

Prophecy in Perspective

Dr. Scott Gregory Downing
An Email Newsletter

Our Times - Prophecy in current events

Israel launched a surprise attack against military convoys in Syria on January 31st. This was an effort on the part of Israel to carry out a bombing campaign on military targets around **Damascus** and the Lebanese border. Israel's concern over the transfer of missile defense systems into the hands of the terrorist organization, Hezbollah, is apparently what prompted the attack. Israeli leaders reportedly have vowed to prevent Hezbollah from getting a hold of these Syrian missile systems and to ensure that stockpiles of chemical weapons, as well, do not fall under their control. This attack may well be in preparation for an Israeli attack on nuclear sites in Iran. Part of Israel's concern is certainly to weaken Syria's ability to retaliate against Israel should such an attack take place. Both Syria and the Russians, of course, are unhappy about Israel's unilateral military strikes, and Syria has threatened retaliation.



An Israeli post office worker shows a child how to put on a gas mask at a distribution station in East Jerusalem. Israel remains on high alert after Syria threatened retaliation for an air strike on what Israel said was a weapons convoy heading for Lebanon
Photo: GETTY

Isaiah has predicted the certain destruction of **Damascus**! This is the oldest, continually inhabited city on earth. Isaiah says that **Damascus** will suddenly cease to exist:



IAFF-16 (Israeli Air Force Website)

***"An oracle against Damascus:
Look, Damascus is no longer a city.
It has become a ruined heap." Isaiah 17:1 (HCSB)***

If Syria were to retaliate against Israel in the days ahead, and if it used enough force to warrant it, Israel might well cause the destruction of Damascus. It is entirely possible that Israel could use a strategic nuclear weapon against this ancient city. Syria, itself might well destroy its own city through the current civil war. Either way, things really seem to be shaping up for the end time scenario to unfold and to indicate that the Lord could come for His church at any moment. The great

Tribulation would not be far off from that predicted event.

The Church Today - Doctrine and Prophecy

Many pay little attention to Bible prophecy today. There are many reasons for this. We can be sure that the devil is pleased with the lack of attention that the prophetic Scriptures are getting these days and of growing doctrinal and church apostasy. As we read passages such as Matthew chapter 24 and 25 we can see that Jesus had a great deal to say about the future and He was concerned that His disciples, and we, understood some important things that God was planning for our future. In the interest of gaining a greater appreciation of the importance of Bible prophecy I have included a section from my book: Transforming Truths for Critical Times. The section quoted below is just some of the reasons why the study of Bible prophecy is important for the believer today.

The Aim of Bible Prophecy

First of all, we should study Bible prophecy in order to know God's plan. This study will better prepare us for our testimony and service for the Lord. For many, prophecy is only a curiosity. But the Lord intends for us to apply our understanding of His plans for the future in practical ways. The Bible teaches that God gives us prophecy in order for us to believe and do His will for today. There are many things about the plans of God that He has kept hidden. But as the return of the Lord draws nearer, we should expect that He will grant more insights into His prophetic plan. He will do this to better prepare us, and through us to prepare the world for Christ's return. Daniel tells us this with the prediction: ***"But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."* (Daniel 12:4)**

Second, we should study prophecy to serve God with purpose with the goal of bringing the lost to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. We hear many today even among "Evangelicals" who wish to make issues like environmentalism or world peace their purpose. Yet prophecy shows us that the Lord will one day "make all things new" (Revelation 21:5). We need to continue being advised by "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Serving God with purpose should be with special emphasis on God's prophetic word. Prophecy rightly motivates and directs us to keep our focus on making Jesus Christ known in our churches through faithful assembling and in the world through faithful living and preaching. We should do this, as Hebrews 10:25 tells us, ***"all the more as we see the day approaching."***

Third, prophecy helps us to walk according to His precepts through the insights prophecy gives us. God's prophetic word cautions us and warns the world that Jesus Christ will come back again. There will be a time of judgment and recompense for the world's rebellion against God. Peter expresses this with these words: ***"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness."* (2 Peter 3:3)**

The Applicability of Prophecy

First, Prophecy puts present suffering in the perspective of future glory through the prophetic focus on the suffering of Jesus Christ. As Jesus' sufferings are central to all the purposes of God and to us, so is His resurrection. These apply to us as believers to give purpose and promise to our sufferings for Christ. Jesus Christ gives meaning to all trials and afflictions in this life and promises glories to follow in His presence for ever. As we read the many hundreds of prophecies about the future we see a clear picture of the joys that await us in eternity to come. This gives us an insight as to why the prophets of

the Old Testament day were so eager to discover all they could about the coming of the Messiah and of the future Kingdom He would establish; as Peter tells us: ***"Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."*** (1 Peter 1:11)

