

A CONCISE GUIDE TO

Bible Prophecy

**60 PREDICTIONS
EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW**

STAN GUTHRIE



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To Mom and Dad:
Irene S. Guthrie and S. Morris Guthrie

*Grace to you and peace
from God our Father and
the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*I thank my God in all
my remembrance of you . . .
making my prayer with joy.*

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Introduction

When I was new to the Bible, the subject of prophecy fascinated me—and, to tell the truth, it still does. I was constantly scanning the headlines for confirmation of scriptural predictions about the future. Was the restoration of the State of Israel a harbinger of the “End Times”? Were developments in Western Europe precursors of a “revived Roman Empire”? Could we calculate the date of Christ’s return?

In our search to know what is to come, many of us turn to the Bible for answers, because its ultimate author (God) claims to know the end from the beginning. Both the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and the Christian New Testament are loaded with prophets and prophecies.

Think of the word *prophet*, and you’re likely to come up with quite a range of characters. Nostradamus, Jeane Dixon, Isaiah from the Old Testament, and Edgar Cayce may come to mind just for starters. There are many people who claim to know the future. Some wear long, burlap robes and carry signs proclaiming “The end is near,” while others who wear pinstripes and Guccis urge us to buy gold in preparation for the “coming economic catastrophe.”

We saw this dynamic yet again in the recent frenzy over Harold Camping, some of whose followers spent their life savings to rent billboards to warn the world about the rapture and the end of the world. Camping’s apocalyptic predictions of the return of Christ, of course, like those of countless others before him, failed to come to pass, inviting depression in some and mockery from others.

But Camping’s tragic errors no more invalidate biblical prophecy than someone refusing to double-check a driving route invalidates the global positioning system device on the car dashboard. The value of prophecy stands. It is up to us to figure out how to use it so we can get to where God wants us to go. That’s what this little book is about.

Bible scholars say that the prophets are God’s spokesmen (and women), who both *foretell* what is ahead and *forth tell* what we are to do now. Technically, *every* statement in the Bible can be classified as *prophecy*—as a word from God (2 Pet. 1:20–21). But in this guide we will confine the meaning of a biblical prophecy to *a statement by God or his representative concerning the future*. And for a prophecy to be confirmed as ultimately from *God* rather than from mere men and women (2 Tim. 3:16), the test is straightforward and unyielding. According to Moses, the prophecy *must come true* (Deut. 18:21–22). When it comes to prophecy, God does not grade on a curve.

The Bible, written over a period of nearly 1,500 years and covering events from creation to the end of the world and beyond, has hundreds and hundreds of predictive prophecies—of numerous literary types—within its pages. Christian apologist Hugh Ross suggests that some 2,500 prophecies appear in the Bible—with 500 still awaiting fulfillment¹—but only God knows the true number. Either they have already come to pass (some in multiple stages) or they await a future fulfillment. (And some that have already been fulfilled partially in history await a final, complete fulfillment when the world is made new.)

Some prophecies are crystal clear both in their presentation and in their fulfillment, such as the prediction in the book of Micah that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Others, such as the return of the boy Jesus and his family from Egypt, are best seen in hindsight. Yet all give us important information about God, the world . . . and ourselves.

A little bit about me and the method I use in this volume:

- I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God. This means that it comes *from* God, *through* human agency (again, see 2 Peter 1:20–21). As a divine-human product, however, the Bible uses cultural and literary forms that, while communicating truth about God, humanity, or the world, cannot always be taken *literally*. For example, it assumes the perspectives common to earthbound readers—such as portraying that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Metaphor is a common literary device. When Jesus says, “I am the door” (John 10:9), he is clearly using one. No one expects to find a doorknob or hinges protruding from the Savior’s robe.
- I believe that Scripture, as originally written, contains no errors. Unprecedented levels of study over the centuries, by friend and foe alike, have only confirmed this belief. Though no original

manuscripts of God’s Word remain, we have thousands of copies (some of which were made within mere decades of the originals), bolstering our confidence that the Bible we possess has not been changed in any significant way. No other ancient manuscript comes close to this level of attestation, and the basic truth of Scripture has been confirmed by archaeology and other sources of knowledge again and again.²

- I believe this little volume you hold in your hands (or on your e-reader) will show that all of Scripture—and all of prophecy—ultimately points to Christ. As the risen Lord told some of his disciples: “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” Then we have this statement from Luke: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25–27). Ultimately, prophecy points to Jesus Christ.

In *A Concise Guide to Bible Prophecy*, we will look at sixty key prophecies in the Bible, each through the lens of one or several Bible verses. Although only a small fraction of the total, these predictions are representative of the whole. Taken together, they enable us to grasp the main themes of Scripture, and they lay a solid foundation for additional study.

