

Volume 1: Two Kinds of Wisdom



*Things to Come
and Why They Matter*
An Introductory Study in Prophecy

Prophecy Series Author's Notes:

Our sermon series for the summer of 2014 investigated the subject of prophecy. The response by the congregation at Vistoso Community Church was so encouraging, that with the help of a few well-placed hints, I began to put the content of our summer series to paper. I hope that you will find it to be a blessing. More specifically, I hope it will order your thinking about God's plans for the future, and as a result make a difference in the way you live your life from this study forward.



The Word of God is “alive and powerful” and is able to transform us by “the renewing of our minds.” What kind of renewal do I believe God is looking for? That we might:

...deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age—looking for the Blessed Hope. . . the appearance of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ! Titus 2:12-13

In His grace,

Kevin Redig, Pastor
Vistoso Community Church

Volume 1: Two Kinds of Wisdom

An Introduction

Welcome to an introductory study on the subject of prophecy. As you can tell from the title, not only will we be investigating what the Word of God has to say about future events, but there will also be a strong emphasis on the intended ramifications of those events on our daily lives! You might say that we will be emphasizing application rather than speculation.

Transition from the Book of Corinthians. Now in turning to a study of prophecy, we are going to be temporarily setting aside our study in the book of 1 Corinthians. Conveniently, there is a very nice bridge, or transition, right at the point of our study in 1 Corinthians that will take us directly to the study of prophecy. Consider the following:

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. I Corinthians 3:18

This seems like strange advice, does it not? Does anything in our experience teach us that the way to wisdom is through becoming a fool? Verse 19 clarifies this apparent contradiction.

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness;" and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." I Corinthians 3:18-19

This is not the first time we have come across this concept. Back in the first chapter of I Corinthians, it was applied to the Gospel, that is that which man thinks is foolish (the cross) is actually the wisdom of God! (1 Corinthians 1:18-f)

In fact, this is a contrast that we have seen many, many times between the ways of God and the ways of this world. Now be careful to note that in our discussion of wisdom versus foolishness, I am not saying that man cannot be smart, clever or industrious. What the Bible is teaching us is this: issues of truth and reality are fundamentally the domain of God. As such, they do not originate with man. They are not subject to alternative interpretation; and they are not open to negotiation! In short, the answer to the rhetorical question raised in 1 Corinthians 2:15, *“For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?”* is an emphatic— NO ONE!

So when man decides to make a proclamation in any of the areas of truth and reality that have already been *carved out* by God—they are foolish in contrast to that which resides in the mind of God and has been revealed



First, let me back it up scripturally:

My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9

And this isn't an isolated example. John 17:17 tells us that truth is found in the Word of God, Proverbs 30:5 states that "every Word of God is flawless," and Psalm 119:96 declares everything has a limit—except for the commands of God. In short, not only are God's ways and man's views of truth and reality distinctly separated from each other—God's ways are also infinitely above and superior to any of man's ways. That's why, to go back to 1 Corinthians 3:21, we are not to boast in man—rather, as is implied, we should boast only in the Lord.

Proof of the Superiority of God's Wisdom. You may be thinking, "Wait a minute, can you give me some proof of this, some examples?" Certainly! Let's start simply. Do you remember when the wisdom of man said, "Don't drink milk (skim if you must), butter is evil and you need to eat low fat everything." In fact our Government, in all its wisdom, published a *food pyramid* nutritional wisdom.



What are they saying now 20 years later? Now the current wisdom is: we are eating way too many carbs (the foundation of the food pyramid); milk helps prevent colon cancer; butter is back (from grass fed cows, of course); we should take a spoonful of MCT's every day to ward off Alzheimer's (100% saturated fat from coconuts); and the list goes on and on. I realize these are little things, but man's wisdom was cast in government regulation, and now we are doing a total flip-flop.

Let's go a level deeper. Our Secretary of State recently said that *global warming* was the greatest threat to mankind. Now rather than debate this statement, let's let it stand for a moment and simply think back to the 60's and 70's. What was the biggest threat to mankind then? It was *nuclear winter*. Then in the 80's and 90's it became overpopulation of the planet. In the year 2000 it was Y2K and now it is global warming.

