

Week 2: Walking in Prophetic Times

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Living in the Last Days Life Group

Description: The Bible has a lot of prophecy in it about the end times. How do we know when what we see in our newspapers and news programs is fulfillment of prophecy? Can prophecy be a distraction? How do we deal with differing views on the end times? What's the correlation between prophecy and current events?

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Teaching (45 minutes)

Understanding Biblical Prophecy

What is prophecy? Many people talk about living in prophetic times, and we are. But how do we know that?

That phrase often points to predictive and messianic prophecies which talk about being in times that forecast the return of Jesus and the beginning of the end times.

When you read Old Testament prophets, you would not experience complete messianic and predictive prophecy. If you did, every Jewish person would know Jesus.

Prophecy is not only predictive. It is not only messianic. We better understand prophecy as engaging our culture with truth, encouragement to know and follow God and His laws, and stomping out idolatry.

Open any Old Testament prophetic book and you will read a lot about these issues. The prophets were always addressing Israel about its idolatry, injustice, and violation of the Torah, God's instruction and laws.

There are different kinds of prophecy, and we will talk about them below because they are important for understanding the last days and end times events. But we need to understand prophecy first through this lens if we are going to understand prophecy in its specific forms.

A prophetic voice speaks about the current issues, the sin, and the idolatry of its culture. Prophetic voices can be very forward and even painful to hear, but it is because they are addressing violations of God's character and goodness.

Message and Method

The prophets proclaimed a message about God to their culture and nation. They spoke in vivid images, stark language, and were sometimes the very illustration of the message.

- Hosea married Gomer, a prostitute who kept running away from him to symbolize Israel's idolatry and prostitution to idols, leaving her true love Yahweh.
- Isaiah named his children after Israel's failing relationship with God.
- Ezekiel was told by God to do certain things for so long that resembled what Israel was doing, like cooking his food over a fire fueled by dung.

The message was always front and center that any vivid language or images, like Jeremiah's image of prostitutes lifting their skirts under trees for the idolatry of Israel, always reinforced God's message to His people.

The methods were different but the message never changed. All these examples of prophets and how they visualized the message for Israel had the same message about idolatry and injustice.

True prophecy may have stark language, vivid imagery, and even inappropriate imagery at times, but it is always commanded by God as the method to bring His message to that culture and nation.

Sometimes we try to make prophecy so tame and we might reject a true prophetic message because we can't get over the imagery. The imagery and methods are meant by God to grab our attention and the attention of our culture.

This does not mean that prophets don't sometimes speak "in the flesh" and not from God, or not using the imagery and language He has told them to use. A prophet should not be abrasive or vivid just to grab attention. They must do what God tells them to do.

Predictive, Messianic, and Personal Prophecy

Several specific types of prophecy help us understand the times we live in. Sometimes prophecy had to be proven because its fulfillment would not be realized by the contemporaries of the prophet.

The Place of Predictive Prophecy

Predictive prophecy is a feature of prophecy used to prove the truth of a prophetic message. I like to call it God "calling His shots." It can be a relatively short amount of time between the prophecy and its fulfillment.

When a prophecy will happen years, decades, or even hundreds of years after the prophecy is given, there must be a sign to accompany the prophecy within the time it is given.

God gives a word through a prophet that confirms the prophet and message are genuine.

Messianic Prophecy and the End Times

Messianic prophecies foretold the coming "Anointed One" God would send. At the time of Jesus, the Jews expected a certain kind of Messiah. They wanted a military leader and king that would get rid of their enemies.

Jesus is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. He saves us from our sins, a much more pervasive enemy than nations and human enemies. He did what no one else could do.

Messianic prophecies occur throughout the Old Testament prophets, many psalms, and just about every other Old Testament book of the Bible. There are also confirmations that Jesus is the Messiah the Old Testament predicted in the New Testament.

Some of the messianic prophecies have been fulfilled already but there are some messianic prophecies that have yet to reach their full fulfillment.

We must have an ongoing personal relationship with Jesus so we can recognize false Christ's that will appear in the last days and end times to deceive Christians.

