Solomon began well, but as his reign progressed, he showed a serious character flaw. He took as his wives many foreign women, and much of the nation's resources were consumed in maintaining the army and the government structure. Solomon, in all his glory, began to forget God! It was a formula for disaster.

The last two books of the "former prophets"—I and II Kings—record the final experiences of this "model nation."



ISRAEL'S ROUTE TO CAPTIVITY

When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam came to the throne and immediately made a foolish mistake.

The people came to him, asking for some relief from the heavy tax burden that Solomon had imposed on them (I Kings 12). The elders advised Rehoboam to make concessions. He chose instead to listen to younger, inexperienced men. On their advice, and flushed with self-confidence and power, Rehoboam told his people that far from get-

ting relief, they could expect even more pressure from on high!

That did it! The 10 northern tribes broke away and formed their own nation, to be known as the House of Israel. Only the tribe of Judah, most of the priests (Levi) and the small tribe of Benjamin remained loyal to Rehoboam and became known as the kingdom of Judah (verses 16-24).

Now the story of the chosen people splits into two. The northern kingdom of Israel under their leader, Jeroboam, began to adopt customs of the neighboring Canaanite religions, which God had expressly forbidden.

The kingdom of Judah did not deteriorate as fast, although even it was not what it should have been.

As the decades went by, the House of Israel and eventually the House of Judah drifted into idolatry. The rest of I Kings and II Kings tell the dismal story. The House of Israel never returned to its spiritual roots.

Occasionally there is a brief upturn in Judah, as a righteous king tries to bring the nation to its senses. The revival does not last long—his successors take the people even farther down the path to spiritual ruin.

God was patient and merciful, but he could not forget the terms of the covenant. Israel was an example—for better or worse—for all people. They must reap what they sow.

So begins a very significant chapter in the story of these ancient peoples. But first, God sends each of them a warning because, as the prophet Amos said, **"Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets"** (Amos 3:7).

Enter the Prophets

There were many prophets. Some have only a brief mention. Others, like Elijah, we know of by their deeds, although they themselves left no written record.

Then there are those we call the written prophets—men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the 12 "minor" (but by no means insignificant) prophets—whose

words *are* recorded in the Bible.

These prophets spoke out, first to the House of Israel, then to Judah. They were not appreciated. They were treated like . . . well, like we would probably treat them today. They were rejected, resisted, ridiculed, thrown in jail and sometimes put to death.

Their writings are a record of a hard and thankless task. Few took them seriously. Usually, not the king. Nor the priests. Nor the people. They were superb patriots—but they were regarded as troublemakers and traitors. “Can’t you see what is happening?” they would warn. “Unless we, God’s chosen people, change our ways and return to him, national disaster will overtake us. Can’t you see that even now the forces are gathering against us? Don’t you realize why things are going wrong for us? We have drought and crop failure. . . . We’re losing battles. . . . Our societies are falling apart. Can’t you see that these things are happening to warn us and wake us up? Put away those idols. Stop your lying, cheating and adultery. It is not too late to change. People of Israel and Judah, can’t you see?!”

No—they could not see. They wanted their own way. They rejected the warnings of the prophets, and reaped the consequences.

Israel went first. In the latter half of the eighth century B.C., the northern kingdom suffered a devastating series of invasions by the Assyrian Empire. Finally, they were taken into captivity and their land was resettled by others. The Israelites lost everything—their homes, their liberty, their land and eventually even their identity. The Bible record seems to close around them with these sad words: **“For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, . . . and they had feared other gods, . . . Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, . . . saying, ‘Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets.’ Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks. . . . until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the**

prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day” (II Kings 17:7, 13, 14, 23).

The kingdom of Judah limped on for about another 120 years. God sent more prophets but their pleading fell on deaf ears. There was a brief revival under King Josiah, but after his death the people of Judah continued their moral slide.

Inevitably, they, too, paid the penalty. This time it was at the hand of the Babylonian Empire (II Kings 25:7-11), which had replaced the Assyrians as the major



LAST KING OF ISRAEL VANQUISHED

It seemed as if the story of the chosen people was over.

power in the Middle East. Jerusalem was besieged, the last king was taken captive, and the temple was destroyed. Like the house of Israel before them, the people of Judah were led off to captivity.

It seemed as if the story of the chosen people was over. God had kept his part of the covenant, but neither Israel nor Judah would remain faithful. They wanted their own way. They took God’s blessings for granted and mistook his patience and mercy as a sign of weakness.

The lesson of the six books of the “former prophets” is clear. A chosen people who persistently fail to keep their part of an agreement with God must reap the consequences.

If that *were* the end of the story, we could leave it there. The writings of the prophets could be included in the records of ancient Israel. Certainly, they would make interesting and instructive reading, as do the annals of other ancient people, if it were the end of the story.

But it was not the end. Israel and Judah were taken into exile, but the prophecies continued to come.

Unfinished Business

We cannot wrap up the lessons of prophecy with the story of ancient Israel and Judah. Their prophets had spoken many words of warning. The people ignored them and reaped the consequences. But not everything that had been prophesied had been fulfilled. The prophets' stern warnings were filled with hope. God was angry, but he would not be angry forever.

