

## Chapter 2

### Future History

Sounds like an oxymoron, doesn't it? *Future history*. Who can say with any assurance what is going to happen tomorrow? Popular psychics of recent years, of course, have tried, for there are big bucks to be made from a gullible public if you can hit some paltry percentage of your guesses. Tell 'em what musician will be sleeping with what movie star next month, and the TV talk shows will throw significant amounts of cash at you and promote your latest book. Street corner gypsies will read your palm if you'll grease theirs, telling you what they think you want to hear about your future. Or go uptown to the "young lions of the merchants of Tarshish," excuse me, the financial prognosticators of Wall Street, where fortunes aren't told, they're *made*, by predicting what will happen to other people's money—i.e., making educated guesses.

None of this is future history. There is no certainty that any of these predictions will come to pass, and their accuracy doesn't correlate to how much money you pay for them. The vaunted Nostradamus made a tidy little sum publishing his cryptic quatrains—considered great entertainment by the cognoscenti of his day—but no one acted on them; no one changed the course of their life because of what they said. How could they? They're vague to a fault, apparently the result of a great deal of effort to make them precisely that. The best you could do with them was to scan the events of the day trying to find something that sort of lined up. Occasionally, something did. Even a blind squirrel finds an acorn now and then.

But future history? No. Even if they're right sometimes, you can't trust Jeanne Dixon, Nostradamus, Madam Sabrina of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, or even your broker at Morgan Stanley to be as accurate as next Wednesday's newspaper. (You can't trust the newspaper either, but let's not go there.) History, ideally, is a true account of events that took place in the past. You can trust it, learn from it, build your future upon it. Wise men study history so that they might avoid the mistakes of their forebears. They look at what they did right, and emulate them, and look at what they did wrong, and do something else. History is a stern schoolmaster. Those who ignore its lessons are doomed to repeat the class.

But if history teaches us anything, it's that we *do* ignore those lessons. We always have. Solomon nailed it: "**That which has been will be; that which is done will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.**" (Ecclesiastes 1:9) Oh, sure, we have technology the ancients couldn't have dreamed of, computers, frozen pizza, and flush toilets, but human nature hasn't changed one whit. Given the chance, we will chase after everything under heaven trying unsuccessfully to fill the void

within us that only God can fill, just like Solomon said. We can look at history and try to figure out where we went wrong. We can peer ahead, hoping to avoid the disaster we suspect is lurking there. Or we can choose to live blithely in the present, willingly ignorant of both the past and the future. But we will never know peace until we come to terms with the One who holds the past and the future in the palm of His hand and calls it all *now*.

God knows how we're built—after all, He built us. He's aware that we have needs, and that the highest of these is the need to know Him. It's just the way we're wired. Yahshua, quoting Moses, put it like this: **“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”** (Matthew 4:4) Perhaps that explains why the Word of God is replete with history—both past and future. God wants us to know Him, to have a relationship with Him, to understand who He is, what He's doing, and what He plans to do in our future. Because we live within the constraints of time, He—who does not—must meet us within the framework of historical reality if He is to meet us at all.

Our relationship to God, time-wise, is like watching the Rose Parade on New Year's Day. Not on TV, you understand, but freezing our toes off in person in Pasadena. We are on the ground; we can see the float right in front of us, and we have a clear memory of the marching band that just passed. If we listen very carefully, we can hear the klop klop of horses' hooves on Colorado Boulevard, telling us something about the immediate future: there's an equestrian unit coming. Beyond that, only our knowledge of Rose Parades of years past can give us a clue, and then only in the most general of terms, as to what's coming in the more distant future. That is, unless we have the official Tournament of Roses program. With the written schedule in hand, we'll know that after the horses and the float from that big insurance company, the Shriners in their funny hats and miniature automobiles will arrive. The program helps us appreciate the effort that went into putting on such a grand event, and, on a more practical level, will let us make sure we're not stuck standing in line at a hot-chocolate vendor's cart when the guys in the little cars show up.

But while we're down on the ground, watching life moment to moment, there is someone above us who sees the entire parade route from start to finish in one eye-gulp. This guy, from his lofty perch in the gondola of the Fuji blimp, witnesses every float, marching band, equestrian team, and even the fellows in the little cars—all at the same time. The entire parade is present tense to him.

All of this has a direct parallel in the parade of life—the march of human history. We live our lives one day at a time, trying to learn from the past and wondering what the future will hold. All the while, there is a God in heaven who sees the whole thing, end to end. This same God has given us His “parade program,” the Bible, so we'll remember what's past and have an idea what's

coming. Some of us have been watching the parade so long, we think it goes on forever, but the program states quite plainly that it does not. It had a beginning, and it will have an end. We can hear the music of the last marching band as it makes its way toward us. We can see the last float coming up the street. The end is almost here.

Look again at your program. See all those ads? Yes, I know. Most everybody ignores them. But they tell us something important: there is life outside the parade. The event happens on New Year's Day, but we still have the whole year ahead of us, 364 more days to work and play, to laugh and love, to walk hand in hand with our Father, wide-eyed in awe at his greatness. The parade we're watching is the whole of human history, but it's only the first day. When the last float passes, when the music fades, it will merely mark the end of the beginning. Eternity lies before us.

