

Armageddon for Beginners

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INTRODUCTION

There is a growing interest in endtime prophecy. People want to know whether world events are leading toward some predetermined end, and whether that end has personal significance for them. That much is fine ... but the end result may not be. Interpreting prophecy can be complex, and it is easy for the uninitiated to be drawn into making or believing conclusions that go beyond the actual intent of the prophecies.

Sadly, many of the widely recognised experts in theology have little faith in anything except their own expertise. They dismiss Bible prophecy along with anything else that they cannot dissect and explain on a human level. On the other hand, many of the self-professed experts are blindly committed to making everything fit some pet theory of theirs. They come up with contrived interpretations which confuse and frustrate anyone looking for real truth.

What the public wants (and needs) is an explanation that is simple without being simplistic, and clear without being contrived. They want to know if the Bible really does predict the future, without being conned into a lot of double-talk that finishes up saying nothing.

This book is an attempt to meet that need.

Keeping it Simple

We have tried to keep the explanations simple. However, the subject matter does take a lot of concentration if you hope to fully appreciate the significance of what it is saying.

Here are some tips to help you understand this book better:

1. Look up Bible references as you go. For your convenience, most references are listed in an appendix at the end of each chapter. Make the effort to turn to it each time a Bible reference is mentioned in the text of the chapter. If you do, you will be able to understand more clearly what is being said.

The more you understand the passages, the more you will appreciate that we are not taking some isolated text out of context and trying to make it say something that it does not say. What we are looking at in this book is the big picture, based on a broad understanding of the whole message. This takes more effort than simplistic “proof-texting”.

2. Read slowly. It takes time to digest the full meaning, not only of the Bible references, but also of the comments we are making. We have tried to pack a lot of teaching into just a few pages. Time is needed to reflect on the full meaning of each statement.

3. Pay special attention to key terms. We have specifically commented on some, but there are many more. A list of some key terms to watch for as you read this book appears at the end of this introduction. They are part of a very complex inter-related web, which when all put together give a totally consistent picture of what life and the future are all about.

It takes some time, as we move from tree to tree, to give a complete picture of the “forest”, but the end result will be worth the effort, and it will save you from myopic extremes that come from just focusing on one issue.

Having said that, we will now give updated comments on a few of the individual “trees”. These comments did not appear in the first editions of this book, and have been written as afterthoughts.

The Pope

From the days of Martin Luther, there has been a large body of teaching about the Pope being the Antichrist. The strongest support for this theory comes from the fact that the Latin title for his role as “Vicar of Christ” is one that adds up to 666 according to the formula described on pages 147-148. This is a significant fact which should not be overlooked, although it has not been dealt with specifically in the main body of this book.

One reason we have not dwelt on this theory is because the title (“Vicar of Christ”) belongs to an office rather than to an individual. It may be that the office will at least be used to support the individual who will eventually be the final Antichrist. (See our book, *Survivors*.) Of course, there is also the possibility that the Antichrist could actually be some future Pope. It does not, however, necessitate condemning all Popes as antichrists.

The Pope, like Solomon, symbolises what the world perceives to be the epitome of religious excellence. Yet the best that the religious world can offer becomes unspeakably evil if it is used to fight against the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Bible says, “Let God be true, and every man a liar.” (Romans 3:4) In other words, unless we are willing (in loyalty to Christ and to all

that he taught) to turn loose of our loyalty to whomever we perceive to be the next most noble religious authority, we are going to err seriously in our attempts to find the truth about anything, including the future.

However, we still maintain that our emphasis should not be on targeting and attacking any individual. The real battle is more one of right and wrong attitudes. Characterisations of people as either demons or as angels often miss the point of God's grace.

Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses

Groups like Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh Day Adventists have been the world's chief exponents of endtime prophecy. As such, they deserve some recognition.

Although we do not agree with all of their conclusions, we recognise that the tendency for the religious establishment to condemn them for even attempting to understand prophecy (and coincidentally the tendency to condemn the whole idea of trying to understand prophecy because such groups are associated with it!) has developed moral character in many of those who have been persecuted for their stand.

The Jehovah's Witnesses in particular are one of the most universally hated groups in the world today, even though most of their opponents could not agree on what it is, exactly, that is so supposedly evil about them.

The Seventh Day Adventists are going through a significant period in their history. In an effort to gain acceptance and to avoid the persecution that the Jehovah's Witnesses have suffered for their more militant opposition to mainstream Christianity, many Adventists are starting to downplay their traditionally strong stand against religions that continue to worship God on Sundays.

