

## The Conditional Nature of Bible Prophecy

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As we travel through the at times psychedelic, technicolor world of The Revelation, it's every verse it seems teeming with creatures and terrain straight out of redux Tolkien, it's poetic language whipping back and forth between symbol and reality, it's perspective at times jerking from present to future and back again like a midway roller coaster ride, it helps to keep several principles in mind. One of these is the conditional nature of prophecy.

Prophets are peculiar people, at times speaking to their day in vivid Jeremiads, at times looking far off into the future, their minds and prophetic eyes guided by the Spirit of God, at times confronting, cajoling and exhorting the people in their present and at times predicting events far in advance, at all times living and speaking out their message in words at once clear and obtuse.

Some prophets sent by God to people inhabiting the landscape of the Bible times never predicted the future at all, but were sent by God to proclaim doom, destiny or delight; others, as far as we know only looked to the future.

In the Messages to the Seven Churches of the Revelation, John spoke mainly as one communicating God's feelings about the lives of seven congregations on a Roman postal road winding through Asia Minor. In the rest of the book, God, through straight testimony and a whole range of symbols describes the final culmination of the Great Controversy between good and evil, the Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness, God and Satan.

In the process, John delivers a number of predictions about nations and organizations and people. How are we to view these as we study this very important book?

One principle we must keep in mind is that all Bible prophecy except those directly related to salvation, is conditional - either on God changing his mind when circumstances change or because people change the circumstances for which the prophecy was given.

Several commentators express this principle very clearly:

“The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. Thus it has always been presented to me. It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the Word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional.” *E.G. White, Evangelism, p. 695*

“The principle of conditionality is not a hermeneutical gimmick contrived by Seventh-day Adventists . . . Conditional prophecy, or controlled uncertainty, is a biblical principle applied to the statements of a predictive nature that concern or involve the response of men and women. Whenever an unfolding of events depends upon human choice, certain aspects of prophetic fulfillment are necessarily conditional . . . Moses made the principle of conditionality clear in Deuteronomy 28:1,2,15: "If you fully obey the LORD your

God by keeping all the commands I am giving you today, the LORD your God will exalt you above all the nations of the world. You will experience all these blessings if you obey the LORD your God . . . But if you refuse to listen to the LORD your God and do not obey all the commands and laws I am giving you today, all these curses will come and overwhelm you . . .” *Herbert Douglas, “The End,” pg 58*

“The Scriptures teach that all of the prophecies, covenants, promises and threats found in the Scriptures are conditional whether or not a condition is stated; their fulfillment is contingent upon man’s response to God’s commands. Promises of blessing cannot be fulfilled to a disobedient nation or individual and prophecies of punishment will not be fulfilled against the repentant.” *Tim Crosby, Ministry Magazine, August 1986*

“In the King James, the Hebrew word “niphāl” is translated “repent” 38 times. The majority of these instances refer to God’s repentance, not man’s . . . The word most frequently employed to indicate man’s repentance is “sub”, meaning “to turn” (from sin to God). Unlike man, who under the conviction of sin feels genuine remorse and sorrow, God is free from sin. Yet the Scriptures inform us that God repents (Gen 1:1; Ex 32:14; Judg 2:18; 1 Sam 15:11 et al.), i.e. he relents or changes his dealings with men according to his sovereign purposes. On the surface, such language seems inconsistent, if not contradictory, with certain passages which affirm God’s immutability: “God is not a man... that he should repent” (1 Sam 15:29 contra v. 11); “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind” (Ps 110:4). When *niphāl* is used of God, however, the expression is anthropopathic and there is not ultimate tension. From man’s limited, earthly, finite perspective it only appears that God’s purposes have changed. Thus the OT states that God “repented” of the judgments or “evil” which he had planned to carry out (1 Chron 21:15; Jer 18:8; 26:3,19; Amos 7:3,6; Jonah 3:10). Certainly is a striking reminder that from God’s perspective, most prophecy (excluding messianic predictions) is conditional upon the response of men. In this regard, A. J. Heschel (The Prophets, p. 194) has said, “No word is God’s final word. Judgment, far from being absolute, is conditional . A change in man’s conduct brings about a change in God’s judgment.” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.*

“ . . . for such predictions, however apparently positive in their terms, were generally conditional; strange as this may appear to some who, through their general ignorance of everything but the peculiarities of their own creed, suppose that every occurrence is impelled by an irresistible necessity.

