

Why We Need Biblical Prophecy

Would you like to know what's going to happen in the next few years or decades? A desire to look into the future is natural. But do you know where to look? What is the one reliable source that gives accurate information about future events?

With the arrival of each new year comes the usual deluge of political, economic and astrological predictions. The current year of 2004 is no different, but how many of these predictions will prove accurate in the long run?

We're all very interested in the future. Is it going to rain when we're on holiday? Will we have an adequate pension when we retire? We work and plan to ensure that our futures are as secure and comfortable as possible. Knowing what is going to happen is not just handy, it's invaluable. If we knew the future, we could act on that knowledge, enabling us to prosper, avoid accidents and even premature death.

Knowledge about the future is priceless. But reliable information can only be found in the Bible. Granted we will not find our names or details of our individual futures

in God's Word, but we can discover what is going to happen to our nations and the world at large.

Scripture is prophetic

It is estimated that approximately a fourth to a third of the Bible contains prophecy. Much of this is yet to be fulfilled and centres on the return of Jesus Christ. The run-up to His return is foretold as a time of unprecedented troubles, environmental disasters, natural catastrophes, and warfare with no holds barred. Jesus Christ admonishes us to watch out, to be on our toes spiritually, and to be ready for this time (Luke 21:34-36).

In Matthew 24:15 Christ refers to the book of Daniel and indicates that we should read it in particular to begin to understand coming events.

There are many critics of the Bible. Many would prefer to ignore what Scripture predicts, and refuse to even believe there is a God,

perhaps because that would mean they would have to respect the Creator in conducting their lives.

Many of these critics certainly don't agree with the book of Daniel. Yet it is a book full of specific prophecies about future events, some of which have been fulfilled as predicted, with others yet to occur. Faced with these facts, critics have said that Daniel was written after the events took place. The fact is that archaeological finds have dated the book further and further back in time. The Dead Sea scrolls show that this book, as we have it today, was already in circulation nearly 200 years before Christ.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Let's briefly look at a couple of prophecies foretelling events that lead right up to the return of Christ. These were revealed to Daniel, who lived during the Babylonian

kingdom well over 500 years before Christ. They describe the empires that would rise up and dominate the Holy Land until the return of Christ. This knowledge was revealed to Daniel because he showed respect to His Creator and looked to God to reveal the future of his nation.

In chapter two of the book of Daniel we read of a dream that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had.

The king was so troubled by the dream that he wanted to know exactly what it meant. He set a tough assignment for his astrologers and wise men by requiring them to tell him not only the interpretation, but also the dream itself.

When they asked the king to tell them the dream, he lost patience and ordered them all to be executed (verse 7). Daniel was one of those wise men facing execution, so he asked God to reveal the dream and

its meaning to him. God did so, in considerable detail.

The image and its meaning

In chapter two we read about the great, awesome image in human form. The dream described four successive empires to arise. Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonian Empire, was the first – the head of gold. Next would come the Medo-Persian Empire represented by the chest and arms of silver, thirdly, the Greco-Macedonian, symbolised by the belly and thighs of bronze, and finally the Roman Empire, which was the legs of iron and feet of iron and clay.

Further details about these four major empires were revealed to Daniel in another dream. In chapter seven the four empires are symbolised by beasts. Chapter seven adds that the fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire, was to have 10 revivals, the last of which would be

current at the time of Christ's return. Nine of the revivals of this last empire, the Holy Roman Empire as it came to be known, have already taken place.

These events correspond with secular history. The seeds of the final revival of the Holy Roman Empire may have already been sown. You can read of what may well be this final revival in central Europe in your daily newspapers.

Jesus Christ's return

The book of Daniel is a good place to start checking on what God has to say about the future and specifically about His Kingdom to come.

The great image in Daniel chapter two had feet and toes composed of a mixture of iron and clay. In verse 42 we read, 'As the toes of the feet were partly of iron

(Continued on page 7)

A Compelling Challenge from God

God claims that He alone can accurately foretell the future and that seeking such information from other sources is not only disrespectful to Him, but is usually a waste of time. Repeatedly He challenges soothsayers, fortune-tellers and self-appointed prophets to let their predictions be tested, proclaiming:

- 'I am the Lord, that is My name; and my glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to graven images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them' (Isaiah 42:8-9).

- 'Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure"' (Isaiah 46:9-10).

- "'Present your case," says the LORD. "Bring forth your strong reasons," says the King of Jacob. "Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; let them show the former things, what they were, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare to us things to come.

Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; yes, do good or evil that we may be dismayed and see it together. Indeed you are nothing, and your work is nothing; he who chooses you is an abomination"' (Isaiah 41:21-24).