Because we believe their traditional stand was misguided, it is easy to see this shift in their emphasis as being a shift which is taking them a step closer to the truth. However, indications are that it is not a step forward to greater truth, so much as a backward step, based primarily on political expediencies.

It has been our misfortune to be accosted aggressively by some Adventists and JW's (and by individuals from smaller groups, as well as some totally loose cannons) whenever we have been out distributing this book. Such people rarely show any interest in reading what we have to say, because (they tell us) they "know it all already".

It is this arrogance that has turned so many away from the overall subject of endtime prophecy; and it is also this error which can just about guarantee failure in terms of finding the real secrets of God that are hidden within the pages of the Bible.

We would call on students of Bible prophecy everywhere to exercise greater humility, and greater honesty with regard to the limitations of their own studies, so that we may be able to profit from the truths that God has allowed others besides ourselves to find.

For myself, I must confess that there is very little in this book which is totally original.

But I have been able to learn from many sources which were unwilling to listen to me or to anyone else for that matter. Until we stop behaving so narrow-mindedly and break free from our individual delusions of grandeur, endtime prophecy will continue to be equated with crackpots and ratbags.

Armageddon the Movie

Coincidentally, the movie Armageddon was released on video in Australia at about the same time that the first edition of this book became available to the general public. It is worth making some comment on the similarities and differences between the movie and the message of this book.

Sadly, the movie (like another one referred to later) gives almost no recognition to God (except in the selfish context of using him to achieve even greater glorification for the supposedly wonderful achievements of mankind).

In addition, what little reference the movie makes to the real Armageddon is misleading. (You will be able to appreciate the error more after you have read this book.)

Armageddon, in the Bible, is a term given to a battle in which all the armies of the earth are gathered together to challenge the heavenly armies of God.

Although the real Armageddon is closely linked with the “end of the world” as we know it, it really has nothing to do with an asteroid striking the earth.

It would have been more accurate to have called the Armageddon movie The Tribulation if the producers had wanted to relate it to an asteroid threat mentioned in Bible prophecy. But such technicalities aside, the asteroid threat is certainly a part of the overall picture leading up to the real Armageddon.

In the biblical account, the world is not saved (by Bruce Willis or anyone else), but neither is it totally destroyed by the asteroid.

It is interesting that the movie version featured a fiery shower of smaller asteroids raining down on the earth just a few days before the big one was to hit. It does appear that the Bible account describes a shower of asteroids as well as a single hit by a huge “mountain”, which causes the whole earth to “reel to and fro like a drunk” as a result.

The one feature of the real Armageddon that the movie of the same name most accurately depicts is the total lack of genuine repentance that will characterise the inhabitants of the earth at that time. Characters in Armageddon, the movie, thought of loved ones, and some (most notably Muslims and Hindus) flocked to places of worship as the end approached. But nowhere did there appear to be any serious attempt to read into the impending disaster a warning from God Almighty that the inhabitants of the earth should seriously take stock of their goals and values, and make fundamental changes in the way that they were living their lives. Instead, the focus was all on a pack of roughnecks who were going off to “kick ass” in the name of mankind.

Independence Day

There is another slightly older movie, which does an amazingly accurate job of depicting what is actually prophesied in the Bible as going to happen some time after the asteroid hits, during the real battle of Armageddon (although the movie itself makes no claim to being based on any prophecy). That movie is Independence Day. With only a slight change in the script, Independence Day could very well have been called Armageddon.

The events leading up to the Battle of Armageddon as described in the Bible, include a scene where thousands of people are suddenly “beamed up” to a huge spaceship that is actually referred to as a “city” floating in the air over Israel.

The Bible talks of all the armies on earth gathering together below it, in an attempt to wage war on this huge “starship”.

In the past, whenever I have read this account, I have found it difficult to believe that the armies of the earth would really be so stupid as to think that they could make war against such a supernatural force as that is described in the Bible. And yet, when you watch Independence Day, you see exactly that happening. And it all sounds so plausible when you realise that the earth’s inhabitants will have been convinced that the invaders are aliens from another world, who have come to destroy the earth. And that is pretty much what they are and what they’ll do... except that they will be aliens from the kingdom of heaven, coming to carry out the will of God!

