

BIBLE PROPHECY



The Christadelphians

WHAT EXACTLY IS BIBLE PROPHECY?

Think about these three situations:

A. Two parents are talking about next year's holiday. It always seems to rain when you take a holiday at home. Maybe they should try the Mediterranean this time. It is usually warmer there, but with all the upsets from climate change, you cannot be sure. If only they could look into the future, and know for certain whether or not the sun will shine in their holiday week!

B. At a trade fair for children's toy manufacturers, shop owners came in their hundreds to place orders for next Christmas. But how can they decide which toys to promote? What is likely to prove most popular next winter? Will it be an electronic hand-held game, or a new type of construction kit? If only they could look into the future and know for certain which one will sell the most!

C. A young married couple are trying to buy a house. What sort of mortgage should they take out? Should they choose a standard repayment mortgage with variable interest rates, or a different type with the rate of interest fixed for the next ten years? Will interest rates increase? How can they be sure? If only they could look into the future and know for certain what will happen!

In all these cases prophecy would be very helpful. A dictionary definition of prophecy is “a prediction of future events”. There is an implication that such a prediction is going to be accurate. The future event must actually take place, otherwise the prophecy is of no use.

This is the big problem with the future – none of us can be sure about it. Even with the most powerful computers, weather forecasters can only make guesses about what will happen just a few weeks ahead. We make our plans, but we cannot be certain they will be fulfilled. We may be prevented by unforeseen circumstances from doing what we hoped. For example, we might be struck down with ill health and end up confined to our home, unable to do what we expected. Human life is very uncertain.

However, the Bible says that God does know the future. He knows what will happen. More than this, God can make things happen. He is in control of our world. Just think about these words that God wrote in the Old Testament about Himself:

For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure'.”¹

So, God knows everything – right from the beginning to the end. He can predict with certainty, for He already knows what will happen in the future. What He has proposed will happen. Although we humans are unable to predict future events, God can. The next question is – has He made predictions? Are there prophecies from God which we can read and trust?

¹Isaiah 46:9-10 (Isaiah chapter 46 verses 9-10).

Bible quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

THE PROPHETS

In most of the capital cities of the world there are diplomats, who have been formally appointed to represent their native country. The embassy in which they work is even regarded as being a small part of their native country. When they speak, they do so with the authority of the government they represent.

In a similar way, God chose ambassadors to give His messages to people. In the Bible they are called prophets. These men were chosen to speak God's words to God's people. Most of the time they were concerned with the daily lives of their fellow citizens, but on many occasions they predicted the future. One prophet wrote these words:

"Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets." ¹

There are 66 books in the Bible, written over many centuries, both before and after the birth of Jesus Christ. Many of these books record God's revelations to the prophets – what God wants to tell us about Himself, about ourselves, about Jesus Christ and His purpose with this world.

Some of the names of the prophets may sound familiar – for example, Moses and Elijah. Many prophets have books in the Bible that carry their name – such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. At the end of the Old Testament there is a collection of twelve books, each of which has the name of a prophet as its title, including Jonah, Micah, Joel, Zechariah, and Malachi.

There was an obvious problem that faced people who were living in Israel all those centuries ago. How did they know who was a true prophet? How could they be sure that the prophet was really sent and appointed

¹ Amos 3:7

by God? Throughout the books of the prophets, we read the words “The word of the Lord came to me saying...” or “Thus says the Lord...” These were easy words to speak, but who was genuine and who was not?

On one occasion God made a promise to Moses. He predicted the future. He said that one day He would send a prophet like Moses himself, and that when he came, the people would need to listen to this prophet.¹ It is clear from the New Testament that God was speaking about Jesus Christ, who would be the greatest of all the prophets (see Acts chapter 3 verse 22). This prediction was made to Moses over 1,500 years before it actually happened. But when God said that the people must listen to this prophet, He also said they should ignore false prophets, men who pretended to speak from God, usually to make money. The problem was – how would they know which prophets were false? That’s exactly what it asks in verse 21 of Deuteronomy 18:

**“How shall we know the word which the
LORD has not spoken?”**

The answer of God is interesting. It explains why there is prophecy in the Bible. Verse 22 says:

**“When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing
does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which
the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it
presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”**

That is the reason why Bible prophecy, the predicting of the future, is so important. It proves that the Bible is God’s word. And if it really is God’s word, we can trust it, and it can change our lives.