For our part we are challenged to check out God's claims. Surely they are worth looking into, for if we find the claims are true we have a guide on whom we can depend. Notice that in these passages God maintains that only He can tell the future. Check up on it by writing for our free brochure *Is the Bible True?*

Ten Carriers of *God's Attributes*

They are mentioned in each coronation of a British monarch. Christ and the apostle Paul in the New Testament refer to them. They were given prime place in the most holy part of the Jewish temple. They are the 'Oracles of God', first given in written form to the children of Israel at the time of the Exodus.

What purpose do the Ten Commandments serve? Some believe that the 'Ten Words,' or Decalogue, are outdated in modern-day Britain and Europe. Others hold the view that Christ's sacrifice did away with the law of God. Have the 'Oracles of God' passed their sell-by date with no further practical application in society?

The ten carriers are the Ten Commandments – each one of which expresses an aspect of God's holy character, so dramatically missing in Western society today.

Moral foundations crumbling

One need not carry the mantle of a prophet to realise that the moral foundations of society are crumbling at an alarming rate. What we are witnessing is the rapid disintegration of the spiritual foundations of our Judaeo/Christian heritage. Discarding the law of God, including the Ten Commandments, is threatening the moral well-being and long-term survival of the British nation. Its seriousness cannot be exaggerated, nor its consequences overstated.

Take the divine institution of marriage as an example. In *The Daily Telegraph*, Janet Daily tells us: 'Governments no longer feel that

they can favour married couples in the tax and benefit system: single parent families, however much they may be proved to be less stable and beneficial to children, must not be discriminated against. Unmarried couples must be given the same legal status as married ones, even though marriage as an institution has shown itself to be the most robust force for community well-being. And when communities fail, because the family networks have broken down, the state must step in and take over their responsibilities' (5 Nov 2003).

Laws to guide a people

The Bible makes it clear that the laws of God are there for our benefit. The apostle Paul writes, 'The law is holy, and the commandment holy, just and good' (Romans 7:12).

Each of the Ten Commandments expresses an aspect of God's holy character.

Christ's sacrifice for our sins clears the way for God's gift of everlasting life, but the law of God teaches us to live a godly life. In no way does keeping the law devalue Christ's sacrifice. One doesn't compete against the other; each has a different but complementary part

in fulfilling God's plan of salvation.

Once we understand the purpose of God's law, we realise its importance in the spiritual development of godly character. To help you in this quest, please request our free booklet simply titled *The Ten Commandments*.

The Bible shows us that there is a way to access that spiritual source of morally perfect character. But we must be receptive. 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,' the apostle Paul admonishes us (Philippians 2:5). Christ reflected the very mind of God.

The moral standards the Holy Scriptures expect of us are faultless and just. When applied they serve to benefit humanity. This God-given morality is so much better than the inadequate standards the world holds, standards that all too often are polar opposites of what God offers.

Human beings are not born with moral character. We do not have an inbred proclivity that is passed on automatically from one generation to the next.

Godly character is developed by embracing and practising the moral code given to men and women by their Creator. Good character is a divine attribute. Its origin lies with God and can be developed by men and women 'created in the image of God' (Genesis 1:27).

For the human family to reflect the Creator's character attributes, it is essential to apply all the moral teachings found in God's Word and to live by the Ten Commandments.

Entrusted with God's law

The Holy Scriptures make it plain that the people of Judah were chosen from among the 12 tribes of Israel to preserve the Hebrew scriptures. The apostle Paul reminds his readers that 'to them were committed the oracles of God' (Romans 3:2).

At the time of the Exodus, Moses encouraged the Israelites with these words: 'Surely I have taught you statutes and judgements, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them' (Deuteronomy 4:5-6).

The purpose for these laws immediately follows: 'For this is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the people who will

hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us . . . and what great nation is there that has such statutes and wise judgements as are in all this law which I set before you this day?' (verses 6-8).

The people of Judah have not always been willing participants in proclaiming God's purpose to the world. Nonetheless, they have played their part in perpetuating God's Word, the Holy Scriptures, for posterity.

The Church publishes God's gospel

Today, however, the spiritual body of Christ, God's Church, has been given the commission to carry that special, spiritual way of life, where both Jesus Christ and the law of God play essential roles. Since the people of Judah as a whole have not included Jesus Christ in

the equation of God's plan of salvation, the spiritual mantle falls on the Church to highlight Christ's sacrifice in our salvation and to teach the fundamentals of morality based on God's Law.

