

FROM PROPHECY INTO HISTORY

Proof of God's Hand on the Bible

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TRAVIS SWART



Carpenter's Son Publishing

From Prophecy into History: Proof of God's Hand on the Bible

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From Prophecy into History is an important book for those who want to know if the Bible, and Christianity, are true. Fulfilled prophecy is one of the oldest evidences given for the Christian faith, and yet it has not been as developed as other forms of apologetics. I am thrilled to see that Travis has taken the time to simplify and clarify the evidence from prophecy so both believers and skeptics can benefit.

SEAN MCDOWELL, PH.D.
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS
BIOLA UNIVERSITY
BEST-SELLING AUTHOR, SPEAKER

When the missionaries and evangelists in the earliest Church offered up reasons for faith to a skeptical world their reasons almost always centered on miraculous acts and on fulfilled prophecy. The art of using prophecy as a tool of apologetics has not been used in many generations. And I am delighted to see Travis Swart remind us just how important prophecy can be in the defense of the faith.

CRAIG J. HAZEN, PH.D.
FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF MA PROGRAM IN APOLOGETICS
BIOLA UNIVERSITY
AUTHOR OF *FIVE SACRED CROSSINGS*

Travis Swart has given us a gift. In a clear and uncomplicated way, he's helped us see how fulfilled prophesy leads us to a deeper awe and trust of God's Word and the Author of the Word. For some this is a great review. For many it will open up a new world to the mystery revealed through the Bible.

GLEN ELLIOTT
LEAD PASTOR, PANTANO CHRISTIAN CHURCH

*This book is dedicated to my wonderful wife, Catherine.
Thank you for all your support and for hanging in there
with me over the last two years.*

*Special thanks to my friends and family
for your input and encouragement.*

*My sincere gratitude to Keith as well, who led me to challenge
my faith, which thereafter kindled my passion for serving the Lord.*

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INTRODUCTION

“Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end . . . None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.”

—DANIEL 12:9, 10B

“Prophecy.” Many see it as mere hocus-pocus and vague predictions concealed in myth, legend, and religion. Most probably associate the word with visions of the future and often “the Apocalypse.” Religions since the dawn of time have had their wise men, soothsayers, diviners, and prophets—all of whom have made claims to bear the revelation of their gods or spirits. We can probably think of a few headlines in our lifetime about “the end of the world” as predicted or interpreted from some religion or culture’s literature. We always seem to be intrigued by such things, only to sigh indifferently as they come and go without any effect—after all, who is ever surprised that no one can really predict the future of world events? Many try and guess right occasionally—even the weatherman can get things right from time to time—but most fall flat on their face and are never right consistently.

But what if someone really could accurately and consistently predict the future of world events? What if many people already have? And, what if all these people have done so over the course of 1,500 years, all weaving their prophecies together into one big, coherent picture that lays out the plan of the same deity over the course of history? Would you listen to them and at least consider what they had to say? They would certainly have my attention. Would it surprise you, then, to know that such a thing has already happened, and that events foretold by these prophets have repeatedly come to pass and continue to do so to this day? These prophets are none other than those of the Holy Bible. Nonsense, you say! All I ask is for a bit of your time to show you, then you can decide for yourself.

No other religion boasts the type of rich, robust, and accurate predictive prophecy like that of Christianity (which includes all of the Old Testament writings of Judaism). Both Old and New Testaments combined consist of around 25 percent prophecy, with over one thousand instances of predictive prophecy (LaHaye 2006, 7). Many of which can be shown to have been fulfilled in history. The Bible is unique in this aspect. “It is the only volume ever produced by man, or a group of men, in which is to be found a large body of prophecies relating to individual nations, to Israel, to all the peoples of the earth, to certain cities, and to the coming of the One who was to be the Messiah” (Smith 2015, Ch. 1). Jesus stands alone among all other religious figures in having the support of predictive prophecy foretelling his coming hundreds of years in advance. No scriptures among any other religion past or present bear such marks of divine authority. The importance and significance of prophecy in the Bible cannot be overstated.

My experience with Bible prophecy was sketchy throughout most of my first thirty years of life. Although I became a Christian at a young age, went to a Christian elementary school, and grew up in the church, I had very little knowledge or appreciation for it. I’m sure I had read over many of the prophecies addressed in this book before, but I didn’t know what they meant, their significance, or how to connect all the dots. I took them for granted, as I’m certain many church-goers do today. I haven’t encountered too many pastors that give sermons or teachings focused solely on biblical prophecy—most probably don’t think prophecy is going to put people in the pews. (My hat’s off to Pastor Glen Elliot, however, who opened me to new perspectives). While it does get sprinkled in here and there, most of us probably go through our spiritual journey mostly ignorant of such things—if Christians know very little about prophecy, how much more so with non-churchgoers? I’ll endeavor to fix that on both fronts with this book.