What about Personal Prophecies?

Personal prophecies are ones given directly to a person about that person's life, or the choices a person has to make. A prophet can speak into your life and help you discern many things like future decisions you must make that will be hard, sin in your life (given personally, not publicly about you), a direction God is going to use you in, and other ways God is speaking to you through a prophet.

This has biblical precedent and merit. The Old Testament prophets give personal prophecies to kings and priests. There were even times when they gave them to other individuals in their ministries.

How should you take a personal prophecy? You will be able to tell right away if a prophet is off-base with their prophecies for you. They will not "ring true" about your situation, what you know about yourself, or what God has already spoken to you personally.

If this is not the case with a personal prophecy you receive, I would hold it tentatively and allow it to play out over time. If you know the character and caliber of the prophet who gave you the prophecy and they have a track record with you in the past of true personal prophecy, you can put even more trust in what they say.

Realize that the prophetic ministry of the Church, prophets, and personal prophecy are accurate ways God speaks into your life. But as many genuine prophets as there are in the Church, there can also be charlatans or prophets who speak out of turn or "in the flesh."

Pray about any personal prophecies you have been given and ask the Lord to reveal to you what He is speaking to you and if they are accurate and true prophecies He is speaking through someone in your life. Do not be automatically cynical about any personal prophecies your given.

The Telescoping Effect of Biblical Prophecy

Picture prophecy like a telescope. It's hard for us to look through the wider lens and understand exactly what a prophet saw in the vision, dream, or wrote down in a prophecy.

Similarly, a prophet may have received a vision of the future but not been able to understand everything he/she saw. This makes it all the more harder to fully interpret and understand every prophecy in the Bible.

I believe God gives prophets and those who study prophecy insight and wisdom about the prophecies they read, hear, and speak.

The prophecy the prophet receives and records gives more insight as time passes. The prophet only sees a little of the picture and fulfillment of the prophecy. But as time passes the prophecy receives more fulfillment and understanding.

Like the revelation of the Bible from the Old Testament to the New Testament, the prophecy receives more revelation and can be better interpreted the closer it is to its ultimate fulfillment.

The prophet sees into the future and writes down the full revelation he receives, and as the time draws closer to its ultimate fulfillment, we are able to see a fuller picture.

Note also that a prophet can see through several points in time as God reveals to him, and he writes everything he sees. He may see different fulfillments at different times and write them all down in a single prophetic passage.

You can actually see different points of fulfillment in the same prophecy. For example, when Isaiah writes about the Messiah being a wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, and Prince of peace, he also said the government would rest upon his shoulder ([Isaiah 9:6-7](#)). This will not happen until Jesus is King in his second coming during the millennial reign.

Isaiah 9:6-7 ESV

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to

establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Many of the Old Testament prophecies are like this. They show partial fulfillment but promise an ultimate fulfillment of the whole prophecy written. We need to keep this in mind when we look at them.

Prophecy is very specific and every word written in them is part of an ultimate fulfillment. Partial or multiple fulfillments do not negate the full prophecy having an ultimate fulfillment.

We can easily be wrong about the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy when we see a partial fulfillment. We need to keep this in mind as we study prophecy and consider its fulfillment.

Multiple and Ultimate Fulfillments

Even in the Old Testament prophets, you can see multiple fulfillments and ultimate fulfillment. **Multiple fulfillments** are when a prophecy is fulfilled more than once throughout history.

For an example of multiple fulfillments, consider Daniel's prophecy of the abomination of desolation ([Daniel 9:27](#)). This has been fulfilled more than one time in history.

One chief example is Antiochus Epiphanes IV (ruled Syria from 175-164 BC). He went into the temple, sacrificed pigs on the altars, and raised up a statue of Zeus. But this is not the ultimate fulfillment of that prophecy.

Jesus references the abomination of desolation after this event in history and points to the end times as its ultimate fulfillment ([Mark 13:14](#)) and Mark gives a parenthetical statement (let the reader understand). All these clues point to multiple fulfillments with an ultimate fulfillment. Paul gives more information about the same event for the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist ([2 Thessalonians 2:1-5](#)).