The Greek New Testament uses the word *ekklesia* for Church, essentially meaning 'called out ones'. God's Church, although organised in order to preach its Christ-given commission to the world, consists of the spiritual body of Jesus Christ. The members are those who have been given the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9) and have the wonderful privilege to help get the gospel of God's kingdom to a morally bankrupt society. As publishers of God's way of life, that is our commission.

If you would like to understand more about the role of the Church in preaching and publishing the gospel of the kingdom, please write for our free brochure *This Is the United Church of God*.

Gerhard Marx

A Great Unspoken Sermon

Jesus Christ said that in His Church there would be a quite different form of administration from that found in society round about it (Matthew 20:25-28). The leaders in His Church, He said, would not 'lord it over' people, but would instead lead in humility as servants. Christ's teaching was prompted by two of His disciples who had been vying for position and pre-eminence in His coming Kingdom.

Of course, the greatest servant of all was Jesus Christ Himself, but we should all, whether minister or lay member, be reflecting Christ's attitude of humility.

After the recent Feast of Tabernacles at Grange-over-Sands in England's Lake District (Oct 2003), I reflected on the content of the sermons. We had received a variety of excellent messages, but what stood out in my opinion was not a spoken message, but one preached by example. A guest from the

United States, who holds a senior position within the United Church of God, was visiting Britain along with his wife. Both showed a willingness to serve wherever they saw a need, however mundane the task. I overheard a remark he made in conversation to someone that 'the ministry are not more important than anyone else in the Church.'

Actions speak louder than words, and the teaching by example was plain for all to see. The matter of leadership in the Church has been discussed at length over the years, and there has been a process of growth in understanding its meaning.

I would suggest that the enjoyment of this year's Festival in Grange was due at least in part to a more mature understanding of responsibility and leadership in God's Church. For further understanding, please request our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built*.

Will McLoughlin

Why *Good News* Meetings and Bible Studies?

In the last several months Good News readers have been invited to a number of meetings during which our representatives have explored several subjects from a biblical perspective. Why are we doing this? While it is always good and profitable to meet our readers face to face, there is another even more compelling reason.



Last October my wife, Barbara, and I visited France. We took advantage of a number of excursions available to us. As we travelled through the beautiful countryside around the Loire valley, I couldn't help but notice the number of vines that were being cultivated. In places there were large fields of them, elsewhere just a couple of rows acting as a divider between other crops. The vines were planted in orderly rows, wide enough for someone to walk through, and just high enough so the grapes could be picked.

In the Bible vines and vineyards are common images. Typically a wall or hedge would surround a vineyard, which contained a vat or winepress for treading out the grapes. Often there was a watchtower for guarding against wild animals or enemies. Vineyards also contained trees, into which the vines would be trained. Fig trees were a favourite for this, hence the image of a future millennial peace in Micah 4:4:

'They shall sit each one under his vine and under his fig tree.'

The message of the vine

Jesus Christ pictured Himself as the vine, and His disciples, including His followers today, as the branches (John 15:1, 4-5, 8). This analogy also pictures God the Father as the vinedresser. It is the purpose of each branch to

produce spiritual fruit, but to do that they have to be attached to the true vine – Jesus Christ Himself.

As a tree is known by its fruit, whether good or bad (Matthew 7:17-19), so the disciples of Christ are similarly known by their fruits. In Titus 2:14 the apostle Paul calls

God's people (i.e., the branches pictured earlier) a 'special people zealous of good works'. Ephesians 2:10 adds, 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them'. So true Christians will be characterised by their 'good works'.

These are many and varied, including everything from obedience to the laws of God and men, to maintaining a good reputation for truthfulness, honesty and hard work. To these outstanding qualities add charitable deeds, humility, hospitality and a deep love and concern for one's fellow human beings

Fellowshipping with Others

The United Church of God *British Isles* continues to plan additional meetings for study and fellowship throughout Britain. We have congregations in or near:

Birmingham
Bricket Wood, near St Albans
(just north of London)
Edinburgh
Gloucester
Preston in Lancashire
Ramsey, Isle of Man
Tonbridge, Kent

We also have Bible Study groups in **Chelmsford**, Essex, and **Taunton**, Somerset, and have plans to start another in the Northwest of England.

If you are interested in attending any of these groups, or desire fellowship in other areas, please contact us at:

PO Box 705, Watford WD19 6FZ
E-mail info@goodnews.org.uk
Telephone: 020 8386 8467

Your contacting us will help us choose areas for future meetings. Please include your phone number.

(Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12, etc).

These are probably the more obvious kinds of 'good works'. There are other works, however, that may be more difficult to fulfil. In John 13:34-35, Christ states that His disciples will be known by their love for one another. He reinforces this in John 15:12 and 17, by confirming that this is a commandment from Him – that we love one another as He first loved us. This love is what others should notice about God's people above all else.

