BACK TO THE BIBLE
Meet with God

LOOKING FORWARD
TO OUR FUTURE
Prophecy—we might associate that word with fortune tellers or tabloid magazines, predicting what good or bad things are in store for us. But that’s not really prophecy as the Bible portrays it. Biblical prophecy originates with God who knows the future. His accuracy rate is 100 percent. In fact, the Old Testament tells us that anyone claiming to prophesy for God—who made even the slightest error—was to die. God doesn’t make mistakes.

This month we will embark on an adventure in biblical prophecy. If the thought of studying prophecy scares you just a little, let me point out some of the benefits and reasons behind God’s decision to include prophecy in the Scriptures:

Prophecy establishes the authority of the Bible. It reveals God’s power and wisdom—He knows what He’s doing. Prophecy promotes peace among God’s children by pointing to a common destination, and prophecy motivates us to holy living as we look to Christ’s return. The study of prophecy isn’t a spiritual hobby for those who have too much time on their hands; it is God’s way of showing us that there is a time coming when He will make all things right!

During our study, we’ll begin to discover that God doesn’t want to leave us in the dark about the future. He has certainly told us enough so that we know how to live today. Let’s go back to the Bible to discover what God tells us about tomorrow. I pray that as we do, the result will be more faithful living today.
God tells us a lot about the future. He reveals events that will occur. But He doesn’t often tell us when they will happen. God has reasons for what He shares and for what He withholds. For example, there are at least five good reasons why God reveals aspects of the future to us.

First, prophecy proves the authority of the Bible. The Bible records hundreds of prophecies, many of which have already been exactly fulfilled. If the Bible has a track record of accuracy in the prophecies that have been fulfilled, why wouldn’t we trust its authority in those prophecies yet to come to pass?

Second, the content of prophecy reveals God’s power and wisdom. Prophecies usually cause us to ask, “How will this happen?” We can’t see a human cause—because only God by His power and wisdom could bring about such things.

Third, prophecy shows that God has a plan. Everything He allows or causes makes up part of His plan. He acts purposefully in the world. Prophecy allows us to understand and accept God’s purposes.

Fourth, prophecy promotes peace and hope among God’s people. When it comes to the story of the human race, God has told us how it turns out. No matter what happens today and tomorrow, we know the final outcome. Twice during the Last Supper, Jesus said to His disciples, “These things I have spoken to you” (John 14:25; 15:11). The first had to do with peace; the second, with joy. People are supposed to notice our joy so that we in turn can tell them why we have peace and hope in this joyless world.

Fifth, prophecy provides incentives for holy living. It forewarns us so we can make appropriate changes and obedient actions in the light of God’s plan. Woe to us if we know beforehand and do nothing.

So, if God is willing to tell us what, why won’t He usually tell us when? Because He knows us. If He announced He would return in 24 hours, many of us would spend the first 23 and a half wrapping up personal loose ends before we got around to watching for Him. Jesus wants moment-by-moment disciples. So, He guarantees His return, but not the hour. Instead He tells us, “Watch!”

**Mark 13:1–37**

“And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” (Mark 13:37).
Watching is different than staring. When we try to stare at something, we lose focus. If we want to watch alertly, our eyes must be moving constantly as well as deliberately changing focal length (looking close and far). Watching for Christ’s return isn’t staring at one thing. Rather it’s looking at His Word, His world and events He has told us that will indicate He’s coming. In what different ways are you watching for Christ today?

During at least part of your prayer time today put into words some of your thoughts and feelings about the coming of Christ. Tell Him how much you are looking forward to seeing Him!

What immediate and continuous actions does Jesus expect of those who follow Him?

How do the parables Jesus tells in verses 28–29 and 34–36 help you understand the importance of spiritual alertness?

What examples of alert living are regular parts of your life?

How does this passage challenge you to greater alertness?
REMEMBER IT

1. On the Mount of Olives, Peter, James, John and what other disciple talked to Jesus privately?
2. When on trial, who speaks through the believer?
3. For the sake of whom will the days of tribulation be cut short?
4. Heaven and earth will pass away, but what will never pass away?
5. Since we don’t know the hour of His return, what is Jesus’ final command?

ANSWERS: 1. Andrew (Mark 13:3); 2. The Holy Spirit (Mark 13:11); 3. The elect (Mark 13:20); 4. Jesus’ words (Mark 13:31); 5. Stay awake/Watch/Be alert (Mark 13:33, 35, 37)

SEEK IT

GO DEEPER INTO YOUR STUDY OF THIS WEEK’S LESSON.

God’s Wisdom:
Daniel 2:20–23
Romans 11:33–36

Hope in Christ’s Return:
1 John 2:28–29

READ IT

Revelation 1:9–3:22
“What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea” (Rev. 1:11).

How often do you use the maps in your Bible?
Take a moment to find the seven churches listed in Revelation 1:11. They were all located in what today we call western Turkey.