To his own conduct, in reference to such matters, God has been pleased to give us a key (see Jer 18) which opens all difficulties, and furnishes us with a general comment on his own providence. God is absolute master of his own ways; and as he has made man a free agent, whatever concerns him in reference to futurity, on which God is pleased to express his mind in the way of prophecy, there is a condition generally implied or expressed. As this is but seldom attended to by partial interpreters, who wish by their doctrine of fatalism to bind even God himself, many contradictory sentiments are put in the mouths

of his prophets.” *Adam Clarke's Commentary*

Prophecy for most people “indicates the future. Is the future in every case absolutely determined by it? Or, is room still left after it has uttered its declarations for human freedom to work, and according to the nature of the working, to give a corresponding turn to its prospective announcements? In a word, is it the characteristic of prophecy to make known certainly and conclusively what is to come to pass? Or, are its revelations to some extent conditional, depending on the line of conduct that may meanwhile be pursued by those to whom they are addressed?

“ . . . The question rather is, whether prophecy . . . ought to be regarded as announcing what is fixed and conclusively determined by God—his irreversible decrees? Or, whether it should not to some extent, and if in some, then to what extent, be viewed as the proclamation of God’s mind respecting his future dealings, on the supposition of the parties interested standing in a certain relationship to his character and government. In this last case the word might assuredly be expected to take effect, in so far as the relations contemplated in the prophecy continued; but in the event of a change entering in the one respect, then a corresponding change in the other might reasonably be looked for.”  
*Patrick Fairbairn, Prophecy, 1874, pp. 70-71*

Fairburn went on to recognize two different categories of prophecies: The unconditional which “disclose God’s purpose of grace to men and indicate in its grander outlines their appointed course of development,”<sup>1</sup> and the conditional which were the rest of Bible prophecy.

H.L. Ellison declared conditional prophecy to be the rule rather than the exception when he said: “Except where a promise is confirmed by God’s oath (Genesis 22:16; Psalm 105:9; Hebrews 6:13) we are safe in concluding that every statement of God about the future has some element of the conditional in it, something ancient Israel was as unwilling to believe as we are” *Ezekiel H.L. Ellison, The Man and His Message, 1956, p. 103*

Something that is very difficult for us to understand and grasp and appreciate, but which we must if we are going to adequately understand Bible prophecy, is that what while we are often most concerned with the minutia of predicted events and circumstances, because that is where we live our lives on a daily basis, God’s focus is on the big picture. Specific circumstances may unfold very differently, individual players may change, whole predicted acts in the Drama of the Ages may be re-written on the fly as conditions unfold in a fluid manner, but God will accomplish his larger end which is the triumph of the Kingdom of Light over the Kingdom of Darkness.

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<sup>1</sup> ie. Those which for instance predict the ultimate triumph of woman’s seed over the tempter and God’s promise to bless all of the families of the earth through the seed of Abraham

Tim Crosby describes this principle well when he writes that: “Properly understood, the concept of conditional prophecy does not imply that God is changeable or wishy-washy in relation to man. God's very unchangeableness in His essential nature and attitude toward sin requires Him to change His tactics when His people change their attitude toward Him. Water's unchanging property of always seeking the lowest level makes it constantly change its position, sometimes sitting placidly, other times raging and cutting. God does not change, but His children's changing relationship to Him sometimes makes it impossible for Him to fulfill His promises to them.”  
*Tim Crosby, Ministry Magazine, August, 1986*

