

Christ in Prophecy
“Prophecy 5: The Abuse of Bible Prophecy”

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: There is probably no portion of the Bible that has been more ignored or abused by the Church than Bible prophecy. It has been trashed by liberals; it has been spiritualized into meaninglessness by those who do not believe that it means what it says. And it has been trivialized by fanatics who have used it as a playground for sensational speculations.

Program

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus our blessed hope and welcome to Christ in Prophecy. This is the first in a series of programs on the fundamentals of Bible prophecy. We're going to begin with a discussion of the abuse of prophecy. In the second program we'll take a look at the importance of prophecy. During our third program, we'll discuss the fascinating variety of prophecy. The fourth program will focus on the interpretation of prophecy and we will see that the best way to understand it is to look for its plain sense meaning. In our fifth program we'll take a look at the various end time viewpoints. Or to put it another way, we'll take a look at the four major ways in which people have interpreted end time prophecy. The sixth and final program in the series will be devoted to a presentation of an overview of the signs of the times that point to the soon return of Jesus. And now let's begin this series of programs with a look at the abuse of Bible prophecy.

My topic is the abuse of Bible prophecy. Folks, let's face it. Bible prophecy is held in contempt by most people. Non-Christians just scoff at the very idea that anything supernatural could be going on in this world, that anyone would have supernatural knowledge. But the tragedy is that many professing Christians share this particular attitude, this scoffing attitude. The consequence of this is a paradox. The paradox is that we worship a God of prophecy, and yet we ignore the prophetic Word. There's a great passage about this in Isaiah 46:9 that I'd like to bring your attention to. In this passage,

God, speaking through Isaiah says, "I am God. There is no other. I am God there is no one like me. Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying 'my purpose will be established and I will accomplish all my good pleasure, truly I have spoken, truly I will bring it to pass.'" Now God is saying here, "I am the one and only unique God. And I can prove this, because I know what's gonna happen in the future. I am omniscient. And, I can prove it because I have the power I'm omnipotent to see to it that what I say will come to pass." And because of this, we are exhorting throughout the scriptures to pay attention to Bible prophecy. For example, in first Thessalonians 5:20, Paul admonishes us with the words "do not despise prophetic utterances." And in Second Peter chapter 1 verse 19 Peter wrote these words. He said "We have the prophetic Word to which you do well to pay attention, as to a lamp that is shining in a dark place." And yet, despite these warnings, there is a long and sad Christian heritage regarding Bible prophecy. Throughout most of Christian history for the past 2,000 years Bible prophecy has been abused and Bible prophecy has been ignored. In fact, the only portion of God's Word that has been as abused and ignored as Bible prophecy is the very beginning of the Bible, the creation story. In fact, I don't know if you've ever stopped to think about this, the two areas of the Bible most abused and most ignored throughout history have been the beginning of the Bible, and what the Bible says about the End Times. Those two areas Satan has concentrated on in trying to convince people that they are not true, that they are to be skeptical of them, that they do not mean what they say.

Let's take a look for a moment at people today who are causing the problems with regard to Bible prophecy. There are three groups that I want to talk about, in fact before I do that, let me just make a point. And that point is that the very scoffing that we've been talking about, the very attitude of scoffing is in itself a fulfillment of Bible prophecy and an indication that we are living in the End Times. Look here at Second Peter chapter 3. "Know this first of all that in the last days, mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts and saying "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the father's fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." And we have people like that all over the place today; you know "Where is He coming?" "Why hasn't He come? He never will come." He's delayed so long. It's all a fable, it's all a myth." Even professing Christians are saying these sorts of things.