We would now like to put the Bible to the test.

¹ Deuteronomy 18:15-22

TEST 1: THE COMING OF JESUS

There was something about the birth of Jesus that was completely different from the birth of everyone else. His father was God! The God of the Bible, who created this world in which we live, was the Father of Jesus Christ. God performed a miracle on Mary that enabled her to have a child without a human father.¹ But here is something amazing. The birth of Jesus had been expected for a long time, not just for nine months, but for centuries. This is going to be our first test of Bible prophecy. The Old Testament contains prophecies about Jesus' birth, his ministry, his death and resurrection. How could the Old Testament writers and prophets make predictions about Jesus, long before he was born, unless God inspired them to write these things down?

¹ Luke 1:34, 35



The following table contains a series of Bible references about Jesus. We encourage you to look up these prophecies, remembering that you are reading words written hundreds of years before the events actually happened.

Prophecies about Jesus Christ	Old Testament Ref	New Testament Fulfilment
God would be his Father	1 Chronicles 17:13	Hebrews 1:5
His virgin birth	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:22-23
The announcement of his coming	Isaiah 9: 6-7	Luke 1:30-35
His birth at Bethlehem	Micah 5: 2	Matthew 2:5-6
The visit of the wise men	Isaiah 60:3 & 6	Matthew 2:1-12
His being taken to Egypt	Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:13-15
His miracles of healing	Isaiah 53:4	Matthew 8:17
His entry into Jerusalem	Zechariah 9: 9	Matthew 21:4
The betrayal by Judas	Psalms 41:9	John 13:18
Sold for 30 pieces of silver	Zechariah 11:12-13	Matthew 26 v15
The enemies of Jesus	Psalms 22:6-8	Matthew 27:39-43
His crucifixion	Psalms 22:14 & 17	Luke 23:33-35
Clothes shared out at his crucifixion	Psalms 22:18	John 19: 24
Gall and vinegar offered at his crucifixion	Psalms 69:21	Matthew 27: 34
His resurrection	Psalms 16:8-10	Acts 2:25-28

This table contains just a small sample of the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus. There are four records of his life in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). They contain over 100 quotations from the Old Testament. There are also many events recorded and words spoken in the life of Jesus that link with indirect references in the Old Testament. Some of these prophecies were fulfilled by people with no

knowledge of the Old Testament, such as the Roman soldiers who divided Jesus' clothes between them.

This underlines the accuracy of Bible prophecy. These predictions were made long before the time of Jesus. They pass the test. The prophets who spoke and wrote these prophecies were driven by the Spirit of God. They would never live to find out whether their words would come true. But the prophecies did come true, to the letter.

TEST 2: WHERE ARE THE JEWS NOW?

At the present time there are over 170 nations recognised by the United Nations. Over the past sixty to seventy years the number has increased, because many nations have obtained their independence. Some of these new nations not only became independent but also changed their name.

In the course of history, countries' names and territories have changed countless times. This is true of world empires that no longer exist – such as the Assyrians, the Medes and the Persians, the Hittites, the Babylonians and many others.

For the second test of Bible prophecy we turn our attention to a nation that existed over 3,000 years ago and still exists today. It is a nation about which God has made many promises and prophecies in the Bible. If we find that these prophecies have come true, we will know that God wrote this book. The nation is Israel, the Jewish people. We can divide its history into three different periods.

1: 2,000 BC - The Beginning

2,000 BC marked the beginning of the Jewish nation. In the book of Genesis we read that God chose a man called Abram (later renamed Abraham) to be the father of this new nation. When God called him, He made him many promises. One of them was this:

“He said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions... but in the fourth generation they shall return here.’”¹



In this prophecy God outlined what would happen to the descendants of Abraham over the next four hundred years. There were four points:

1. During this period the nation would live in a foreign country
2. They would suffer affliction for four hundred years
3. They would eventually come back to the land Abraham lived in
4. They would leave the foreign country with great possessions

All this happened. By the time of the great leader Moses, Abraham’s descendants had grown into a sizeable nation. They were living in Egypt, but enslaved to the Egyptians. Under the direction of God, Moses led the nation out of Egypt. Because the Egyptians had suffered during the Ten Plagues that Israel’s God brought on them, they were keen for the Israelites to leave, and handed over much of their wealth to make sure that all the Israelites left their land.² Then began Israel’s long journey through the wilderness, until they arrived back in the land where Abraham once lived.