The prophets looked through the bleakness of their present to a much, *much* better time when Israel and Judah would be once more at peace, dwelling together and sharing blessings even greater than before. God would send them a great deliverer—or Messiah—who would lead them into a glorious future (Isaiah 11:2-4). Jerusalem would become the *world* capital, and *all* nations would go there for direction and leadership. The prophecies looked forward to a time when there would be no more war or suffering. Israel's enemies would be allied with her. Even wild beasts would lose their animosity toward men, and all men everywhere would worship the one true God. The Messiah—Israel's long-awaited Deliverer—would be King over

said can be easily and directly applied to their situation, but not everything. There is a lot of unfinished business.

For instance, Ezekiel continued prophesying to the House of *Israel* after they had been taken captive by the Assyrians (Ezekiel 2:3). Jeremiah showed that Judah *and* Israel would be restored (Jeremiah 30). Almost in the same breath, he announced that they would suffer the worst time of trouble any nation has ever had, but they would be saved, and the long-dead King David would be restored to them.

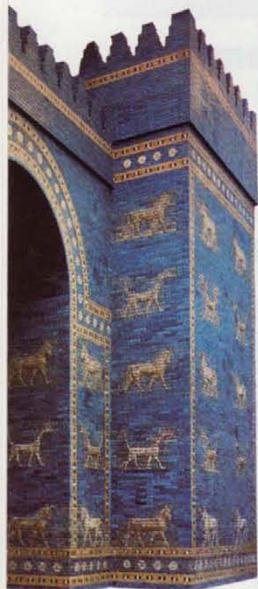
Obviously, not all these prophecies were fulfilled by the experiences recorded in the Old Testament. Often the prophets referred to events of the future—including a time some of them called “the latter days.”

Prophetic Duality

At the time they wrote they did not have a clear understanding of when this would be. They were rather like men looking at a distant mountain range. Some features could only be described in broad outline, and it was difficult to judge distance and establish perspective.

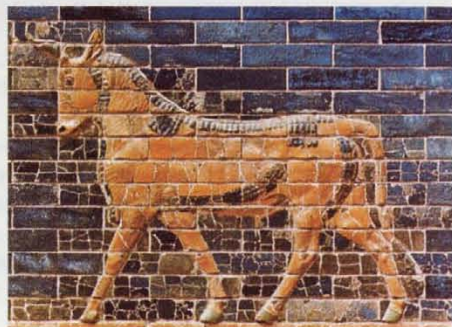
God was telling them there would be a yet future Israel and a Judah, and a prophetic message would again need to be sent to them.

There is an important principle of prophecy known as duality. An event (“type”) would be the forerunner of a similar event (“anti-type”) that would occur in the future. In other words, prophecy, like history, sometimes repeats itself. You will find this often as you study prophecy. Something that occurred in the distant past will be seen as a prototype of a later fulfillment. The duality of the prophetic messages is an important key in understanding God's hand in history—and, what is for us even more important—the present.



BABYLONIAN GATE

God had promised many things, but much remained to be fulfilled.



DETAIL FROM GATE

all the earth. All this and more God had promised, but it had not yet been fulfilled.

So what did it all mean? This is what makes prophecy so intriguing—and yet so frustrating. The record of *ancient* Israel doesn't seem to be the whole story.

Certainly, much of what the prophets



DANIEL'S DREAM

So, against the backdrop of the troubles of their time, the prophets revealed details of things to come in the future. But when? And how? God did not choose to make the picture crystal clear at that time. As Isaiah said, his words were **“here a little, there a little”** (Isaiah 28:10).

What was needed was a framework, into which the many components of prophecy could be fitted logically.

A few years after Judah was taken into captivity, a young man named Daniel was puzzling over this question. He had found favor in captivity, and had risen to a very influential position in the Babylonian government. Through it all, he remained a faithful, God-fearing man. He knew what the prophets had said, and he wanted to understand more.

Daniel and the Future

What Daniel wanted *most* was the answer to prophecy’s *big* question: When would the Messiah come?

He knew this would be the turning point of all history—not only for Israel and Judah but the entire world.

Daniel loved his people, and he was deeply concerned with the condition they had been brought to. They had once marched so triumphantly out of Egyptian slavery. Now they were captives again. He had realized, from Jeremiah’s prophecy, that Jerusalem’s desolation would last for 70 years. In which case, the time of liberation and restoration could not be far off. Could it be that the golden age of Israel’s fortunes was just around the corner? Daniel asked God for the answer.

God began to reveal some vital details that helped Daniel—and us—to more completely understand prophecy. He showed that although the time for Judah to return home was near, the coming of the Messiah was still a long way off. Many things would have to happen first. The Babylonians who were holding the Jews captive were only the first of four great empires that would rise and fall before the Messiah would establish his kingdom and restore Israel’s fortunes.

Daniel lived to see the Babylonian Empire fall—in the autumn of 539 B.C.—at the hands of the Medes and Persians. He found favor with the new rulers, and continued to hold

positions of influence. But the coming of the Messiah and the restoration of his people continued to preoccupy him, and he never ceased to ask God for understanding.