Well, of the groups that are abusing Bible prophecy the first group that I would mention are what I would call the apostates. The apostates are people who are professing Christians but who scoff at the Word of God not only regarding Bible prophecy, but just about everything in the Word of God, and yet they profess to be Christians. These are people who do not accept the Bible as the revealed Word of God. Instead what they argue is that the Bible is man's search for God, and therefore it is full of myth and legend and superstition. They argue that there is no such thing as Bible prophecy. They argue that every prophecy in the Bible was really written after the effect and manipulated to make it appear to be prophetic in nature. They hate for example the book of Daniel. Despise it completely because it is so accurate in its prophecies. And yet, our Lord Jesus Christ quoted the book of Daniel.

I want to give you an example of what I'm talking about when I talk about scoffing. This is a non-denominational ministry. Because of that I have been to just about every kind of Church you can possibly imagine. I have been to Orthodox and Unorthodox, Charismatic, Non-charismatic, Pentecostal; I've been to churches you couldn't even imagine. But I've been to all kinds and I've discovered the Lord has a great sense of humor in getting me into some of these Churches that once I got there they wished I had never come. I'll give you an example. Back in the early 80's when I was on radio I had a call from a man one day who said "I've been listening to your radio program," and he said "You know what? I would love for you to come to our Church in the mid-cities area between Dallas and Fort Worth." He was from a Mainline Protestant denomination. He said, "I'd love for you to come to our Church and teach one Sunday evening." I said, "Well I'd be glad to come, just have your pastor invite me." He said, "That's the problem." I said, "What's the problem?" He said "Our pastor does not like Bible study," he said, "On Sunday evening we have entertainment." He said "He brings in folk singers and dancers and ballet" and he said, "We've had puppeteers, everything you can think of except Bible study." He said, "He just doesn't like it." So he said "it's gonna be very difficult for me to get him to invite you." And I said, "Well, I don't know what to do about that." He said, "Well I'll tell you what, give me a jazzy title." And you know what? The moment he said that I thought it was funny but the moment he said it, just like that, a title popped into my mind. This was in the early 80's, Hal Lindsey's book the *Late Great Planet Earth* was still popular, and the title that popped into my mind was "The Future of the Late Great Planet Earth." He said "Wow that's jazzy." He said "Pray for me, it's gonna take a miracle." The

next day this guy called me and you could have heard him shouting all the way across Dallas, he was so excited. He said "Brother, you're invited! You're invited! The pastor will be sending you a letter," he said "I can't believe I didn't even have to argue with him!"

Now what he did not know and what I did not know, only God knew, was that when he walked into that pastor's office, now this is hard to believe, but this is the way God orchestrated. When he walked into that pastor's office he said "I have a man I would like to invite to teach Bible prophecy" and he said "Bible prophecy?" and he said "Yes." He said "What's his title?" he said "*The Future of the Late Great Planet Earth*" he said "Invite him!" Because that man was sitting there at that moment reading a book by that title, a book I'd never heard of, a book by a man who was debunking Bible prophecy saying there is no such thing, there is not one prophecy in the Bible and Hal Lindsey is an idiot. Well folks, I was invited. And when I got there that night he stands up and he says "We're so glad to have this learned man on Bible prophecy, he's gonna tell us tonight why there is no such thing in the Bible." And I'm looking around, is he introducing me? And I jump up, you know there's 200 people there, I run up and tap him on the shoulder and I say, "I need to talk to you for a minute" and in front of the whole congregation I called him over and I said, "You know, I think there's been a mistake." He said "Why" I said, "I believe in Bible prophecy" he said "There's been a mistake" I said "Do you want me to go home?" he said "No just keep it short." I said "Okay."

So I got up, I was scared, I didn't know what to do. I said "Okay I'll tell you what we will do. Let's turn to the book of Acts." And I was gonna show them how the very first gospel sermon ever preached by Peter on the day of Pentecost was nothing but Bible prophecy from end to end. He said this prophecy, this prophecy, this prophecy, this prophecy and Jesus fulfilled them all, and the people said "what must we do to be saved?" so I said turn to Acts chapter 2. And I didn't hear any pages rustling, you know that's music to the ears of a preacher, I look out and everybody's sitting there like this. I said, "How many have a Bible?" no one had one. I said, "Okay get the pew Bibles" a guy stood up and said, "We don't have pew Bibles in this Church" I said, "Okay I tell you what we'll do, I'll lead you in three songs and while we do that you send the deacons through the educational wing of the building, get all the Bibles and bring them back in here. We led three songs, they came back, and they said, "We can't find any Bibles in this Church." The pastor stood up and said "Well I think I got a few in my office." He comes out and

