

Lesson 1
"Prophecy Gives Us Hope . . . Not Optimism"
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This week is the first of eleven lessons which form the framework of the big picture of God's prophetic Word. As Carol told us last week, each lesson will be like part of a jigsaw puzzle. Week after week as each piece of the puzzle is completed, the "picture" on the puzzle box will start coming together, helping us see God's overall plan for the future. Prophecy is not to **frighten** us but to **invite** us to trust our Father in Heaven and be **excited** for His promises! This study will not only build confidence that when God says something, He will do it, but it will also inspire and prepare us for events of the last days.

Is it just me, or are you also hearing more and more believers talking about the tribulation, the end times, the antichrist, the rapture? Speaking of end times, a husband and wife were driving behind a car that had a "Honk if you love Jesus" bumper sticker on it. The wife said to her husband, "Stay clear of those folks, Harry. If they get raptured, that car's gonna be all over the road!"

Knowing prophetic Scriptures helps us recognize events God told us would occur, that either **did** occur, or **will** occur. The Architect of these events is God Himself, and through His Son, His prophets, and His Word, He has graciously allowed us to see many of the plans He has for the future, often in exacting detail.

Could this be the season of Jesus' return? I hope so. I mean, I don't even buy green bananas anymore!

The world continues to change. Cultural beliefs are changing, they're trying to change scientific facts, bad is good, good is bad. There's political turmoil, devastating events in nature, and who could have predicted COVID? Some are worried the government is going to put chips inside of people. I hope I get Cool Ranch Doritos.

I don't want to make light of the fact Christians will face challenges we've never dreamed of. But I can't find anywhere in the Bible where Jesus told His disciples that in the end times things will be **really great**. No, what did He say? Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Devastating events like 9/11 filled churches with people scrambling in search of answers about the future. But their fear and desire to find those answers didn't last long. And now, there's so much craziness going on, people need hope more than ever. But who they place their hope in is a matter of life or death. Believing God is in control will bring peace to one's soul when the world is out of control.

We mustn't put any importance on this temporary home - this declining world. World conditions are ripe for events God promised will happen. Imagine living here without knowing where all this was going to lead! Praise God because He told us we're going to live with Him for eternity! That's what we must focus on. The more I prepared for this lecture, the more God reminded me we are quickly approaching the glorious appearing of our Savior, Jesus.

Satan doesn't want anyone to study prophecy because prophecy contains the revelation of his defeat and demise. Evil things may be happening throughout the world, but God will be triumphant over all. Just knowing that should encourage you as you do this study, read the Bible, live your life! No matter what kind of scariness the world tells you is coming, we know how the story ends, and it ends perfectly for those who follow Jesus.

WHY DID GOD GIVE US PROPHETIC SCRIPTURES?

Want a spoiler alert? We humans are not perfect! We tend to be disobedient and often require reminders from God to get our attention. God gave us prophecy for the same reason He gave us **all** the other parts of His Word. In His grace, God wants us to know the future, as well as the past, to prepare us for the Master's return; to actively share the gospel with those who don't know Him; to help us grow spiritually; to be prepared for the future; and to give us hope.

PROPHESY GIVES US HOPE NOT OPTIMISM

I love optimists – you know, the 'glass is half full' kind of people. They **expect** the other half of the glass will be filled up. Optimism says the future will have positive, not negative outcomes; that the world will change for the better; that disease will disappear; that another ruling party will make things better; that everything will just work itself out.

Did you hear what the optimist said as he jumped off the building? "So far, so good!".

Hope is definitely NOT the same as optimism. The word "hope" can be used to mean uncertainty, such as, "I hope the chair holds me when I sit on it," or "I hope I get the toy in my bowl of cereal," or "I hope I don't trip coming up to the podium." But the Biblical definition of hope is "confident expectation; certainty."

Christian hope blows optimism out of the water because Christian hope is **confidence** in the promises of God. Optimism says, "focus on the good", but Christian hope says, "focus on the **Someone** who is good, perfect and eternal."

