

END-TIME PROPHECY

World events have really been heating up lately. Hurricane Harvey in Houston, a huge earthquake in Mexico, Hurricane Irma in the Caribbean and Florida, the nuclear missile tests of Kim Jong Un, the volatility of Donald Trump—so many dangerous things hanging over us.

Early this year, the doomsday clock was moved to 2½ minutes to midnight, the closest it has come since 1953.



How close are we to the end? We don't talk about prophecy as much as we used to, but there's still a huge amount of it in the Bible, so it's good to revisit that from time to time.

So let's have a look at some of the prophecies today, and see if we can work out how close we are to the end. One of the main books of prophecy is Daniel. We haven't looked at these prophecies for ages, so let's go through them.

Daniel 2 tells of Nebuchadnezzar and his vision of the huge statue. God gave Daniel the explanation of what it meant.

Daniel 2:37-43—World empires to come

³⁷ “Your Majesty, you are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; ³⁸ in your hands He has placed all mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky. Wherever they live, He has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold. ³⁹ “After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. ⁴⁰ Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. ⁴¹ Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. ⁴² As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. ⁴³ And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.”

Daniel 2:44-45—God's Kingdom to destroy all the others.

⁴⁴ “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. ⁴⁵ This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.”

Does this tell us when Jesus will return? It depends who the iron and clay toes are. We used to say it proved there will be 10 nations in the E.E.C., and we discussed that at great

length, but now there are 28. Even if it is talking about the E.E.C., we don't know how this will happen.

And is it really talking about the toes? Verse 44 seems to be talking about all the kingdoms in the entire statue. And that is definitely right, in that it is true to say that in the days of mankind's kingdoms, God is going to set up His glorious, world-ruling Kingdom.

What is the important thing about this prophecy? Surely it is that man will have a go at setting up his kingdoms, but they will all be corrupt and failures; however, eventually God will sort things out by setting up a Kingdom that will solve all the problems.

We can spend a lot of time arguing about who each of the metals represent, but the overall purpose of prophecy is to show us God knows what will happen, and whatever happens, He is in control. Prophecy highlights the hopeless situation when man rules the world, and that our only hope for a future is in God!

The next major end-time prophecy is in Daniel 7.

Daniel 7:2-6—Three great human kingdoms or empires.

² Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. ³ Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. ⁴ "The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being, and the mind of a human was given to it. ⁵ "And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!' ⁶ "After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule."

Daniel 7:7-8 ⁷ "After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns. ⁸ "While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully."

The 4th is the greatest—seems like the 10 horns are the same as the 10 toes of the previous image. But what is the horn that uproots 3 other horns? There have been many explanations of this, but which is correct? Does it matter? Let's see:

Verses 9-10 ⁹ "As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took His seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of His head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. ¹⁰ A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before Him. Thousands upon thousands attended Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened."

There's no question about what that pictures!

Verses 11-14 ¹¹ “Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. ¹² (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.) ¹³ “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

More about the 4th beast and the Kingdom of God.

So Daniel asked what the meaning is, and here it is, summed up in just 2 verses!

¹⁵ “I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. ¹⁶ I approached one of those standing there and asked him the meaning of all this. “So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: ¹⁷ ‘The four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth. ¹⁸ But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, forever and ever.”

They sum up Daniel 2 prophecy and the prophecies of Revelation and all of world history! Here again, the reason God gives the prophecy is to let us all know whatever happens, He is in control.

Daniel 8 is another interesting vision/prophecy, where Daniel saw a ram with two horns attacked by a goat with one big horn. That horn was broken off and replaced by 4 horns. One of them closed down the daily sacrifices for 2300 evenings and mornings. This is called the “2300 day prophecy.”

God showed Daniel what it meant.

Daniel 8:20-25. In the interpretation, God doesn’t even mention the 2300 days. He just refers to the “vision of the evenings and mornings.”

So it makes you wonder how important the details are. Of course, God wouldn’t have given them if they don’t have some meaning. One day we’ll know, but it might not be until after Christ’s return—then we’ll find out how it all tied together marvellously.