Personally I recommend that readers see both movies, primarily because they give a certain Twenty-First Century credibility to what has been written in the Bible for thousands of years. They will certainly make you a little less inclined to laugh at what is described in this book.

-Dave Mckay

Key Terms

Below are some key terms that you should be looking for as you read this book. Some could be listed in several groupings. The groupings below are very loose and not representative of the complete picture.

This list will not make much sense now; but remember as you read through this book that we are trying to give you a picture of how they all inter-relate. This will help you to appreciate how complex the subject is.

The baddies: Prince, king, kingdom, head, beast, dragon, bear, lion, eagle, panther, scarlet/red, prostitute, Babylon, sand/clay.

The goodies: Prince, king, kingdom, Son of Man, Lamb, a white horse, birds, giving birth, woman, virgin, remnant, wilderness, stone/rock, servants, witnesses, God’s people, the Lord’s day.

Numbers: Three and a half years, ten (toes and horns), three (ribs and horns), seven (heads, mountains, years).

The Mark: Images/idolatry, 666, Temple, Solomon, wisdom, greed, gold, Babylon.

Other: desolation, abomination, 'great trouble' [tribulation], trumpets, falling stars, wrath, poured, determined, covenant, sword, signs and wonders (miracles), mystery, floods.

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1. The Overall Scenario

The scope of this book does not allow us to cover all of the details that fit together to make up the big picture of what is about to come to pass in the world in the next few years. There certainly is room for disagreement on some of the details, since they are all based on interpretations of Bible prophecies. However, in this chapter we will give you a rough outline of some of the things that we expect (Many of them have already begun.) and then proceed to explain specifically how some of the conclusions have been reached.

The first edition of this book came out in 1999, prior to the end of the Millennium. At that time, we said, "We can say with relative certainty that nothing will happen at that time that is any more significant than the sort of things that are happening now and that will continue to happen after January 1, 2000. There is nothing in Bible prophecy to support the theory that the year 2000 marks the end of the world. "

But we went on to say, "Don't be surprised if the end comes just a few years after the start of the new millennium. It has nothing to do with the calendar, but plenty to do with developments in world politics, and especially with developments in world banking." We are now living in those first few years after January 1, 2000.

So here is the picture as we saw it then, and as we see it now.

There will be more earthquakes, more epidemics, and more famines. An increase in wars, and more problems with the world economy, will lead to drastic changes in both government and banking.

Russia will more or less rise from the dead and turn on America, virtually destroying it in a surprise military strike over the North Pole. An extremely popular man will gain control of the U.N. and use it to set up a world empire which will bring in world peace and prosperity.

The world's banking system will be totally transformed, with computer scans eventually controlling all business transactions. People will do all of their buying and selling through a microchip implant in the back of their hands. (Amputees will be able to get an implant put on their forehead.) This implant will virtually eliminate the need for paper money.

The changes, both in government and in economics, will bring great benefits to most of the earth's population. This will further increase the power and popularity of the world leader.

The Jews will rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem, and resume animal sacrifices. There will be, for a while, greater religious tolerance than ever before. Only the most rabid fanatics will oppose the changes. Amongst opponents will be a small

group of Christians who will argue that it is all a mask for something unbelievably evil.

This group of Christians will try to tell the world that the popular leader is actually the Son of Satan in much the same way that Jesus is the Son of God. They will also warn that a global disaster is about to strike the earth. (The exact details are not clear at this stage.) They will warn of an asteroid (or possibly nuclear satellites) crashing into the earth and poisoning much of the earth's water supplies, killing life in the oceans, and destroying much of the world's vegetation. Millions will be killed as a result of this disaster.

About the time that the disaster takes place, the world leader will begin a campaign against the fanatics, possibly accusing them of playing some part in causing the disaster that has struck the earth. The leader will order that all forms of worship be abolished and that he alone be worshipped as god. Anyone who refuses to worship him will be arrested and executed. This program of systematic persecution against all who believe in God will result in the deaths of more people than have ever been slain by any world leader in history, including Hitler and Stalin.

Two spokespersons for the fanatics will repeatedly elude capture at the same time that they succeed in getting the world to hear their message of warning. A worldwide manhunt will eventually track them down, and their execution will be televised around the world. Their bodies will be displayed in public for three days.

And then Jesus Christ will return to earth.

