

How to Study Bible Prophecy

A Seventh-day Adventist Guide

A Teaching Manual and Study Guide for Serious Students of Scripture

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Preface

This work is written for pastors, teachers, seminarians, and lay members who desire to study biblical prophecy in a manner that is faithful to Scripture, responsible to history, and consistent with the principles of historic Seventh-day Adventism. Prophecy has often been abused through speculation, sensationalism, and date-setting. This manual seeks to restore prophetic study to its rightful place as a means of spiritual formation, doctrinal stability, and preparation for the return of Jesus Christ.¹

Introduction: Why Study Prophecy?

Nearly one-third of the Bible consists of prophetic material. From Genesis to Revelation, God reveals His purposes in advance in order to strengthen faith, expose counterfeit systems, and prepare a people to stand faithful in the closing events of earth's history. Proper prophetic study is therefore not optional for the Christian church; it is essential for doctrinal integrity and spiritual readiness.²

Beyond its informational value, prophecy functions as a formative instrument in the life of the church. By unveiling God's sovereign control over history, prophetic revelation cultivates confidence in divine providence and stabilizes faith amid political, and cultural upheaval. As Seventh-day Adventist theology affirms, prophecy is not merely predictive but pastoral, intended to nurture perseverance, obedience, and hope in the midst of an unfolding cosmic conflict.³

Moreover, prophetic study preserves the eschatological identity of the remnant church. In the Adventist understanding, prophecy delineates the contours of the great controversy between Christ and Satan and clarifies the church's mission in the last days. Without a disciplined engagement with prophecy, the church risks losing both its theological coherence and its sense of historical vocation.⁴

¹ Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding Biblical Prophecy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1974), 15–22.

² *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1955), 25–30.

³ Gerhard F. Hasel, 9–14.

⁴ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, 17–23.

1. The Purpose of Bible Prophecy

Prophecy is given not primarily to predict events, but to reveal the character and purposes of God. Revelation 19:10 declares that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” This means that all genuine prophecy points ultimately to Christ—His redemptive work, His present ministry, and His final triumph. In Scripture, prophecy serves at least four purposes. First, it confirms the divine inspiration of Scripture by demonstrating God’s foreknowledge of history. Second, it exposes false systems of worship and counterfeit religion. Third, it calls God’s people to repentance and covenant faithfulness. Fourth, it offers hope by assuring believers that evil will not triumph permanently.⁵

The revelatory function of prophecy is inseparable from its redemptive intent. Prophetic messages are given not to satisfy curiosity about the future but to draw human hearts into alignment with God’s saving purpose. Ellen G. White repeatedly emphasizes that prophecy is designed to awaken conscience, reform life, and prepare a people for the judgment and the coming of Christ.⁶

Furthermore, prophecy establishes a moral framework for history. By announcing both judgment and restoration, prophetic revelation affirms that history is neither cyclical nor accidental but directed toward a divinely appointed consummation. In this sense, prophecy discloses not only future events but the ethical meaning of the present, calling the church to live responsibly in anticipation of the kingdom of God.⁷

When prophecy is studied merely as a chart of future events, its deepest purpose is lost. True prophetic study leads to worship, obedience, and trust in God’s sovereignty over history.

2. Christ-Centred Interpretation

Jesus Christ is the centre of all biblical revelation. In Luke 24:27, Christ interpreted to the disciples “in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” This principle must govern all prophetic interpretation. Christ-centered interpretation guards against two dangers: intellectualism without devotion, and speculation without salvation. Every prophecy must be asked: What does this reveal about Christ’s character? How does this advance His redemptive mission? How does it prepare a people for His return? In Adventist theology, Christ is revealed in prophecy as Creator, Redeemer, High Priest, Judge, and Coming King. Any interpretation that obscures Christ’s saving work or diminishes His mediatorial ministry is fundamentally flawed.⁸

⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 343–350.

⁶ White, *The Great Controversy*, 593–599.

⁷ Jacques Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 27–35.

⁸ Jacques Doukhan, 45–60.