Eventually, God revealed the longest continuous prophecy in the Bible. You will find it recorded in Daniel, chapters 11 and 12. A remarkable series of events is predicted—the waxing and waning of great empires, an ongoing struggle for power between kings, political intrigues, invasions and counter-invasions, with times of great persecutions for those who remain faithful to God. It is a sobering chronicle, but with a happy ending. Those who maintain their faith in God emerge victorious.

At the end, the details of this prophecy become very specific—even indicating a sequence of events in terms of *days*. Once more, Daniel asks, when will these things happen? But God had revealed enough for that time. He tells Daniel, **“The words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end”** (Daniel 12:9).

Daniel never did get his big question answered, but his prophecies added important perspective to *our* understanding. We see from Daniel’s writings that prophetic events are not to be thought of *only* in the context of ancient times. Nor would they only affect the people of *ancient* Israel and Judah. They were the “type.” In the latter days, their descendants would be the “anti-type.”

The Latter Days

The Persian emperor Cyrus eventually allowed some Jewish exiles to return to their homeland (Ezra 1:1-4), to

DECREE FREEING JEWS



The prophecies have a special relevance to the modern descendants of Ancient Israel.



PERSIAN ARCHER

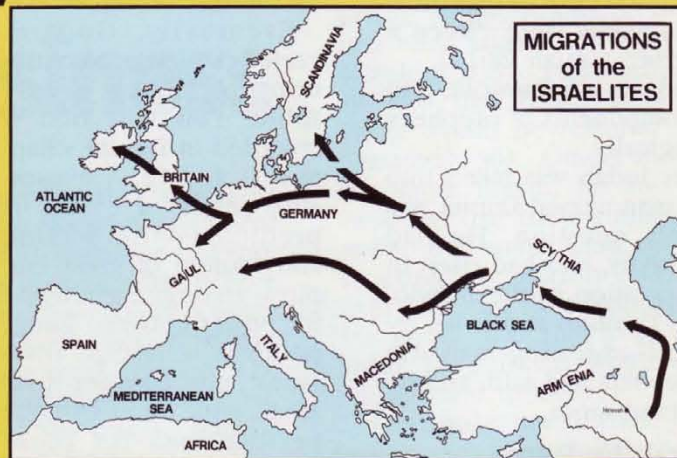
Mystery of the Lost Tribes of Israel

In 721 B.C. the people of the northern kingdom of Israel were taken into captivity by Sargon's soldiers. We last hear of them when they are resettled in the Assyrian Empire "in Halah and by the Habor... in the cities of the Medes" (II Kings 17:6). The territory of Israel was settled by gentile people who became known as Samaritans.

When the Assyrian Empire collapsed about 100 years later, the Israelite tribes migrated to the northeast, into the region of the Caucasus Mountains.

Eventually they forgot their language and even their name. This may sound unlikely, but it need not take long for an exiled or immigrant people to forget the past, as history shows.

The prophet Amos said God would "sift the house of Israel among all nations, as grain is sifted in a sieve" (Amos 9:9). And they soon lost their identity. That might have been the end of the mat-



ter, except for the rest of this verse, "yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground."

Amos, and many of the other prophets, tell of Israel playing a key role in the "latter days"—the time at the end of the ages when most of prophecy's "unfinished business" would be settled. These prophecies require that the people of Israel would exist as a nation or nations in the "end time."

We know the subsequent history of the tribe of Judah—right down to today and the modern state of Israel. The story of Judah is important, but it does not answer all the questions of Bible prophecy. If prophecy is to

have any validity today, the ten "lost tribes" of Israel need to be identified.

There have been many attempts. Some have tried to trace them to the Pathan tribes of Afghanistan, to Central America, even the borders of China. The fact remains the historical record is at best sketchy and inconclu-

sive. But the tribes can be located—if we use the clues and signposts of the Bible itself. The identity of the modern descendants of the ancient House of Israel is one of the significant, and little understood aspects of history. It is vital to know who they are, if you want to make sense of the prophecies of the "latter days." There is *some* fragmentary evidence in history, but the *proof* is in prophecy. We have available for the asking a free booklet that explains who the modern descendants of Israel are. Its title is (and a clue to whet your appetite is right there) *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*. It is fascinating reading.

become a vassal state of his empire. What happened to these people and their descendants has been well-documented. We know the often-tragic history of the Jewish people—their struggle to reestablish themselves, under the Persians, in their homeland, their ill-fated rebellion against the Romans that ended in A.D. 70, the diaspora and pogroms of later times, Hitler's holocaust, and the problems facing the state of Israel today. But the modern Jewish state represents only one part of the descendants of Judah, and doesn't even include the House of Israel.

What about the others—the northern tribes of the House of Israel that had earlier been taken into exile by the Assyrians? History has no record of their *ever* being restored. They have become the legendary "lost tribes." Yet, many

prophecies make it clear that the House of Israel would exist in the "latter days," and there are still many prophecies concerning them that have not as yet been fulfilled.

So what we have learned is this: The prophecies of the Bible pertain to the descendants of ancient Israel and Judah who are living in the "latter days," who will be making the same kinds of mistakes their forefathers did.

God does not change his mind easily and he is not a respecter of persons. He doesn't forget his promises, and he doesn't alter his standards or values. He is merciful and long suffering, but he will not tolerate any people ignoring his laws forever—especially a chosen people. He has never forgotten they are his "chosen people"—and he has not yet finished

with them.

