

say: "When this war is over there will be a tremendous extension of missionary work in China. With the great friendship that the Chinese now have for the Americans, our missionaries will receive a tremendous hearing as soon as the war is over, and within ten years Christianity will be known throughout the length and breadth of that country." Yet within ten years after the war not a single missionary was left in China. Within fifteen years after the war it was impossible to hold a Christian service anywhere in China that would be open to the public. How wrong all these predictions had been! Those who made them never dreamed that the communist forces would quickly sweep over China and utterly destroy Christianity in that vast area.

Back in January 1939 I picked up a copy of Liberty Magazine which stated on the cover that it contained an astrologer's predictions about the important events that would occur in the year that was just beginning. It said that this astrologer was widely known and respected for his great ability to predict the future. Consequently the magazine had asked him to give its readers an idea of the great events that would occur in 1939.

I do not recall whether I read the article that year. I happened to come across the magazine a year later when the events of 1939 were already past history, and at that time I found the article most fascinating to read. The astrologer made about a dozen definite predictions as to what would occur in 1939. Not more than two or three of these coincided with the events that had actually occurred. Thus the article declared that Hitler would die in 1939. Actually Hitler continued to be a great force in world affairs for nearly five more years. It declared that no great war would start in 1939. Actually the Second World War, the most destructive war in all history, began in the fall of that year. It predicted that during that year President Roosevelt would announce that he would not run for a third term. Actually President Roosevelt did run, not only for a third term, but later on for a fourth term as well.

Human predictions of the future often sound very good. Usually, however, they sound rather silly if they are read a few months or years later. It is extremely difficult to predict the future. Only God can do this correctly, and He has done so in the Bible.

Sometimes it is said that prophecy is history written in advance. This is not really an accurate statement, though there is an element of truth in it. History consists in a statement of important facts about the past. No historian attempts to tell everything that has happened. That would be utterly impossible. Merely to list all that occurs in any one week would require the filling of many encyclopedias. A historian selects the facts about the past that he considers important for his purpose, and endeavors to set them down in logical order. Biblical prophecy reveals certain future events that God considers important for His people to know. Their importance is not simply a matter of satisfying curiosity.

There are two reasons why Biblical predictions are important. First, they are important to strengthen our faith in God. When we find something predicted in the Bible that is utterly contrary to what we would expect, and when the event occurs just as it was predicted, it strengthens our assurance that God controls all things, and that the Bible is His inerrant and dependable Word. In order to satisfy this purpose it is not necessary to tell everything about the future, or even everything that human beings would consider important. A few striking predictions that are utterly unexpected will completely satisfy this purpose.