The two people who were executed will suddenly come to life, as will thousands of others who were killed for their faith in Jesus Christ. They will all be given new bodies that are not subject to gravity as people are now. All of these people, plus those who are alive and who have refused to worship the world leader or to allow a microchip implant in their bodies, will be able to float up to meet Jesus in the sky. This amazing escape will be documented with television coverage around the world. All those who are drawn together in this way will disappear into another dimension, possibly into some kind of a huge starship, where they will celebrate their deliverance. At the same time, new problems will confront those left on earth.

More disasters will strike the earth over the next few weeks, causing suffering for billions of people. Those left on the earth will continue to put the blame on the departed fanatics, and will become convinced that they are dangerous aliens from another world. All the armies of the earth will be drawn together to challenge the aliens, as a show-down looms over Israel.

When those who disappeared have finished their celebrations in their refuge in the skies, they will swoop down on earth behind their leader, Jesus. The weapons amassed in the valley of Megiddo, in Israel, will be no match for them. This is the famous Battle of Armageddon, and it will be totally one sided. Those mortals who mistakenly thought they could fight God, will be wiped out. The victorious army will be fully occupied for months just burying all of the bodies and disposing of the ruined weapons.

Then Jesus and his supernatural army will set about rebuilding the earth with the few survivors that remain. The Devil will be bound by God, so that evil will no longer triumph on earth. Whereas all past governments had been corrupt and cruel, and had appealed to people's greed, the forces for good will triumph in this new world.

Jesus will begin a reign of a thousand years on earth, in which he and his supernatural followers will seek to educate the inhabitants of this planet in the ways of God. The earth's mortal population will increase during that period of time.

At the end of the thousand years, the devil will be loosed once again, to see if the people of the repopulated earth have learned how to resist his lies and deceptions. But enough for now. That's another story.

Obviously all of this must sound a bit far-fetched for most readers. There are probably details which we do not have exactly right. But anyone who has studied Bible prophecy at all would have to agree that the overall picture is pretty accurate. In the chapters that follow we will attempt to lead you through some of the steps in how we arrived at these conclusions, including a timetable that you can use to actually count down the final seven years before Armageddon.

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2. First the Bad News

Prophecy, by its very nature, tells us something about the future. It may also proclaim practical everyday spiritual truths. But what makes it unique is that it comes from a divine, super-human intelligence which we call God. God is not restricted by time and space. Past, present, and future are all like different chapters in the same book to him. In God's eternal present, he can look ahead and see what is going to happen; and he can move back to our present and tell us what he knows. Doing this does not mean that God has forced anything to happen. He just happens to know ahead of time; and telling us some of what he knows becomes one of many parts that make up the overall formula that will finally result in what was predicted.

Think of it like a video of a football game. No matter how many times you watch it, the same team will always win. It isn't that the game was fixed, or that the winning team had no choice in the matter. It's just that what you see on the video is what actually happened as a result of everyone's free will.

The same is true when God tells us what is going to happen in the future. We should probably be thankful that he doesn't go into more detail than he does, or it could really get us tangled up in knots, either worrying that we might mess things up, or struggling to change the predicted results.

So if you're looking for a way to cheat fate through understanding prophecy, forget it. The prophecy itself is inescapable. After a period of struggling against it, each person must eventually come to the realisation that what has been prophesied will, indeed, happen, no matter what choices they as individuals make. God's reason for telling us something about the future is not so that we

will try to change it, but rather so that we can learn lessons from it that will result in changes within ourselves.

In one of the Back to the Future movies, a character finds a book listing the winners of various horse races, and he pockets it, with the hope of being able to take it back to the present, where he will then use the information in it to make big bets on those same races. Unfortunately, in one way or another, this is how most so-called believers approach Bible prophecy. But it simply won't work.

It isn't as though we've stumbled on God's personal diary without him knowing about it, so that now we can outsmart him by being there when wealth is to be distributed, and by not being there when punishments are to be handed out.

In the John Cleese movie Time Bandits, some fallen angels steal a map of the universe which shows some glitches in the time-space continuum, and they decide to capitalise on these little holes from one age into another by becoming robbers. They use the time warps as foolproof getaways. But what they don't know is that The Creator himself has set them up, so that they will lead him to the glitches and enable him to make the necessary corrections.

This is an important lesson, and one that needs to be made clear right from the start of this book: You are only kidding yourself if you think that you can use what you learn here for selfish gain. No matter what you do, you will still end up playing into God's hand.