The E.G.White Estate in a monograph prepared to explain the principles upon which prophecy is based and which is posted on their web site states: “The Lord has said that when conditions change He will act differently, either for reward or punishment. . . .What makes the difference? Why is one man whose prediction is not fulfilled called a false prophet, and another true? The answer is this: God has explained to us a principle governing all prophecy in which men's decisions and attitudes are involved. We understand on the basis of the Jeremiah 18 statement that all of God's promises of blessing or threatenings of punishment are made on condition, whether the conditions are stated or not, because their fulfillment depends upon man's relationship to God. This understanding in no wise applies to the portions of God's plan that are not subject to modification by the decisions of men. For instance, Jesus Christ is going to return to this earth to gather the faithful and destroy the wicked. This is a part of God's unalterable purpose, and it will come to pass despite any decision that might be made by any individual or group. Peter says that it is possible for us to hasten the day of His coming (2 Peter 3:12—see the margin, which in this case is the preferable rendering), and conversely, it is possible for us to delay the coming through the slowness of our preparation; but we cannot alter the fact that He is coming.”

Bible prophecy, then, is more akin to a living chess game where God predicts the outcome and even suggests the probable moves in advance, even at times predicting whole probable sequences of moves, but where those moves are dependent on the often unpredictable moves of his antagonist and his mercurial followers as well as the often capricious and unpredictable moves of his own players.

Herbert Douglas, in the quotation above, calls this the principle of “controlled uncertainty.”

While most of us who are followers of God are comfortable with the idea of the conditional nature of prophecy when we wish to use it to explain Bible promises or threats that did not materialize as God through his prophets predicted they would, we have a much harder time with it when it concerns our favorite prophecies concerning the future. We are all made uncomfortable with that kind of uncertainty, but it is the only one which allows for God's involvement in the affairs of humankind while preserving free choice. It calls for a brand of faith based not on trust in God's ability to line out the future in minute detail, but for a faith based on the character and person of a God who will be there with us in every detail as it unfolds and who will lead us through every circumstance if we will let him.

This kind of faith becomes a daily adventure of trust in a world that is constantly in flux rather than a panorama, set in stone, in which we are painted players playing out a predetermined script.

### The Bible's Theology of Prophecy with Examples

The Bible carefully delineates the conditional nature of prophecy and is replete with descriptions of examples of the conditional nature of its prophecies.

Jeremiah 18:1-10 - The LORD gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, 2 "Go down to the shop where clay pots and jars are made. I will speak to you while you are there." 3 So I did as he told me and found the potter working at his wheel. 4 But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so the potter squashed the jar into a lump of clay and started again.

5 Then the LORD gave me this message: 6 "O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand. 7 If I announce that a certain nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, 8 but then that nation renounces its evil ways, I will not destroy it as I had planned. 9 And if I announce that I will build up and plant a certain nation or kingdom, making it strong and great, 10 but then that nation turns to evil and refuses to obey me, I will not bless that nation as I had said I would."<sup>2</sup>

While God is specifically addressing prophecies concerning nations and kingdoms as regards Bible prophecy in this passage, it is not because the principle applies only to nations. Rather it is because that is what the issue was in this particular circumstance.

The whole of Deuteronomy 28 addresses the conditional nature of Bible prophecy - in this case prophecies concerning Israel and her future and is designed to be placed in apposition to all of those passages - promises and threatenings - where God apparently without equivocation describes the future of Israel.

Probably the most egregious example, from the prophet's perspective, of this principle working out is the story of Jonah. God goes to great lengths to convince the prophet to go to Ninevah with a very unequivocal message - "In 40 days I am going to completely destroy Ninevah." Period. No conditions. No "ifs," "ands," or "buts."

Jonah was understandably reluctant to deliver this message to the headquarters of the most powerful nation on earth - known for impaling its enemies on poles via convenient orifices and

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<sup>2</sup> All Bible texts quoted are from the "New Living Translation" for ease of reading. The King James, New King James and Revised Standard translations are generally more emphatic even, but do not read as readily for modern readers.

leaving them there to eventually die and decompose. But God, in very creative fashion finally persuaded his prophet to take his message. For 40 days Ninevah preached throughout the length and breadth of Ninevah, proclaiming his message of doom on every street corner and from every high and prominent place. Then he climbed a hill, built himself a shelter, and waited to watch the fireworks - apparently hoping for a Sodom and Gomorrah redux.