The community of God's people

The people of God, followers of Jesus Christ, are a special community. Jesus' analogy of the true vine illustrates the relationship between Himself and His followers who are the branches. God the Father is the vinedresser and the owner of the vineyard. With that vital connection Christ's 'special' people will be able to bear fruit, to practice good works and to love one another as He first loved them.

God's people are not a closed community. They are part of the human race and as such want to share the knowledge of God with others, the blessings they have received as branches of the vine that is Jesus Christ – planted and growing in the vineyard of the great God and Father of all mankind. That is why we are bringing these *Good News* meetings and Bible studies to as many of our readers as we can. It is a vital part of the Church's mission to share this precious knowledge.

The mission of the Church

'The mission of the Church of God is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God in all the world, make disciples in all nations and care for those disciples.' These words, contained in the United Church of God's

Mission Statement, are based on Matthew 28:18-20. It states: 'And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore and make disciples of the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age."'

The key figure in the gospel message is Jesus Christ – everything He is, everything He does, everything with which He is associated, everything the Father has given Him to do. It is the purpose of our preaching – 'Christ in us, the hope of glory' (Colossians 1:24-29).

Acts 17:1-3 records an example of that preaching. Paul proclaimed the message that 'this Jesus is the Christ' or 'the Messiah'. In verse 7 the message is explicit: These early

Christians were proclaiming that there was another king – Jesus Christ, which some mistakenly took as a threat to Caesar. Christ is king now over the people of God – His Church – *and the future king over the whole earth.* (For more information on the role of Jesus Christ and the coming kingdom of God, please request your copies of our free booklets *Who Is God?* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom.*)

To preach Christ's gospel is to preach the Kingdom of God in all of its many facets. This is why we are holding meetings for our *Good News* readers. We are following Christ's instructions to go and make disciples (not for ourselves, but for Him) in the anticipation that they can be taught all things that He has commanded them. After all, that is why the Church of God, the body of Christ, exists. That is its purpose.

David Fenney

Getting to Know You

The representatives of *The Good News* and the *British and European Supplement* look forward to meeting our readers as opportunities arise. But for geographical and other reasons, some may be unable to attend a *Good News* meeting at present.

Even so, we would still like to get to know you. So if you have a few moments to spare, please drop us a line. We would be delighted to hear from you, not only to become better acquainted, but to help us assess whether or not the material we include in our publications is of interest, fully meets your needs and addresses your concerns.

What kind of articles are of most – or least – interest? Is there a topic that would be helpful for us to address from a biblical perspective?

In general terms, we are interested in whether our readers would characterise themselves as young, or older; student, parent or retired; living on their own or in a family group.

Be anonymous if you prefer, but please write to us at the address given at the bottom of the box on page 3.

You can use the return address envelope included with this issue of *The Good News* or email us at info@goodnews.org.uk.

Thank you for your interest in *The Good News* and for your time in writing or emailing us.

Questions & Answers

Q I agree with you concerning the main part of your beliefs, but there are some verses I'd like you to explain, keeping in mind the doctrines you hold.

Mark 9:1, where Jesus states that there are persons who will not taste of death (in the Romanian translation) and will see the Kingdom of God established. Of whom is Jesus speaking here?

The keeping of which days does Paul condemn in Galatians 4:10? I agree with your explanation of Colossians 2:16.

I C, Romania

A One key biblical principle to bear in mind is that the Bible interprets the Bible.

A parallel account of the transfiguration story in Mark chapter 9 is also found in Matthew 16:28; 17:1-9. Verse 9 of chapter 17 relates: 'As they came down from

the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell *the vision* to no man until the Son of Man is risen from the dead" (emphasis added throughout).

Three of the disciples were to witness an advance preview of the coming Kingdom of God, but *in vision* (Matthew 16:28; 17:9). They were not to die until they had first seen this vision of the Kingdom. (For further understanding, please request our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.)

Regarding Galatians 4:10, a fundamental rule of Bible study is to check the context, i.e., those verses before and after a passage. This is basic to comprehending Galatians 4:10, which says, 'You observe days and months and seasons and years.' Please bear in mind that most of the Galatian Christians were Gentiles who previously had not known God or His laws (verses 8-9). What they

were starting to turn back to were *pagan* days and months and seasons and years. The King James Version says 'times and years'. The Authorised Version also says: 'You shall not eat any thing with the blood; neither shall you use enchantment, *nor observe times*' (Leviticus 19:26, emphasis added).