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So two things are apparent. First, God alone is in a position to know the future, because He alone exists outside of the bounds of time. Even his self-revealed name, Yahweh, means "I am," i.e., "the self-existent one." Second, He has chosen to reveal something of our future to us. (It's not *His* future, mind you—all time is present to God.)

As I hinted earlier, revealing what will happen is one of the few tools God has to prove his deity to us without forcing us to worship him, and that is something He doesn't want to do. That may come as a surprise, but it makes perfect sense. What's the one thing the Creator lacks within himself? Companionship, fellowship. Let's face it—it would be really hard to take God to court and try Him by a jury of his peers. He *has* no peers. Who knows how many eternities God thought about this before he started, but at some point He decided to do something about it. He started out by creating angels. (That's a guess, of course; SF3.) These wonderful creatures were built to last forever, and they served God in the spirit realm. I believe that although they had the capacity for loyalty, they did not have the capacity for love, not really.

Eventually, one of their number, the most splendiferous angel of them all, became filled with pride, grew jealous of God, and rebelled, drawing away a third of the angelic host with him. Thus Ezekiel reports of Satan: **"You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.... You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.... You became filled with violence within, and you sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God...**

**Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor....” (Ezekiel 28:12,15,17)**

Isaiah describes it like this: **“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’” (Isaiah 14:12-14)** “I will be *like the Most High?*” God was looking for companionship, not competition. This wasn’t exactly what He had in mind. Then John describes how Satan got his following: **“His [the Dragon’s] tail drew a third of the stars of heaven [a metaphor for angels] and threw them to the earth.” (Revelation 12:4)**

I’m pretty sure none of this surprised God. It did, however, prove that angelic beings weren’t going to fill the bill as God’s companions. Instead, He would create an order of beings that, while lower than the angels, were made in His own “image and likeness”—beings with the capacity for love, not just loyalty. Their relationship with God would be different from the angels’ because their nature would be different.

But that would require some infrastructure. God converted some of His energy into matter—something that had never been done before (SF8)—and built a universe, complete with galaxies, solar systems, and planets, so His companions would have a nice place to live. Call me crazy, but I firmly believe that man is the end product of God’s creative process, the *only* reason He made the cosmos. This is not some arrogant religious-whacko theory akin to the “earth-is-the-center-of-the-universe” nonsense that almost got Galileo burned at the stake. But think about it. Does God need galaxies? What good do super-novae or quasars do Him? He lived quite nicely *forever* without them. We, on the other hand, need the heavier elements formed in stars for our very existence, for we are physical beings as well as spiritual, made quite literally of “the dust of the earth.” The wonders of creation are not so much an indicator of God’s greatness as they are a measure of his love.

And that, God’s love, is the key to companionship. The capacity to love is to some extent what gives us “the image and likeness” of God, for God *is* love. You see, love is the one thing that cannot be forced, even by an omnipotent deity, because if it is, it’s no longer love but something else. In that, it’s fundamentally different from obedience, loyalty, or even worship. It can’t be compelled, bought, stolen, held for ransom, or even manufactured; it can only be earned. It can’t be sold or bartered; it can only be given away. And here’s the rub: the capacity to love requires the capacity *not* to love. If the object of God’s affection cannot reject Him, then accepting Him is a meaningless concept.

That brings us back to God's little paradox. How can he have a loving relationship with us—His would-be companions—if he leaves us no choice but to accept and reciprocate his love? If we have no choice, our love is nothing more than obedience; but if we *do* have a choice, our obedience demonstrates our love.

So He gave us a choice, a very simple way to demonstrate our trust, our love for Him, in the Garden of Eden. He said, “Do anything you want, but *don't* eat fruit from this one tree, kids.” Then God left us alone for ten minutes—or ten thousand years; it doesn't really matter—and we rejected His love. We woofed down the forbidden fruit like Oliver Twist with a bowl full of Fruit Loops. That didn't surprise Him either, but I'm sure it saddened Him. Knowing what was going to happen, He already had a remedy ready, an antidote for the poison we had so eagerly consumed: He would divest Himself of His glory, enter our history as a mortal man, and offer Himself up as a sacrifice. And through this sacrifice, we could again become God's companions, readmitted to His fellowship, just like Adam was before he chose to walk out on God.

But the remedy—the redeemer—didn't just waltz into the Garden that afternoon and make everything swell again. It would be some time before He physically made his appearance. God wanted to reestablish a bond of trust with his companions first. So what was the first thing He did? He uttered *prophecies* to all the participants in the first sin:

**“Yahweh said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel....’”** By tempting the first humans to doubt Yahweh's word, Satan had made himself God's mortal enemy. So Yahweh informs him that a descendant of these same humans—and specifically of the woman—would ultimately be his undoing.

**“To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you....’”** Yahweh had created the man and the woman as equal partners. But the woman would, due to her key role in the first sin, henceforth be “ruled” by her husband, and women from that day forward would be frustrated in their desire to wield the authority that men held. “Women's rights activists” must blame Eve, not Adam—and certainly not Yahweh—for the injustice they find in the world.

But the man didn't get off Scot free. **“Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, “You shall not eat of it,” cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.’”**

(Genesis 3:14-20) The close, intimate fellowship that Adam had enjoyed with his Creator had been broken. His sin had separated him from his God, and as a result he had become mortal—his body would now grow old and die.