How ironic is it that in the span of a few short decades our biggest threat, that against which we need to marshal the world's resources, has shifted from winter to warming! This looks to me like a fulfillment of I Corinthians 3:19:

“He catches the wise in their own craftiness. . .the thoughts of the wise are futile.”

By the way, what does God say is the biggest threat to mankind? How about, “*In Adam all die. . .*” (1 Corinthians 15:22); or that if we finish our lives on the same “roads” we started on, we are destined to eternal condemnation. (Matthew 7:13-14)

Two Views of Eternity. Now let's look at the differences regarding a really serious issue—How can we be assured of spending eternity in heaven? By that I mean, how can we be rescued from Satan's kingdom and transferred into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ? Do you think mankind and God are going to agree or will their answers be different? Whose answer is going to be grounded in truth and whose is going to be suspect? Let's check it out and see.

Here is what famed academic and political advisor Arthur Schlesinger had to say, “. . .*we must push off the mystic prophets of the absolute and save ourselves. . .*”

Contrast this with what God says:

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name (than that of Jesus) under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12

How about former mayor of New York and billionaire Michael Bloomberg, *"I am telling you, if there is a God, when I get to heaven I'm not stopping to be interviewed. I am heading straight in. . . I have earned my place in heaven. It's not even close."* Again, contrast this with what the Word of God has to say:

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us. . ."

Titus 3:4-5

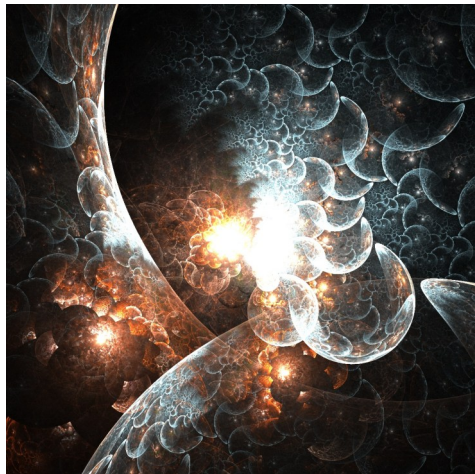


Are you convinced? God's ways and man's ways are very different! As for God's ways being higher than man's—let me just make the following observation for now: unless something changes, Michael Bloomberg and the thief on the cross are going to have very different experiences in eternity.

So it is from this starting point—this statement of propositional truth: *"For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God"* (1 Corinthians 3:19)—that I want to transition to our study of prophecy. For I can't think of a better way to further illustrate the very point being made in this passage than to show you the difference between the wisdom of God and that of man, as it relates to the future!

Let's start by asking, "What about the future of our planet, and for that matter, the physical universe in which it exists? What do mankind's greatest cosmological minds have to say?" (You will find the answer to be fascinating stuff!)

Let me first give you a short lesson on physical cosmology. Now, of course, there is more than one theory, but the most commonly accepted end is often labeled *The Big Freeze*. Consider this theory to be the bookend to *The Big Bang*. Basically, this theory says our universe is going to continue to expand, as cosmologists believe it is currently doing, which will eventually cause the universe to be so spread out that it dies a *heat death*. The result: no more star formation; stars burn out; matter becomes more and more de-fused. Finally, the universe is simply cold and dark. When will this happen? Some time trillions of years in the future.



As an alternative to the *Big Freeze*, let's consider one of the hottest new theories regarding the end of our universe, which is an extension of something called *Inflation Theory*. To explain it, let me give you a brief quote that I read recently:

“. . .our universe is part of the multiverse. This vast structure is made up of an infinite number of universes, each of which can spawn an infinite number of daughter universes. . .”

For years we have been told of the awesome expanse of the universe in which our tiny little insignificant planet exists. Now, you have just been told that our universe is, in fact, just one of an infinite number of universes—all existing at the same time, each of which can spawn an infinite number of daughter universes. Is there the slightest shred of evidence for this? Absolutely none!

However, it conveniently gets around the thorny issue of the origin of this universe—a universe in which the measurable physical parameters are so finely-tuned that they require design. Their solution—if there are actually an infinite number of possibilities—anything could happen. In the words of one famous scientist, “We are smack dab in the middle of the one universe that did work out, and wondering about it!” Recall what the Bible says the wisdom of man is. . . !