I don’t mind finding out later! I don’t mind if I never know what the 2300 days refer to, as that isn’t important to my salvation. I can be there in the Kingdom whether or not I know those details. Everyone else who has died up until now didn’t know the details, but that doesn’t matter.

The main thing is that this prophecy shows us God is in control, and it is going to work out in the end. Interestingly, this is the point of all of the prophecies we have looked at, and all the others in the Bible!

They are there to point us towards God and faithfulness and obedience to Him, knowing our only hope for the future is in Him.

Let’s now go into the New Testament and see what it says about prophecy. Maybe it explains what the terrible beasts and horns mean for us? Maybe Jesus expounded on them? Well no, He did outline in Matthew 24 etc that He is going to return again, and

prophesied a list of events to happen before that. But He didn't say anything at all about the meaning of the world kingdoms. And Paul and the others didn't refer to them.

But of course we do have more beasts in Revelation. I recently came across an interesting Seventh Day Adventist commentary on this. The S.D.A.'s are keen on prophecy. This is what their latest "Signs" magazine says.

"Effective preaching of Revelation is Christ-centred"

The opening words of Revelation are, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev.1:1). While this phrase shows that Revelation comes from Jesus Christ (subjective genitive), it also shows that the book is about Jesus Christ, the One revealed (objective genitive). While Christ would be the One who revealed the messages of the book to John, the book focuses on His self-revelation and post-Calvary ministry in heaven. He is the central object of the entire book. The book begins and concludes with Him.

As the name of the book shows, Jesus Christ is the main focus of Revelation. He is the key that unlocks the true meaning of the book's content. Any exposition of Revelation's prophecies that focuses on events or people (whether past or future) at the expense of Christ and His relationship with His people entirely misses the central focus of the book...Although future events occupy much of the book, these are seemingly not the book's primary focus. Revelation was not intended to be a collection of predictions written to satisfy our obsessive curiosity about the future. The primary purpose of the predicted events that are recorded—whether those already fulfilled or those yet to happen—is to assure us of Jesus' presence with His people throughout history and its final events. Effective preaching of Revelation must be focused on Christ, not on events."

Let's look at a couple of other prophecies in the New Testament, and see if they support this conclusion.

2 Timothy 3:1-5¹ "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people."

We are living in the last days (but it has been that way for 2,000 years!)

2 Timothy 3:13:¹³ "while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."

The world will get worse.

Verses 14-15:¹⁴ "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

This is what the scriptures including the prophecies do for us! Make us "wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ." Build up our faith and therefore our place in the Kingdom of God forever.

Verse 16:¹⁶ “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

This is what the scriptures, including the prophecies, are for!

Verse 17: “so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

To be put into practice!

The end-time prophecies are given to get our attention, to realise man’s ways will fail, but God’s Kingdom will sort it out, and we need to be sure we are in the Kingdom.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 ¹⁵ “According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

A fantastic prophecy. It doesn’t mention dates and beasts and horns, but it is simple and clear, and something you can hang your hat on! Surely that’s the most important thing. But we want to know when will this happen!

1 Thess. 5:1A “Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates...”

Now it gets to times and dates!

1 Thess. 5:1B-2 “we do not need to write to you, ² for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”

We don’t need to know them! All we need to know is it will come suddenly, so be ready at any time!

Verse 3 “While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.”

It will be devastating for the world.

Verse 4 “But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.”

It will be different for us—we don’t have to be surprised like a thief.

Verse 5 “You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.”

That proves we will know when He is going to return? God will tell us the timetable? Well, that’s not what it says. But it does go on to say why we won’t be surprised, like everyone else.

Verses 6-8 ⁶“So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.”

By being alert, with faith, love and hope.

Verses 9-10 ⁹“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.”

Again it focuses on Jesus Christ.

Verse 11 “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

A great verse to conclude on. And it sums up the purpose of Bible prophecy: it is there to encourage us with the wonderful truth that whatever happens in man’s evil and perverse God-rejecting society, God is going to have the last say, and put it right. The glorious Kingdom of God is going to come and solve all of the world’s problems forever.