Three players, three predictions. *Prophecy Principle Number One*: pay attention to the object of the prophecy. God said something different to the serpent, to Adam, and to Eve. Determining who the prophecy is about will keep us from jumping to erroneous conclusions—sometimes. It's not always this easy to tell who the subject is. For example, in the passages about Satan quoted above, Isaiah had begun by speaking out against the King of Babylon; in Ezekiel's tirade, the prophet was hammering the prince of Tyre. In each case God shifted the subject in mid-prophecy. Earthly kings were used as metaphors for Satan. We need to stay on our toes.

Only God knows the future, because He alone exists independent of time. And He, from the very beginning, has shown a willingness to tell us what's coming. Why, then, don't most of us know what to expect? Why do we worry, fret, plan, and scheme? Why do we hedge our bets—compromise with a world system we know is flawed and corrupt? It's because we don't appreciate, deep down inside, that our Creator God actually *is* in control.

A few examples will serve to demonstrate that a solid faith backed with a knowledge of prophecy could give us a degree of peace most of us never experience. **“He took the twelve aside and said to them, ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.’ But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.”** (Luke 18:31-34) If we *knew* what God had planned, if we really understood where we stood in Yahweh's grand scheme, we wouldn't sweat the small stuff. We could cheerfully declare with Paul, **“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”** (Philippians 1:21)

On a practical level, correctly applying Biblical prophecies to our lives can save us from unnecessary pain. Yahshua warned Jerusalem, **“If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”** (Luke 19:41-44) By the time Titus besieged the city in 70 A.D., thousands of Christians, familiar with this prophecy, had already left town. Those who stayed died or were enslaved.

As if to make my point for me, Paul writes, **“Now all these things [i.e., Israel's misfortunes in the wilderness] happened to them as examples, and they were written**

**for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”** (I Corinthians 10:11)  
If we study to learn the mindset of God and familiarize ourselves with his prophetic plan, we will be in a position to live according to His will in a sinful world, avoiding the coming wrath: we too can get out of Jerusalem before the Romans show up—if we know what God has predicted.

The study of prophecies that have already been fulfilled can go a long way toward correcting the misconception that this world is out of God’s control. Beyond that, they will tell us a great deal about how Yahweh intends to bring about His prophecies that have not yet come to pass (which, after all, is the subject of this book). *Prophecy Principle Number Two*: Yahweh doesn’t change. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Thus if we can determine how His prophecies were fulfilled in the past, we will be in a better position to predict how they will be fulfilled in the future. Though “His ways are higher than our ways,” though His judgments are unsearchable and His methods “past finding out,” the fact remains that He went to a great deal of trouble to see to it that we had information, and lots of it, that described our future. It’s there for a reason. It’s there because He loves us. When He said we’re supposed to “comfort one another with these words,” what words was He talking about? They were words of prophecy!

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I mentioned how psychics and prognosticators can achieve fame and fortune by guessing correctly some of the time. God’s prophets were held to a slightly stiffer standard: **“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’** And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which Yahweh has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which Yahweh has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it **presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”** (Deuteronomy 18:20-22) The flip side of this truth was stated by Jeremiah: **“When the word of the prophet comes to pass, the prophet will be known as one whom Yahweh has truly sent.”** (Jeremiah 28:9)

In fact, Yahweh works both sides of the street, vindicating the words of His true prophets by bringing their prognostications to pass while confounding the false prophets who presume to speak their own mind in His name. **“Thus says Yahweh, your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: ‘I am Yahweh, who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by Myself, who frustrates the signs of the babblers, and drives diviners mad, who turns wise**

men backward, and makes their knowledge foolishness; who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers.” (Isaiah 44:24-26)

John put it like this: **“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”** (Revelation 22:18-19)

Okay, got it. (1) Don't attribute false doctrine to Yahweh (which, by the way, is the *real* meaning of the Third Commandment), (2) don't ascribe deity to false gods, (3) don't add to or subtract from His revelation, and (4) don't deny the truth of God's Word—or you're toast. Now you know why I'm so careful about putting the real thing in a bold font. My ramblings may help you understand what God meant, but don't confuse them with Scripture.

Consider what else Moses said: **“The secret things belong to Yahweh our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”** (Deuteronomy 29:29) Moses realized that Yahweh didn't tell us everything—our feeble minds couldn't handle the strain. We're on a “need to know” basis: what He *did* tell us, He told us for a reason. “All the words of this law” boils down to this, if I'm not mistaken: **“Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one! You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength...You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** (Deuteronomy 6:4, Leviticus 19:18) Yahshua insisted that all of the Law and the Prophets hung upon these two interrelated concepts. Did you catch the connection? God reveals things to us so that we might love Him, or more to the point, return His love.

Being called as a prophet of God had its downside, besides the obvious problem of getting stoned—in the literal sense—if you announced something that God didn't actually reveal. The sad fact was that God's message was often unpopular, especially among the ruling elite. And since they often didn't know the One who'd sent the bad news, they attacked the messenger instead. Some things never change. Yahshua Himself pointed this out to the scribes and Pharisees of His day in his own meek and gentle way: **“Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.”** (Matthew 23:33-36; see also Luke 11:49-51) He sure had a way with words. Murder had been a time-honored way of silencing the truth from the first generation onward: The Zechariah He speaks of here is not the prophet, but the father of John the Baptist. Yahshua's prediction,

by the way, *was* fulfilled within that generation—less than forty years later—when Titus tore Jerusalem apart, stone by stone.