he's got five Bibles. We divided the congregation into five groups he gave each group a Bible. I said "Okay, now great turn to Acts chapter 2" and the pages started rustling, and they rustled and they rustled and they rustled. There was no one there who knew where Acts was you know, I grew up in a Church that thought the only book in the Bible was the book of Acts. They didn't know where it was. So we had a Bible drill. I taught them Old Testament, I taught them New Testament, I taught them that the Old Testament was full of history books and poetry books and Major Prophets and they loved it! And finally we got to Acts chapter 2 and I made my point and they were just shouting hallelujah! They were ready to go. And I said, "Okay, turn to the book of Daniel." And the pastor stood up in front of the entire congregation and said, "We do not allow anybody to read from that book in this congregation." I said, "Why?" he said, "You obviously are not a seminary graduate because if you were you would know the book of Daniel is a fraud and shouldn't even be in the Bible." So we got into a debate over the book of Daniel. I said, "Well Jesus quoted it." "Well I..." he said, "You know he quoted it because it had just been written at the time." I said "Come on! It was included in the Septuagint translation." He said, "What does that mean?" I said, "Well that translation was made 280 years before Christ." He said, "Well I don't believe that's when it was made." I said, "It was shown to Alexander the Great when he came to Jerusalem." He said, "Where'd you get that story?" I said, "From Josephus." He said "Ah, Josephus, all he ever wrote were old wives' tales." I said, "Do you want me to go home?" He said "No, you just can't quote out of the book of Daniel."

So I stood there for a moment and I said, "Okay, turn to Genesis 3:15, let's look at the first Messianic prophecy in the Bible." And everybody started turning, he stood up and he said, "We will not allow that verse to be read in this congregation because I know what you're gonna do with it, you're gonna use it to talk about the virgin birth and we don't believe in the virgin birth here." This went on all evening long. I wish I could say that this is an exception to the rule but I'm telling you, I've run into this kind of hardcore unbelief over and over and over again.

Now, it's easy to throw rocks at liberals. I mean, they're just such easy targets. But there are others who abuse Bible prophecy in fact there are conservatives who abuse Bible prophecy. These are the spiritualizers. The spiritualizers who use the Bible against itself. There are both liberal and conversation spiritualizers. They are the ones who say the

Bible never means what it says, particularly when it has to do with Bible prophecy. They'll take a passage like the one in Revelation seven that says that during the great Tribulation, 144,000 Jews are going to be sealed supernaturally by God. Protected by God during that time, and probably will be great evangelists going out all over the world sharing the gospel. And they take that and they say, "Well, the 144,000 doesn't mean anything at all, that's just a number. And these are not Jews, this is the Church." Did you know one time I looked at all of the commentaries on the book of Revelation that I could find and 85% of the commentaries I could find said "those 144,000 Jews were the Church." Folks, what would God have to do to convince us that He is talking about 144,000 Jews? He says 144,000 then He numbers them by tribe. He names them by tribe. Would he have to put a neon light in the heavens and just flash in on and off and say, "Jews! Jews! Jews!" he said, "144,000 Jews." I believe He meant what He said. Yet it's amazing how people take that and spiritualize it and say, "Oh no, this is the Church, it's a symbol for the Church." Well I wanna suggest to you that God knows how to communicate. I wanna suggest to you that He wants to communication, and I want to suggest to you that He doesn't play games as He communicates. You do not need a PhD in Hermeneutics or a PhD in imagination to understand the Word of God, even to understand Bible prophecy. What you do need is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. So we have the apostates, we've got the spiritualizers.