Precisely, to the letter, these predictions made to Abraham over four hundred years before, happened to his descendants. Bible prophecy was proved true by later events.

¹Genesis 15:13-16 ²Exodus 12:36-37



2: 600 BC

The nation of Israel settled in the land promised to them. They had a succession of kings. Moses had given them God's laws to follow, but they obstinately turned their backs on God and worshipped the gods of the surrounding nations.

Eventually the Lord God decided to punish the people in a dramatic way. He told them that Babylon, the superpower of that time, would conquer the nation and take them captive:

“Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Because you have not heard My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,’ says the LORD, ‘and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around... and this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,’ says the LORD; ‘and I will make it a perpetual desolation...’”¹

¹Jeremiah 25:8-12

So once again God promised the nation of Israel would move to another land. But, He said, after seventy years they would return. History records that these prophecies from Jeremiah came true. King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem in 587BC, destroyed the city and the holy temple, and took the people captive to Babylon. For the time being, the nation came to an end. They had no king, and were outcasts from their own country. But before long the Babylonian empire was replaced by the Medes and Persians, and Cyrus, the new king, permitted the exiled people to return to their homeland. So, as God foretold, 70 years later in about 520BC Israel, also known as the Jews, came back to their land and settled there again. Jeremiah's prophecy had come true. Sadly, things went slowly downhill. After the Jews rejected Jesus' call to repentance in the first century AD, the Romans drove the Jews yet again from their homeland.

3: Today

At the beginning of the 20th century there were very few Jews in the land of Israel. There was no State of Israel. Scattered around the world, God's people had been homeless for centuries.

But many years before, at the time of Jesus' crucifixion, his disciples had praised Herod's beautiful temple that was still being built in Jerusalem. Jesus made a prophecy about the temple which no doubt surprised them. He said:

*"These things which you see, the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down."*¹



¹Luke 21:6

The disciples wanted to know when this would happen. They asked for signs that would tell them this destruction was near. They also asked for signs about the second coming of Jesus. Jesus made it clear that God was going to punish the people because they had forsaken His ways. He gave them signs that would show when the destruction of Jerusalem was near, and also signs to show what the world would be like when he returned to set up the Kingdom of God.

It is worth reading the whole of Luke chapter 21. It contains many exciting prophecies. Although Jesus said that the nation of Israel would temporarily come to an end, he made it very clear that eventually it would be restored. This is how he described it.

“They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led away into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”¹

For a third time, we can see a prophecy of the return to the land of Israel. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. By 135 AD all Jews were banished from the land of Israel. But even though they were scattered through many countries, and forced to endure persecution and shame, the Jewish race survived.

Things changed for the Jews during the 20th century. In the early part of that century they began to return to the land first promised to Abraham so long ago. In 1948 the State of Israel was created, despite much opposition by the Arabs. Since then there has been a long period of conflict. In 1967, as a result of the Six-Day War, Jerusalem returned to the control of the Jews for the first time since the first century, just as Jesus had prophesied.

The very fact that Israel exists today as a nation, and Jerusalem is in the hands of the Israelis, is a direct fulfilment of the prophecies Jesus made.

So, three times we have seen Bible prophecy proved true by later events.

¹Luke 21:24

TEST 3: PROPHECIES ABOUT THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

Although there are many good things about today's world, they are easily forgotten under the weight of so much that is wrong. When we think about the growing population, the resources running out, climate change and the dreadful living conditions for millions of people, most of us feel pessimistic about the future.