Christ-centred interpretation preserves the unity of Scripture and the coherence of the plan of salvation. Prophetic symbols and timelines find their true meaning only as they illuminate the person and work of Christ, especially His priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Thus, prophecy is not an independent discipline, but a Christological witness embedded within the larger redemptive narrative.⁹

3. The Historicist Method

The historicist method understands prophecy as a continuous unfolding of history from the prophet's time to the end of the world. This method was used by the Protestant Reformers and adopted by early Adventists. Historicism contrasts with preterism, which confines prophecy largely to the ancient past, and futurism, which projects most prophecy into a brief future period. Historicism alone provides a coherent, continuous framework that accounts for the major empires of Daniel 2 and 7 and the progressive development of Revelation. By tracing prophecy through verifiable historical events, historicism protects interpretation from subjectivism and anchors it in history.¹⁰

Within Seventh-day Adventist theology, historicism is not merely a methodological preference but a theological necessity. By affirming that prophecy unfolds progressively across the Christian era, historicism preserves the relevance of prophetic revelation for successive generations of believers. This method affirms that God speaks not only to the prophet's immediate audience but to the entire church as it moves through the great controversy toward its consummation.¹¹

Moreover, historicism provides a publicly accountable framework for interpretation. Because its claims are correlated with identifiable historical developments, they may be examined, tested, and refined in dialogue with historical scholarship. This guards prophetic interpretation against arbitrary speculation and ensures that doctrinal conclusions remain anchored in both Scripture and history.¹²

Finally, historicism safeguards the eschatological identity of the Adventist movement. By locating the rise and development of religious and political powers within a continuous historical sequence, historicism clarifies the church's understanding of its own place in prophetic history and its mission in the closing phase of the great controversy.¹³

⁹ William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 41–52.

¹⁰ Shea, 3–18.

¹¹ Shea, 19–27

¹² Hasel, *Understanding Biblical Prophecy*, 103–110.

¹³ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, 35–42.

4. The Year-Day Principle

The year-day principle teaches that in symbolic prophecy, a prophetic day represents a literal year. This principle is grounded in Scripture itself (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6). It is essential for understanding long prophetic periods. Without this principle, the 2300 days of Daniel 8:14, the 1260 days of Daniel 7 and Revelation 12, and the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 cannot be meaningfully interpreted. Historically, the year-day principle has been confirmed by the precise fulfilment of these periods in history. This principle demonstrates that God governs history according to a precise prophetic timetable.¹⁴

The year-day principle undergirds confidence in divine sovereignty. The exact correspondence between prophetic periods and historical fulfilment testifies that history unfolds not at random but according to a divinely ordered plan. This precision strengthens faith in God's foreknowledge and affirms that the unfolding of world events remains under His providential control.¹⁵

5. Scripture Interprets Scripture

Biblical prophecy must be interpreted by the Bible itself. Isaiah 28:10 teaches that truth is built "line upon line, precept upon precept." Symbols are not to be explained by imagination, newspapers, or current events, but by inspired biblical usage. For example, beasts represent kingdoms (Daniel 7:17), waters represent peoples (Revelation 17:15), and horns represent political powers (Daniel 7:24). This method ensures objectivity and theological consistency.¹⁶

This principle preserves the self-interpreting authority of Scripture. By allowing inspired writers to define their own symbols and patterns, the interpreter submits human reason to divine revelation and resists the intrusion of external philosophical or political agendas into the text. Prophecy is thus read not through the lens of contemporary speculation but through the coherent testimony of Scripture itself.¹⁷ Moreover, this method safeguards doctrinal unity. Because prophetic symbols recur across multiple books of the Bible, their consistent interpretation establishes continuity between Daniel, the Gospels, and Revelation. This intertextual coherence ensures that prophetic conclusions are not the product of isolated proof texts but arise from the unified witness of the biblical canon.¹⁸

Scripture-interprets-Scripture disciplines the interpreter spiritually as well as intellectually. By refusing to impose private interpretations upon the text, the student of prophecy cultivates humility and reverence before the Word of God. This posture

¹⁴ Hasel, *Understanding Biblical Prophecy*, 87–101.

¹⁵ Hasel, *Understanding Biblical Prophecy*, 87–95.

¹⁶ Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 7, 812–820.

¹⁷ Hasel, 55–62.