I make no claim that this slim work will cover such a grand subject exhaustively, but it will help us see how the prophecies fit together in the overall sweep of Scripture. It will also help us avoid the common pitfall of wresting individual prophecies from their contexts, an error that causes many readers to go astray when interpreting the Bible’s predictions.

To enhance our understanding and to avoid misinterpretation to the best of our ability, we will consider these prophecies by category, in the context of the rest of God’s Word as well as any applicable historical events. That’s because the prophecies were given *by* real people *to* real people *in* real historical situations and *facing* real issues.

Following your own interests, feel free to read the chapters in any order you desire. Each is written to stand on its own. However, I believe you will get the most from this book if you read about the prophecies in order, as I have arranged them. I believe this approach will best illuminate the key themes of Scripture and the unfolding of salvation history.

To aid you in further studying this vital subject, in the back of the book are some basic principles of hermeneutics (biblical interpretation) and the main approaches that Christians (including me) use when handling prophecy and studying the end of the world (eschatology).

This book is not a dry, academic discussion about prophecy. Nor is it a sensationalistic attempt to tickle our fancy about the future. Instead, it is meant to help, instruct, and encourage ordinary people like you and me. It aims to create or strengthen belief in the Bible as God's Word. My hope is that it will give you a deeper appreciation for the unity and genius of Scripture; trust in the omnipotent, omniscient God who is unstoppably at work in human history; and an unshakable confidence about the future. Toward that final goal, this book will offer a personal application for each prophecy.

Just as the Bible's many predictions had meaning for their hearers when they were initially given, so they have significance for us today—whether the events they describe have already happened or still await a future fulfillment. That's because prophecy is never given solely to satisfy our curiosity about what is to come. It is also meant to transform our lives *today*. As 2 Peter 3:1–2 says, “I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior.”

So let's get started.

Israel

1

Blessed to Be a Blessing

Genesis 12:1–3

God calls an unknown man named Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans, a sophisticated pagan society of moon worshipers, to wander in an unknown land.

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 12:1–3

The fulfillment of this four-thousand-year-old promise, like so many other prophecies, occurs on more than one level. First, of course, the “great nation” is fulfilled in Israel and the Jewish people, who bless the world with their presence on the strategic land bridge connecting Europe, Asia, and Africa. Abram and his wife, Sarai (later, Abraham and Sarah), battle decades of doubt and desperation before miraculously receiving Isaac, their son and heir, from God.

Sadly Isaac’s son (Abraham’s grandson) Jacob is forced from the land of promise because of his own greed and trickery. Is the prophecy to Abram nullified? Not at all, because by God’s grace Jacob is restored to the land with his sons, who will become heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. These men, however, jealous of their gifted and conceited brother,

Joseph, sell him into Egyptian slavery. But Joseph grows in his faith and in his position, rising to become second-in-command in the nation. His God-given wisdom and prophetic foresight enable Egypt to thrive in the midst of a massive famine.

Jacob and his family (including Joseph's evil brothers) are forced to flee the Promised Land for Egypt to survive the famine. Is the prophecy of Genesis 12:1–3 then overturned? No, as the Lord will again bring his people back and establish them in the land (see chapter 3, "Deliverance from Egypt"). Subsequently the kings and nations that bless Israel will be blessed, and those that oppose the vehicle of God's salvation program will face judgment.

Eventually Israel, despite many highlights of faithfulness, fails in its mission. God judges his people accordingly, using the nations of Assyria and Babylon to bring down the Jewish kingdom. Only a remnant is eventually brought back to the land. Israel's glory days are over, apparently forever. What then of the prophesied promise to Abraham and his "offspring"?

The New Testament says that ultimately the prophecy looks ahead to Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah and the world's Redeemer, and his followers of every nation. In the age of Rome, Jesus tells the discouraged nation about the ultimate kingdom of God. We see this new chapter of salvation history begin in a dramatic way on the day of Pentecost, forty days after the resurrection of Jesus, when the Holy Spirit is poured out on an international gathering of Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2) and then on the Gentiles (Acts 10), who become "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:29).

The prophecy that Abraham and all God's people are blessed to be a blessing is also a command. The resurrected Christ's Great Commission crystallizes our joyous responsibility for the world: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18–20).

APPLICATION

**God's blessings are worth waiting for,
and they are to be shared.**

Jacob Returns

Genesis 28:13–15

In the Old Testament, God’s work of blessing the nations centers around Israel living out biblical faith in the Promised Land, pointing the surrounding pagan cultures to the one true God. Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, is to become the father of this nation.