Prophets as a class had it rough. Jeremiah preached for forty years. Nobody listened. They finally threw him into a cesspool. Isaiah had a long and illustrious career, capped, legend has it, by getting himself sawn in two. But occupational hazards notwithstanding, God’s messengers felt compelled to tell the truth, regardless of the consequences. Amos put it like this: **“Surely Yahweh does nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? Yahweh has spoken! Who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:7-8)** Later, Peter and John, when told to shut up and go home, remarked, **“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you [religious leaders] more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19-20)**

For all their dedication and courage, the prophets’ role was temporary, like our program for the Tournament of Roses Parade. Between every line they wrote was the understanding that the day would come when the light of reality would make their words seem pale by comparison, like a candle outdoors on a brilliant summer’s day. That doesn’t lessen the significance of their service, however, for without their words, many of us would not survive to see God’s bright tomorrow. Paul said it best: **“Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (I Corinthians 13:8-13)**

None of the spiritual gifts are designed to last beyond our mortal bodies. But love is. Prophecies will *fail*? Yes. They were meant to guide us in this life, not beyond. Besides, the shocking truth is, God doesn’t always keep his word. Before you stone me, let me point out that there are several times in scripture where God clearly didn’t do what he told His prophet He’d do, and the reason was always the same: mercy. *Prophecy Principle Number Three*: God’s wrath is always tempered by his love; He postpones judgment till the last possible moment because He does not desire any of us to perish. He alone knows when our sin has reached the point of no return. Compare Genesis 15:15-16—**“Now as for you [Abraham], you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”**—to Numbers 21:23-24, some four hundred years later: **“So Sihon [king of the Amorites] gathered all his people together and went out against Israel in the wilderness, and he came to Jahaz**

and fought against Israel. Then Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land.”

Because of his mercy, God didn’t wipe out a rebellious nation of Israel and start over with Moses, as He threatened to do. And He didn’t destroy Nineveh in forty days, as He proclaimed He would through Jonah. Instead, he showed mercy, patience, love—in the first case because the prophet interceded for the people, and in the second case because the people repented—buying their city another century of life.

We have no idea how deep the river of God’s mercy runs. But here’s another hint. Ever wonder why the oldest man in the Bible, Methuselah, lived so long? He was the grandfather of Noah, and he died (at the extremely ripe old age of 969) the same year as the flood. This kind of “coincidence” begs us to dig beneath the surface to figure out what God may have been up to. Clue number one: he was the son of Enoch, a godly man with an intriguing story of his own—the second man listed in the “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11. We’ll look at his story a little later. Could it be that Enoch named his baby boy something prophetically significant? At first glance, it seems not. Methuselah (Heb. *Methuwselach*) comes from two words, *math* meaning man, i.e., adult, and *shelach* meaning dart or spear. Not much help. But if we look at the primitive roots for *those* two words, we discover something provocative. *Math* is from *mathay*, meaning “to extend,” as in, “a man’s years are extended beyond those of a child.” *Shelach*, “spear,” comes from *shalach*, “to send away or cast out, hence, to forsake.” Some Hebrew scholars suggest that his name could be rendered, “when he dies (that is, at the extension of his years), it shall be sent.” Was Enoch saying his son’s life would personify the extension of man’s time on earth before they were cast out? Pretty thin, you say. Perhaps, but the guy did live longer than anyone else, before or since. I’ve come to distrust coincidences. I’ll put my money on God’s mercy any day.

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Alright, then. Let’s get down to cases. I’d like to examine several Old Testament prophecies and their fulfillments, with an eye toward comprehending the ones that are still ahead of us.

Luke records this story about Yahshua: “**So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of Yahweh is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to**

set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of Yahweh.' Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'" (Luke 4:16-21)

The quote was from the prophet Isaiah, but Yahshua had stopped and closed the book in mid-sentence. Isaiah had gone on to say: "...and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Yahweh, that He may be glorified." (Isaiah 61:2-3) Why didn't Yahshua quote the whole thing? Because only the first part was being fulfilled there and then—during His first-century advent. By quoting this portion of the passage, He had claimed to be the promised Messiah ("He has anointed Me...") but by cutting it short, He was saying, in effect, "I'm not going to do all these things at this time." He was demonstrating *Prophecy Principle Number Four: peaks and valleys—the concept of split fulfillment.*

Where I live, the terrain is quite hilly. There are places where you can stand and see four or five ridges, one right after the other. But you can't see what's between them. The only way to tell how deep or wide the valleys are is to go down into them, to "live through them." Prophecy is often like that. The seer is shown a series of mountaintops, but he can't tell whether they're all clumped together or whether there are deep valleys of time in between them. In this case, Isaiah saw two groups of events that would take place a couple of thousand years apart, but he didn't know their fulfillment would be separate. He saw everything but the timing. When Christ came the first time—laying aside His glory—He brought us the good news of His salvation, healing and freeing us from the bonds of sin. But when He returns, He will have assumed His glory once again, wreaking righteous vengeance on those who have chosen to reject Him and comforting those, especially among the Jews, who have accepted His gift of love.