Yet the Bible is confident about the future. It says a time is coming when what is wrong now will be put right. It promises a new world over which Jesus Christ is to be king, and where there will be peace, justice and food for all. Later, we shall return to the subject of the Kingdom. The reason for mentioning it at this stage is because the Lord Jesus Christ also gave a description of what the world would be like just before his return to be the King. In general terms he described our world in these words:

“And there will be signs in sun, in the moon, and in the stars, and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”¹

When Jesus spoke of the sun, moon and stars, he was using Bible language to describe the ruling powers in the earth, and by sea and waves he meant the nations of the world. This symbolism is found in many prophecies in both the Old and New Testaments.² In these words Jesus prophesied a time when there would be great distress in the world, a time of fear and foreboding. It would be a time when there would seem no way out of the world's problems. These words fit absolutely the times in which we live.

¹Luke 21:25-26 ²For example, Isaiah 13:9-11, Ezekiel 32:2,7-8

But he continues in the next verse:

“Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

If Jesus was describing the world in which we are living, this is exciting news. We can expect that Jesus Christ will soon come back to this earth, to bring about the Kingdom of God.

But was Jesus really describing the world we live in? To help answer this question we need to look at other Bible prophecies concerning the era before Jesus Christ returns to this earth. We find one such prophecy in a letter Paul wrote to his friend Timothy:

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”¹

Here is another Bible prophecy, describing the days just before the return of Jesus Christ. And these verses describe perfectly the attitudes and problems that face society today.

Jesus Christ gave another description of the world at the time of his coming, in the following words:

“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven’.”²

¹2 Timothy 3:1-4 ²Luke 21:10-11

Combining these three Bible prophecies of world conditions just before the return of Jesus we can draw up the following list:

1. Turmoil in the countries of the world
2. World problems without any solutions
3. Fear and dread of what might happen
4. Moral standards disappearing, with everyone doing what they think is right with no regard for the consequences
5. God and the Bible increasingly ignored, with society living for pleasure
6. Countries at war with each other
7. An increasing number of earthquakes
8. Widespread famine, with much of the world population missing the basic needs of life

This is the Bible describing our world. This is Bible prophecy being fulfilled.

Our tests demonstrate that we can have complete confidence in Bible prophecy. We saw the life of Jesus Christ predicted in the Old Testament. Our conviction was increased when we found all that the Bible said about the future of the Jewish nation came true. Now, in this chapter, Bible prophecy has accurately described the world we live in.

None of us can be happy with the state of the world today. Maybe we share in the fear and foreboding of which Jesus spoke. There seems no way out of the problems of the world. So what does the Bible say will happen next?



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

We are now ready to look into the future. We have already seen how the Bible predicted events that came to pass. It told us about the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth 2,000 years ago. It outlined the destiny of the Jewish nation. It spoke of events in today's world. So by now we can feel confident to ask the Bible about the future, beyond our time. What is going to happen next?

We are going to select just two events which God has said will happen next.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

When Jesus gave a prayer to his followers for them to copy, he said:

"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."¹

Clearly it is God's intention to create His Kingdom on the earth. The coming of this kingdom has been predicted many times in the Bible. Here is one example, from the book of Daniel. About 600 years before Jesus Christ was born, the world empire of the day was ruled from Babylon. One night the emperor Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which he could not remember, but which he knew was important. He ordered his astrologers and mystics to tell him the dream and what it meant. Not surprisingly they failed to do so, and because of this they were in danger of losing their lives.

In Nebuchadnezzar's court was a young Jew named Daniel, who had been taken captive to Babylon. When he heard of the emperor's dream, Daniel and his friends asked God to show them the dream and explain its message.

¹Matthew 6:10

The record of these events is in Daniel chapter two. The king had seen in his sleep a large statue of a man. His body was made from different materials: gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay. In the dream the emperor had seen a stone strike the image on its feet, causing it to collapse in pieces. The stone then ground everything to powder, the wind blew the dust away, and the stone grew bigger and bigger until it filled the whole earth.