Paul refers to the keeping of these days, months, times and years as 'weak and miserable principles' (Galatians 4:9). That is *not* the way God refers to His annual festivals and Holy Days.

Many theologians try to use Galatians 4:10 to avoid the keeping of God's true Holy Days which the biblical prophets, priests, judges and kings observed – followed by Christ, the apostles and the early New Testament Church.

For further knowledge, please request our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* and *Sunset to Sunset*:

Biblical Prophecy

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and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile.'

The Kingdom of God

Now in verses 44 and 45 we read, 'And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in

pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold – the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain and the interpretation sure.'

The stone cut out without hands is Jesus Christ. His Kingdom will be everlasting.

In dozens of places in the New Testament Christ refers to the yet-future kingdom that will be set up on earth. He and the apostles give us much detail about how it will be set up, how it will be run, and who will help Him run it.

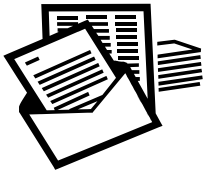
But in the meantime Christ warns us in Matthew 24:21: 'For then there will be great tribulation,

such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.'

Yet in Luke 21:36 He also says: 'Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.'

This article has given a brief but important taste in understanding why we need biblical prophecy. Further important principles are expounded in our free brochures *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. Why not request them today?

Will McLoughlin



Letters From Our Readers

The Good News

I am very grateful to you for sending me *The Good News*, and also the special [introductory] edition of it, which have impressed me deeply. After reading them I realise there is so much more I need to know which could change my life.

A H, Penzance, Cornwall

Thank you for responding to my request to receive *The Good News*. I have felt the pull of God in my life, and I believe it was God that led me to buy the edition of *Reader's Digest* which included your advertisement. Having been unable to work for some years now due to depression, I found the article [in the special introductory edition] on that illness interesting reading. Being on benefit, free publications such as yours are very welcome.

R G, Midlothian, Scotland

I do not agree with your theology, but I like the magazine.

D E, Chatteris, Cambridgeshire

The Good News British and European Supplement

Please accept the small token of appreciation for several years of enjoyment, fascination and viewpoints, not only from the magazine itself, but also from the *British and European Supplement* which accompanies the magazine.

Thank you for 'The Only Way Is Up' (Nov/Dec *Supplement*, page 5) which is one of many items that have given me good reason for even more thought.

R B, Surrey

Thank you for your excellent *Good News* magazine. I am enclosing a cheque as a donation to help with your preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom of God, which must surely be close now. I would like to request the brochures offered at the end of John Ross Schroeder's article on Europe [Nov/Dec *Supplement*]: *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy, The Book of Revelation Unveiled, Are We Living in the End Time?*

P D, Ringwood, Hampshire

Bible Study Course

Although I started studying the Word of God with a small group of Christians here, I have to confirm with this short note that the lessons and other information received from your organisation have gone a long way in answering most of the questions I have at the moment.

G Y, Vienna, Austria

The Sabbath and Holy Days

I am a 61-year-old Christian. Last week I saw a very interesting booklet named *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*. I would like to receive my own copy. And if I may ask for another one named *God's Holy Day Plan*, I'll be so glad if you send it to me. Excuse

my poor English. My friends and I are reading the Bible together two times a week for more than four years now. We are sure that the Sabbath is the correct day.

L V, Czech Republic

• *So are we! Both the Sabbath and Holy Day booklets have been mailed to you from Britain.*

Appropriate literature required

Thank you very much for your publications, as I find them very useful and helpful in overcoming spiritual problems.

A Y, London

I would like to receive any free information that you could provide me with so that I can make an informed decision on the knowledge in the literature that I have read so far.

N H, Surrey

In your case we mailed What Is Your Destiny?, and The Church Jesus Built. Others may have similar questions. We welcome any questions and comments.

British Internet website

Thank you for the offer of enrolment in the *Bible Study Course*. I use your web page on the Internet which I find excellent.

S B, Cambridgeshire

• *Any readers who have internet access may wish to visit our UK website at www.ucg.org.uk.*

How our literature is funded

The United Church of God *British Isles* is registered as a charity in England and Wales (number 1079192). The publication of this Supplement and other literature is funded by the generosity of members of the Church, co-workers and our readers. Following Jesus Christ's instruction (Matthew 10:8), it is supplied free of charge so that it can be made available to all who wish to receive it. We are grateful to those who assist financially in the work done by *The Good News*. Donations may be sent to: The United Church of God, PO Box 705, WATFORD WD19 6FZ. Euro donations can be transmitted to our Euro bank account using the IBAN: GN63 NWBK 6072 1027 0225 87. IBAN BIC: NWBK GB 2L.