The principle of peaks and valleys caused a great deal of confusion in Yahshua's day. Even His disciples thought, at first, that He had come to overthrow Rome and set up His kingdom on earth. But it should not be a source of confusion for us today. With the benefit of hindsight, we can know what they did not: we need not assume that a prophetic passage will be fulfilled all at once. God, rather, will do things in His own sweet time, and in His own inimitable fashion.

To clarify the principle, let's look at one more example, the prophecies concerning the downfall of Babylon. This was no mean city. About fifty miles south of present-day Baghdad, it was originally founded by Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah. It was the premier city of the post-deluvian world, rising and

declining in successive waves, as great cities often do. In 626 B.C., Nabopolassar the Chaldean threw off the yoke of Assyria (there are a bunch of Biblical prophecies predicting that, too) and rebuilt the city. His son Nebuchadnezzar II became its greatest monarch, dispensing God's judgment upon an apostate and rebellious Judah in 586. Nebuchadnezzar's vision, interpreted by the Jewish captive Daniel, pinpointed Babylon as the first of four great gentile world powers.

But before Nebuchadnezzar had drawn his first breath, Babylon's fall had already been predicted by the prophets of Israel. Isaiah, writing over 150 years before the fall of Jerusalem, had said: **"Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who will not regard silver; and as for gold, they will not delight in it. Also their bows will dash the young men to pieces, and they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye will not spare children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there. But wild beasts of the desert will lie there, And their houses will be full of owls; Ostriches will dwell there, and wild goats will caper there. The hyenas will howl in their citadels, and jackals in their pleasant palaces. Her time is near to come, and her days will not be prolonged."** (Isaiah 13:17-22)

He went on to say, **"For I will rise up against them,"** says Yahweh of hosts, **'and cut off from Babylon the name and remnant, and offspring and posterity,'** says Yahweh. **'I will also make it a possession for the porcupine, and marshes of muddy water; I will sweep it with the broom of destruction,'** says Yahweh of hosts." (Isaiah 14:22-23) Another prophet predicted: **"They shall not take from you [Babylon] a stone for a corner nor a stone for a foundation, but you shall be desolate forever,"** says Yahweh." (Jeremiah 51:26)

So between the two of them, God predicted that the city of Babylon—then approaching its glory days—would be destroyed as completely as Sodom and Gomorrah had been, never to be inhabited again, even by wandering Bedouins. It would be both a home for desert creatures and a swamp—seemingly a glaring contradiction.

The key, besides God's omniscience of course, is the principle of peaks and valleys, split fulfillment. This is how the history unfolded. Half a century after the fall of Judah, as the Persians under Cyrus pondered ways to breach the formidable walls of the city, a couple of Babylonian deserters wandered into their camp. They pointed out that one of the things that made the place siege-proof was that the Euphrates ran *under* the wall. Perhaps the Persians could too. Cyrus conferred with his counselor, Chrysantas, who opined that if they could divert the river, they could waltz in and take the place without firing a shot, more or less. The course of the river had tended to shift from time to time anyway, wandering off and losing itself in marshes to the west of the city. Why not divert the Euphrates with a huge

trench? Cyrus did just that, and on October 13, 539 B.C., he took Babylon while its overconfident regent drank himself under the table, celebrating, no doubt, the fact that *nobody* would ever get over his wall—the strongest city wall on earth at the time. (*That* story is recorded in Daniel 5.) Interestingly, though the Persian commander, Cyrus, was credited with conquering the city, Daniel says that his ally, Darius the Mede (a.k.a. the Gobryas mentioned in contemporary inscriptions as the man who defeated Babylon without a battle), took control of the kingdom, just as Isaiah had predicted.

But the prophecies were a long way from being fulfilled. Xerxes (a.k.a. Ahasuerus, the Persian king whose queen was Esther) sacked the place in 478 B.C. while quelling the rebellion of Bel-shimmani and Shamath-eriba. Alexander the Great took it from the Persians in 331 and planned to restore it to its former glory, but he died before he could do much, at the ripe old age of 33. Coincidence? If you say so.

The infighting among Alexander's generals following his death eventually landed Babylon in the hands of the Seleucids, who took one look at the estimate for rebuilding the crumbling ruin and opted for a brand new capital city instead, Seleucia, forty miles north on the Tigris River—effectively doing for Babylon what Interstate 40 did for Route 66. Incredibly, they didn't use any of its massive stones that had been quarried at such great expense; apparently the marsh that had inundated much of the city made them too hard to haul away. Babylonian *bricks* have been found elsewhere, but not its stones. Jeremiah was right.

Eventually, the ever-fickle Euphrates played its part again and changed course, leaving the city high and dry. By the time of Caesar Augustus it was virtually uninhabited; Strabo lamented, "The great city has become a desert." It was used as a walled hunting preserve by the Persians, and a few die-hards struggled to keep the temple of Bel going until about A.D. 75. But even this wouldn't last; the once mighty seat of Chaldean power was swallowed by the desert, awaiting the archeologist's spade. Just like Sodom and Gomorrah.