But there is a third group that is guilty of abusing Bible prophecy and these are the fanatics. The fanatics are often people who truly believe in Bible prophecy, unlike the editors of the *Sun*, who just use it to sell newspapers. But they usually believe ardently in Bible prophecy. But they are so obsessed with date-setting and with endless speculations, they are sensationalizers to the core who play with Bible prophecy, instead of using it in a responsible manner. They are the ones who often make me ashamed of being a Bible prophecy teacher because when you say that to people they often think "Oh he's one of those guys, you know, looking under every rock for the Antichrist." We are in the midst of an epidemic today of these sensationalists. And I think this is no accident, I think the closer we get to the coming of the Lord, the more of these sensationalists there's going to be. Because Satan is trying to deceive people by taking some really honest people, some really sincere people, and they just simply get so deceived into start setting dates and naming names and all that sort of thing, And it's like the little boy crying "wolf! Wolf! Wolf" and they do this over and over and then when a

responsible Bible prophecy teacher comes along, and says, "I don't know the date, but let me tell you we're in the season." They say "Oh come on, you're just like the rest."

We are in an epidemic. Let me just mention a few just to remind you. In this epidemic of date setting we started in 1988 in this great plague with a man by the name of Edgar Whisenant. Remember? *88 Reasons Why the Lord's Coming Back in 1988*. He sold 2 million copies of this pamphlet! I was knee-deep in them! My radio listeners sent me one after another. I was just gonna ignore it, but finally I decided I've got to deal with this, and so I did. And I pointed out if you accept all of his assumptions, Jesus is coming in 1988, but his assumptions are all false, they're not based upon Biblical concepts. When Jesus didn't come, guess what Edgar Whisenant did? He put out a new pamphlet *89 Reasons Why Jesus is Coming Back in 1989*. These guys never learn.

Or, take for example in October, the Church in Korea, which set the date of October the 28th, 1992. Everybody in the Church sold everything they had, gave it to the Church, the Church used that to publish pamphlets in every language of the world. In fact, I was in Moscow walking down the streets of Moscow when a Korean Asian man walked up to me, handed me a pamphlet. I knew enough Russian to be able to figure out what it was, and it was a pamphlet about why Jesus was returning on October the 28th, 1992.

Or consider this man, Harold Camping who owns the largest Christian radio network in the United States. He predicted that the second coming would occur in September of 1994. It didn't happen. Or consider Monte Judah, a fellow in Oklahoma. This is a guy who formed a ministry in 1995 and suddenly announced to the world that the Tribulation had begun in 1993, September 1993. He picked that because that was when...you remember? Yitzhak Rabin met with Arafat at the White House and signed the peace treaty. He said, "That was it! That was the beginning." I always got amused by that because let me tell you something, when the Tribulation begins, nobody will doubt that the Tribulation has started. Nobody will have to call it. I have pastors call me and say "Do you think we're in the Tribulation?" I said "Brother, let me tell you, if we were in the Tribulation, you wouldn't have to ask anybody." I mean it is gonna be something horrible. Yet he said it started in 1993 and that the Antichrist would appear in Jerusalem in March of 1997 to stop the sacrifices. I called Monte, I said "Monte, are you aware of the fact that there are no sacrifices in Jerusalem?" he said, "I know that's a problem. I think that

they will be started, they'll be started before then and then they will be stopped." And he said, "You know, you're just a scoffer." He said "I'm a prophet of God and you're a scoffer." Finally, he had so many people challenge him he actually issued a written statement saying, "I am so convinced that I am right that if what I've prophesied does not happen, I will demand that I be stoned to death." And he even went so far to say, "I will let Dave Reagan throw the first stone." Well, I wasn't interested in stoning the man to death I was interested in the integrity of God's Word, and people not making fun of it. But he missed it all, and he continued. He didn't get stoned to death.