Unpredictably, Ninevah repented. When they did, "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it." In other words, God changed his mind because clearly predicted circumstances changed.

Jonah was not pleased!

"This change of plans upset Jonah, and he became very angry. 2 So he complained to the LORD about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. I knew how easily you could cancel your plans for destroying these people. 3 Just kill me now, LORD! I'd rather be dead than alive because nothing I predicted is going to happen." Jonah 4:1-3

How much different would we sound if, with the proverbial egg all over our prophetic faces, the things we so punctiliously predict fail to materialize after all we have written and spoken with such certainty?

God goes on to explain to Jonah that he is a God of mercy who reserves the right to change any prophetic prediction if circumstances change.

Other examples of the conditionality of Bible prophecy include:

1. Josiah - 2 Chronicles 34:19-28 -19 - In the space of 28 verses, Huldah the prophetess quotes God's prophetic promises that if his people strayed into idolatry they would be destroyed, says that God had been keeping his promise and that he was the ultimate source of their misfortune, then says that because of their repentance God was changing his mind and would begin blessing them. She then closes with the promise that Josiah would die a peaceful death and be gathered to his fathers.

Unfortunately, Josiah's circumstances changed and he chose not to listen to God's instructions and warnings - even from a pagan king who was being directed by God to attack him (2 Chronicles 35:21) and he died not a peaceful, quiet death, but a violent one in the Battle of Carchemish.

2. Eli - God promised Eli that his house would be priests for God forever, then withdrew that promise when circumstances changed. (1 Samuel 2:30,31)

3. Hezekiah - God prophecies of Jerusalem's destruction in the days of Hezekiah were not fulfilled when the people repented (Jeremiah 26:18,19) and Isaiah's prophecy that Hezekiah would die soon of his present sickness was not fulfilled when God changed his mind in response to Hezekiah's prayers. (2 Kings 20:1-6)
4. Ahab - God promised through Elijah to punish Ahab, then relented when Ahab repented. (1 Kings 21:17-29)
5. Israelites who left Egypt - God promised to bring the Israelites who came out of Egypt to the Promised Land (Exodus 6:8) then did not fulfill it because of changed circumstances. (Numbers 14:30-34)
6. Ezekiel - God promised to destroy Jerusalem which happened in 586 B.C., then promised to never repeat this terrible punishment. (Ezekiel 5:9,10) Unfortunately, it did occur again in A.D. 70 because Israel's circumstances changed.
7. Aaron - God promised Aaron and his sons a perpetual priesthood that would last forever (Exodus 40:15; Numbers 25:13.) Yet, the Levitical priesthood was replaced with the Melchizedekian. (Hebrews 7)

The conditional nature of prophecy is based on the characteristics of God he most prefers as a description of who he is: namely that he is a God who is . . . merciful and gracious . . . slow to anger and rich in unfailing love and faithfulness . . . show(ing) this unfailing love to many thousands by forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion. Exodus 34:6

F. Furman Kearley described this connection when he writes: In short, the Lord is the perfect blending of justice and mercy. It is His nature to give sinners every opportunity to repent and, when they repent, to forgive them. Thus, it is natural that His prophecies, His promises, and His threats should all be conditional (except those that pertain to His ultimate sovereignty and scheme of redemption). Many times in Scripture it is noted that God repented of evil He intended to do, or repented of blessings He intended to bestow (Genesis 6:6, Jeremiah 18:8-10; 26:3,13,19; Joel 2:13-14; Psalm 106:45). *F. Furman Kearley, The Conditional Nature of Prophecy: A Vital Exegetical and Hermeneutical Principle, pg. 12*