Remember the principle we mentioned earlier: God does not do anything without first revealing it through his servants the prophets. He knows what he has said. He knows what must be done for it all to be fulfilled.

Prophecy was preserved, not because it is the interesting annals of an ancient people, but because its message is as valid today as when it was first uttered.

Whoever the modern descendants of

the twelve tribes of Israel are, the words of the prophets have a very special relevance to them.

We have come a long way in our understanding of prophecy. Can we know more?

Daniel added many details, but there were still some important pieces of the puzzle missing.

Many of these pieces were added during the life of the greatest prophet of all—Jesus Christ.

Amos 9:14 "I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them."

Zechariah 8:3-5 "Thus says the Lord: 'I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the Lord of hosts, the Holy Mountain.'

"Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age.'

'The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.'"

Zechariah 8:22 "Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord."

Jeremiah 31:33 "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, says the Lord, I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

Ezekiel 36:26-27 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

Isaiah 2:4 "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

Isaiah 11:6-9 "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

"The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

"The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.

"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

Isaiah 19:24-25 "In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, 'Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.'

Isaiah 35:5-7 "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

"Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.

"The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water. . . ."

Micah 4:1-2 "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it.

"Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

Joel 2:27 "Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame."

Zephaniah 3:20 "'At that time I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you; for I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes,' says the Lord."

Hosea 1:10-11 "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea . . . And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there it shall be said to them, 'You are the sons of the living God.'

"Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel!"

Prophecy's Unfinished Business

Jesus and Prophecy

You probably knew that Jesus was born about 2,000 years ago, in Bethlehem, that he was born of a virgin, came from the tribe of Judah and was a descendant of King David. It may surprise you to know that some people knew it even before he was born.

How could this be? Because many details about Jesus Christ had been prophesied centuries before his birth, by the prophets of the Old Testament. If Jesus had not been born when he was, where he was, and if he had not done the things he did, we could dismiss those prophets as frauds. Well-meaning, God-fearing frauds perhaps, but frauds nevertheless.

At the time Jesus was born, the people of his nation Judah were expecting a deliverer—whom they called the Messiah. Judah had fallen on hard times again. They had a few centuries of semi-independence after the Persian King Cyrus permitted the exiles to go home. The temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt. But almost 60 years before Jesus was born, Judah was again conquered, and had become a province of the Roman Empire. Roman rule had brought certain benefits, but like subject people, anytime, everywhere, the Jews wanted to be free. God, through the prophets, had promised a Messiah who would lead them not only to freedom, but to power and prosperity.

The prophecies about the Messiah were very specific—even down to minute details. A prophecy in the book of Daniel had even foretold, *hundreds* of years in advance, the *exact* year that Christ would begin his ministry. Others showed where he would be born, details of his childhood, how and where he would teach, his death, burial and resurrection. The odds against someone deliberately choosing to

fulfill these prophecies are astronomical. So at the time Jesus was born, those who understood the scriptures knew something important was about to happen.

They were people like the old man Simeon, who immediately recognized who Jesus was when Mary and Joseph brought him to the temple (Luke 2:25-35).

Then there was Anna, who had prayed all her life to see the Messiah (verses 36-38). Even the wily King Herod was aware the Messiah was due. His advisors could pinpoint from prophecy the exact town where Christ would be born—Bethlehem (Matthew 2:3-6). When Herod had the male infants of Bethlehem slaughtered, he unwittingly fulfilled yet *another* prophecy (verses 16-18).

“Jesus Will Save Us”

As Jesus began his ministry, many other people began to see that he might be the long-promised Messiah. He did miracles. He said he was born to be a king. It began to sound like he had been sent to lead them to freedom. Some people expected him to begin a popular uprising against the Romans. They saw Jesus



BETHLEHEM

as a revolutionary leader of a liberation movement, and they were in at the ground floor. They surely would receive influential positions in his government once he had led them to victory. The question was, *when* would he make his move?

Then one day, just before the Passover, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, just as the prophet Zechariah had proph-

esied the Messiah would (Zechariah 9:9). Now there was no question. This was surely it. Big things were about to happen.

What *did* happen took them all by surprise. Just a few days after his triumphal entry, Jesus was arrested, condemned to death and then crucified. His supporters had not expected that.

They should have. Jesus had warned them often enough that it would happen, and it *was* prophesied, right down to the details. The Messiah would be rejected by his friends and abused and humiliated before being executed with common criminals. This, however, was an aspect of prophecy his followers did not understand, and it certainly did not fit in with the popular idea of a Messiah. What kind of a deliverer was this?

Even the closest disciples of Jesus were left bewildered and confused. What had gone wrong? Hadn't Isaiah proclaimed so confidently that when the Messiah came, **"the government will be upon His shoulder. . . . Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end"** (Isaiah 9:6-7)?

They were greatly encouraged when three days later their fallen leader was resurrected. His followers now thought that surely he would lead them to victory. **"Will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"** they asked (Acts 1:6). His answer was interesting. **"It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority"** (verse 7). In other words—no, not yet. It was not the time.