Second, Prophecy reveals truths about the future that are designed to encourage us today in our faith, walk and testimony. We are to be dynamic and convincing witnesses of the realities of God and his purposes for now and the future. There is no other dependable source of information for the world than the prophetic oracles of the Bible. But, we, knowing the revelations of the future, should be encouraged by them to take heart in our own times of trial. In terms of our prophetic outlook, our courage and faithful stand for truth in challenging times will speak convincingly to a watching world. The truths of God's Word will seem true to them, because they will see how they are proved by our own lives. This was the outlook of God's prophets in ancient times. Along these lines, Peter writes: ***"To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into."*** (1 Peter 1:12)

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Three, Prophecy keeps our minds stable and focused to the end through many troubles, trials, and threatening. The Christian who seeks to live for Christ will be under constant pressure to hide or even abandon his or her convictions for the Lord. Sometimes difficult financial pressures may tempt us to hold back our tithe. Changing laws may influence many to compromise on their stands at work or school to the detriment of wholesome relationships and activities. As

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Christians, we are to "stand therefore" (Ephesians 6:14). We must be resolved by the power of the Holy Spirit to stay focused and thus to be stable in mind and heart.

This stability will be reflected in our families, in our churches and even in society as we "shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15). Prophecy will encourage us to do this. Again, in the words of the Apostle Peter: ***"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ"*** (1 Peter 1:13).

Four, Prophecy transforms our lives into conformity with Christ and His holiness since we look forward to being with Him in His holy presence. The society we live in today is growing less and less interested in the One true God. Sin is the cause of this growing spiritual apathy. Culture is already deeply infected with sin. Sinful lifestyles attitudes and philosophies are being promoted as virtuous, such as "gay rights" and "a woman's right to choose to abort her child" while the holiness of

the Christian is increasingly viewed as hateful and intolerant. Yet, for the child of God who studies prophecy and takes seriously both its promises and warnings, there is power through their truths to transform our lives. The world today, as well as many compromising church members need to see what a committed student of the prophetic Scripture really looks like: holy and fully surrendered to the Lord and His will for our lives. The Scripture exhorts us to live: ***"As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance, but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'"*** (1 Peter 1:14-15).

Fifth, Prophecy offers practical wisdom and direction for believers who read, hear and obey it, because Bible prophecy is revealed as a practical word offering real guidance and direction for the Believer. Life in these latter times is very complicated, and the Christian needs a simple and sound Word of direction. As a child of God, He promises to bless you if you will take His Word seriously. When you commit your life to God's Word through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, you can be confident that He will guide you in a "plain path" (Psalm 27:11). It greatly concerns me when I hear Christians say they are trying to make a decision about something, but they do not mention anything about prayer or seeking God's Word. God reveals His Word for His glory and for our good. The Lord warns of the consequences of not hearing and heeding His prophetic warnings as Nehemiah 9:30 says: ***"Yet for many years You had patience with them, And testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands."*(NKJB)** This is a warning that speaks to us today. Christians should study prophecy and live it out. God promises His blessing, that is, His divine guidance, help, provision, strength, etc., to those who believe and surrender to His prophetic Word. This is the plain and distinct teaching of the Lord to all who study the prophetic book of Revelation: ***"Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near"* (Revelation 1:3).**

In these times we are living in today, we have an incredible opportunity to make Jesus Christ known by pointing to the amazing reality of hundreds of fulfilled prophecies, and prophecies yet to be fulfilled. Everyone of them will be fulfilled to the letter! As you study the Word of God in the days ahead, ask the Lord to impress upon your heart the many wonderful promises He has made to you and to the Church through Bible prophecy. The Lord Jesus Christ loves you and wants you to know how He truly has the future in His capable hands. Therefore you do not need to fear the future because you know the God who has ***"declared the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure'" (Isaiah 46:10 NKJB).*** If God loves you enough to tell you the future, then you know that He loves you enough to take care of you today! You can put all of your concerns into His faithful hands today, by simple faith in Jesus Christ.

"He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen.

EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS!"

(Revelation 22:20)

Prophecy in Perspective, Copyright, vol. no. 45 - February 8, 2013

(Note: If you would like to interact with Dr. Downing concerning this newsletter, views, etc. you can "blog" with him at prophecyinperspective.com. If you would like to subscribe to this newsletter at no charge, please send your email address to: sgdowning@bellsouth.net. Also, you can purchase his book, "Good News From a Far Country", a study in the book of Daniel [\$15]; "Becoming Mighty in Spirit...through Revelation's Prophecies" [\$10]; or his latest book, "Becoming Mighty in Spirit...through Developing a Prophetic Walk...A study in the lives and ministries of Elijah and Elisha" [\$10] by contacting him.)