Jacob (which means “supplanter”) is the twin (and younger) brother of Esau and emerges from the womb holding Esau’s heel. Later, Jacob, with the help of his scheming mother, Rebekah, conspires to deceive his aging father, Isaac, and steal Esau’s blessing. Esau, already impetuous and hotheaded, is quite naturally enraged and vows to kill Jacob, who flees into the wilderness, fearing for his life.

The night of his escape, Jacob lies down exhausted on the hard ground to catch some desperately needed sleep. His departure has been so abrupt that the only thing he has for a pillow is a stone. Somehow, uneasily, he drifts off to dreamland. Suddenly he is confronted with a vision of a ladder that reaches from heaven to earth, with angels ascending and descending on it. Then he hears the voice of God.

The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will

bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

Genesis 28:13–15

Immediately Jacob realizes that this is not just any dream but a prophecy from the Almighty: “Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it!’” (v. 16).

In this message God reiterates to the grandson (Jacob) what he already promised the grandfather (Abraham)—that he will be blessed to be a blessing. Yet how can this be, since Jacob is on his way to pagan territory, where he will spend many long years?

God’s blessing actually follows Jacob to his Uncle Laban’s home. Like the mythical King Midas, everything Jacob touches turns to gold. Eventually, laden with riches and a growing family, a slowly maturing Jacob leaves Laban and heads back to the Promised Land, uncertain of his future. But God remains with him, and Jacob’s hard-won faith (and some well-timed gifts to Esau) precede his reinstatement to the land of blessing.

Yet in his old age, famine strikes, and Jacob and his growing clan are forced to pull up stakes and head to Egypt as a matter of survival. The land is again bereft of God’s people. Has the prophecy pronounced in a dream so many years before finally failed? No, because Jacob knows he will eventually return to his homeland. But for now the Jewish people go with him to the land of Pharaoh, where they flourish and multiply, becoming a mighty nation.

Before he dies in Egypt, ancient Jacob gets his exalted son, Joseph, to promise to take his bones from Egypt to the Promised Land, which the great leader does after winning approval from Pharaoh: “So Joseph went up to bury his father. With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt” (50:7). Jacob, once the trickster, does not want to miss out on the worldwide blessing that he knows is coming. In faithful death, Jacob is literally re-deposited in the land of promise, a down payment on all that is to come.

APPLICATION

**Even when we fail, we can count on
God’s promises.**

Deliverance from Egypt

Exodus 6:1

After Joseph passes from the scene, the good times in Egypt come to a screeching halt for the Jewish people.

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

Exodus 1:8–14

At this point, God’s prophecies to the patriarchs seem like a cruel joke. Yes, Israel is now a “great nation,” but it is also a hopelessly enslaved people. Yet God’s plan isn’t frustrated, and he continues patiently to work out his purposes for the world. At the right time, hundreds of years later, he raises up a man, Moses, from Pharaoh’s own household to lead the people back to the land of promise. Proud Pharaoh, however, has a hardened heart and refuses to let them go.

So God, working through Moses, demonstrates his sovereign power. He performs a series of miraculous plagues, from flies that cover the land to blood that contaminates the water. Each time, Pharaoh initially agrees to let the Jewish people go before going back on his word, relying on the false power of the Egyptian gods.

Finally, the Lord reassures a discouraged Moses: “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land” (6:1). This prophecy seems impossible, but Pharaoh, facing the ultimate calamity, the loss of all the firstborn in Egypt (including his own son), actually *orders* God’s people out (12:31–36).

However, the king of Egypt changes his mind once again and sends his chariots after the Israelites to slaughter them by the sea. But God parts the Red Sea for the Jews; the Egyptians, heedless of the danger, plunge into the breach after them.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.” So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the LORD threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

Exodus 14:26–29

So Pharaoh has again reneged—but for the last time. It is time for the prophecy to be fulfilled—without him. Pharaoh is ultimately an unwilling participant in God’s prophecy . . . but a participant nonetheless. God’s plan to bless the world through his people marches on.

APPLICATION

**God’s promises may seem long in coming
but they always prove true.**

Blessings and Curses

Deuteronomy 28

On November 1, 1755, a cataclysmic earthquake strikes Lisbon. When it is over, more than ninety thousand people in Portugal are dead. Another ten thousand die in Spain and Morocco. In Voltaire's *Candide*, the title character watches from Lisbon harbor as the good perish and the evil survive.¹

With every natural disaster since, from Krakatoa to the Asian tsunami, people have asked why bad things happen to good people—always assuming that *they* are among the good. Like petulant children, we are quick to claim, “It’s not fair!” when we face hardship or death. “If only God would treat us as we deserve!”

In one era of history, God seemingly did just that—among the Jewish people. (Actually the surrounding pagan nations were also included in God’s program to give people what they deserved.) In that far distant era, God’s desire was to inculcate values and behaviors necessary to make his people truly his and to use them as a model to draw the surrounding peoples to himself.