J. Barton echoes this sentiment by his statement: "God is no changeless, impersonal force but reacts rather, in a living way, to the responses that are made by human persons. In Exodus 9:15, for example, His own words document the reality of divine change, since they foretell what He might have done, but did not because of one man's intercession: "For now I had put forth My hand, and smitten thee (Moses) and thy people with pestilence, and thou hadst been cut off from the earth" (cf. 2 Kings 20:1-5). It is not that God's standards, His decrees, or His nature are changeable; it is, in fact, the very immutability of the character of deity which necessitates the application of differing aspects of His fixed principles, in accordance with such changes as may

be exhibited by fickle men. Prophecy in particular has been designed by God for moral ends, so as to motivate men into conformity with divine holiness. Should men, therefore, seek to take advantage of its holy assurances, toward non-moral ends (e.g. as in Jeremiah 7:4, 8-10, or Micah 3:11), change becomes then not only possible but inevitable *J. Barton Payne, Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy, 1973, p. 62*

F. Furman Kearley then explains the reason why prophecy must be conditional if it is to adequately express the character of God. He writes, “According to Zechariah 7, 2 Kings 17, 2 Chronicles 36, and many other passages, one of the chief purposes, if not the most significant purpose, of prophecy was to motivate men to repent of sin and turn toward God so He might bless them instead of punish them. Since this was the purpose of prophecy, it was essential that the prophetic pronouncement of punishment or blessing be conditional—i.e., depending upon the reaction of the hearers. This is exactly the principle that Jeremiah stated in Jeremiah 18. On this point, Olshausen wrote: “None of the divine predictions are bare historical proclamations of what is to take place; they are alarms (alarms) calling men to repentance, of which it may be said, that they announce something for the very purpose that what is announced may not come to pass” (1874, p. 72). This principle is so obvious it hardly needs to be stated. Man’s history is the history of sin and suffering, then repentance and blessing. Thus, man needs the justice and mercy of God. A man might be righteous and obedient, with God promising him great blessings; however, it would be unfair and unjust to continue these blessings when he has turned to sin and rebellion. On the other hand, man might be wicked and sinful, but it is the height of God’s grace and mercy to forgive him and bless him when he repents. Mankind, then, needs conditional prophecies because of his own contingencies and vacillations. What can be said of men as individuals also applies to entire nations. Nations, as a whole, can be righteous when promised certain blessings, but then turn evil; or they can be evil when threatened, and then repent and become righteous. Thus, conditional prophecies are well suited to the nature of both individuals and nations.” *F. Furman Kearley, The Conditional Nature of Prophecy: A Vital Exegetical and Hermeneutical Principle, p. 13*

### **Hermeneutical Principles Growing Out of the Bible’s Prophetic Patterns**<sup>3</sup>

1. Whenever God speaks of blessings or punishments concerning a nation, an organization, a movement or an individual, that statement should be regarded as conditional even if no expressed condition is stated. unless it is an overarching prophecy such as the final triumph of God over the forces of evil.
2. Conditional prophecies are not limited just to the contemporaries of the prophet, but may extend for many generations.

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<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Tim Crosby, F. Furman Kearley, E.G. White, Herbert Douglas, and a number of others for their insights in this area. I have cherry picked the best of those insights to compile at least a beginning list of hermeneutical principals which can guide our use of the Bible’s prophecies.

3. God's ultimate plans relating to his sovereignty and scheme of redemption are not conditional but often his means to accomplish these plans are - because they are almost always related to the contingencies of humans.
4. The conditional nature of prophecy means that any given prophecy may be: fulfilled exactly as stated; delayed in its fulfillment; altered in its fulfillment; or repealed.

### **An Important Question Raised by the Concept of Conditional Prophecy**

The principle of "conditional prophecy" raises some important questions concerning what some Christians have used to "test" people who claim to be modern prophets. While not comprehensive, the following list contains most of those standards used by various ones to determine whether a modern prophet is to be considered as speaking for God:<sup>4</sup> As will be seen, none of them address or preclude the subject of conditional prophecy.

*Test 1.* Isaiah 8:20 - "Check their predictions against my testimony," says the LORD. "If their predictions are different from mine, it is because there is no light or truth in them.