God does occasionally use his knowledge of the future to prepare people in advance for disasters, etc. He did that when he prepared Noah for the flood. He told Noah it was coming, and then he gave him instructions on how to avoid it. But remember that he did it because He chose to do it, and because He believed that Noah was the right person to trust with the information. Noah didn't "study" God to nut out a way to escape the flood. It took supernatural assistance from God for Noah to learn that the flood was coming in the first place, and it took supernatural assistance from God for Noah to find a way to escape it. Noah had to stay in touch with God from start to finish to be saved. He couldn't just grab the disaster plan and run off with it to some secret hideout where he would devise his own scheme for salvation.

If you're not willing to do it God's way, then you are just going to end up running around in circles, and you may as well put this book down now. He set it up that way, and there is no way around it.

Of course Noah wasn't the only one who was warned. You don't build a full scale replica of the Titanic in your back yard without people asking a few questions about how you plan to launch it. So the general public more or less knew what was coming; and yet there was something missing in their spiritual make-up that blinded them to what was really needed to keep from being drowned. Some may have started swimming lessons. Others may have bought row boats and kept them in the garage. But whatever they did, it didn't save them in the end. And this is how it works with any knowledge about the future. The only way to change your fate is to change your attitudes.

Forget about prophecy for a moment and think about the future in general. If you do, you will see just how useless knowledge of the future can be if people don't have the right attitude toward it. I will illustrate this:

Nurses are one of the most informed groups of workers on the dangers of smoking; and yet the nursing profession in Australia has one of the highest incidences of cigarette smoking of all vocational groups. Simply knowing ahead of time that cigarette smoking will cause lung cancer does not appear to be enough to make these people stop smoking. A little knowledge can be dangerous. Sometimes those who know the most about the future assume they are so smart that they will be able to escape the consequences at the last minute; and so they end up taking even greater risks than those who are less informed.

Can you see the lesson here with regard to Bible prophecy? If you learn some things about the future from this book, it could end up making you more reckless than ever, and prove to be more harmful than if you had stayed blissfully ignorant... unless you change your attitudes.

Now for another illustration. The one thing we all know with absolute certainty about the future is that we are going to die. But what have we done about it? Most of us prefer not to think about dying. We try to blot it out of our minds. When someone is seriously ill, we shunt them off to a hospital, out of sight and away from the real world. All references to death are pretty much hushed up or avoided in our everyday conversations. Apparently what we know most certainly about the future we would rather not know.

Yet if it was possible to discover exactly what day and place, and under exactly what circumstances we would eventually die, most of us would not be able to resist trying to locate it. We would want to know, but then we wouldn't know how to handle the information once we had it.

If we did know the exact details of our death, we would almost certainly ruin the rest of our lives by trying to manipulate things so that we would not be in that place on that day, or at least not under those circumstances. This is definitely not the way that we are supposed to act on knowledge of the future; and such an approach will not change the future.

How much better it would be if people would just accept that they are going to die, and then do all they can to make each day count for good between now and when they go. Instead, we waste our time trying to put off or trying to escape facing something that we all know is inevitable.

Now let's return to Bible prophecy. There is a growing number of people who have discovered what the Bible says about the world today. They know that a world government is coming which will eventually turn evil. Sadly, one of the most widely identifiable traits of these Bible prophecy enthusiasts (at least in Australia and America) is their strong advocacy for freedom to own guns. They do this because they want to protect themselves from this coming world government. Their fear about what is coming has led them to think that they can stop it if they just stockpile enough firearms. People in this group also believe in a wide range of conspiracy theories. Many of the theories they espouse show strong signs of paranoia, religious bigotry and racism. Some of the individuals in the prophecy-believing group started with valid revelations about the future, but the fear that it generated within them led them to be sucked in by some of the most bizarre and ridiculous claims that the human mind could imagine. Some of

these people have even become a serious threat to minority groups such as Aborigines and Jews.

Sadly, nothing seems to be more effective in turning people off the whole subject of Bible prophecy than taking a close look at the people who profess most strongly to believe in it. Their knowledge of the future has led them to mount various campaigns to save the world from the coming one-world government. But these same campaigns may have unwittingly sped up the very process that they wanted to stop.

Consider a recent political movement in Australia for example. A woman named Pauline Hanson found strong support from gun-toting fundamentalist Christians who feared a one-world government they saw predicted in the Bible. But the end result was that they brought the other political parties (and the media) closer together in opposition to her. In other words, big government gets bigger and more united, and gains approval for more power for itself, when the public can be shown that a little group of fanatic racists might be plotting to take over the country. The general public did not want to return to the kind of reactionary right-wing philosophies that people fell for in Germany prior to World War II; so they united against such a movement.