Daniel explained to the emperor that the metal parts of the image represented four successive world empires which would control the Middle East. The Babylonian Empire, the head of the image, would be succeeded by the Medes and Persians, then by the Greeks, and finally by the Roman Empire. In turn this would be followed by a period of mixed weak and strong nations. Eventually a 'stone power' would fall from heaven and destroy the image, replacing it with a new kingdom. Daniel explained this in the following words:

“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”¹

Here is a very clear prophecy about the Kingdom of God that will be established at the return of Jesus Christ. He is the stone that returns from heaven and takes over the government of the world. This prediction is at the very heart of the Christian hope. It means that all the kingdoms of the world are going to be replaced by God's kingdom, which will continue forever. The Bible has many prophecies of this amazing time, and impressive details of what that kingdom will be like.²

¹Daniel 2:44 ²For example, Isaiah 65:17-25

THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD

The Bible has another prophecy about something that will take place at Christ's return. At the end of the book of Daniel we read these words:

"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt." ¹

One of the most remarkable events in history was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus was cruelly put to death by crucifixion and buried the same day in a tomb in Jerusalem. Three days later, he was raised to life, never to die again. This unique event is at the centre of the Christian hope.

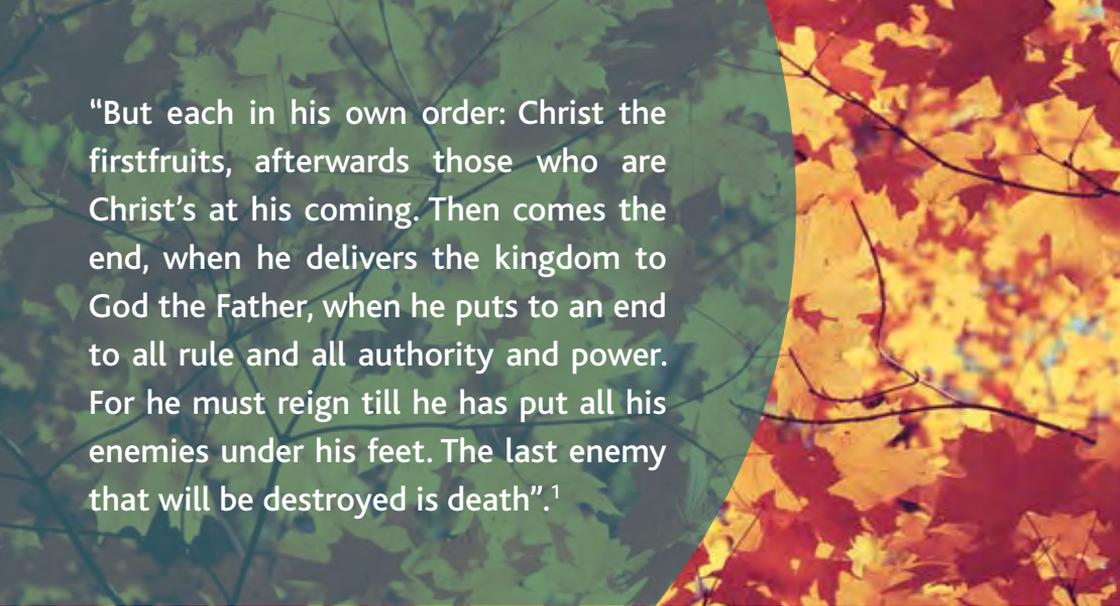
The reason why Jesus' resurrection is so important is made clear by Paul in one of his letters:

"For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." ²

The message could not be clearer. Death awaits us all. But the Bible offers hope. Because Jesus rose from the dead, the Bible says others also will rise from the dead. Those who are 'in Christ' will be raised. There is more about this in the next chapter. The question we need to ask here is: When will the resurrection of the dead take place?

This is where Bible prophecy helps again. Further on in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 we come to these words:

¹Daniel 12:2 ²1 Corinthians 15:21-22



“But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterwards those who are Christ’s at his coming. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when he puts to an end to all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death”.¹

This tells us when the resurrection will take place. It says it will be ‘at his coming.’ When Jesus comes again to be King over the world, he is going to raise from the dead those who have believed in him. So Bible prophecy is important, for now we are reading about events that could happen in our lifetime.