All this test states is that it is to be expected that what God's prophet says will agree in principle with what he says elsewhere. In other words, there is a continuity of intent that flows through them that is coherent and consistent.

*Test 2.* Matthew 7:20 - Yes, the way to identify a tree or a person is by the kind of fruit that is produced.

This test of a prophet does not address the principle of conditional prophecy one way or the other. What does it say?

Sometimes the life and influence of a professed prophet is so completely out of harmony with the Bible that there is no difficulty in placing him in his proper classification. But ordinarily this is not the case. Generally speaking, the application of this test requires more time and is very subjective. What determines if the fruit of a prophet's life and ministry is good or bad?

- A. The life of the prophet must be worthy of God's personal representative.

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<sup>4</sup> This series of tests is found on the website of the estate of the author E.G. White. The notes which follow each of them is a condensation of supplementary material they have prepared to explain each of them. Rather than placing quotations, I have chosen to give credit for the basic ideas in this fashion.

This does not mean that being God's prophetic spokesman makes a person infallible; it does not ensure that he/she will never make a mistake. None should be recognized as having met this test because of a few outstandingly good traits of character, and none should be labeled a failure because he has made some mistakes. It is the trend of the life as a whole that must be considered, rather than any occasional good deed or misdeed.

B. The influence of the prophet's life and messages upon individuals and the church as a whole must be good. Frequently the Lord has had to use prophets to tear down before they could build up, but the net result of the work of a true prophet will be constructive rather than destructive.

C. A person may live a good life and have an excellent influence on others, but this does not necessarily prove that he/she is a prophet. All the other tests of a true prophet must be met.

D. The application of the tests is cumulative. If, in addition to speaking in full accord with the former prophets, the prophet's own life has been a godly one, and if the tenor of his messages is such as would lead to genuine piety, we may conclude that he has passed another of the tests which may eventually identify him as a prophet of God.

*Test 3.* Jeremiah 28:9 - So a prophet who predicts peace must carry the burden of proof. Only when his predictions come true can it be known that he is really from the LORD."

It is as important to note what this verse does not say as it is to see what it does.

It does not state that if what the prophet predicts does not come true, he/she is not a prophet. Only that if what he/she predicts does come to pass that they have passed one of the tests of being a prophet.

As noted elsewhere, many predictions made by God's prophets do not occur, because the circumstances they involve change or because God changes his mind. This test actually supports the principle of conditional prophecy.

It is also reasonable to assume that the prophecies discussed here are specific enough that it would take a miraculous gift to give them. Nostradamus, for instance, and many of the psychics one reads in various supermarket tabloids are so general in their predictions that it is almost impossible for at least a percentage of them not to come to pass. Just the law of averages would guarantee that some prophecies of even the most non-prophet prophet will occur.

*Test 4.* 1 John 4:1-3 - Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are

many false prophets in the world. This is the way to find out if they have the Spirit of God: If a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ became a human being, that person has the Spirit of God. If a prophet does not acknowledge Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist.

Is there anything in this test that denies the principle of conditional prophecy?

This test of a prophet merely recognizes the truth of John 1:14 which tells us that “the Word (Jesus) became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. In other words, a prophet who truly represents God believes and teaches that Jesus is the incarnation of the God, manifest as man - God, as the Word, the Creator, the Source of Life and the Light of Humanity entered human history in the form of a person, a human and lived among us.

### Conclusion

One of the hardest things for any of us to shed is our “a priori” (prior) assumptions when we set out to study and understand God’s word to humanity, the Bible. Our genetic predilections, how we were socialized, what our teachers taught us, sermons we heard, books we read, the opinions of valued friends and the impact of esteemed mentors even our own opinion all conspire at times to obscure the plain truths of the Bible.

Sage aphorism tells us “not to believe everything we are told.” To that could be added, “neither should we believe everything we think.”

Nowhere is this more true than when we open the prophetic books of Daniel and the Revelation.

This is not to say that all of the above cannot help us in our understanding of these amazing books - but if they are to do so, their opinions must be checked and rechecked against Scripture to see if they were correct in their understanding.