Hope doesn't ignore reality, but even though God said the world will not change for the better, hope trusts in God's power to overcome those realities with His plan - a plan we cannot even imagine, may never understand and may never see until heaven.

Hope is faith. "Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." (Hebrews 11:1) What we hope **for** should always be second to **Who** we hope **in**. Even if we cannot be optimistic, we **can** be hopeful. Even though life can make us grieve, we

can still have hope. Paul said, "Do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope." (I Thessalonians 4:13)

The more we know God's prophetic promises and learn of their fulfillment, the more confident hope we will have that the future will occur just as God has said it would and it will give us confident hope that He is in control over everything. God gave us prophetic Scripture so that, as we learn what has already been fulfilled, we can **know** that **all** God's prophesies will be fulfilled.

Gaining an understanding of Bible prophecy helps us not worry over impending events because God did not intend for us to walk in hopelessness. He intended for us to be people of faith. Hope is the enemy's main target. Satan wants to destroy our confident expectation - to not believe that God is omnipotent. Regarding hope, God's Word tells us that:

- "I pray that God, **the source of hope**, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in Him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)
- "We wait for **the blessed hope**--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:13)
- "We boast in the **hope of the glory of God.**" (Romans 5:2)
- "We are heirs having the **hope of eternal life.**" (Titus 3:7)
- "The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease. Therefore, I will **hope in Him!**" (Lamentations 3:22,24)

FULFILLED PROPHESIES GIVE US HOPE

God told the prophet Isaiah: "Everything I prophesied has come true, and now I will prophesy again. I will tell you the future before it happens." (Isaiah 42:9) Our hope for the future has roots in fulfilled prophesy of the past. The very nature of God will bring to pass what He has foretold because He cannot lie. "He remains faithful for He cannot deny Himself." (2 Timothy 2:13) He holds everything in His hands. He is all knowing and all powerful. He is the One who has promised our future and He is the **only** One who can make it happen.

As we progress through the lessons, we'll learn more about prophesies of Jesus. Allow me to focus on just a few of them. The first prophetic reference to the Messiah is in the book of Genesis and it marked the beginning of what would become the Messianic Hope.

THE MESSIANIC HOPE

God foretold He would send a Redeemer to judge Satan, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." (Genesis 3:15) Eve's descendant would undo the damage Satan caused in the garden.

Jesus' First Coming

More than 300 prophesies have been fulfilled about the first coming of God's Son, the Messiah, which should leave no question in our hearts that God is Who He says He is, and He will do what He says He will do because prophecy has been fulfilled about:

- place of Jesus' birth
- the quality of Jesus' ministry
- the purpose of Jesus' life
- the agony of Jesus' death
- the triumph of Jesus' resurrection

The Messiah's Genealogy

The Messiah would be the "seed of a woman", meaning that a future descendant of Eve would have no human father because women do not produce seeds. The promised Seed would be miraculously implanted in the womb. In this way, Jesus could not inherit the sin nature that disqualifies every man on earth from becoming the Savior.

From our lesson we learned there are many Old Testament Scriptures indicating who the ancestors are in the Messiah's genealogy which is reflected in the books of Matthew and Luke.

The Messiah - A Great Prophet

Thousands of years ago God told Moses to tell the Israelites, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites" (Deuteronomy 18:15). God also told Moses, "...and I will put my words in His mouth. He will tell them everything I command Him" (Deuteronomy 18: 15,18) Israel had many prophets, but none but Jesus fulfilled that prophecy.

Jesus fulfilled all the requirements for a prophet in title, word, and deed. He is God's ultimate prophet because He is the very Word of God Himself. (John 1:1).

In the Gospels, the title "prophet" is used many times when other people referred to Jesus (Matthew 21:11; Luke 7:16; John 4:19). Jesus also referred to Himself as a prophet in Mark 6:4.

The Messiah's Arrival

About 700 years before Jesus was born, God revealed to Isaiah that, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6) Those are all titles for Jesus the Messiah.