These days, Babylon is of interest only to historians and megalomaniacs. Saddam Hussein, who would have died happy if he could have gone down in history as a modern-day Nebuchadnezzar, actually rebuilt a palace on its original Babylonian foundation between 1982 and 1989. But nobody *lives* there—nobody was even allowed in to see it for over a decade after the first Gulf War.

Bottom line? As unlikely as the prophecies sounded when Isaiah and Jeremiah (and Ezekiel, Habakkuk, etc.) penned them, they came to pass exactly as God had said they would. The "peaks" they saw were spread out over seven hundred years, but it all came to pass. "But what," you may ask, "ever happened to **'Her time is near to come, and her days will not be prolonged'**...? Seven centuries sure sounds like 'prolonged' to me." Forget the infrastructure for a minute. If you consider that the

*government* of Babylon under the Chaldeans lasted a mere forty-seven years after they destroyed Jerusalem, you'll have to admit that its demise was rapid indeed.

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All of this brings up another point. *Prophecy Principle Number Five: Backup.* God doesn't put all his eggs in one basket, and, to scramble my metaphor, He always backs up his files.

The famous portrait of George Washington that hangs in the White House, the one that served as a prototype for the engraving on our one dollar bill, was painted by Gilbert Stuart. Most people don't realize that Stuart painted three portraits of the first President from life, and he kept an unfinished one for himself to use as a model for future work—much to Martha's chagrin. Whenever he needed money, he'd crank out another Gilbert Stuart "original" of Washington. He painted over sixty of 'em before he was through. Different backgrounds, different costumes, but always the same half-smiling tight-jawed face. Likewise, God has painted many portraits of things to come—different details, varying points of view, but all based on the same reality.

Peter said, **"...No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."** (II Peter 1:20-21) We can therefore expect any significant prophetic event to be examined in several different passages, often by several different prophets. God does not ask us to take any man's word for anything. Rather, his Holy Spirit instructs different men to reveal different things about the same future event. Only when we examine each facet of the diamond do we gain a full appreciation for its beauty. This redundancy—this system of back-ups—also goes a long way toward ensuring that God's Word survives our sometimes woefully inadequate (and sometimes flat-out *wrong*) translations.

We've looked briefly at Babylon, which was taken to task by Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, Zechariah, and the Sons of Korah. Similar seven-lane highways could be followed to Nineveh, Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Phoenicia, Damascus, Ethiopia, Arabia, Elam, and yes, Israel—*especially* Israel. Daniel in the Old Testament and John in the New Testament apparently saw some of the same events, though with radically different imagery. This kind of redundancy is ubiquitous in scriptural prophecy.

In similar fashion, a prophet of God was often given the same information more than once. We see Joseph dreaming about his brothers' sheaves bowing down to his, and later the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. (Gee, I

wonder what that could mean.) Joseph recognized the “Sesame Street Factor” at once when he heard about Pharaoh’s dreams: **“Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, ‘The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do....’ The dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.”** (Genesis 41:25, 32) In the same way, Daniel was given several very different visions, many years apart, describing the times of the gentiles. God clearly doesn’t mind repeating himself if it helps us understand what He’s trying to tell us. We can expect the same rule to apply when we look at prophecies as yet unfulfilled.

Related to this concept is *Prophecy Principle Number Six*: God often reveals different aspects of a future event separately. When the police interview the witnesses to a crime, they expect to hear slightly divergent descriptions of the scene. One witness says the bad guy was wearing blue jeans. Another says he had on a red shirt and a baseball cap. One says he saw the perp waving a gun; another says he saw the guy throw something black into the bushes. This kind of testimony is complementary, not contradictory. It has the ring of truth. As a matter of fact, if the accounts are *identical* they smell to investigators like collusion, an attempt to hide the real story. In the same way, Biblical prophets are merely telling us what they saw at the scene of the crime. They never claim to have told us everything; on the contrary, they themselves often seem unaware of the significance of what they’ve witnessed.

It’s like the old story of the four blind men and the elephant. The first one grabs the tail and says the pachyderm is like a rope with a frayed end. The second hugs a leg and concludes that the thing is some sort of tree. The third feels the trunk, and pronounces the animal to be a species of large snake. And the fourth feels his way down the elephant’s side and announces that the beast is a mighty wall. Though they seem to be in complete disagreement, they’re actually all correct, but nobody’s got the full picture. Prophecy is like that.

I suppose the best example of this principle is the body of prophecies concerning the Messiah. There are several hundred of them in the Old Testament. Where did the prophets say He would hail from? Micah said he would come from Bethlehem Ephrathah—David’s home town, a few miles south of Jerusalem. Hosea, on the other hand, predicted that he would be “called out of Egypt.” Isaiah, not to be outdone, referred to Him as a “shoot [*netzer*] out of the stem of Jesse”—the same word being the origin of the name of the Galilean town of Nazareth, where Yahshua grew up; thus Matthew points out that He was *expected* to be a Nazarene. The three prophecies are seemingly contradictory, yet they all fit the human history of Yahshua like a glove (and, by the way, nobody else that we know of).

How about Messiah's mission? Isaiah says, **"He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.... He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken.** (Isaiah 53:3, 7-8) This is one of many predictions of a Messiah who would suffer and die. If words mean anything at all, there is no way to make these verses apply to the nation of Israel and the trials they've endured, though the Jews have been trying valiantly to do that very thing for the last two thousand years. But Isaiah's prophecy fits the life and death of Yahshua so well that to explain them away or ignore them is nothing short of intellectual suicide.