Sociologists call this phenomena a "self-fulfilling prophecy". When someone believes strongly enough that an evil government is coming, they will be tempted to react so strongly against the existing government that they will force it to become even stronger as it seeks to defend itself. In other words, their belief alone is enough to make the prophecy come to pass.

But now consider the other possibility. Suppose Pauline Hanson's people had been successful in achieving all the political power that they wanted. Suppose that the sky was the limit. How much power would it take before they would feel that the world was safe from the evil government that they feared? Because they had not thought through such issues to the ultimate conclusion, they had no concept of a point where they could say, "This is enough power." Their paranoia would justify every new measure to increase power for themselves, until they themselves would eventually become the evil world government that they originally feared. As someone has said, "We all believe in total control, as long as we are the ones who wield it."

So either way, whether it comes from the Right or from the Left, the world is going to eventually have a single world government; and it is going to eventually abuse the power that it receives. What is going to happen is going to happen, and just knowing that it is going to happen does not equip anyone to stop it.

This is how it works with most Bible prophecies. Even if you knew the exact time and date when the world would end, it wouldn't do you one bit of good if you were not ready to make the same drastic changes in your life that you should have made just by knowing that you are going to die one day. What it takes to prepare for the end of the world is exactly the same as what it takes to prepare to die.



Having said that (and you will hear much the same again later in this book), there is no doubt in this author's mind that most of you are going to ignore it (if, in fact, you bothered to read this chapter at all). All you really want to know is when it is all going to happen, and what proof there is for such claims. And you want to know it so that you can set about devising a way to alter (or to disprove) it. But that's your problem.

We will move on now to more of the specifics.

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3. The Jig-Saw Puzzle

What makes prophecy so complicated is that it rarely comes right out and says precisely what is going to happen and when. Remember, God is working in a kind of loop between our free will and his knowledge of what will be the result of what we know.

Obviously, as he tells us more about what will happen, it results in responses on our part, which, in turn, will affect the end result. He can only tell us so much, and then he must take into account what our reaction to that will be. If our reaction would be such that it would actually change the outcome that he has predicted, then of course he must alter the prediction or restrict what he says until he tells us just enough to prepare us for the coming event, without us missing the point of the change needing to be internal rather than external.

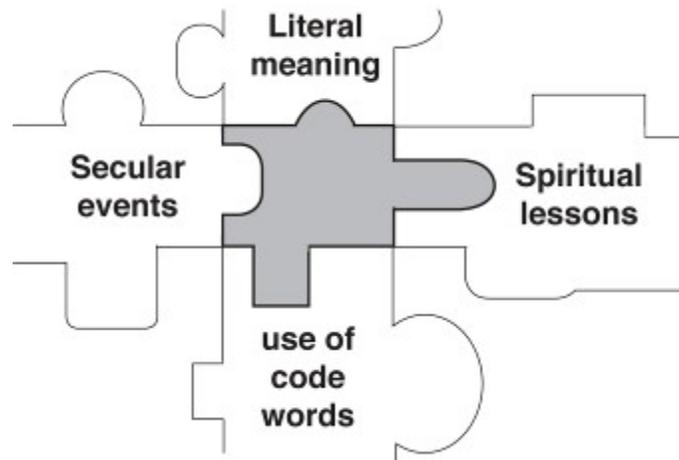
Occasionally there are exceptions to this. When Jonah went through Nineveh shouting, "Forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed!" it was really just a threat more than a prediction. Because the people repented, God did not destroy them at that time. Jonah himself was deeply angered that God had made a fool out of him by not carrying through on the threat. (Jonah 3:4-4:1) (Note: God did, however, destroy Nineveh eventually.)

There are little tricks that God uses to hide certain parts of what he is trying to say. Some parts are hidden to everyone; and others are just hidden to certain people. Jesus said to his closest followers, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to others in parables, that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." (Luke 8:10)

Another trick is to include hidden meanings and double entendres that only become clear as one moves closer to the events that they predict. In Chapter Six we will discuss a prophecy which actually predicted the date when something would happen. However, it included a word which had two different meanings. It could have meant seven days or it could have meant seven years. Because the prophecy was not fulfilled in time for the seven "day" interpretation, and because it was fulfilled perfectly for the seven "year" interpretation, we now know which meaning was the right one.