The **ultimate fulfillment** of a prophecy is when a prophecy is completely fulfilled in all its parts and all its conditions.

How do you know it's one of the multiple fulfillments and not an ultimate fulfillment? Multiple fulfillments can happen throughout history and yet not fulfill all the requirements of a prophecy.

Consider that a prophecy can be taken so literally that every part of the prophecy must be fulfilled for it to have its ultimate fulfillment.

Let's take for example the prophecy of [Isaiah 7](#). We are very familiar with the sign of the prophecy because we hear it every Christmas because Matthew quotes from it. But let's get a fuller picture of the prophecy.

- Ahaz is king of Judah and they have received word that Israel and Assyria, a Northern Alliance was formed against them and wanted to destroy Judah. The people were deeply afraid and were looking to Egypt to save them instead of the Lord.
- Isaiah meets Ahaz and prophesies the following prophecy:

Isaiah 7:7-9 ESV

thus says the Lord God: “ ‘It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. And within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered from being a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.’ ”

- The prophecy is that the Northern Alliance would not stand after 65 years. It will not be fulfilled until after Ahaz is no longer king of Judah, and probably not alive. There was no way to prove the prophecy within his lifetime.
- How could Isaiah prove this prophecy was from the Lord? He would have to show him a sign that would happen within his lifetime. King Ahaz refuses to ask for a sign, so the Lord gives it anyway.

Isaiah 7:14-17 ESV

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!”

- The Hebrew word for virgin does not have the specific meaning of the technical term we use today. It can refer to any unmarried maiden.
- However, it's interesting to note that when the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint), the Greek technical term for virgin was used in that sign.
- When Matthew quotes the sign, and he quotes from the Septuagint, he is using the Greek technical term for a virgin. The sign was given because of the prophecy.
- Because the king would not be alive when the Northern Alliance was destroyed, Isaiah further gave him a sign he would be able to observe in his time to know the prophecy was true.
- The sign was that a virgin would give birth to a son and people would call him Immanuel. Because this sign had to be fulfilled within his lifetime, the virgin was most likely a maiden within his court who would be married and bear a son.
- But this was not the ultimate fulfillment of that sign. That's why Matthew says that Mary is the virgin who gave birth to a son, Jesus, who would save His people from their sins. This is the ultimate fulfillment because Mary was a technical virgin who was not married at the time. And Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the name "Immanuel," a name that means "God with us."

Signs for prophecy came about because some prophecies would not be ultimately fulfilled for many years beyond their proclamation. The prophets had to be tested by their prophecies because of the standards Moses laid down about prophets and their prophecies ([Deuteronomy 18:20-22](#)).

Definition of prophecy: A message given by God through a prophet concerning His people, kings, nations, or individuals. It usually concerns idolatry, injustice, or unbelief.

Definition of sign: A sign is a prophetic pointing to something that would happen in the life of the nation or individual when a prophecy's ultimate fulfillment would be much later than that person or nation would live.

Both the prophecy and the sign are prophetic. And as we see from Matthew, a prophecy and a sign can have multiple fulfillments. The ultimate fulfillments of the virgin giving birth came through Mary.

But that sign was not about the original prophecy Isaiah gave by the word of the Lord. The sign of Mary giving birth to Jesus was that God's ultimate salvation, not from a couple of nations to Israel's north, was coming upon the earth in Jesus, the Savior of the world.

How to Tell Genuine Prophets from False Prophets

A prophet sees the idolatrous, unjust, and ungodly parts of society and addresses them. The message will usually go against cultural norms and shock its hearers.

In the Church, prophets encourage, exhort, and console God's people. They can offer correction but they do it in a loving way.

If the prophet makes a prophecy that does not come true when the prophet says it will, that prophet is a false prophet ([Deuteronomy 18:20-22](#)).

Deuteronomy 18:20-22 ESV

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.' And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?'— when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

If the prophet speaks statements that go against what the Bible has said, that prophet is a false prophet.

