

# ***PROPHETIC PRINCIPLES***



***A PRIMER TO THE STUDIES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION AND ISAIAH***

# PROPHETIC PRINCIPLES

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## INTRODUCTION

In a very real sense the Bible is in its entirety a Prophetic Book, in that it reveals the Heart of God to man and that it teaches us His ways and the call to draw near to Him.

*2Ti 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

We also know that a large part of Scripture is also predictive prophecy which relates to future events. We find most of this in the Prophets, the Psalms and of course Revelation.

As Biblical Prophecy is so significant it is good that we aim to understand some of the basic purposes and principles of prophecy and how it opens up our understanding of Scripture, especially those that refer to past and future events. As someone once said "The Bible is a Book of History, some of which has not happened yet"

Understanding Biblical prophetic principles is also important in helping to understand and discern the prophetic today, and to rightly understand the times we are in. We are also warned of many false prophets and false doctrines which we must discern and avoid.

That said we must also recognise that prophecy and other parts of Scripture often contain a mystery, and we should not expect to always understand everything. The Lord will always have His surprises! Scripture is not there that we can know everything but that we can firmly put our trust in Him who does know everything! It says in Deuteronomy that there are still secret things that belong to God, for example the time Jesus will return!

*Psalm 131 LORD, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me. Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.  
O Israel, hope in the LORD From this time forth and forever.*

Thus the aim of our studies is not to gain "knowledge" for its own sake but that we might fully trust Him who does hold the past present and future, and to give ourselves to Him, His ways, and have a heart to do and live by the revealed will of God in Scripture.

*Isa 66:1-2 Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, And all those things exist," Says the LORD. "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.*

*Psa 25:14 The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant.*

Prophecy can be multi-layered in that it can speak of a particular time or event, but also speak into our own lives and situation as in effect the "Logos" word can become a "Rhema" word when the Holy Spirit uses it to spotlight something in our own lives, with a "sharp two-edged sword".

However we have to recognise that this is NOT the same as taking it as a personal interpretation or for private use as Peter warns us. So whilst we recognise that Scripture and prophecy can be used to speak into our individual or corporate lives, we should always keep in mind its primary purpose. We must also bear in mind that all prophecy in Scripture is totally authoritative, and as Peter says we would do well to pay close attention to it [2 Peter v 16-21]. All other prophecy must be judged in the light of the Word of God and Biblical prophecy.

Understanding Biblical prophecy should also help us in know how we should pray, especially in these "Last Days". It is a key part in understanding the "times and seasons". This will help us to avoid praying for things that are clearly not in the revealed will of God.

## TWO MAIN CAMPS CONCERNING PROPHECY

There are two main camps of interpreting Biblical Prophecy, particularly unfulfilled predictions. The approach you take affects not only how you see history but also how you read and interpret the whole of Scripture.

### 1. Allegorical.

This takes prophecy and other parts of Scripture as having a hidden meaning is purely figurative. For example references to Israel can be taken to mean the people of God generally, or the Church. Jerusalem can mean heaven or the Throne of God.

References to Israel and future events such as in the Book of Revelation refer generally to the battle of Good and Evil and the ultimate triumph of the Church. Israel dwelling in peace would refer to people in the Church dwelling peaceably. Also this approach will often place emphasis on symbolical meaning of numbers and names. For example:

- The 1000 year reign just represents  $10 \times 10 \times 10$  which is a “complete period of time”
- 144,000 sealed represent  $12 \times 12 \times 1000$  which means “governmental perfection”

Within this camp you will generally find proponents of Replacement/Fulfilment Theology which basically considers that the Church has completely replaced Israel, that Israel no longer has any place in the plan or purpose of God, and that it is as any other nation.

### 2. Literal/Plain Reading

This states simply that the Lord means exactly what He says, and says exactly what He means. In this case unfulfilled prophecy will be fulfilled exactly as stated, without any hidden or obscure meaning. In this case:

- Israel does mean the land and people of Israel
- Jerusalem means Jerusalem
- 1000 years means 1000 years
- 144,000 means 144,000

This approach allows for that fact that Scripture, just as in our normal language, will use pictures, idioms and symbolism to make a point. This is to clarify rather than obscure its meaning, and the use of this is normally quite clear from the context.

It also makes the point that all fulfilled prophecy has been fulfilled exactly as stated, because it demonstrates the Omnipotence and Omniscience of the Lord. We should thus expect all unfulfilled prophecy to be fulfilled exactly as given. This does not detract from the spiritual lessons that are also contained in Biblical prophecy and how numbers/names are important but this is here without changing its primary meaning and fulfilment..