Now you have probably heard enough of this, but here is where it really gets interesting. How are these supposed infinite number of universes formed and where do they come from? According to Raphael Bousso and others in the field of theoretical physics, it goes something like this:

"A good analogy would be that our theories predict a boiling pot of water, and the origin of our universe is the formation of one of the bubbles at the bottom of the pot"

Can you picture this—universes, like ours, are constantly forming just like bubbles in a pot of boiling water. Furthermore, Dr. Bousso goes on to explain that in the same way bubbles collapse and *disappear* when they reach the top of the pot, so, too, universes are constantly collapsing and disappearing when they reach their own top of the pot or *cut-off*.

Bouso's team of *scientists* have calculated that our universe will reach its cut-off point; that is, the time when it will cease to exist, about 4-5 billion years from now. Now interestingly enough, this coincides nicely with the estimates of cosmologists regarding the lifespan of the earth.

“...our sun—now a middle-aged star at about 4.57 billion years old—will be reaching the end of its life in about five billion years. At that point in time, the sun will run out of fuel in its core and will start to shed its outer layers of gas, inflating to become a red giant and ultimately a planetary nebula.”

So at some point, as our sun ages, it will actually expand beyond the limits of the earth's orbit and incinerate itself. When is this expected to happen? About 4-5 billion years from now. How long has man been on the earth? Estimates vary widely among secular scientists, but let's use 100,000 years for the sake of our discussion. If the earth ends in five billion years, that would make it 50,000 times longer than all of human history. In other words, scientists are telling us that *the end* is so far in the future that it doesn't matter in the least.

What kind of demands do these scientifically predicted ends place upon us? What kind of ramifications are there associated with the end of our physical universe according to the wisdom of man? **None whatsoever!** Apparently, we can do what we want.

A team of research scientists surely have some evidence for a theory like this. They do—mathematical calculations. There is not one single shred of physical evidence supporting multiple universes, their constant formation, or their constant disappearance.

Now let's see what the Bible has to say:

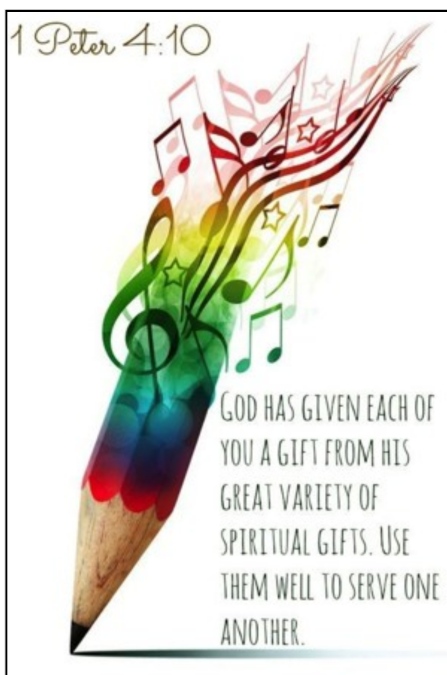
“But of that day and hour no one knows. . . Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight , at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: watch!”

Mark 13:32-37

But the end of all things is at hand; . . be serious and watchful in your prayers. . . fervent in love. . each one has received a gift, minister to one another. . .”

1 Peter 4:7-10

Do you see why I spent the time explaining cosmological theory to you? I wanted you to see how sharply it is in contrast with the Word of God. God's revelation to us doesn't push off the end of all things until some unimaginable future time—it could be today. Furthermore, since the end is potentially imminent, we are to be fully engaged in such things as prayer, manifestations of love, and use of our spiritual gifts. Could the results of a life lived as the natural extension of these two theories about the future possibly be any more different?



Two Views of Our Attitude Toward God. Now, so far, all we have done is take a brief look at the contrast regarding the future of our physical universe. We could do the same thing with respect to man's social structures as well as many other areas. For the sake of time, let's just consider the religious side of man—his thoughts and attitudes regarding God. For those of you over 40, I would suggest that for most of your lifetime the people of our country would, in general, have acknowledged the existence of God, although personal responses would have varied greatly.