Around 500 years before Christ, the angel Gabriel told the prophet Daniel that the "Anointed One"- the Messiah - would appear. That prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus.

What is referred to as "the Immanuel prophecy" foretold the unique birth of Jesus by a virgin: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name "Immanuel."

(Isaiah 7:14). And before Jesus was born, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. He told him that Mary, Joseph's betrothed virgin, was expecting a child—conceived not by man, but by the Spirit of God.

The Messiah's Birthplace

The prophet Micah lived around 700 years before Christ and God gave Micah this prophesy about the city in which the Messiah would be born, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans' of Judah, out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." (Micah 5:2) Since only one of two cities named Bethlehem was in Judea, Micah's prophecy was precise in distinguishing Bethlehem Ephrathah as Jesus' birthplace. Joseph and pregnant Mary had traveled to Bethlehem in Judea where Jesus was born - the very town prophesied by Micah six centuries earlier.

The Messiah – His Arrival and Rejection Foretold

In a Nazareth synagogue, Jesus read from a scroll containing the Book of Isaiah. Of over one hundred references to the Messiah, Jesus chose to read the Scripture that closely identified Him as the Messiah. Unrolling the scroll, he read to the synagogue audience, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Isaiah 61:1,2) Jesus rolled up the scroll, sat down and said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:21)

At first, his audience, "All spoke well of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from His lips" (Luke 4:22) until He said that, like Elijah the prophet, He too was not welcomed in His hometown. That so angered the people they tried to push Him off a cliff. However, He is omnipotent God, so He passed through the crowd and went on His way.

Jesus' rejection in Nazareth was one of the fulfillments of Isaiah's prophesy: "He was despised and rejected by men." (Isaiah 53:3)

The Messiah's Ministry

The book of Isaiah contains some of the most significant prophetic Messianic passages. God foretold He would send someone who had never done anything wrong, who would be punished and killed to pay for everything **we** have done wrong; and, **that** Someone would "swallow up death forever; wipe away the tears from all faces." (Isaiah 25:8) He would be the One, "Who will sweep away your transgressions, for My own sake, and remember your sins no more." (Isaiah 43:25)

The Messiah would "open the eyes of the blind, free the captives from prison." (Isaiah 42:7) God said the Messiah would "...do more than restore the people of Israel to Me. I will make You a light to the Gentiles, and You will bring My salvation to the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6)

The Messiah's Death

Centuries before occurring, virtually every aspect of Jesus' suffering and death was spelled out in detail. God revealed to Daniel that the Messiah would be "cut off," meaning He would be put to death.

Fulfilled prophesies include that He would be betrayed; His hands, feet and side would be pierced but his bones would not be broken; while on the cross, He would be offered vinegar to drink and some would gamble for his clothes.

Isaiah tells us He would suffer in pain; be punished by God for our sins; be beaten so we could be whole; that humankind's iniquity would be laid on Him; He would be led like a lamb to the slaughter; He would be unjustly condemned; He would be buried in a rich man's tomb; He had done no wrong, yet His life was made an offering for sin. (Isaiah 53:3-11)

Throughout His ministry, Jesus told His disciples He would be delivered over to the religious leaders; that they would condemn Him to death, and He would be raised to life on the third day. After His resurrection, Jesus told His disciples everything written about Him in the Scriptures had to be fulfilled.

Prophesies about Jesus were written centuries in advance of their fulfillment, and the One who foretold them – the Everlasting to Everlasting – the Author of Scripture – the Almighty God, also said, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come." (Isaiah 46:9,10)

Jesus the Messiah is the center of our hope because of:

- The price He paid on the cross (Romans 8:32)
- The resurrection power He displayed at the tomb (Romans 8:34)
- The position He holds on the throne (Romans 8:34)

FULFILLED PROPHESIES

There are **hundreds** of fulfilled prophesies in God's Word, all of which are to strengthen our hope in God to bring about what He says the future holds. I can't begin to list them **all** the fulfilled prophesies in the time allotted for this lecture, unless Carol says I can have another hour. No? Didn't think so! But let me share just a few more I find exciting about the power of Almighty God!