Jesus knew that his mission on earth had not been a failure. He had accomplished all that he had been prophesied to do—*so far*—and he knew something his disciples had overlooked. There were many, many prophecies about the Messiah that still had to be fulfilled.

All According to Plan

Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection were the beginning of a new phase. He had been born and lived life as a human being, and had shed his blood for the sins of mankind. The rest of the plan could

now begin to unfold.

Plan? What plan? Because we have not acquired our religious beliefs in a systematic way, many of us do not realize that God has a plan. That plan is to save mankind from the penalty of sin—which is death—and give them eternal life (Romans 6:23). Most people know this in a



SACKING OF TEMPLE

The disciples expected Jesus to lead a revolt against the Romans. It didn't happen like that.



ROMANS DESTROY JERUSALEM

vague sort of way—but don't really understand *how* it will happen. It seems to be a rather haphazard process.

Have you been taught that God is pleading with sinful mankind to accept Jesus so that they can be saved before it is too late? If that is true, it is not a very *effective* plan. Most people today have not accepted Christ. Millions have never even heard of him. It seems that, if God's plan is to get people to accept Christ now, it isn't working very well. However, to think this way is to misunderstand the real message of the Bible and the full lesson of prophecy. Prophecy explains God's plan, and shows how he will save the world from the consequences of sin.

Jesus coming to earth, and thereby founding his Church, dying for the sins of mankind, and returning to heaven were all *very* significant events, and they were all revealed in advance through the

Many people began to see that Jesus might be the long promised Messiah.

Rode into Jerusalem on a Donkey

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9).

Rejected by His Own People

"He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him" (Isaiah 53:3).

Crucified with Robbers

"He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12).

Resurrected

"For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" (Psalm 16:10).

Ascended to Heaven

"You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell there" (Psalm 68:18).

come discouraged and disillusioned, and he certainly did not want them to think he had let them down.

Many people today also have some false expectations of Jesus Christ. They don't, of course, look to him to lead a popular revolution. But apart from that they are rather like the people of the first century B.C. They believe Jesus is trying to save the world, and they want to help him. They, ever so sincerely, believe that a Christian is involved in a desperate race against time to save as many as possible before it is too late. Tragically such people are in for some shattering disappointments in the years ahead.

Jesus is *not* trying to save the world—at least, not yet. What he was telling the disciples, and what he wants *you* to understand, is that this is what he will do after his *second coming*. That's when the action really begins. That's when he will set his hand to begin saving mankind, after he has established the kingdom of God. When he does, it will be the most dramatic, spectacular moment in history, and the turning point of all mankind's fortunes. You would expect God to have revealed *that* through his servants the prophets, and of course he has.

The Kingdom of God

The events leading up to the *second coming* of Jesus Christ are the central

theme of all prophecy. It preoccupied Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and the other prophets. At first glance their writings may seem like pronouncements of doom and gloom. But when you really understand, you will see how they looked through the troubles of their time to a world of peace and happiness. They looked forward to utopia, the millennium, the kingdom of God on earth, but they did not live to see it. Jesus reinforced their message, and told his disciples that they should prepare for it; yet they did not live to see it either. It is not here yet.

In view of this, it is not surprising then that many students of the Bible have wondered if perhaps Jesus did not *really* mean what he *seemed* to have said. Perhaps, they argue, he meant that he would come again and establish a spiritual kingdom *in our hearts*. Others have looked for the kingdom of God in history. Could it have been the Church, or the Holy Roman Empire perhaps, or even the *British Empire*? But the words of Jesus, *taken at face value*, are quite clear. He would come again, at a time he called the end of the age. He would put down all opposition and establish the kingdom of God on earth. Mankind would enter into a time of peace and prosperity. Then, and only then, would God begin the work of saving the majority of mankind. That was—and is—the gospel of the kingdom of God.

When would that time come? Jesus warned that, for those who were not awake and aware, it would come like a snare—unexpectedly (Luke 21:35). Many sincere people would be caught unawares, but it didn't *have* to be that way. His true followers would know when the time was *close*, and they would be ready (Matthew 24:36-44). But how could they know?

The prophetic record was nearly complete, but something more was needed. The prophecy still needed a keystone—something that would lock them all in place, and give a sense of timing and perspective.

Some years after Jesus Christ had returned to heaven, he revealed the final, vital pieces of information. They are recorded in the last book of the Bible—the surprising and to some enigmatic book of Revelation.

Jesus' mission to earth was not a failure. He had accomplished all he came to do—so far.

A Voice Across Time

Before we look at the Apocalypse or book of Revelation, let's understand two important things. Some older versions of the Bible title this book the "Revelation of St. John." It isn't, and this has been corrected in most modern translations. It is the revelation of *Jesus Christ*. The *revelation*, not the *obscuring*. This book has a reputation for having some of the most difficult areas of the Scriptures to understand. Yet, Jesus Christ gave it to provide answers, not to hide the truth. The book is not difficult to understand when you know what has come before, and what questions still need to be addressed for God's prophetic revelation to be complete.

Christ revealed it initially to John, the last survivor of the 12 original apostles. About A.D. 90 John recorded a series of prophecies revealed to him in a vision. His experience was somewhat similar to Daniel's, but by John's time the sequence of prophetic events had advanced considerably.