However, I think you would also agree that over the course of the past 20 to 30 years, we have seen an increasing tendency to dispute, often vehemently, the very existence of God. Within the last generation one such popular scientist, who boldly rejects any such thing as the supernatural, wrote a book entitled *The Selfish Gene* which *authorizes* us to live self-centered lives as the way based upon evolution. Now here is the latest by D. Dennett, a cognitive scientist, whose book, called *Breaking the Spell*, teaches the following:

“ . . . belief in God must have at one point served an important evolutionary purpose, . . . encouraged reproduction. . . granting an evolutionary advantage. . . we have no more need of such primitive beliefs.”

Do you see what he is saying? The evolutionary purpose he is talking about is related to the *survival of the fittest*, and the fittest are those who produce the most.

Dennett is saying that belief in the afterlife gave a kind of hope that encouraged reproduction, but we don't need it any more (perhaps because we don't need to encourage reproduction in our over-crowded planet—another hobby horse for the sages of our day).

Now perhaps you are dismissing this as the ranting of one crackpot professor. I assure you, the thoughts of this man are widely read, and, if you have kids or grand-kids in college today, they are surely being exposed to this kind of thinking.

Let's continue by considering what God has to say. A study from Genesis to Revelation regarding God's intent for His creation of man would reveal to us that He has made man in His "image and likeness," that we might know and worship Him. Furthermore, man has turned from the original purpose for which he was made, is in a state of rebellion, and if something isn't done the consequences are going to be terrible!

"I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am He, you will indeed die in your sins."

John 8:24

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment ...

Hebrews 9:27

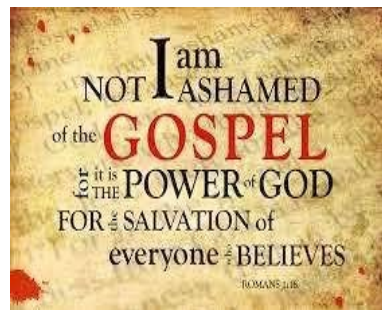
Once again we see that the differences between the *wisdom* of man and that of God are as diametrically opposed as it is possible to be. Furthermore, the consequences for choosing the wrong view of reality are huge! Let me summarize. On the one hand, the wisdom of man offers a view of the future that makes no demands, and assigns no consequences for choices made in this life. Furthermore, it teaches you to find peace in your rebellion and quell any pangs of conscience you might have.

On the other hand, the Divine perspective regarding the future teaches us that the next step in God's plan for the ages could begin at any moment. So, God's plan behooves us to live our lives in expectant readiness. In addition, our eternal destiny is directly connected with the choices that we make now, and, in fact, depends upon them. What we do each and every day as we compile our lives has eternal ramifications and, therefore, should govern the choices we make!

Beginning our Study of Prophecy

So it is from this starting point—the huge contrasts, actually mutually exclusive explanations about the future, that are found at the apex of human wisdom in contrast to what God has to say in His Word—that I would like to begin our study of prophecy. Now let me tell you right up front that I am biased. You see I have reached the point that I am no longer all that interested in what man has to say. For I have already found that man's declarations on such things as purpose and meaning to life, how to reconcile one's life to God, and how to find lasting peace and joy are just as foolish and ephemeral as God has said they would be.

On the other hand, I have also found that what God has to say is "mighty unto salvation." So when it comes to a study of the future, especially as it bears upon my life right now, I know where I am going to look and to whom I am going to turn!



Since man, in his wisdom, can't even make up his mind on whether or not butter is good for me, why should I bow to the pronouncements of this world about the future—especially when it involves really important things like my eternal destiny and standing. No, I am much more interested in what God has to say about such things!

Why Should We Study Prophecy? Okay, with that introduction, let's use the remainder of this lesson to see if we can whet our appetite for the study ahead. First, why would we want to study prophecy? By this I mean, why would we want to investigate the declarations of God, as found in His Word, about things to come? Consider Revelation 1:3:

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

This is a very unusual promise that should catch our attention. Blessing comes even to those who will simply read the book of Revelation! Not only is there blessing for those who read, but also for the hearing (with understanding) and, of course, for responding in obedience to the things revealed.

By the way, the Greek word translated *Revelation* is *apokalupsis*, which means an unveiling or disclosure. When it refers to a person it carries the idea of that person stepping forward. What a great one word title for the book, for it is both the unveiling of God's future plan for the ages as well as the *stepping forward* of Jesus Christ as He comes to earth for a second time—this time not as a suffering servant, but as a reigning King!