¹⁸ Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 7, 845–852.

preserves both exegetical integrity and spiritual fidelity in the study of last-day events.¹⁹ Never put into Scripture your own interpretation; allow Scripture to interpret itself. Revelation comes from God and not us; spiritual things are spiritually discerned.

6. Symbolism and Apocalyptic Language

Apocalyptic prophecy communicates through symbols because it reveals realities that transcend ordinary language. These symbols compress vast historical processes into vivid imagery. Literal interpretation of symbols produces confusion and sensationalism. Instead, symbols must be interpreted according to their biblical definitions, literary context, and historical application. This protects prophecy from both rigid literalism and uncontrolled allegory.²⁰

Symbolism is understood as a divinely chosen mode of revelation suited to the cosmic scope of apocalyptic truth. By clothing transcendent realities in concrete images, God enables finite human minds to apprehend themes such as judgment, redemption, conflict, and restoration. These symbols are not arbitrary but arise from a consistent biblical vocabulary shaped by earlier revelation.²¹ Moreover, disciplined symbolic interpretation preserves theological balance. It resists the extremes of crude literalism, which distorts meaning, and unrestrained allegory, which dissolves meaning. By grounding symbols in Scripture and history, the interpreter maintains both clarity and restraint, ensuring that prophetic conclusions remain faithful to the intent of the inspired text.²² Symbolic language serves a formative and pastoral function. Apocalyptic imagery awakens moral seriousness, cultivates watchfulness, and sustains hope in times of crisis.

7. The Role of the Sanctuary

The doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary stands at the centre of Adventist prophetic theology. Daniel 8:14 announces a decisive phase in Christ's ministry: the cleansing of the sanctuary. Hebrews 8–9 reveals Christ as our High Priest ministering in the heavenly sanctuary. This doctrine explains the investigative judgment, the meaning of 1844, and the final preparation of God's people. Without the sanctuary, Adventist eschatology loses its coherence.²³

The sanctuary doctrine integrates prophecy, Christology, and soteriology into a unified framework. It affirms that the atoning work of Christ did not terminate at the cross but

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 19–23.

²⁰ Shea, *Selected Studies*, 55–72.

²¹ Jacques Doukhan, 15–24.

²² Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding Biblical Prophecy*, 63–71.

²³ Ellen G. White, 121–135.

continues in His priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Thus, prophetic chronology is inseparable from the ongoing application of redemption in the plan of salvation.²⁴

Furthermore, the sanctuary doctrine serves as the indispensable theological framework for the investigative judgment, positioning it not as a contradiction to justification by faith, but as its final eschatological vindication. Within this context, the judgment functions as a cosmic demonstration, revealing to the entire universe the efficacy and reality of God's redemptive power within the experience of the believer. Consequently, the sanctuary model provides a sophisticated synthesis of divine justice and mercy, harmonizing them within a singular, coherent process of universal reconciliation.

8. Historical Fulfilment and Verification

True prophetic interpretation must be verified by reliable historical fulfilment. Daniel's prophecies accurately predict the rise of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The 1260-year period finds fulfilment in the medieval papal supremacy ending in 1798. History is not used to control Scripture, but to confirm its accuracy. Fulfilled prophecy strengthens confidence in God's Word and assures believers that unfulfilled prophecies will also be accomplished.²⁵

Historical fulfilment functions as an apologetic witness to divine inspiration. The correspondence between prophetic prediction and historical event provides objective evidence that the Scriptures originate not in human foresight but in divine revelation. Fulfilled prophecy thus stands as a public testimony to the reliability of the biblical canon and the sovereignty of God over the course of human history.²⁶ Moreover, historical verification establishes continuity between past, present, and future. By tracing fulfilled prophecies across successive empires and epochs, the interpreter perceives a coherent pattern of divine action unfolding through time. This continuity assures believers that the God who has acted faithfully in the past will also complete His purposes in the future.²⁷

Finally, historical fulfilment guards against both skepticism and fanaticism. It restrains speculative excess by grounding interpretation in documented events, and it strengthens faith by demonstrating that God's word does not fail. In this way, history becomes not the master of Scripture but its servant, confirming the truthfulness of prophetic revelation.²⁸

²⁴ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, 843–852.

²⁵ Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 201–225.

²⁶ Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding Biblical Prophecy*, 111–120.

