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The book *The World's Worst Predictions* lists some of history's all-time prophetic goofs.

- King George II said in 1773 that the American colonies had little stomach for revolution.
- An official of the White Star Line, speaking of the firm's newly built flagship, the Titanic, launched in 1912, declared that the ship was unsinkable.
- In 1939 The New York Times said the problem of TV was that people had to glue their eyes to a screen, and that the average American wouldn't have time for it.
- An English astronomy professor said in the early 19th century that air travel at high speed would be impossible because passengers would suffocate.
- Marshal Ferdinand Foch in 1911: "Airplanes are interesting toys, but they have no military value."
- Business Week, 1958: "With over 50 foreign cars already on sale here, the Japanese auto industry isn't likely to carve out a big slice of the U.S. market."
- Frank Knox, U.S. Secretary of the Navy, on December 4, 1941: "Whatever happens, the U.S. Navy is not going to be caught napping."
- Economist Irving Fisher on October 16, 1929: "Stocks have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau."

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Lesson #1
Of Palm Readers and Truth
The Meaning And Purpose of Prophecy

Focus Scripture: Acts 10:34-48

Memory Verse:

Acts 10:43

⁴³ *He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name."*

We all worry about the future – what will happen at work tomorrow? Will she say “yes?” Will he ever ask? How soon will I get over this illness? Or get that promotion? Or, ... well you know how it is. On a much broader scale, business leaders plan products and marketing strategies years into the future. Government and political leaders draft treaties for dealings between nations on the basis of mutual desires for peace. But, what happens when a Hitler comes along? Or a new power arises who is not interested in the treaty. Consider, if you will, the Ford Edsal or the “new Coke.”

Then, the future becomes more important. Yet, events such as the tensions in the Middle East, tensions between India and Pakistan, and the terrorists of September 11th, all remind us that the future is fragile and uncertain.

In the midst of these concerns, we forget that the Bible tells us *"So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today"* (Matt 6:34). Jesus can relay such a piece of wisdom because God does know the future. And, in general terms, God has told us what the future holds. These factual predictions are what we call prophecy.

What is Prophecy?

How should we view prophecy in this new millennium?

In the Bible prophecy really takes two forms:

Fore-telling or prediction -- a "miracle of knowledge, a declaration or description or representation of something future, beyond the power of human sagacity to foresee, discern, or conjecture." (Easton Bible Dictionary)

Forth-telling –exhortation - 1 Cor 14:3 – setting the truth, justice, mercy, and righteousness of God against the backdrop of every form of denial of the same.

Thus, prophecy is to speak boldly against every form of moral, ethical, political, economic, and religious disenfranchisement. This is about 2/3rds of all prophecy.

BIG theological word: Eschatology – the study of the last things or the end times.

Between 25% and 38% of the Bible is prophecy, depending upon how you view and define prophecy.

Prophet -- an authorized spokesperson for God with a message that originated with God and was communicated to the people. The “prophet” did not need to occupy the office of prophet – he could be a king, judge, or other leader.

The word "prophet" occurs over 300 times in the Old Testament and 125 times in the New Testament. Other terms:

- The term "prophetess" appears 6 times in the Old Testament and 2 times in the New Testament.
- "man of God" appears over seventy-six times in the Old Testament. Nearly half of these references (36) are used of Elisha
- My Servants
- Lord's Messengers
- Seer
- Shepherd
- Watchman

Are there modern “prophets?”

Consider:

Certifying signs by which a true prophet of God could be recognized:

- a biblical prophet must be an Israelite
"from among [his] own brothers" (Deut 18:15)
- he must speak in the name of the Lord
"If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name" (Deut 18:19);
- he must be able to predict the near as well as the distant future
"If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken" (Deut 18:22);

- he must be able to predict signs and wonders (Deut 13:2);
- his words must conform to the previous revelation that God has given (Deut 13:2-3).

Note how Isaiah reacted when he saw the Lord on a throne in His temple (Isa 6:1-5). It was such an overwhelming experience that he was filled with unworthiness over his being in the presence of a holy God. Daniel fainted and took to his bed after receiving his visions.

How does this contrast with modern day “prophets?”