CHARLEMAGNE CROWNED



The Four Kingdoms

You remember from chapter three that God had shown Daniel four great empires that would dominate the world before the kingdom of God is established.

The Babylonian Empire, as we saw, was replaced in Daniel's lifetime by that of the Medes and the Persians. The Persians dominated until they were decisively defeated by the Greeks in 333 B.C. Then the Greeks were masters of the world

for about 300 years. By the time the Apocalypse or book of Revelation was written, the Greek Empire had been supplanted by the Romans, and the fourth and last of the four empires of Daniel's prophecies

had arrived on the scene. How long would it last?

It is tempting to begin to take you right now through these exciting prophecies of Revelation, but that would turn this booklet into a book. This is only intended to be a brief introduction to the subject of prophecy. We will have to be content with a summary.

Whereas the previous empires had lasted a relatively short time, the prophecies of Revelation show us that the Roman Empire would continue for a long time. It would have several significant phases, or resurrections. Their progression is a yardstick by which we can measure the sequence of prophesied events that lead up to the return of Christ.

The Empire Survives

Rome was overrun by barbarian hordes around the middle of the fifth century A.D., and at the time it might have seemed that the Romans would go the way of all other empire builders. But the Roman system proved to be a remarkably durable institution.

Justinian restored the empire in the Western Mediterranean in A.D. 554, and it continued in one form or another for many centuries. In the Middle Ages, many of the rulers of Central Europe patterned their governments after Rome. Charlemagne was crowned in A.D. 800 as a worthy successor of the Roman caesars.

Later, the German-speaking states of Europe formed the Holy Roman Empire. Leadership eventually passed to the Austrian Habsburgs until they were defeated by the emperor Napoleon, another European ruler who was greatly impressed with the Roman system.

Even Benito Mussolini, who dominated Italy between 1923 and 1944, considered his regime to be a new Roman Empire. Mussolini's dictatorship—which came to be completely overshadowed by Hitler's Nazi Germany—was only the most recent and perhaps most ruthless resurrection of the Roman system.

When we look back at the pictures of



JUSTINIAN

**The Roman
system was
to live on
down to our
day.**

these Fascist regimes, we can see how their leaders were influenced by the pomp and pageantry of ancient Rome.

There have been to date numerous "resurrections" of the Roman Empire.

They have all risen around the heartland of Europe, and with varying degrees of success, have tried to conquer everything within reach.

The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation have proven to be a remarkably accurate forecast of the mainstream of Western civilization during the last 2,500 years.

These prophecies show that there will be one final resurrection of the Roman system. It will be the most formidable economic,

military, political and religious power the world has ever seen. It will rise up dramatically and unexpectedly. All nations will be influenced by its power. It will suppress everything and anyone who stands in its way. This ruthless system, which the Bible calls "the beast," is to be based in the territory of the old Roman Empire—the continent of Europe where 12 nations are now trying to form a peaceful economic union. Could that effort be an experiment that will backfire?

The Final Showdown

The prophecies of Revelation show that the beast dominates the world for several years. Eventually, it attacks the only other superpower left on earth at that time, the teeming inhabitants of Marxist Eurasia.

In a dramatic vision, John saw this future war. It was unlike anything he had ever seen—waged with weapons very different from the swords, spears and battering rams of *his* time. Today we might recognize these strange weapons as attack helicopters, cruise missiles, bombers and tanks. John described them the best he could in the language of the first century. (Revelation 9:3, 7-10).

When John saw this vision, its fulfillment was yet far in the future. It has to do with the time just before Jesus Christ, the Messiah, returns to earth to set up his

world-ruling kingdom.

The words of Isaiah will be fulfilled. The government *will* be upon the Messiah's shoulders, and of the increase of his government and peace there *will* be no end. The Apocalypse or book of Revelation shows that Christ will rule for 1,000 years. This will be the long-awaited kingdom of God.

This is the time the prophets dreamed of—*hoped* for. It didn't come in their lifetime. Jesus' apostles and the early Church expected it to happen in their day. But there would be many more centuries of waiting. Jesus told his fol-



CHARLES V

NAPOLEON



Revelation describes the full fury of modern warfare.



ADOLPH HITLER

lowers to stay faithful, and to endure patiently to the end.

Through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Age of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, they waited, as the resurrections of the Roman Empire rose and fell.

There would eventually come a time when there would be just one more resurrection. It would rise up in

a time very different from the world the prophets knew.

If Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and John were to come back today, what would they make of our world with its technological marvels, its incredible advances in nearly every field? There would be new languages, new nations, different politics and peculiar customs. But something about this world would seem familiar to them.

When they compared the conditions today with the prophecies they had so faithfully recorded long ago, they would realize that the end time had come!

So Now What?

Prophecy is not given just to provide us with intellectual stimulation—a sort of inspired crossword puzzle. It is a message from God.

The more you learn, the more you begin to gain a new perspective about the past, the present, and the future. You understand that the great events are being guided along a predetermined path by a God who is concerned about the destiny of all nations and individuals. What may once have seemed like isolated episodes of history are now understood to be stages of the plan. God really has known **“the end from the beginning, and declared from ancient times things that are not yet done,”** as Isaiah said (Isaiah 46:10).