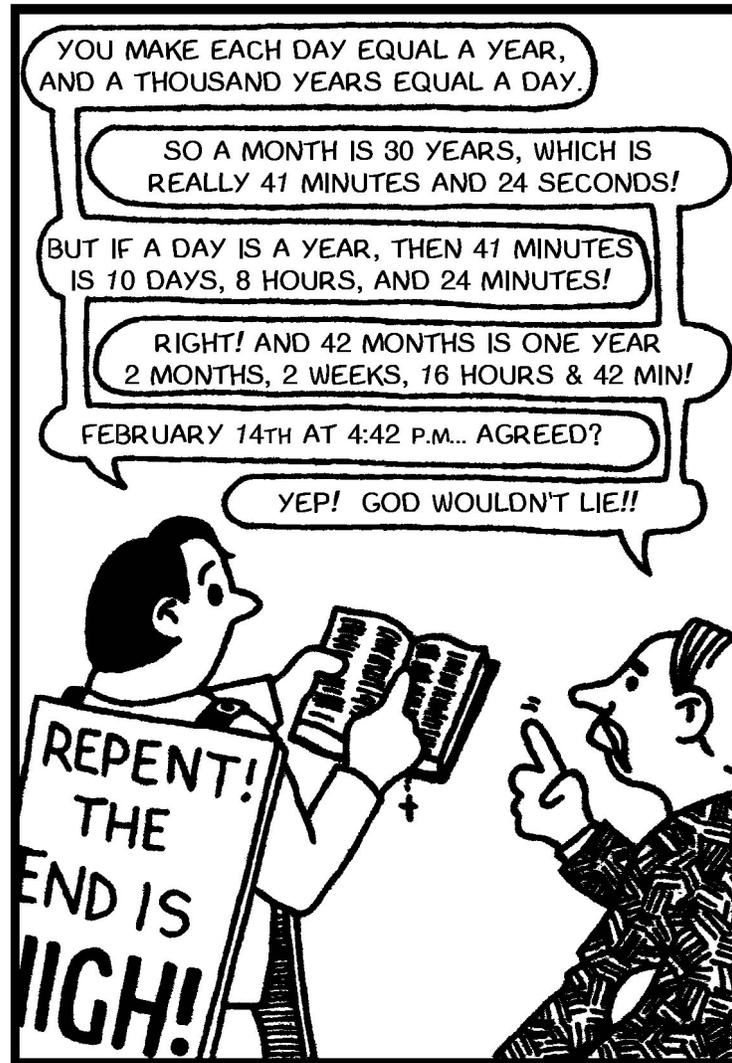
But the people who first heard it would not have known for certain which interpretation was correct. Virtually every prophecy includes some vague terms like that.

Most prophecies are like single pieces in a jig-saw puzzle. They must line up with all of the pieces around them if they are to be considered correct. You might be able to force two pieces together that don't really belong together, but it is very unlikely that the same piece can be forced to agree with all the other pieces around it.



We have suggested four areas where the prophecy must line up with the pieces around it. They are (1) literal meaning; (2) secular events; (3) spiritual lessons; and (4) consistent use of code words. There may be others, but these will do for now.

(1) Literal meaning. If you get the feeling that someone is trying to get a prophecy to say something that it is not actually saying, don't be afraid to challenge the interpretation. Spurious interpretations often focus on key words and ignore the grammatical context of the sentence in which they appear. One of the areas where this most often happens is with numbers. People see a passage which refers, for example, to 1260 days, but because the period of time does not fit their personal theory, they will tell you that it really means 1260 years!



The Year 2000 theory was an example of this. The Bible says that time is nothing to God: "A day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day." (Psalm 90:4) We know God made the world about 6,000 years ago, in just six days, and then he rested on the seventh day. Neither of these two isolated truths is prophetic. They just say the obvious: that God can do more in one day (e.g. create human life) than we could do in a thousand years.

But Bible prophecy does say that Jesus will rule the world for 1,000 years after he returns. So people took the two non-prophetic statements and put them together to form a theory that God spent 6,000 years running the world, and in the year 2000, Jesus would return, so that God could have a 1,000-year rest. But of course the Bible never said that.