Most of us would rather take the easier road of accepting someone else’s opinion and adopting it as our own.

We want to understand Bible prophecy. We all long for certainty in this uncertain world and to know that someone, sometime knew ahead of time what will happen gives us comfort and reprieve from the fear that maybe we are nothing more than passengers on a lonely planet in a galaxy soaring through an endless universe, going nowhere, with no purpose and no reason for our existence.

In a world where there is so much that is slippery and ill-defined, it is nice to know that there is a God who knows the future and can reveal it to us.

And in a world where so many of us have such serious questions about our own self-worth, it

satisfies our great longing to matter that maybe we are the only ones who understand the mysteries of life revealed in the symbols of prophecy; that the world needs us to explain and interpret those mysteries - because we are the ones with the truth, the only ones who can.

So, it is easy to assume that God intended to tell us much more in prophecy than he may have intended and to believe that every prophecy, and especially those concerning our own future, will come true.

Hopefully this short paper has revealed a different slant on the Bible's prophecies - God's slant. And prayerfully it has opened your eyes to a whole new adventure in life - a life not built on the dubious accuracy of detailed prophetic charts and carefully crafted prophetic theories, but on a daily walk with the God who holds the future and who will restore his Kingdom of Light on earth.

That is a prophecy you can bank on!

## Appendix

**The following are a group of quotations from the E.G. White Estate website.<sup>5</sup> They will not be included in the version of this paper which will be posted on our website under the Revelation section. Because they are “in house” issues, their inclusion in this handout is further clarification of this principle.**

Concerning a conference in 1856 Ellen White declared: "I was shown the company present at the conference. Said the angel, 'Some food for worms, some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus.' " All who were alive then are now dead. Does this unfulfilled prediction mean that Mrs. White is a false prophet? We offer a more extended answer to this question because it illustrates a fundamental misconception regarding the gift of prophecy.

Deuteronomy 18:22 reads: "If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken" (NRSV). This text, taken alone, would indict a number of Bible prophets. Deuteronomy 18:22 is to be understood, even as any other lone text, in the context of all Scripture. Other scriptures reveal that there are qualifying factors that operate in relation to a prophet's predictions, particularly where the free will of humanity may be involved. It may come as a surprise to some to think that God's promises of blessings and His threats of judgments are conditional. But the Scriptures are explicit on this. Notice the words recorded by Jeremiah:

"At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it." Jer. 18:7-10 (NRSV).

The Bible presents a number of illustrations of the application of this principle set forth by Jeremiah. Indeed, we may be thankful for Jeremiah's words; they help us rightly to understand some texts of Scripture that might otherwise seem to indict the divine claims of certain prophets . . . The conditional character of Bible predictions may be explained on the altogether reasonable ground that God, though sovereign, is not arbitrary. He does not deal with people as if they were lifeless objects on a chessboard to be moved about exclusively at His will. He mysteriously holds

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<sup>5</sup> They can be directly accessed by copying the following address into your web browser: [http://www.google syndicated search.com/u/ellenwhite?q=conditional+prophecy&sa=Search+Site&cof=S%3Ahttp%3A%2F%2Fwww.whiteestate.org%3BAH%3Acenter%3BLH%3A94%3BL%3Ahttp%3A%2F%2Fwww.whiteestate.org%2Fgraphics%2Fwhiteestate\\_logo.png%3BLW%3A612%3BAWFID%3A3ddffb066880b60f%3B&domains=whiteestate.org&sitesearch=whiteestate.org](http://www.google syndicated search.com/u/ellenwhite?q=conditional+prophecy&sa=Search+Site&cof=S%3Ahttp%3A%2F%2Fwww.whiteestate.org%3BAH%3Acenter%3BLH%3A94%3BL%3Ahttp%3A%2F%2Fwww.whiteestate.org%2Fgraphics%2Fwhiteestate_logo.png%3BLW%3A612%3BAWFID%3A3ddffb066880b60f%3B&domains=whiteestate.org&sitesearch=whiteestate.org)