It's far easier for the Jews, of course, to take the "reigning Messiah" passages literally. The same prophet says, **"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will perform this."** (Isaiah 9:6-7) When Isaiah talks out of this side of his mouth, everybody responds, "Yea, verily! Bring it on!" But we're looking at two advents of the same Messiah, two sides of the same coin. You can't spend one side and keep the other. And so it is with as-yet-unfulfilled prophecy. We must be prepared to deal with seemingly contradictory evidence.

This leads us to *Prophecy Principle Number Seven*, the "That's Impossible" factor. God sometimes progressively narrows the field through successive revelations until literal fulfillment is virtually impossible; and only then does He bring it to pass. Yahweh delights in doing what can't be done: you know, raising the dead, parting the Red sea, making the sun stand still, stuff like that; you can almost hear Him chuckling, "If this were easy, any god could do it."

Figuring out these conundrums usually requires some digging, but the gems we can find are beautiful indeed. At issue here are faith and information. If we see an apparent contradiction in scripture, we need to have faith that God doesn't make stupid blunders; No, it's *us*—we just don't have enough information yet.

My favorite Scriptural "impossibility" is the lineage of the Messiah. It begins in the Garden of Eden. In the Genesis 3 passage quoted above, God began by intimating that sin would eventually be overcome via the human race, the "seed of the woman." That rules out orangutans and amoebas. After the flood, Noah narrowed it down to one of his three sons, Shem: **"And [Noah] said: "Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem...."** (Genesis 9:26-27) Later, God told Abraham, a

descendent of Shem, **“I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”** (Genesis 12:3) The line passed through Abraham’s son Isaac (not his half-brother Ishmael): **“Then God said: “No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.”** (Genesis 17:19) Then *his* son Jacob, the second-born of twins, was given the nod: **“And Yahweh said to [Rebekah]: ‘Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.’”** (Genesis 25:23)

The patriarch Jacob, a.k.a. Israel, identified Judah—the fourth of his twelve sons—as bearer of the Messianic line: **“Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh [‘he to whom it—i.e., the scepter—belongs’] comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”** (Genesis 49:8-10)

Let’s pause and take a breath. So far, God has narrowed the field five times (not including the *de facto* cut at the flood) effectively eliminating millions of people from consideration as Messiah’s ancestor. Note that the prophecies are getting more specific and detailed as time progresses. Note also that not once did God choose the chronological firstborn son to carry the Messianic torch (though listed second, Japheth was Shem’s older brother—see Genesis 10:21), as would have been expected by the people involved, reminding us that manmade traditions don’t mean a whole lot to Yahweh.

Also, there’s an interesting prophetic twist about Judah’s scepter—the symbol of royal authority. Israel’s first king, Saul, was from the tribe of Benjamin, *not* Judah. But once David succeeded him, 640 years after the prophecy was spoken, the throne of promise was never occupied by a king from any Jewish tribe other than Judah. The wording of the prophecy was precise: he didn’t say that no other tribe would hold the scepter, only that it wouldn’t ever *depart* from Judah. (Herod’s clan, the first kings since the Babylonian captivity, don’t count. They were not, properly speaking, Jewish, but were Idumaeans—descendants of Esau—and were placed and maintained in power by a foreign gentile government.) Yahshua the Messiah was a Jew, of the tribe of Judah. He could trace his lineage all the way back. Technically, his claim to the throne of David is what ultimately got Him crucified. But within a generation of His death, the genealogical records of the Jews were up in smoke with the rest of Jerusalem. This means that after A.D. 70, and certainly after A.D. 135 when the Romans came back and finished the job, no Jew could prove—or even demonstrate—his

lineage. From that time on, it was impossible to present a legitimate, verifiable Messianic claim.

Okay, back to the prophecies. King David was the next to be pinpointed as someone in the Messianic line. Nathan the prophet came to him and said, **“Yahweh tells you [David] that He will make you a house [a royal dynasty]. When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.”** Now here’s the kicker: **“If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.”** (II Samuel 7:11-16)

Sufficiently confused? You should be. Is God referring to David’s son Solomon, or to the ultimate King, the Messiah? The answer is *yes*. *Prophecy Principle Number Eight*: there can be both near and far fulfillments for a single prophecy. It’s maddeningly hard to sort out sometimes, but God likes to put interrelated truths into the Biblical Blender and hit *frappe*. Let’s look at the details here. David’s physical son will reign in his stead: that’s obviously Solomon. God says He will establish *his*—Solomon’s—throne *forever*. That statement will soon get us into trouble, but let’s skip over it for now. The phrase “If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him...” makes no sense. Solomon *did* commit iniquity, but most certainly did *not* receive the “blows of the sons of men.” Rather, God’s mercy stayed with him, as the passage clearly predicts. So is the prophet talking about the Messiah? Christ committed no iniquity. What’s going on here?

The key is in the little word “If.” The Hebrew word *‘asher* is a primitive and rarely used relative pronoun that can mean almost anything: when, who, which, what, if, how, because, in order that, etc. *Strong’s* notes that “As it is indeclinable, it is often accompanied by the personal pronoun expletively, used to *show the connection*.” Right. So the phrase really means, “If—or when—He *is associated with* iniquity....” The prophet is predicting the suffering of Christ! Then he finishes up by saying David’s house, kingdom, and throne will be established forever.