(2) Secular events. Ultimately, the proof of the pudding is in eating it. If Jesus had returned on January 1, 2000, then I would have had to back down on what I said before that date. Hindsight is much sharper than foresight, and it is easier to see where a prophecy clearly said something after the "something" actually happens. This reality robs the prophecy of some of its punch, but it can still show

just how clever God is: He's able to tell us something at the same time that he hides it from us until he really wants us to see it. As we said earlier, it keeps us from using our knowledge to upset the flow of events.

Secular events are especially helpful as we get closer to the fulfilment of a prophecy. Certainly things that are happening in the world today are exciting when you compare them with what the Bible says about them. But beware when people start with the newspaper and then try to find some prophetic significance in every headline they read. There is always someone trying to tell you that the Bible predicted Monica Lewinsky, or that it said Diana was going to die in a car accident. Make sure the particular prophecy lines up with the other three parts of the puzzle before you put much faith in it relating to the particular secular event.

(3) Spiritual lessons. As we said earlier, God doesn't just do miracles to entertain us, and this includes Bible prophecies. Even his warnings of judgment are pretty few and far between. Most prophecies are actually trying to teach us something about the world in general; and the lessons from one prophecy to another are fairly consistent. Most of the prophecies of the Old Testament were about the coming of Jesus Christ. Most of the prophecies of the New Testament are about his return. But along with the return itself are important revelations about the futility of trusting any other system or organisation except God himself and his invisible kingdom of love and faith.

(4) Consistent use of code words. This rule may sound a bit strange. But because prophecies are so cleverly hidden from the understanding of most people, it takes a little work to find key words that help to line one prophecy up with another. They not only establish a connection between various passages, but they also give a hint as to what the spiritual lesson is behind them.

For example, most of the Old Testament prophecies about the Jewish Messiah did not use the term "Messiah". There were a number of other code words or phrases. In Daniel 7:13 it was the term "Son of Man". Although Jesus rarely referred to himself as the Messiah (or "Christ"), he repeatedly used the term Son of Man when referring to himself. To the unlearned mind he was saying nothing proud or boastful. After all, we are all sons or daughters of other human beings. He was not claiming divinity or kingship or even that he was the Messiah. This was consistent with what he taught about not over-rating ourselves, and about leaving it to others to praise us. (Luke 14:8-11) Hindsight has revealed the full significance of what Jesus was saying. "Son of man" was a code phrase that led back to Daniel's messianic reference to Christ returning in "the clouds of heaven."

Because of all these factors, we can't teach prophecy by just pointing to a verse that says, "The U.S. is going to be destroyed in the year 2023." We have to link up a lot of jig-saw pieces first, before we can say much with confidence; and even then the prophecy will be part of a bigger lesson that is being taught. When all the pieces start going together, then it can be quite exciting. But it takes a while before this begins to happen.

Appendix, Chapter 3

Jonah 3:4-4:1. Jonah began to enter the city a day's journey, and he cried and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" So the people of Nineveh believed God and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them... And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that he had said he would do to them. And he did it not.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

Luke 14:8-11. [Jesus said:] When you are bidden of anyone to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honourable man than you be bidden of him, and he that bade you and him come and say to you, "Give this man place", and you begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when you are bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room, that when he that bade you comes, he may say to you, "Friend, go up higher." Then you will have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with you. For whoever exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.

Daniel 7:13-14. [Daniel said:] "I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days. They brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

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4. The Revelation

Most of the prophecies in the Bible that are about the End of the World come from the writings of the Hebrew prophet Daniel (More about him in Chapters 5-8.) and from The Revelation, a book written by a man named John. John was one of the first Twelve Apostles. Because of his beliefs, he was sent to live as an exile on an island, where he eventually died. But before he died, his "Revelation" was smuggled out and circulated amongst Christians all around that part of the world.

The Revelation has intrigued and baffled people for centuries. It is so full of symbols and allegories that most people just give up trying to figure it out, after making one or two attempts.

Two hints which could make your job easier: First, break it down into smaller pieces; and second, concentrate on the bigger picture. Smaller and bigger... Sounds contradictory, doesn't it? But if you'll read on, you'll see that it isn't.

There are some major themes and some major divisions in The Revelation. If you study them one by one, it won't matter if you don't understand every single word of the book. At least you'll have a broad overview in which to fit the details.

It helps to think of The Revelation as poetry or music, or even as a painting. Too much analysis can easily destroy the overall feeling that an artist is trying to communicate. Sometimes a work of art just needs to be "experienced" rather than analysed.

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