THE CHALLENGE OF PROPHECY

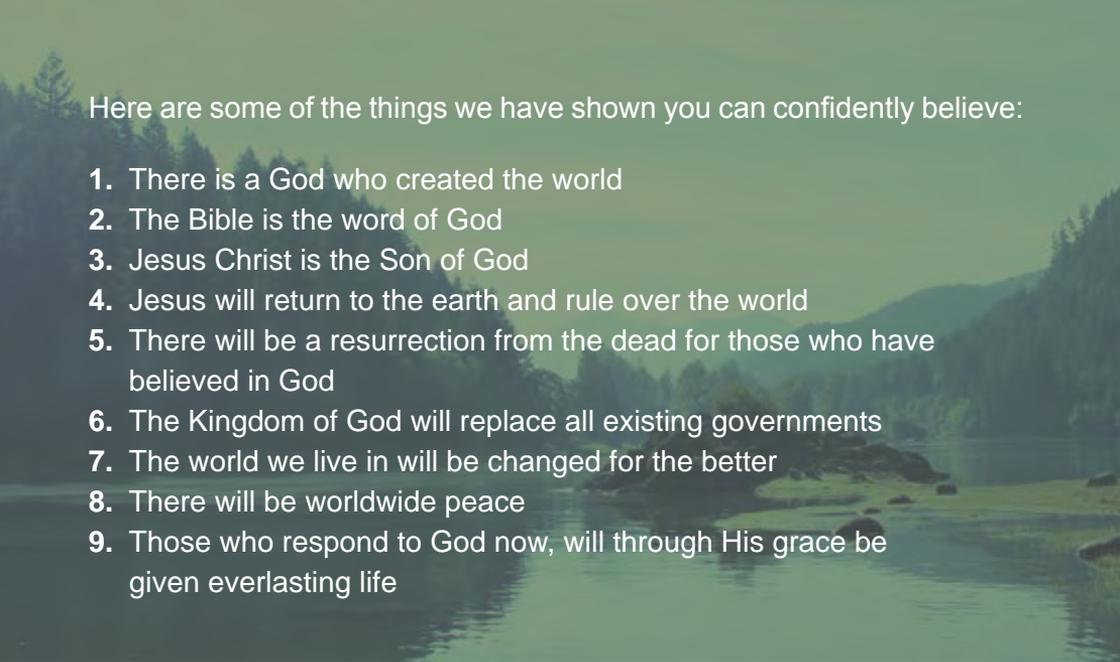
The Bible often repeats important messages or warnings so that people will take notice. For example, Jesus told his apostles three times during the Last Supper that what he had predicted for them would come to pass. When this happened, he said, their faith would be strengthened that he really had come from God. We too have found fulfilled predictions in different prophets and writers, so that our own faith in God can be strong and secure. We can believe in the Bible. We can believe in the God who wrote the Bible. We can believe in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was sent to save us from eternal death.

¹1 Corinthians 15:23-26

But the Bible is not just a book of predictions. It tells us about God Himself and His purpose with this world. We learn about Jesus Christ and why he came. We learn about our need for salvation from death and how God has offered that to us. This book is unique, the most remarkable book ever written. It gives hope and confidence. It gives direction and purpose to life.

The challenge to us is, what are we prepared to do about the Bible's message? We might previously have dismissed the prophecies in the Bible as mere speculation. But that just will not do. There are so many really accurate prophecies, they cannot be dismissed as coincidences. We are justified in believing, and we can have a hope for the future.





Here are some of the things we have shown you can confidently believe:

1. There is a God who created the world
2. The Bible is the word of God
3. Jesus Christ is the Son of God
4. Jesus will return to the earth and rule over the world
5. There will be a resurrection from the dead for those who have believed in God
6. The Kingdom of God will replace all existing governments
7. The world we live in will be changed for the better
8. There will be worldwide peace
9. Those who respond to God now, will through His grace be given everlasting life

Now you know a little more about the Bible, why not read it for yourself? Then, you will find the deep joy that comes from confidence in God's plan for the future. You will be able to put your life into God's hands. You will still make plans for yourself and your family, but you will say, in the words of the letter of James, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that",² knowing that the Kingdom of God could come tomorrow and change all our lives forever.

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Published by the Christadelphians
Freepost THE CHRISTADELPHIANS
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²James 4:13-15