The Gospel was proclaimed in these cities, and believers gathered into churches. Each congregation took on a character and developed a history. Once you begin to read about the Revelation Seven, you will probably want to get the whole picture. Jesus had a message for each of them.

The church in Ephesus (Rev. 2:1–7) was a successful megachurch. It was the apostle John’s home church. His reputation probably drew many seekers. Jesus commended them for their excellent labors but also confronted them because they had “left your first love” (v. 4).

The church in Smyrna (vv. 8–11) lived as a persecuted church. There would be more suffering in their future but a promise of the crown of life. Their review by Jesus is entirely positive.
Jesus described the Pergamum church (vv. 12–17) as His church in a bad neighborhood. He affirmed their faithfulness but warned against their acceptance of evil teachers. They were in danger of compromising their faith. Jesus called them to repentance.

When Jesus described the church in Thyatira (vv. 18–29), He noted not only admirable qualities but an increase in acts of service. But they were allowing a “Jezebel” to teach immorality. Jesus insisted that her followers must repent, and He comforted those who’d resisted the temptation of Satan.

The church in Sardis (3:1–6) Jesus described as little more than a morgue with a steeple. They appeared spiritually alive, but Jesus saw lethargy and deadness. They needed to wake up!

Jesus commended Philadelphia’s church (vv. 7–13) as the faithful Chapel of Opportunity. He saw they were obedient within their limitations. He promised them “an open door” of effectiveness and His personal protection in difficult times ahead.

Jesus described the church in Laodicea (vv. 14–22) as the big downtown church facing subtle temptations in the city. Their apathy made them distasteful. He challenged them to move one way or the other rather than wallow in the middle.

Jesus gave each church a challenge. And He challenges us today to be “overcomers”—followers who really follow the One who gives us life.
Most of the physical landmarks that we deal with are part of a long-standing but not eternal creation. But the truth of God’s Word stands for time and eternity. The directions God ... day for correction and encouragement. And we will live by those instructions we find chiseled in the landmark of God’s Word.

Proverbs is filled with short landmark statements that provide us with food for thought and reflection each day. Choose one of the proverbs from today’s reading, and express it in a prayer. Ask God to keep bringing His words of direction to mind throughout the days of your journey ahead.

**REMEMBER IT**

1. The seven golden lampstands which appear around Jesus represent what?

2. The church at Ephesus hated the works of which group?

3. To the church at Smyrna, Jesus says that those who are faithful to Him even unto death, will receive what?

4. Which church had the reputation of being alive, but was actually dead?

5. Jesus counsels the Laodicean church to buy what from Him?

**SEEK IT**

**Overcoming the World:**
- John 16:33
- 1 Corinthians 15:50–58

**The Church:**
- Psalm 149:1
- Colossians 1:18

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Sondra J. Key E. G. Gold, multiplied by the (Rev. 3:18)
Rev. 2:6; 3. The crown of life (Rev. 2:10), 4. The church of the seven churches (Rev. 1:20). 2. The (Rev. 3:18)
Answers: 1. The seven churches (Rev. 1:20). 2. The (Rev. 3:18)
The word “worthy” deserves extra attention. When something or someone is called “worthy,” we tend to sit up and take notice. We wonder, Are they really worthy, or is that just a claim? How do we know someone is worthy?

When John entered God’s throne room, he couldn’t take his eyes off the One who sits on the throne and receives the worship of the elders who say, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (Rev. 4:11). In Revelation 5:9, Jesus (the Lamb) is described as the One “worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals.” In verse 12, Jesus is also worthy “to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!”

The worthiness of Jesus relates to His abilities as well as His attributes—what He does and who He is. God is worthy because He is the Creator; Jesus is worthy because He is the Redeemer. And He demonstrated His worthiness by dying. “Slain” is mentioned in 5:9 as well as 5:12, reminding us once again of the central role of Jesus’ death in the ultimate unfolding (in this case, unrolling) of history. When Jesus is called worthy, those who worship Him are acknowledging His unique qualifications and how we came to see them.

The seals hold back the judgments of God recorded on the scroll. The Lamb breaks each seal. As each seal breaks, another divine judgment on earth is released. God has been patient with generation after generation of the sinful human race. Time after time, those who have suffered unjustly have cried out for relief and justice. And God will answer. His answers have been held back by the gracious seals maintained by the Lamb. When the time for judgment comes, the Lamb Himself will break the seals—not because He is eager to judge sin, but because beyond the judgment is the kingdom, the fulfillment of all of God’s plans.

The One who is worthy to break the seals is the One who is also our Savior. But when the breaking of the seals begins, we who have received Him as Savior will already be in heaven with Him.
**CONSIDER IT**

Based on chapter 5, how would you describe the atmosphere in heaven?