²⁷ Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, 101–112.

²⁸ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, 65–72.

9. Ethical and Spiritual Application

Prophecy is never merely intellectual. Its purpose is moral and spiritual transformation. Daniel and Revelation call God’s people to patience, obedience, faith, and endurance (Dan. 12:3, 10; Rev. 14:12). Prophetic knowledge without holy living produces pride and fanaticism (1 Cor. 8:1; 2 Tim. 3:5). True prophetic study produces humility, watchfulness, missionary zeal, and readiness for Christ’s return (Matt. 24:42–44; 1 John 3:2–3; Titus 2:11–13).²⁹

In Scripture, prophetic revelation is consistently linked to ethical response. The visions of judgment and deliverance summon God’s people to repentance and covenant faithfulness (Dan. 4:27; Rev. 22:11). James affirms that authentic faith must manifest itself in obedience (James 1:22), while Jesus Himself declares that readiness for His coming is demonstrated through faithful living and responsible stewardship (Matt. 25:1–13, 14–30).

Thus, prophetic understanding is finally tested not by intellectual precision alone but by transformed character. As Paul teaches, the ultimate goal of all divine instruction is “love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). In this way, prophecy fulfills its highest purpose by preparing a people morally and spiritually for the return of Christ.

10. Warnings Against Speculation

History testifies to the dangers of prophetic speculation. Date-setting, sensational predictions, and conspiracy theories bring reproach upon the gospel and discredit the prophetic message. Adventists are called to sober, reverent, and disciplined study. Where Scripture is silent, the interpreter must remain silent. Where Scripture is clear, the interpreter must speak with confidence and humility.³⁰

Scripture repeatedly warns against presumptuous interpretation. Jesus Himself declared that “of that day and hour no one knows” (Matt. 24:36) and cautioned His disciples against being misled by false predictions and deceptive signs (Matt. 24:4–5, 23–26). The apostle Paul likewise warned against being “quickly shaken in mind” by speculative teachings concerning the end (2 Thess. 2:1–3).

Moreover, biblical prophecy condemns curiosity that exceeds divine revelation. Moses affirms that “the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us” (Deut. 29:29). Peter warns that no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation (2 Pet. 1:20), and Paul commands that believers do not go “beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6).

²⁹ White, *The Great Controversy*, 593–602.

³⁰ Hasel, *Understanding Biblical Prophecy*, 201–215.

Therefore, true prophetic fidelity is marked by restraint as well as conviction. By refusing speculation and adhering strictly to revealed truth, the interpreter honours the authority of Scripture and preserves the credibility of the prophetic message before the church and the world.

Study Guide and Discussion Questions

Chapter 1

- Explain the phrase “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”
- How does prophecy strengthen faith in divine inspiration?
- In what ways should prophecy shape personal devotion?

Chapter 2

- Identify ways Christ is revealed in Daniel and Revelation.
- How does Christ-centred interpretation protect against error?
- Discuss the danger of separating prophecy from the gospel.

Chapter 3

- Compare historicism, futurism, and preterism.
- Why did the Reformers favour historicism?
- How does historicism provide continuity in prophecy?

Chapter 4

- Trace the biblical basis for the year-day principle.
- How does Daniel 9 confirm the accuracy of this principle?
- Why is this principle essential for Adventist theology?

Chapter 5

- Give three examples of symbols explained by Scripture.
- Why is Scripture the safest interpreter of symbols?
- How does this method prevent subjectivism?

Chapter 6

- What are the dangers of literalizing apocalyptic symbols?
- How does symbolism enrich prophetic meaning?
- Discuss the balance between symbol and reality.

Chapter 7

- Explain the connection between Daniel 8:14 and Hebrews 9.
- Why is the sanctuary central to Adventist identity?
- How does this doctrine relate to judgment and assurance?

Chapter 8

- Identify key historical fulfilments in Daniel 7.
- How does fulfilled prophecy confirm inspiration?
- What lessons should be drawn from prophetic history?

Chapter 9

- How should prophecy transform Christian character?
- What virtues does Revelation emphasize?
- How can prophecy inspire mission?

Chapter 10

- What historical examples warn against speculation?
- Why is humility essential in prophetic study?
- How should the church address sensationalism?

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