When we take a look at our modern world in the light of prophecy, we must seriously consider if we are approaching the “end of the age.” The key players for the final act may not be on stage yet, but are they waiting in the wings? Is the curtain about to go up on the last terrible resurrection of the Roman Empire, with all that that implies?

If so, then we have reached a critical point in world history.

God sent his prophets to ancient nations to draw attention to their sins. God saw the injustice, lying, cheating, brutality, greed, licentiousness and religious hypocrisy of those ancient societies. He warned them that he was about to do something about it, unless they heeded the words of his prophets and changed

their ways. But what about us?

Do we think God has not noticed the way we live today? Do we think that he is going to put up with it *forever*? Why would he intervene in the affairs of ancient Israel and Judah and not do anything about *today*? Our societies are making the same kind of mistakes they made. If we won't learn the lessons of prophecy, why should we not reap the consequences as they did?

It doesn't have to be this way. Prophecy is conditional. God told Jeremiah, **“The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. . . . Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good”** (Jeremiah 18:7-8, 11).

Learning the Lesson

Unfortunately, very few people take this seriously. One nation did—the people of Nineveh, capital of ancient Assyria. After God had sent a prophet to warn them, they temporarily turned from their wrongdoings and averted a national calamity. You can read that story in the book of Jonah. It shows us that a prophecy doesn't *have* to be fulfilled—but the overall lesson of history is that it almost certainly *will* be. Most people do not turn at God's reproof . . . even those who claim to know him best. As Isaiah wrote, **“These people draw near to Me with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me. . . . I will again do a marvelous work among this people”** (Isaiah 29:13-14).

Jesus issued the same challenge to people who claimed to be his followers but did not obey him: **“Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?”** (Luke 6:46). Those who think of themselves as Christians should think very seriously about this.

On the day the New Testament Church began, the apostle Peter preached a stirring sermon in Jerusalem. Many of those who heard him had been among the mob who had urged Pontius Pilate to crucify Jesus Christ. Peter showed them, from the prophecies, that the one they had so cruelly executed was their long-awaited Messiah.

The people were struck with fear and remorse, as they understood these scriptures for the first time. They asked, **“What shall we do?”** (Acts 2:37). This is the question all people should ask when they begin to understand the implications of prophecy. Peter gave the answer in verse 38, **“Repent,”** and in verse 40, **“be saved from this perverse generation.”**

You, too, must consider this as you be-



When we look at our world in the light of prophecy—we must ask “Is this the end of the age?”

gin to understand the words of the prophets. God expects some action—it should be more than just an interesting intellectual exercise. *Repent* may seem like a threatening, religious-sounding word, the sort of thing you would expect from a

ing shape in the news *today*. Our days are as much “Bible times” as the days of Isaiah, Daniel, and the apostle John. Many of us alive now will live to see the climactic events of the end of the age. There has never been a time when it is so important to understand world events in the light of Bible prophecy.

You can’t do it all by yourself.

One Final Lesson

About nineteen and a half centuries ago, a high official of the Ethiopian government was taking a break while returning home from an official visit to Jerusalem. He sat in his chariot and began reading the prophecies of Isaiah. He was looking at one of the famous prophecies about the Messiah, but he didn’t understand it (Acts 8:26-35). God saw he was a sincere man and sent Philip to help.

“Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked the puzzled man (verse 30). **“How can I, unless someone guides me?”** he replied (verse 31).

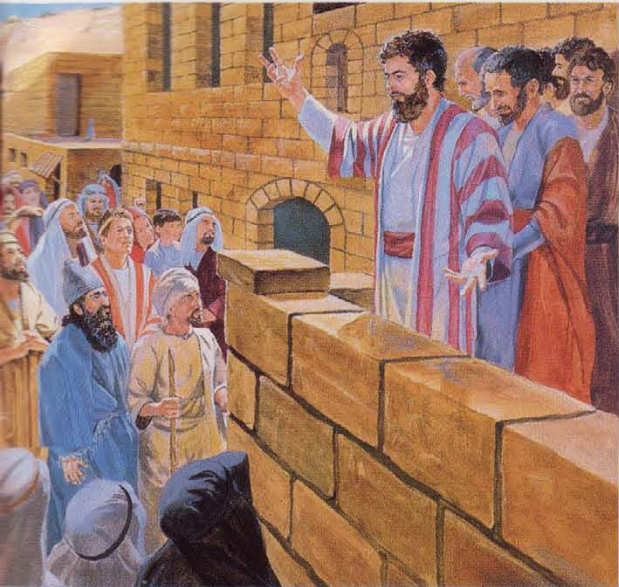
You, too, need someone to help you understand. That is why we published this booklet, and it is why we have available several other free booklets on prophecy. Like all the publications of the Worldwide Church of God, these booklets will be sent to you free of charge, and we will never pressure you to do anything, or join anything. That is a personal matter between you and God.

We have appreciated this opportunity to “sit in your chariot” and share what we know. We hope this booklet has helped you see that an understanding of Bible prophecy will become

more and more significant as the events of the next few years unfold. As the prophecies are fulfilled, you will be faced with some important decisions.

May God guide you to make the right ones.

The prophecies will be fulfilled—whether we heed them or not.