Or consider this pamphlet that a lady sent me from Texas. This was a Texas lady, down in south Texas. She wrote one called Rapture Alert and she set the date for the Rapture of May 26th, 1996. Or consider this pamphlet put out of a prophecy teacher in Michigan, the Tribulation to begin in 1998; the second coming would occur in 2005. On and on and on it goes, and yes Harold Camping came back just like Edgar Whisenant, published a new book, *Time Has an End* and has set the new date for the coming of the Lord to be the 2011. Some people just don't learn. It just keeps going on and on.

Meanwhile, the speculation concerning the identity of the Antichrist continues unabated. You know, I could show you article after article on this in which people are saying, "Well, it's Henry Kissinger, no it's Bill Clinton, no it's Jane Fonda, it's Hillary Clinton, it's Rosie O'Donnell. It seems like anybody that somebody doesn't like, that's who it is. Some have even said Ronald Reagan, but he's passed on now so he obviously is not a good candidate. But it goes on and on and on and the weirdest I've ever run across is in this book, *The Antichrist and a Cup of Tea*." This book is 415 pages long and in this book, he does everything he can to try to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Prince Charles is the Antichrist. Now folks, I've met this guy personally, and I said to him, "Let me tell you something. One of the biggest wimps that have come down the pike in a long time is Prince Charles. How in the world could you possibly think this man is going to be the Antichrist?" He said, "That's part of the whole deal. This is his disguise." He said, "When the time comes, it's gonna be like Clark Kent, walking into the phone booth, taking off the clothes, coming out at superman. All of this is an act. He's really a very strong guy underneath, and one day, he will reveal to the world, that he is the Antichrist."

Is it any wonder that people think that Bible prophecy is a playground for fanatics? But I've got good news for you. If it's properly taught, it can be green pastures for disciples.

Now, in addition to it being abused, Bible prophecy has been sorely ignored. I mean sorely ignored. Some have ignored it because they say it's just too complex. And I love this particular cartoon that shows this fellow up on a ladder and he is trying to draw all of these different diagrams and so forth and these guys down at the bottom trying to figure out what in the world he's doing. The caption reads, "The elders try to make sense of Pastor Steve's third point." Well, I've seen this sort of thing going on. People say, "It's just too complex. Nobody can really understand it." Well, I would agree that Bible prophecy requires what Dennis Pollock my former associate used to call that dirty five letter word, study. It requires study. But anyone who is willing to commit study to it can understand Bible prophecy if they have the Holy Spirit residing within them.

Many pastors take a different position by before I do that let me show you one other cartoon that I love about this, concerning the complexity of Bible prophecy. Here is a Bible prophecy teacher, he's got his end time chart, he's got all kinds of little notes on the end time chart. He's explains everything in detail and this poor lady gets up to ask a question and guess what he says? "No questions please. I find they disrupt the flow of my answers." I have seen a few of those along the way also, which of course, makes it complex for people, and they think it's impossible to understand.

Now, another reason people have ignored Bible prophecy is because they consider it too other worldly. This is where many pastors are. I will say to a pastor, "Why is it you never teach on Bible prophecy?" and his answer nine times out of ten will be because it's all pie-in-the-sky. It has to do with the future, not with the present. He'll say, "David, you're a traveling evangelist, you're not a located pastor like I am. You do not understand the problems I have; you don't understand that I've got every sin known to man in my congregation. I have got adultery going on, I've got homosexuality, I've got people involved in gambling who are addicted to gambling. I've got everything you can imagine going on and I've got to preach practical, down to earth sermons. I do not have time for pie-in-the-sky. And my response to him is, "I can understand that, but you don't understand Bible prophecy, because let me tell you something about Bible prophecy. There are two life transforming facts that you need to know about Bible prophecy.