The main objections to Allegorical are:

1. Since all fulfilled Scripture has been fulfilled as stated, why not the same for unfulfilled? Also other part of Scripture are taken as read by Allegorists, so why the change here?
2. Scripture is not given to confuse but rather give understanding and show that The Lord is in control. Allegorical interpretations can be confusing and not logical or in context.
3. Who decides what the allegorical interpretation is, and on what basis and authority. It also can go against the covenantal nature of God and can make Him seem untrue!
4. Jesus Himself took Scripture literally, and the prophecies He fulfilled were fulfilled literally!

For the purpose of ALL our studies and especially Revelation and the Prophets we will take uncompromisingly the Literal/Plan Reading view. As we shall discover even when there is symbolic or picture language it is explained through context or by other passages within Scripture.

## TYPES OF PROPHECY

### Predictive/Visionary

A significant proportion of Scripture is Predictive Prophecy, which speaks of future events, or gives a vision of the future state.

This is probably the most thought of as prophecy, which essentially is stating what will happen in the future. It is one that is of the most interest, though not exclusively so, when doing studies of the Latter Days such as in the Book of Revelation.

Within these we have to consider:

- Now, near and far and all three!
- The bigger picture
- Partial/repeatable fulfilments
- The prophetic time-clock, is not always the same as our linear time.  
It can also depend on other prophecies and a “filling-up” of events etc.  
The Lord may change and events can be hastened or delayed.

Much of the Predictive Prophecy has already been fulfilled, including several very specific ones about the first coming of Jesus. As has been previously stated fulfilled prophecy has been accurately fulfilled, giving us to expect that what is yet to be fulfilled will be done as written. It demonstrates that the Lord is in charge of History, and gives us certainty for our own destination.

### Forthtelling

This is the other main form of the prophetic where the Lord will speak to His people, and even others, sharing His heart and giving divine revelation on the current state or situation.

Generally this is for:

- **Correction and discipline**  
Shows the need to return to Him and often will come with a call to repentance
- **Warning of consequences**  
Warns of what will happen if there is not a change of heart or action, again with a call to repentance
- **Encouragement and Comfort**  
Sent to affirm and encourage people in a situation, and to know that he is with them
- **Direct instruction to take action**  
Instruction from the Lord as to how to proceed, and to get the victory!

### Conditional/Unconditional

Both types of prophecy can be unconditional, that is they will happen regardless. They may be delayed or be a long time ahead, but they will happen. Others can be conditional and only be fulfilled when the defined conditions are met. A well-known example of this is

**2Ch 7:14** *if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

Generally End-time prophecy is ultimately unconditional as it makes a statement on the outworking of God's covenantal plan and purpose, and that his Word will return to him fully complete.

## HOW DELIVERED

**Num 12:6-8** Then He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?"

Some examples of the different ways in which the prophetic may be delivered:

- **Direct quotation**  
We have a direct statement from the Lord on the matter.
- **Parable.**  
The Lord uses a parable, example or idiom to make a statement.
- **Visions and Dreams**  
The Lord speaks through a vision or through a dream.
- **Acted out.**  
The prophet is called to act out a scenario in order to get the message across. This is effectively using drama to demonstrate what the Lord is saying. We see this particularly in Ezekiel, but also in the other prophets
- **Types and Shadows**  
Events or statements that contain the prophetic e.g.  
Abraham offering Isaac;  
"Cursed is he who hangs upon a tree" Deut 21v22-23 & Gal 3v13  
The incidence of the snakes in the wilderness Num 21v4-9 & John3v14-15
- **Hidden/Mystery**  
Similar to Types/Shadows a mystery hidden to be revealed later, e.g.  
Psalm 22  
ISA 7v14: "a virgin shall conceive" .....  
Hosea 11v1: "Out of Egypt I called My Son"
- **The Feasts and the Tabernacle**  
These are another form of Type and Shadows. For example:  
Passover points to the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God

## PROPHECY IN THE CHURCH

Though not within the remit of this study it is worth just mentioning prophecy in the church today. Many churches do recognise that the prophecy is still an active gift of the Holy Spirit in the church today. For others it remains a controversy.

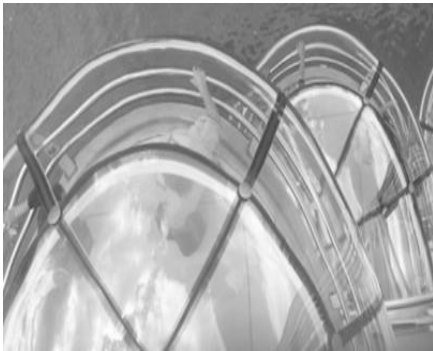
Some churches acknowledge prophecy within the church, but see it strictly limited to "Edification, Exhortation and Comfort" as defined in the letter to the Corinthians, whilst others believe that there can be modern day Prophets as a ministry to the church who will speak concerning the times and season we are in, and will bring the "Rhema" word for today.