If the prophet encourages heresy, false doctrines, and biblical practices among God's people, that prophet is a false prophet.

If the prophet leads God's people away from Him, that prophet is a false prophet.

If the prophet lives a lifestyle contrary to what the Bible commands, that prophet is a false prophet. Test the fruit of the prophet's life.

Test what the prophet says against the Bible ([1 Corinthians 14:29](#)) and ask the Holy Spirit if the word of the prophet “rings true” to what the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church, or what the prophet says about current events.

Applying Biblical Prophecy to Today’s Current Events and Issues

We have both Old Testament prophecies and New Testament prophecy in the book of Revelation that refer to the events of the end times.

It is hard enough to compare Old Testament prophecies like Daniel with New Testament prophecy of Revelation with complete clarity and accuracy.

Don’t get me wrong. We have a lot of information in these prophetic books and they can be linked with the events they point to.

Don’t forget that the revelation of the Bible is progressive through time. Old Testament prophecies about the end times can be better understood in light of the New Testament.

When we look at the evidence of what happens today, looking at our newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other, so to speak, we can see partial fulfillments even in our day.

Most look to prophecies about Israel and see that nation as central to end times events and their prophetic fulfillments. Daniel and Revelation have some of the same material and information about the end times.

New Testament books besides Revelation give us information about the end times, chiefly [Matthew 24-25](#), [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#); [2 Thessalonians 2](#), and other prophecies and prophetic literature of the New Testament.

Let us keep in mind the amount of studying these prophetic materials and the wisdom that must be involved for us to be accurate in our understanding of prophetic literature and current events.

Since the beginning of the last days, the events prophesied and predicted in the Scriptures have become more evident because of the increasing intensity of these events and a general feeling of the end of the last days make us even more keen on these events and their prophetic fulfillment.

Today's current issues in the news, the increasingly wicked generation in which we live, and the immorality surrounding us can also be indicators of the end of the last days. All these issues and events lead us to believe more acutely that we are living in truly prophetic times.

Holding a Loose Personal/Public View of a Prophecy or Prophetic Understanding

Don't be dogmatic about prophecy and current events

Don't let prophetic interpretation of events and current issues divide Christians

Agree to disagree when you hold a different interpretation or understanding of high prophecy might be fulfilled today

Admit you could be wrong about a biblical prophecy and its interpretation today.

Be willing to admit you are wrong when what you believe a prophecy will be fulfilled in a certain time or event that is proven to not be fulfilled.

Humbly approach interpretation of biblical prophecy in current events.

Be willing to talk about your views of prophecy with others but do not be forceful or dogmatic about your views. It is better to be humble about prophecy now instead of eating crow later.

What You Can't Do

Scripture forbids certain practices with prophecy.

You cannot pick dates for the return of Christ or the rapture ().

You cannot divine which prophecies are being fulfilled at this moment. Your limited human perspective may be wrong.

It is easier to understand some prophecies as becoming more evident as you observe what is happening in the world. Sometimes prophecy is more about larger movements in history than smaller ones.

Remember that prophecy, wisdom, and prayer go hand-in-hand. Avail yourself of all three as you live in these last days. Even John was given revelation and told not to share parts of it.

Don't Allow Prophecy to Distract You from Mission

Like eschatology, prophecy can distract you from your mission as a Christian. If you spend all your time trying to figure out which prophecies will happen when or cause division among Christians with your views on prophecy, you are the problem, not the solution.

There's nothing wrong with talking about prophecy and sharing your views with others. But if that's all you talk about, think about, or study, you probably need to take a breather from prophecy and go evangelize, operate in your gifts, and serve others more.

The thing about prophecy is that it will come true at the proper time God has designed it to be ultimately fulfilled. No amount of your thinking about it were talking about it will change that.

You need to live in the moments God has given you to be part of the Christian community, your family, and the current time. While you are distinguishing the seasons of the last days you need to be helpful to the body of Christ.

Discussion (30 minutes)

Application (10 minutes)