Number one, if you can ever convince a person that Jesus is really coming back to this earth, I mean truly convince them. Not here, that's where most professing Christians believe it. I'm talking about believing it here, in your heart. Because you don't really believe anything until it moves to your heart and it begins to have an impact upon the way you think and the way you talk and the way you live. If you can ever convince a person that Jesus really is coming back, and number two, His return is an event that could occur any moment, their lives will be transformed. You know why? Because first of all, they'll commit their lives to holiness, and secondly they commit themselves to evangelism. Let me tell you something folks, that's about as practical as you can get. How much more practical could you get than teaching something that's gonna cause people to commit their lives to holiness and commit their lives to evangelism, but that's why Bible prophecy does if it is properly taught. And I've seen it happen in my own life, and I've seen it happen in the life of others.

Now, there's another reason Bible prophecy is ignored. And that is, preachers often say to me, "It's too controversial. I just don't want to get into it because if I do, I know it will cause dissention in the congregation, people will get mad, people will be fighting each other over it, and some people will leave." And there are good cartoons about that one, like this one. I just love this. These two old geezers in the ring, they've got on their boxing gloves, they're looking at each other like they hate each other, and what is the caption? "It has to do with eschatology." Well, I have seen that happen from time to time, but let me tell you something. Bible prophecy can be divisive. It can be divisive if a person comes into a congregation with a chip on his shoulder, determined to prove that everybody else in the world is wrong except him. But if a person comes with the right attitude, not with cockiness, not with the determination to prove everybody else is wrong, but with determination to simply preach and teach what God's Word says, it is not divisive whatsoever. In fact, what it does is it stimulates people to Bible study. It makes them want to learn more about God's Word, and it drives them into the Bible to test what you're teaching to see whether or not it is true.

There is another reason that Bible prophecy is often ignored and that is some people consider it just too scary. I had a fellow write me one time who was listening to me on the radio and he said, "I don't like Bible prophecy because it's all about blood and gore

and things that go bump in the night.” And I have met a lot of people who feel that way about Bible prophecy.

Let me tell you something folks, there is a lot of very bad news in Bible prophecy for those who have rejected Jesus Christ, but let me tell you something, for those who have accepted Him there is nothing but good news. There is nothing but promise after promise after promise about a glorious future with the Lord Jesus Christ. When I consider how Bible prophecy has been abused and has been ignored, I have come to the conclusion that there must be a satanic conspiracy to discourage people from studying Bible prophecy. Satan does not want anyone to know that he is going to be totally defeated and that Jesus Christ is going to be totally triumphant, so he tries to convince everybody that the book of Revelation is a Chinese puzzle that nobody can understand. He doesn't want anybody reading the last book of the Bible because the last book of the Bible says we win! And I praise God for that.

Bible prophecy is very, very valuable, because it gives people tremendous hope. My study of it has convinced me that Jesus Christ is coming soon, it has convinced me that if I'm alive when He comes that I will be taken up in the sky, that I will not even experience death, that I'll be translated on the way up. It has convinced me that if I die before He comes He will bring my spirit, resurrect my body, put my spirit back together with my body and in the blink of an eye He will transform my body into a perfected body. I think I'm gonna have even a little hair, perfected body. It will be a body that will never age again, never have any pain again. It will be an eternal body. I will be in heaven with Him during that great Tribulation, return at the end. I will see Him reign over this earth and participate in that reign. I will see this earth flooded with peace, righteousness, and justice as the waters cover the sea. At the end of that time He's gonna take me off this earth, put me in that new Jerusalem and from that vantage point I'm gonna see the greatest fireworks display in all of history as he burns up Satan's pollution of his last revolt. And how there's gonna come a new heavens and a new earth and I'm gonna be lowered down inside of a new body in a new Jerusalem to live in the presence of almighty God forever and ever and ever. And because of that, I can look to the future and I can say “Maranatha, Maranatha, come quickly Lord Jesus!”

Well folks, that's our program for this week, I hope it was a blessing to you and I hope you'll be back with us next week when we will continue this series on the fundamentals of Bible prophecy, by taking a look at the importance of prophecy. Until then, this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb and Lion Ministries saying, "Look up, be watchful, for our redemption is drawing near.

End of Program