But while the Lord would show his grace (unmerited favor) to the Jews and the other peoples, he would also show his severe justice. Before the Jews could receive the Promised Land as a staging area to bless the nations, the corrupt locals—called Amorites—would have to be removed. Turning their backs on the knowledge of the one God, they had turned to paganism, child sacrifice, and countless forms of brutality. Accordingly they *deserved* his judgment.

Yet even here God is gracious, telling Abraham more than six hundred years before the coming conquest, “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (Gen. 15:16). In the intervening centuries, the locals receive ample opportunities to repent, but refuse. So the Jewish people roll in from Egypt and bring God’s righteous judgment.

The same principle of grace and justice is at work in the life of God’s people, who must be holy if they are to bless the world. Through Moses, God prophesies to his people: “And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth” (Deut. 28:1).

And at various times, God’s blessings are evident. Faith, heroism, and other virtues flourish in Israel. The nations begin to see God’s glory through this small window in the Middle East. Ruth of Moab joins Israel and becomes an ancestor of the promised Messiah. As the kingdom begins and prospers, the surrounding people come to Israel, which is strategically situated at the crossroads of the world—where Europe, Asia, and Africa meet. Among the visitors to God’s kingdom and temple are Hiram of Tyre and the Queen of Sheba, who seeks Solomon’s wisdom.

Yet the blessings do not last for God’s people. Iniquity resides in the hearts of these “sons of Adam and daughters of Eve,” and they rebel against their Lord and against each other, eventually splitting into two kingdoms. So their blessings turn into curses, as predicted by Moses: “And you shall become a horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the LORD will lead you away” (v. 37).

Despite repeated and ever-increasing warnings from God’s prophets, his people choose to ignore him. The land groans under their idolatry, greed, and violence and eventually expels them. The results are summarized in 2 Kings 25. First, Israel, the Northern Kingdom, is carried off to Assyria. Then Judah, in the south, succumbs to Babylon. They are scattered to the four winds, removed from the Promised Land.

God’s people get what they deserve.

APPLICATION

God’s justice and grace go together.

Elijah's Drought

1 Kings 17:1

Sometimes we think that if we obey God, if we take a step of faith, everything will be easy. The story of Elijah, the prophet who stood against Ahab, Jezebel, and pagan religion in the Northern Kingdom, tells us otherwise.

King Ahab, under the malicious influence of his Phoenician wife, Jezebel, “did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him” (1 Kings 16:30). So God sent a prophet named Elijah to warn him of God’s impending curse on the land. “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand,” Elijah announces, “there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word” (17:1). It is a direct challenge to the pagan religion of Baal, who was believed to control fertility.¹

As predicted, the rain stops and the brooks dry up. It’s not surprising that Elijah is forced to hide from Ahab and Jezebel, who hope for revenge. Years later God sends Elijah back to the king, who is beside himself over the continuing drought. Elijah orchestrates a confrontation with 450 prophets of Baal on parched Mount Carmel. Will the people of God choose the Lord or Baal?

On the appointed day, two altars are built, with a bull placed on each one for sacrifice, but no fire is lighted. Elijah says, “the God who answers by fire, he is God” (18:24).

After frenzied and exhausting pleading, the priests of Baal fail to rouse their god. Then Elijah stands before the altar of the Lord and prays, “O

LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back” (vv. 36–37).

God answers his prophet dramatically. The “fire of the Lord” comes crashing down, the false priests are wiped out, and the people return to God—at least for a time. Then Elijah, atop the mountain, prays for rain and sees “a little cloud like a man’s hand . . . rising from the sea” (v. 44). Soon a terrific storm arrives, and the drought is over. It is a remarkable triumph for God—and for the prophet Elijah, “a man with a nature like ours” (James 5:17).

Yet Ahab and Jezebel are not celebrating. The evil couple seeks to murder Elijah once and for all. Now it is time for *Elijah* to be exhausted. After seeing God answer all his prayers and prophecies, Elijah has what can only be called a bout of spiritual depression. In terror he flees for his life and asks God to put him out of his misery, saying (inaccurately), “I, even I only, am left” (1 Kings 19:10). A man who has controlled the weather, pronounced judgment, and sparked a great revival has come crashing down to earth.

In a series of events that are both awesome and spiritually encouraging, the Lord appears to his wounded prophet and assures him he is not alone and that there is still work to do (vv. 11–19). Elijah picks himself up, wiser now, and completes his assignment. The God who holds the fate of the nations in his hands has a steady shoulder for his people to lean on in times of great stress.

APPLICATION

**God will be with us in the good times
and the bad.**