Methods God uses to communicate with His prophets:

- Audible Voice
- Still, small voice
- Visions, dreams
- Symbols and symbolic actions
- Insight into events

The messages

- Are essentially related to each other and are not isolated sayings
- Are progressively built on one another
- Are delivered as predictions expected to come true and not as an accidental sayings
- And are plainly given predictions rather than obscure statements that “could be” interpreted as a prediction
- Are given far enough in advance of an event that they are clearly predictions and not human shrewdness
- Are fulfilled as given (unless the prediction was given with a condition)
- Are centered on God (theocentric)

History is the final interpreter of prophecy.

Is there a central theme to the prophecy of Scripture?

What is the meaning of prophecy?

Jesus said, *"I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe"* (John 14:29).

All prophecy points to Jesus. *"I am telling you now before it happens, that when it does happen you will believe that I am He"* (John 13:19).

Over 300 Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Jesus.

McDowell (Evidence That Demands a Verdict) classifies these prophecies into 61 different groups

The coincidence of fulfillment is mathematically impossible. Peter Stoner, cited by McDowell, calculated the odds of eight of these prophecies coming true in one individual to be 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. That number of silver dollars would cover every square inch of the state of Texas to a depth of two feet!

Stoner went on to calculate the odds of one man fulfilling 48 of the prophecies to be 1 in 10^{157} .

Based on their fulfillment, prophecy may be: unconditional, conditional, and sequentially fulfilled. For purposes of completion, prophecies may also be considered as: fulfilled, unfulfilled and double fulfilled

- Fulfilled – over and done with – such as dispersal of Israel or the birth of Christ
- Unfulfilled – awaiting the Second Return and the events of Revelation
- Double fulfillment – fulfilled once, i.e., Isaiah had a son, then fulfilled or to be fulfilled in Christ (Isa 9:6).

Unconditional -- simplest and most straightforward.

Included in this category are the divine promises relating to God's covenant with his people Israel and our salvation. Examples are the covenants made with Abraham and David and the new covenant. We will look at the covenants in the next lesson. God's covenant with the seasons (Gen 8:21-22) and his promise of a new heaven and a new earth are also unconditional prophecies.

They are unconditional because they rely upon God's faithfulness for their implementation and not on our obedience or response.

Conditional -- alternative prospects, depending on whether Israel, the individual, or the nation to whom they were addressed, obeyed and responded to the conditions set forth in them.

Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. God promised blessing if Israel obeyed, but punishment if they disobeyed.

Sequentially fulfilled type.

Some prophecies appear to be fulfilled in steps. Ezekiel 26:7-14 is an excellent example of this third category. This prophecy says many nations would come up against Tyre. The clear focus of the prophecy was on Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the mainland city of Tyre on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Suddenly, in the midst of the prediction, there is a switch from the third-person masculine pronoun "he" and "his" to the third-person masculine plural "they." Some contend this was an unfulfilled prophecy since Nebuchadnezzar was unable to capture the people of Tyre. (They simply moved from the mainland city of Tyre to an island one-half mile off-shore.) However, consider that after the Babylonian nation worked its destruction of the mainland city in the 580s B.C., Alexander the Great came along in the 330s B.C. and finished the rest of the prophecy by throwing the "stones, timber, and rubble" of the city that Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed "into the sea" in order to build a causeway from the mainland out into the Mediterranean Sea to the island city and capture the city. The prophecy was fulfilled, but it was fulfilled in multiple steps (sequentially).

Prophecies exist about:

- Jesus
- Nation of Israel and its individuals
- The Church and its individuals
- Tyre
- Egypt
- Moab
- Ammon
- Edom
- Ethiopia
- Nineveh
- Babylon
- Philistines
- Assyria
- The four kingdoms of Daniel – Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome

Premises in Understanding Prophecy

- Christ is the Key to all Scripture (Luke 24:25-27; Heb 1:1-4)

- Eschatology involves but is not specifically a study of Christ
- God set forth His plan before the world began (Rev 13:8)
- Scriptures are the story of human history, not the story of eternity.
- The Bible presents a single, unified “story” of God’s progressive revelation.
- Your view of interpretation will control your view of an understanding of the end times.
- God’s message is set in man’s language so that any spirit-filled person can understand (1 Cor 2:9-13)
- Scripture was written in the language of the time (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic) and should be given its plain meaning.
- It is dispensational (progressive) in nature (Luke 21:24; 1 Thess 5:1). Seeds of things to come are found in parts of all dispensations.

What was the first prophecy?

Hint: It is in Genesis