Everything rolls along nicely until we get to the last few years of the kingdom of Judah. God has finally had enough, and allows Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to haul the flower of Judean society off into captivity. The king that broke the camel’s back, so to speak, was Jehoiachin, also known as Jeconiah, or simply Coniah. Jeremiah prophesied, **“As I live,” says Yahweh, “though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet on My right hand, yet I would pluck you off; and I will give you into the hand of those who seek your life, and into the hand of those whose**

face you fear—the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the hand of the Chaldeans. So I will cast you out, and your mother who bore you, into another country where you were not born; and there you shall die. But to the land to which they desire to return, there they shall not return. Is this man Coniah a despised, broken idol—a vessel in which is no pleasure? Why are they cast out, he and his descendants, and cast into a land which they do not know? (Jeremiah 22:24-28) The prophet says that both Jeconiah *and his descendents* are cast out. The inference is that neither he nor anyone in his line will ever prosper on the throne of David—and certainly not in the land of Israel.

Nathan just got through telling us that Solomon’s throne will be established forever. But Solomon’s royal line ran right through Jeconiah, who is toast, prophetically speaking. Oops. Now the only way the Messiah can ever reign is if he legally occupies the throne of Solomon through the line of Jeconiah—all of whose descendents have been disqualified. And He *still* has to be a physical descendant of David—we aren’t allowed to “spiritualize” any of this away. This whole Messiah thing isn’t looking too promising. Has God blown it?

There are two genealogies of Yahshua in the New Testament. The first is in Matthew, and sure enough, there’s Jeconiah, ugly as sin, right between Josiah and Shealtiel. This lineage runs through Joseph, the legal father of Yahshua. But Yahshua was born of a virgin; the prophets predicted it, and the gospels reported it. Mary’s genealogy, recorded in Luke, proves that Yahshua was indeed a descendent of David, but not of Solomon. Mary’s line went through David’s son Nathan (named, no doubt, in honor of the prophet). Thus while it looked for a moment like the coming of Messiah was impossible, the careful examination of prophecy points to one man, to the exclusion of all others: Yahshua of Nazareth.

By the way, there are a few big American denominations who have officially rejected the doctrine of the virgin birth as *just too weird*. Sorry, folks: no virgin birth, no salvation. Don’t blame me. Blame Jeconiah.

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Let’s recap, then. Making sense of Biblical prophecy requires us to determine the context and the subject of the passage in question. Applying Prophecy A to Subject B is known in theological circles as “stupid.” We need to be especially careful not to confuse Israel with the Church; they’re two different things— notwithstanding the confusion that inevitably arises when God uses Israel as a metaphor for all of His redeemed. Just as a carpenter uses a hammer *and* a saw to get the job done, Yahweh employs both Israel and the Church, but in different roles.

Yahweh Himself, though, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. More to the point, He is consistent in his methods and modes of revelation. So if we can figure out what He's done in the past, we can be confident about what He has told us concerning the future. And because God exists outside the bounds of time as we know it, He is not limited to simple, one-time solutions; He can—and does—split up the fulfillments of His prophecies over many years and many events. A partial fulfillment is like a down payment, demonstrating God's intention to make good on His promises when the time is right. God has also been known to fulfill prophecies more than once—a near fulfillment foreshadowing a more distant one.

Not only are the fulfillments often split up, but so are the prophecies themselves. They are almost never given as complete, independent proclamations, but are rather doled out one piece of the puzzle at a time. They're invariably repeated elsewhere in scripture, often in a different manner, from a different perspective, by a different prophet, with different imagery. Whether a later prophecy adds information to an earlier one, or a different metaphor is used to present the same truth, there is almost always some degree of redundancy in scripture. Truth is built up "line by line, precept upon precept." Prophecy, in this respect, is no different from any major doctrine.

The fascinating thing about it is that the body of revelation was brought to us by scores of writers over a span of at least fifteen hundred years, and yet there are no real contradictions in any of it. To me, that proves what Peter said, that the Holy Spirit is behind it all. God seems to delight in predicting the "impossible," only to create a solution so unlikely it's sublimely ridiculous. I must confess to having a degree of impatience with people who insist Christianity requires an unacceptable "leap of faith," as if you have to check your brain at the door in order to buy into it. I have found, rather, that it takes far more faith *not* to believe—to assume that the hundreds of prophecies that have already been fulfilled came about by accident, or luck, or blind coincidence—without the direct intervention of an omnipotent deity.

God knows exactly what He's doing. The prophet Isaiah threw down the gauntlet, challenging false prophets to predict what would happen, and why: **"Gather together and come, you fugitives from surrounding nations. What fools they are who carry around their wooden idols and pray to gods that cannot save! Consult together, argue your case, and state your proofs that idol worship pays. Who made these things known long ago? What idol ever told you they would happen? Was it not I, Yahweh? For there is no other God but me—a just God and a Savior—no, not one!"** (Isaiah 45:20-21, New Living Translation) If we understand what Yahweh has told us through His prophets, coming to trust in Him does not require a "leap of faith," but merely a step out of the shadows into the light.