- Six centuries before Jesus, Ezekiel said the Eastern Gate at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem would be sealed shut, which it was in 1541, and still is, that is until Jesus returns through it!
- Also six centuries before Jesus, it was prophesied to Daniel that the exact time of the Jews captivity in Babylonian would last exactly 70 years, which it did.

- Isaiah prophesied a man named Cyrus would deliver the Israelites from captivity. More than 150 years later, the King of Persia, named Cyrus, invaded Babylon and released the captive Jews.
- Although too unbelievable for His disciples at the time, Jesus told them Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed, which it was.

Did you know that prophesy is primarily focused on Israel? God has fulfilled some amazing prophesies about His chosen nation, but two within the last 120 years stand out to me as the most exciting.

One was regarding the ancient Hebrew language. No nation has ever lost its original language for centuries, only to recover it again! That's what happened to Israel. God told Zephaniah, "I will restore to the people a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD to serve Him in one accord." (Zephaniah 3:9) 2500 years later, in the late 1800's, Eliezer Ben Yehuda, had a vision from God that he was chosen to restore the Hebrew language. And today, Hebrew is the common language used by all Jews in Israel. If Zephaniah walked down the streets of Jerusalem today, he could converse and be understood in the original Hebrew language!

I assume all of you hearing or reading this lecture are alive. If so, good! It means you are seeing an example of God's prophetic power in our generation! Carol made reference to this fulfilled prophesy, but I will mention it again. For over 2500 years, the nation of Israel ceased to exist. Yet in **one** day, May 14, 1948, it was declared a sovereign state. Isaiah prophesied, "Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment?" (Isaiah 66:8) "Yes, it can," so says God.

WHAT SIGNIFICANCE ARE FULFILLED BIBLE PROPHESIES?

God foretold of events sometimes several millennia before they were precisely fulfilled. Fulfilled prophecy proves that God's Word is true. No other religious book even dares to predict the future because only an omniscient, all-knowing God can know the future! God said, "What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do." (Isaiah 46:11)

God allowed us to know about His prophesies and promises to increase our faith, to trust in Him and to live confidently without fear. Here are a but a few we must hold on to:

- "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)
- Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:2,3)
- "Wait for [God's] Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath." 1 Thessalonians 1:10

Yearning or Yawning?

Let me ask you, are you **yearning** or are you **yawning**? The Bible says in 2 Timothy 4 we are to **yearn**, or long for, the return of the Lord. However, if you find yourself **yawning** when it comes to prophesy, I hope this study will lead you to find out what God has in store for you. If you are a child of God – that is, if you have been saved by believing that Jesus is the Son of God - your promises are:

- *Your Hope is on the way!*
 - “Be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.” (James 5:8)
- *It’s going to get exciting around here!*
 - “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:28)
- *Jesus could come at any moment!*
 - “Wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, (Titus 2:13)

Are you ready for Jesus’ return? It’s nearer today than it has ever been. If you do not have salvation offered by Jesus, never has it been more urgent than now to call upon Him. If you already know Jesus as your Savior, share with someone that the only hope for this world is Jesus the Messiah and that in the “twinkling of an eye” God will snatch away His believing church!

As we learn about the prophetic Scriptures in this year’s study, we’ll see God’s plan unfold through Jesus:

- “Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, He has spoken to us through His Son.” (Hebrews 1:1,2)
- “We find Christ in all the Scriptures. In the Old Testament He is predicted, in the Gospels He is revealed, in Acts He is preached, in the epistles He is explained, and in Revelation He is expected.” (Pastor Alistair Begg)

God is faithful to keep His promises. He has proven Himself. He has made a highway to heaven for us who believe and trust in His love and He has given us our Blessed Hope.

As you wait for His return, remember, think twice about buying green bananas!

Maranatha – Come Lord Jesus!