PETER PREACHING ON DAY OF PENTECOST

prophet. But it is just another way of saying, “Stop doing the things that God says are wrong, and start doing what is right.”

That is how you show God that you have learned the lesson of prophecy. Or of course, you can close the book now and do nothing.

Where Are We Now in Prophecy?

The prophecies will be fulfilled sooner or later whether we heed them or not. Probably sooner. Not every detail is in focus yet, but they are becoming clearer, and as we approach the time of fulfillment, they will become clearer still.

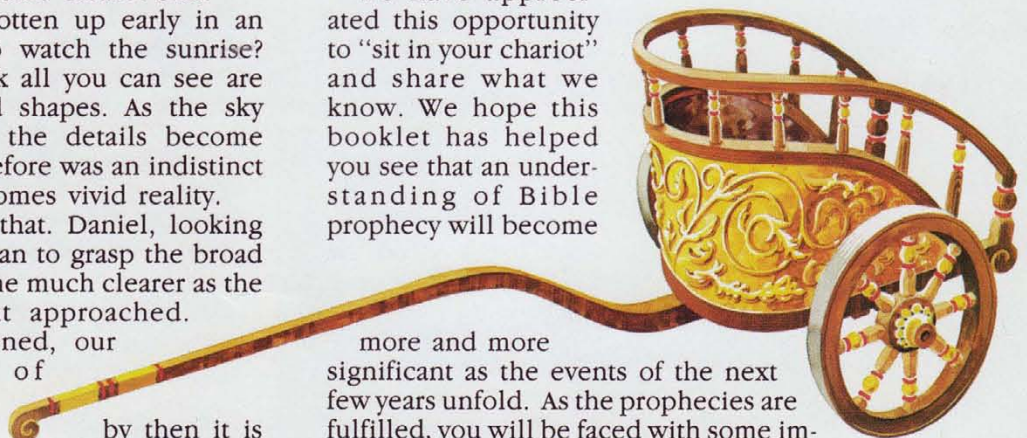
Have you ever gotten up early in an unfamiliar place to watch the sunrise? While it is still dark all you can see are vague shadows and shapes. As the sky begins to lighten, the details become clearer until what before was an indistinct shadowy scene becomes vivid reality.

Prophecy is like that. Daniel, looking across the ages, began to grasp the broad outline, but it became much clearer as the time of fulfillment approached.

After it has happened, our understanding of prophecy is like

20-20 vision—but by then it is too late.

Much of what Daniel foresaw is *already history*. We are seeing other long-propheesied events tak-



There's More...

Here are several other eye-opening booklets about biblical prophecies:

The Middle East in Prophecy

This well illustrated booklet gives a detailed account of this volatile region—past, present, and future—in the context of prophecy.

The History of Europe and the Church

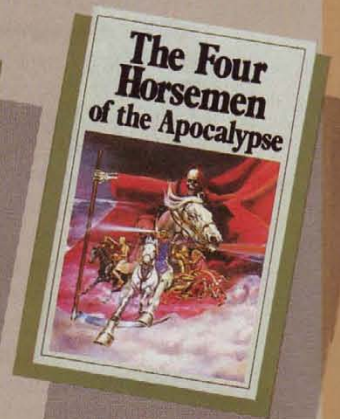
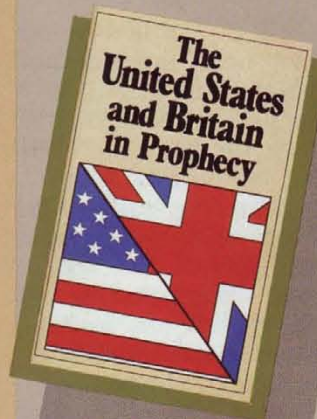
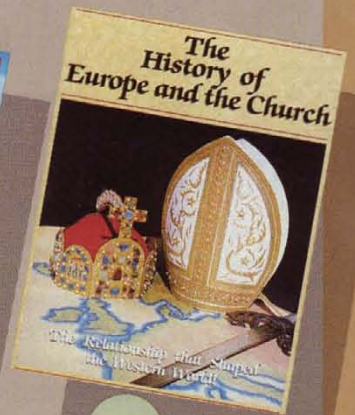
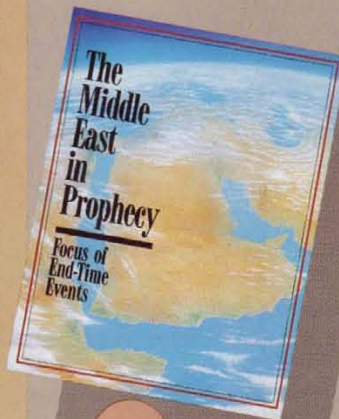
This is a thorough investigation of the prophecies concerning the "ten resurrections of the Roman Empire." The booklet traces the history of Europe from the early days of Rome to the present day—and the immediate future.

The United States and Britain in Prophecy

The Bible does not mention the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, or other major nations by name. This booklet thoroughly explains the identity of these modern nations, and explains their role in prophecy. An eye-opening and important booklet.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Who are the mysterious "four horsemen of the Apocalypse"? What do they represent? When do they ride? You will find the answers to these and other questions in this revealing booklet.



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