**APPLY IT**

When we see how people react to the disasters that happen today, we aren’t surprised when the Bible tells us that most who suffer under the judgment of the seals will respond with bitterness, anger and resentment against God. Isn’t it interesting how easy it is for us to assume that we are worthy of God’s care, blessings and safety, but He isn’t worthy of our worship and trust? What do your reactions to hardship reveal about your trust in God?

**EXPRESS IT**

The hard part of hardships is that they are hard. They are hard to experience and hard to respond to with confidence that God is in control. God doesn’t promise to make things easy, but He does promise to help us bear them. Ask God to help you remember His worthiness the next time you face a hardship of any kind.

**AS YOU READ REVELATION 5:1–6:17, REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

➢ As you read through the seal-judgments in chapter 6, what stands out for you about the severity of God’s justice?

➢ How does Jesus’ worthiness affect your life directly?

➢ What comfort and confidence do you find in God’s plans for the end times? How are you anticipating heaven?
REMEMBER IT

1. What was John’s response when no one was initially found worthy of opening the scroll?
2. Who takes the scroll?
3. What was the color of the second horse that appeared when the second seal was broken?
4. At the opening of which seal did the souls under the altar cry out to God?
5. What were these souls given, along with the command to rest a while longer?

SEEK IT  GO DEEPER INTO YOUR STUDY OF THIS WEEK’S LESSON.

The Worthiness of Christ:
Hebrews 9:27–28
1 Thessalonians 1:10

READ IT  Revelation 8:1–12:17

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death (Rev. 12:11).

Were you aware that the number of Christian martyrs is rising at a shocking rate in today’s world? Christians are imprisoned and killed for their faith in various places all over the globe. In fact, more Christians were killed for their faith in the 20th century than the 19 previous centuries combined!

Despite current conditions, Revelation predicts a time of unspeakable worldwide persecution at some point in the future. Followers of Jesus Christ will be global outlaws. The church will have been removed, but small groups of new Gentile believers and a massive return to God by the Jewish people will signal open hostilities against anyone who trusts Christ.

As God’s judgments rock the earth, humanity will persist in unbelief. The obvious fulfillment of God’s warnings will be ignored. Unable to lash back at God, the world will turn their hatred and rebellion against those who remain faithful to Him.

This week, pray for those Christians suffering persecution.
In the second and third chapters of Revelation, Jesus repeatedly promised blessings to “him who overcomes.” (See 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21.) Here we see a fulfillment of that promise and what it takes “to overcome.” It takes (1) Christ’s blood as the Lamb, (2) a clear testimony (track record) and (3) a willingness to die for Christ. That kind of commitment defeats and humiliates Satan.

Our belief that Christ will remove His Church at the Rapture before the Tribulation gives us no reason to expect we won’t suffer now. The witness of other Christians around the world confirms this. We shouldn’t seek suffering, but we shouldn’t be surprised if it comes either.

Our purpose, however, must be to live as those numbered among the faithful. We rely fully on what Christ did for us on the cross, seek to live and speak a testimony to others and are willing to lay down our lives for the Savior we love!

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**CONSIDER IT**

› What’s so dramatic about silence in heaven?

› Why does God have John eat a scroll that’s sweet in his mouth and sour in his stomach?

› How does God demonstrate His sovereignty in these chapters despite human rejection?

› Based on these chapters, what would you say to someone today who insists on delaying a decision about Jesus Christ?

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**APPLY IT**

Of the three characteristics of faithfulness in those who overcome Satan, the one that often challenges us the most is having a “word of testimony.” Do we speak about Christ and what He means to us? Or are we so afraid of being disliked or rejected that we are faithless long before we’re subjected to any persecution? When was the last time you spoke up about your faith in Christ in a group that included non-believers? Make it a point this week to tell someone your story about coming to Christ in faith.

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**EXPRESS IT**

Even the apostle Paul asked other believers to pray for his boldness and clarity. (See Col. 4:2–4.) Pray about the testimony of those who are closest to you. And ask them to pray that God will give you opportunities and boldness to speak for Christ.
REMEMBER IT

1. What was the name of the star that fell after the third angel blew his trumpet?
2. The creatures that come from the bottomless pit have the power to hurt people for how long?
3. What was John instructed to do with the scroll he took from the hand of angel?
4. How long are the two witnesses allowed to prophesy?
5. When war arose in heaven, who led the angels in the fight against the dragon?

SEEK IT  GO DEEPER INTO YOUR STUDY OF THIS WEEK’S LESSON.

Biblical Martyrs:  
Acts 6:1–7:60

The Faithful:  
Hebrews 11:1–12:2
In *Revelation: The Glorified Christ*, Woodrow Kroll takes a unique look at the much discussed and misunderstood book of Revelation. The central theme of the study is how Revelation reveals the glorified Christ—it reveals Jesus Christ in a way that belongs uniquely to Him. The study has 14 lessons that include a Scripture passage, a devotional, thought-provoking questions and a challenge to go deeper.

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