What I have discovered in recent years is that prophecy can have great power to impact belief in the Bible, and more importantly, in Jesus. This is especially true when it can be related to events confirmed

in history. Jesus and the apostles of the New Testament (NT) certainly knew this to be true. Jesus appealed to Old Testament (OT) prophecy throughout his ministry to point to himself as the Messiah. Luke's gospel tells us that after Jesus rose from the dead, he walked with two of his disciples and opened their eyes to all the prophecies of the OT that pointed to his life and purpose (Luke 24:13-35). These two men described the impact of this revelation as causing their hearts to burn within them as Jesus opened the Scriptures to them—they were connecting the dots!

The apostle Paul, who first took Jesus' message outside of Israel, appealed to the OT prophets for support until his last days in Rome. Under house arrest, he spoke to a large group of Jews, and "He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe" (Acts 28:23-24). Yet so few today realize the persuasive power of prophecy to reveal the truth of God's Word.

Prophecy certainly changed my perspective on the Bible and its truth—it changed my life, literally! Several years ago, during a deployment to Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar (I'm active-duty Air Force, by the way), I had an encounter with an atheist who caused me to begin challenging my Christian beliefs. I began studying many attacks on the Bible, and came across some issues that I couldn't get around. I came to a low point in my faith and was on the edge of disbelief. Then, I had an encounter with God through biblical prophecy.

I stumbled across a prophecy in the book of Daniel, which I had read before but never taken the time to understand. It took me a while to research it and find all the pieces, but what I discovered shocked me to the core. This prophecy was so specific, down to the month and year in which historians placed the predicted event, that I knew there was no way it was just some best guess of a phony prophet. I knew from my research that Daniel had written this prophecy hundreds of years before the event it predicted, and he hit it right on the money. Specific and timely. This realization of God's hand on the Bible took

me from near unbelief and restored my faith to something more than it had ever been—not just belief, but knowledge of the truth. I think of this moment as God’s divine “slap” across my face to wake me up to reality. From that point on, I knew the Bible had to be true—this was strong, positive evidence! So now I give it the benefit of the doubt when dealing with tough questions or issues which bring its truth under scrutiny. What’s more is that through this encounter, God rid me of a shameful addiction that I had struggled with for years—it was as if God affirmed my newfound faith by removing the desire for the addiction in an instant. From then on, God and his Word became my addiction. The answers have come, and my faith continues to grow, especially as I delve more into prophecy and how it has related to history. It’s amazing and scary all at the same time.

It is this prophecy and others that I wish to share with you so that you, too, might see how they reveal God’s hand on the Bible and thereby reveal its truth. Through this realization, I hope you will come to understand and appreciate the implications this has on our very existence and the future to come. I have written this book for Christians and non-Christians alike, although I’ve catered it to those who are unfamiliar with and/or skeptical of Scripture. For those of you who are followers of Jesus, I pray the coming chapters will encourage you in your faith and provide you with new information to help you share that faith with others. For those of you who are unfamiliar with and/or skeptical about the truth of God’s Word, I want to show you some amazing things about the Bible which prove it was not written by just mere men. With its authors’ repeated skill in foretelling the distant future, it could only have been written by men with a connection to the divine. It is my hope that you will come to see the Bible’s Scriptures as from God and trustworthy. I pray that you will become familiar with what Jesus did for us and what it means to follow him, and that you will understand how our relationship with him impacts our lives in eternity.

There are so many issues and questions about the Bible regarding its validity that we could discuss, but I believe prophecy is the best place to start because it speaks for itself, and it is very hard to just

explain away as coincidence. If we can agree that these prophets really did have God behind them, and that his hand really seems to be on the Bible, then we should be able to give it the benefit of the doubt when we encounter issues or questions which seem to cast suspicion on it. Concerns like evolution, the existence of evil, and various difficulties in understanding certain Scriptures will then have no bearing on its truth. What remains is simply to understand these issues more thoroughly and to see how they fit into the context of Scripture and God's existence. I will say, however, that I have been able to answer most if not all of those tough questions and issues. If you have such doubts, I believe the same will be true for you if you take the time and honestly seek to understand. Either way, you won't be disappointed. I have yet to find any concrete argument against the truth of God's Word in spite of trying very hard to find one.

It pains me that so many pass the Bible off as just myth or hoax with such powerful testimony to its truth contained right in its pages. And yet, without the right guidance, prophecy can be very difficult to navigate, even for someone who has been exposed to it before. So it is my goal over the course of this book to take you on a journey from unfamiliarity with biblical prophecy to a coherent understanding of several groups of prophecies which predicted major world events well before they occurred. In doing so, we will see that God really has been working throughout history and the Bible, and that he has a plan—a plan for the redemption of his people, Israel, of all those who come to call Jesus Lord and Savior, and of the very world itself.

Many do not and will not ever understand what the prophets of the Bible have written, but those who endeavor to do so are wise and will be ready for what is to come. In the words of the apostle Peter, "We . . . have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Pet. 1:19). Let me now shed some light on the mysteries of God's Word and his prophets . . .