Whatever the case all prophecy must be discerned and come under the authority of Scripture as being the written and refined word which takes precedence and especially Biblical Prophecy. It should fit Scripture both in terms of its context and tenor.

### GETTING THE BIGGER PICTURE

The following are 2 different perspectives of the London Eye:

One gives the overall context from a distance, the other a close up whilst actually on the London Eye. To try and understand the first picture without reference to the overall has led to all sorts of different interpretations as to what it was! So it can be with prophecy if not understood in its correct context. Indeed some prophecies will be filling in the detail and affirming others within Scripture.



### UNDERSTANDING PROPHETIC TIME AND DISTANCE PERSPECTIVES

**2Pe 3:8** *But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*

God dwells in Eternity so time is not measured in a linear way as we experience. In Peter's statement it is like a thousand years just passing as a day, or conversely a thousand years can be accomplished in just one day.

For example Jesus' death and resurrection are like just two days ago to the Lord! Also what seems impossible for us to happen except over centuries, God can do in a day. He certainly did with Creation!

Of course we also have "the Day of the Lord" or "in that Day" as in some cases referring to the thousand year Messianic Age.

Through the tunnel of time prophecy can look compressed, as if everything is close, but there can be years or even centuries between fulfilments. It can be like looking at a range of mountains:



This is a view of the Valley of Elah in Israel. Note the near, mid and far hills. Each peak can be a prophecy fulfilled, but what we do not always appreciate is the valleys and distances in-between. In prophecy we are not always given the time-lapse between each stage in fulfilment