That should be reason enough to study prophecy, but consider also the following passage:

Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. II Timothy 4:8

We'll look at the potential of rewards for the child of God in a future lesson, but for now consider the one reward (crown) that every believer in Jesus Christ should obtain—the crown for those who long for His appearing. And, of course, it is not possible for us to long for something with which we are completely unfamiliar. Studying what is to come should give us a deep longing and appreciation for the certain return of Jesus Christ. And lastly—consider the cry of the early church: “Maranatha (Come Quickly Lord!).” If that was on their heart, should it not be on ours?

Why is Prophecy Relevant? Perhaps you are thinking, isn't prophecy just an obscure part of Christianity or Christian study? Consider the following:

- Roughly 30% of the Bible was prophetic when written.
- It is certainly reasonable to claim that Jesus is the Bible's central figure. And being so, note that of the 333 prophecies regarding Jesus Christ, only 109 were fulfilled by His first Advent—that leaves 224 remaining as standing prophecy associated with His second Advent and future reign.
- In the New Testament, 23 out of 27 books refer to Jesus' coming again. We are exhorted to be ready for His return over 50 times in those 23 books. And, the fact of His coming, in context, is almost always meant to cause a response in our lives.

In short, there is nothing obscure about the extent of prophecy nor its principle object—the Lord Jesus Christ. To relegate it to a fringe study for academics is to rob it of its intended daily impact on our lives. It is also to relegate it to the fanciful rather than what it is meant to be—something very practical for the Christian.

What Expectations Should We Have? I hope this discussion has prompted you to ask: “So then, what kind of expectations should I have? What should I be looking for with respect to the fulfillment of future events?” Here is a principle for you: *timing is difficult, fulfillment is not!* Let me explain:

- Mark 13:32, and many similar passages, make it clear that there are many prophetic events for which we cannot, in advance, provide an accurate date—nor should we try.
- However, it is essential that we combine our uncertainty with respect to *when* with a correct understanding of the *how*. Consider the meaning of the following Scripture:



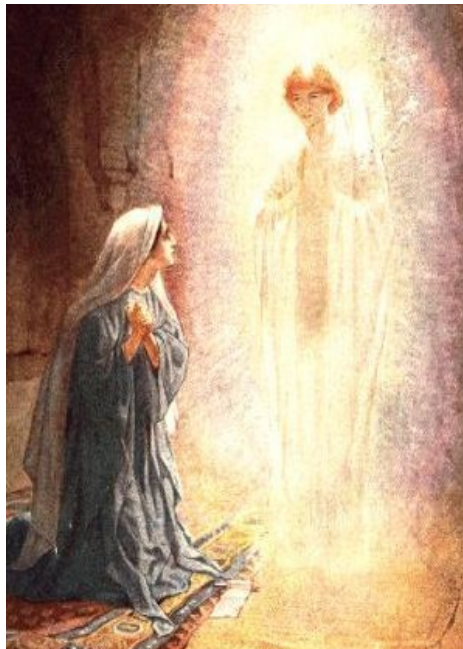
Behold, two men stood by them in white apparel ...
”Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing into the
heavens? This same Jesus, Who was taken up from
you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you
saw Him go into heaven.”

Acts 1:9-10

This Scripture is telling us that Jesus Himself, and not some other entity, is going to come back through the air, which is how He left, and return to stand upon the very same earth He left at the ascension. Now to be sure, many disagree with this interpretation and this approach to interpreting Scripture. You need to think this through very carefully, for correctly interpreting a large portion of your Bible is at stake.

Consider these Biblical examples while you make your decision:

- **Abraham.** The Bible prophetically stated that: God would make Abraham into a great nation (Genesis 12). But the people of Israel would spend 400 years in Egypt before being brought to Canaan (Genesis 15).
- **Promised Land.** The sinful nation of Israel would spend 70 years in exile in Babylon (Jeremiah 29). But, the exiled people would be restored to the land by Cyrus (Isaiah 45).
- **Jesus Birth and Death.** Bible prophecy states that the virgin would be with child (Isaiah 7). Psalm 22 stated that they would look on Him whom they had pierced.