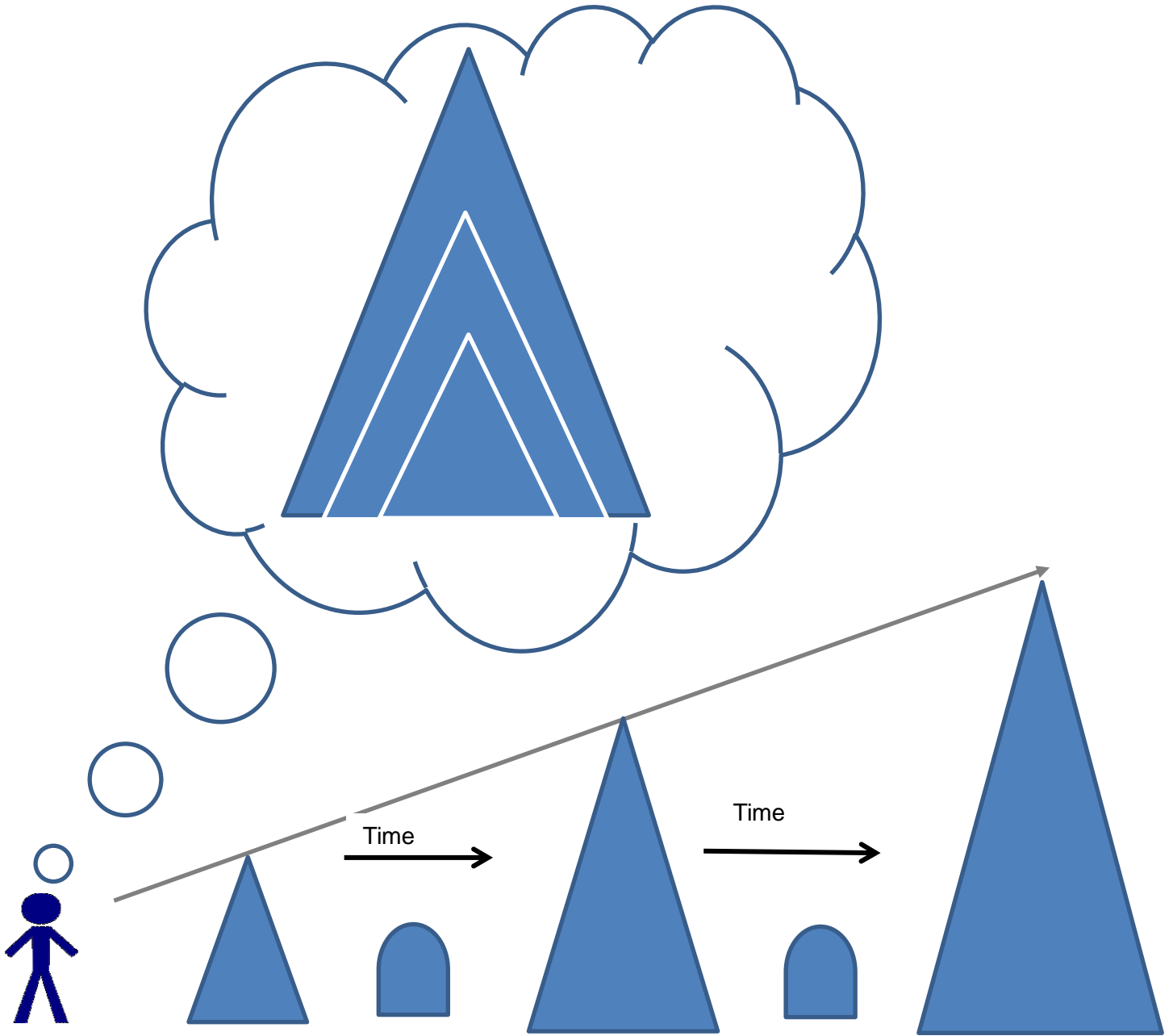


Similarly this view across to Mount Hermon in Israel shows hills and plains near and into the distance, but the snow-capped Mount Hermon almost looks hanging in the air.

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A man sees 3 mountain ranges. What it looks to him are 3 peaks close together, and he may not be aware of the distance between. In the case of prophecy the time lapse may not be apparent between partial and full fulfilment



Also the man may not see or be aware that there are also other hills, forests etc. that lie between these mountains. There may be other prophecies that are linked to and will also require fulfilment on the way.





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## DEALING WITH FALSE PROPHECY AND TEACHING

We are clearly warned in Scriptures that there will be many false prophets and teachers, especially in the Last Days. Finally the most deceptive of all will come which is the False Prophet we read of in Revelation.

*Jer 14:13-14* Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, the prophets say to them, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.' " And the LORD said to me, "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart.

**Mat 24:11-12& 24-25** Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. **[24]** For false Christ's and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand.

**2Pet 2:1** But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

1Jn 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

*2Th 2:9* The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Having a balanced view on Prophecy in Scripture will play its part in helping us to fall into the trap of false teaching and prophecy, but we must:

- Earnestly seek the Lord that he will deliver us from that which is false
- Cultivate a Love for the Truth, and a proper fear of the Lord
- Walk humbly with the Lord and His Word
- Submit completely to the authority of Scripture, and avoid "itching ears"
- Encourage and help one another

**Deu 13:1-4** "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'—which you have not known—'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.

**Deu 18:20** But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'—when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

False prophets and teachers abound today, and even false messiahs. However we must not let this put us off true prophecy and the study of this, as many people are. In fact knowing the real thing that helps us better to spot the counterfeit.

## SUMMARY

The following principles will help in unravelling Biblical Prophecy, including Revelation:

- Understanding the Big Picture of Biblical History is important.  
[“A Brief History of Time”](#) notes on the Cornwall Bible School website may help.
- Understand the context:
  - To whom was it given
  - When, where and the circumstances
  - What is the primary purpose
  - Is it conditional or unconditional
- Use Plain reading of scripture to interpret unless the context **clearly** indicates it is symbolic or allegorical.
- Scripture is its own best commentary. Passages or expression in one part can be explained by reference elsewhere in Scripture. The rule of “first reference” is often key.
- Prophecies can be ‘time sliced’ (partial fulfilment) or be outside of time.  
Is it for now/near or far future ... or a mixture
- Unfolding prophecy can be likened to watching a painter working on a canvas ... filling in detail here and there rather than working in pure chronological order.
- Similarly a painting is essentially two-dimensional and prophecy can be like this, with different events but not an obvious chronology.
- Some are written to be only fully understood at the time of fulfilment. We cannot always understand everything and are prone to error if we think so. It is still there to encourage us knowing that God has a plan!
- Prophecies can have parallel or dual role in fulfilment (lesser and greater).  
May be for now but have a type for the future.
- Prophecies are not for private interpretation. Beware of trying to interpret in ‘our image’. Jesus also warns of many False Prophets and Messiahs that will come. We need to keep a love for the Truth and not “itching ears”
- **Prophecy ultimately testifies to Jesus (Rev 19v10)**
- Fulfilled prophecy is exact, so we should expect unfulfilled to be the same.  
God always keeps His Word!
- Remember that Jesus said no-one knows the exact time of His return. Many have been caught out by specific date and time predictions.
- Prophecy should not be ignored or feared. A large portion of Scripture is prophetic, and is there to give us a certain hope and a future and also to have an eternal view for our lives.
- Be discerning, be good “Bereans”, ask for a love of the Truth, and pray that the Holy Spirit will keep you from being deceived. The person who thinks he cannot be deceived is already deceived!

Often the Truth is indeed stranger than fiction and we can miss the full significance if we just do not believe that God will do exactly what He says. We do not need to try and work out how or “bend” Scripture to fit own times or understanding. In the words of Jesus to the Sadducees:

**Mat 22:29** *Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.*