There are hundreds of other examples of prophecies that were meant that they would be fulfilled literally! The Bible did not mean that these prophecies would be fulfilled in some symbolic, figurative, or allegorical manner. Instead, in these prophecies it was meant to be understood that the connection between the prophetic statement of God in terms of *“making known the end from the beginning, from ancient times what is still to come”* could be clearly recognized by all observers. (Isaiah 46:10)

So when it comes to future events—when the Scriptures say that we are going to meet Jesus in the air, that He is going to reign on this earth for 1000 years, and judge the living and the dead—we don’t know

when this is going to occur. But we most certainly should expect these promises to be fulfilled in exactly the same way as He has fulfilled past prophecies.

Perhaps you are thinking, “Prophecy about the future is too fantastic to take literally.” Listen, you don’t have any reason to doubt God’s Word other than unbelief. He has already provided an enormous proven track record of fulfilled prophecy.



Just because the wisdom of man says, “That’s not possible!” is not reason enough to doubt either the faithfulness or capability of the Creator of the heavens and the earth! For with our God, nothing is impossible and He has been making known the end from the beginning and accomplishing all that He has claimed for a very long time.



Perhaps now you can see why we started by looking at the contrast between the wisdom of man and the wisdom of God. And, you can now understand why we established that not only is Biblical truth distinctly different, but also that the wisdom of God is elevated above and superior to that of man.

Look now at the contrast by considering the future time when we step out of this life and into whatever is next. God’s Word says the soul and spirit will leave the *tent* of this body behind. The materialistic wisdom of man dismisses the idea of an inanimate soul. Man can dismiss the soul for a time, but at some point every single person is going to:

- View this transition with intense interest—either with an arising sense of joy or one of impending doom.
- Realize that it’s all true or admit that everything he or she believed was terribly wrong.
- Move from what lies behind to what lies ahead—for there is no going back, no way to change one’s mind, no do-overs or mulligans.

In short, I urge you to give this study a hearing! The consequences are huge both for this life and the life to come. These consequences should give us all pause to consider what the Word of God has to say.

What Outcomes Should We Expect from Our Study?

Finally, What should we expect in terms of outcomes from our study of prophecy? Perhaps you are thinking,

“Well, I’ll know more about the wild events of the future, different theories, just who is the Antichrist, and the four-horsemen and many other details.”



But you would be wrong, I don’t anticipate talking about any of these things. As mentioned earlier, we are going to focus on the practical rather than the speculative.

There are, however, three outcomes we should expect. Our first outcome is to instill hope—especially in difficult times. Let me combine this first outcome with a second—to prompt godliness. For the study of the future is always meant to result in godly living in the present! God’s grace teaches us to deny:

...ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the Blessed Hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us ...

Titus 2:11-14

... we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

I John 3:2-3

Thirdly, we can anticipate confidence that everything is under control—specifically, under God’s sovereign control. Although looking at current events from man’s perspective, we might be tempted to conclude that things are spiraling out of control. In God’s keeping, events are unfolding right on schedule and right according to His plan. Furthermore, nothing will keep His plan for the future from occurring as He has ordained. Here is how I know that:

“I foretold the former things long ago, My mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.”

Isaiah 48:3



“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. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.”

Isaiah 46:10

As we bring this introductory study to a close, let me ask a question: What is the central prophetic event left on God's calendar?

Arguably it is the second Advent of Jesus Christ. For Jesus is the central figure of all human history and prophecy revolves around Him! This simple truth is part of even the most precious ordinances of the church; for example, communion. For, although it is true that during communion we remember the body and blood of Christ sacrificed for us, it is also clearly stated that “. . . we *proclaim His death until He comes again*” as King of kings and Lord of lords!

So, in the unfolding of our study of prophecy, this is where we will turn next—to the second Advent of Jesus Christ.

Lord, I pray this study will have its desired effect of instilling hope, prompting godly living in the present, and fostering confidence in your sovereign control over all things. Might we see the contrast between your wisdom and the wisdom of man and recognize the pronouncements of man regarding the future for what they are—vain speculations.

Lord, might we turn in faith to Jesus Christ for both the salvation of our souls and our hope of a blessed future. In Christ's name we pray. Amen



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