



A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE END TIMES

Week 1: Introduction to Bible Prophecy

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I. SOME GENERAL BACKGROUND ABOUT BIBLE PROPHECY

- A. It's no secret that Bible prophecy is greatly misunderstood and mistreated in the church today.
 - 1. It's called 'Eschatology' (the study of events and doctrines about "The Last Days").
 - 2. Most pastors, teachers, and Christian leaders today ignore the themes of Bible Prophecy almost entirely.
 - 3. Some even mock it, and they openly ridicule those who give attention to it.
- B. Here are a few facts to consider from the "The Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy" by J. Barton Payne:
 - 1. There are 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament and 578 in the New Testament for a total of 1,817 prophecies.
 - 2. These prophecies are included within 8,352 verses of the Bible.
 - 3. Therefore, since there are 31,124 verses in the Bible, the 8,352 verses that contain prophecy constitute more than one quarter of the Bible's volume.
- C. More to think about:
 - 1. Over 1,500 of the prophecies of the Bible are devoted to Christ's Second Coming.
 - 2. For every prophecy in the Old Testament regarding Jesus' First Coming, there are eight about His Second Coming.
 - 3. Christ's Return also comprises one of every five verses in the New Testament.
 - 4. One would think – given this sort of "Divine emphasis" – that more pastors, teachers, and Christian leaders would give attention to Bible Prophecy – but they do not.

II. STARTING FROM THE CORRECT POSITION (HAVING THE CORRECT BELIEFS - THESE ARE MINE)

- A. The Bible – (Three very important FACTS)
 - 1. I believe that the 66 books of the Bible, which we call the Canon, both the Old and the New Testaments, alone and entirely, comprise the God-inspired Scriptures.
 - 2. I believe the Bible is the very inerrant Word of God, and is profitable for personal growth and faithful living.
 - 3. I believe the Bible – when properly interpreted – presents no conflict in essential doctrine or primary message.
- B. I believe the Bible is intended to be interpreted normally, as one would do with any other work of legitimate literature.
 - 1. This requires that we employ a consistent and literal hermeneutic
NOTE: "Hermeneutic" – this is a method or system of interpretation; a standard by which we approach God's Word

2. The opposite of a consistent and literal hermeneutic is one that chooses to symbolize or allegorize Scripture
3. This results in the opinion that “the Bible does not really mean what it says” – *many of the heresies in the church today stem from claiming the Bible does not really mean what it is saying*
4. IMPORTANT: A consistent and literal hermeneutic recognizes the clear use of Figures of Speech.
 - *A Figure of Speech is saying “It’s raining cats and dogs.” It’s meant to provide illustration. A literal hermeneutic allows for Figures of Speech.
5. This logical, literal, consistent hermeneutical approach is summarized by Dr. David L. Cooper, who in his work, “*The Golden Rule of Interpretation*,” said the following:

“When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense. Therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths indicate clearly otherwise.”

NOTE: Let me put that more simply:

“When the plain sense of Scripture makes good sense, seek no other sense, for it will result in nonsense.”

III. THREE BASIC RULES OF PROPER BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

NOTE: I want you to picture a standard three-legged stool in your mind. Something you would pull up to a counter and sit upon.

- A. Let’s talk about those three legs of that stool:
 1. Each one of those legs is a rule for engaging in proper Biblical interpretation
 2. They are common sense guidelines for letting the Bible interpret itself
 3. These guidelines are manifest within the Scriptures themselves
- B. Here are the three basic rules of proper Biblical interpretation:
 1. First: passages must be understood in light of their original Biblical meaning – *we need to understand them as they were ‘divinely inspired’ to be understood*
 2. Second: passages must be in harmony with other passages on the same subject – *the Bible does not ever disagree with itself, and so all passages on the same subject will say the same thing*
 3. And third: passages must be in compliance with the development of the context – *every passage is part of a larger intent. We must understand the larger intent to properly interpret any passage within it.*
- C. **IMPORTANT:** The proper interpretation of Scripture ALWAYS accommodates these three rules at the same time.
 1. Put another way, no accurate interpretation of any Biblical passage has ever violated any of one of these three rules.
 2. This gets back to the stool with three legs.
 - If one leg is compromised on that stool, you are at risk if you sit on it.

- As one is foolish to depend on a three-legged stool with a bad leg, so one is foolish to accept any position from the Bible that violates any of these three rules of proper interpretation.

III. AS FAR AS BIBLE PROPHECY IS CONCERNED, THESE THREE BASIC RULES OF INTERPRETATION LEAD TO SOME LOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

- NOTE: We'll be looking into all these more extensively in weeks / months ahead (EXAMPLES):
- A. Jesus Christ will supernaturally and imminently rapture His church, at a future pre-tribulation point.
 - 1. The date or time of this event cannot be determined, therefore expectant and faithful living should be the character of God's saints through all the ages.
 - B. A well-defined, seven-year period of history known as The Tribulation, will begin at some point after The Rapture.
 - 1. The Tribulation will start with the confirmation of an agreement or covenant between the antichrist and the nation of Israel.
 - 2. This seven year period of time will contain multiple literal and supernatural judgments upon the Earth, resulting in great worldwide distress and an unprecedented spread of the Gospel.
 - 3. The events of the Tribulation are primarily focused on the nation of Israel. It will conclude with Christ's glorious, physical arrival on earth to set up His 1,000-year Kingdom Rule from Jerusalem.
 - C. God's plan for history demands a consistent distinction between nation of Israel and the church.
 - This means God has had an active and ongoing plan for national, ethnic Israel through all times past, present, and future that culminates in Jesus Christ's Millennial Kingdom.

IV. LET'S GO THE NEXT LAYER DOWN AS WE BEGIN TO LAY SOME FOUNDATION

NOTE: I want to look at two important definitions:

- A. **DISPENSATIONALISM** – This is considered to be a bad word in many churches today, but what is someone who is a 'dispensationalist?'
 - 1. **Dispensationalism** is a term that arose in church history to catalogue certain Christian's beliefs.
 - 2. Dispensationalists are those who seek to interpret the Bible literally.
 - 3. Dispensationalists seek to understand Scripture in its plain, normal, natural, obvious sense, much like we would read and understand most types of literature.
 - 4. Other Dispensationalist views include:
 - a. The Bible is God's inspired, inerrant revelation to man.
 - As such, Scripture provides the framework by which God's plan for history is made clear, and through which we can understand history (past and future).
 - b. Since the Bible reveals God's plan for history, then it follows that – and history has shown this - there is an ebb and flow to His plan.

- Therefore, God’s plan includes different dispensations. These are ages, chapters, or epochs of history within which mankind is tested by design, or in which God uses different means to deal with humanity or portions thereof.
5. Dispensationalists believe, since all humanity fell into sin, each person must individually receive God’s provision of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ by believing the gospel.
 - a. Thus, Jesus Christ is the only way to a right relationship with God.
 6. Because of mankind’s fall into sin, Scripture teaches that all humanity is naturally rebellious to God and to the things of God.
 - a. God’s sovereign election to salvation by grace enables one to become a Genuine believer in Christ and to be open to the teachings of the Bible.
 - b. Therefore, salvation is a prerequisite to properly understanding God’s Word.
 - c. **1 Cor. 2:14** makes this same point very clear:
“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”
 7. Dispensationalists believe that because God’s plan for history is perfect and not subject to the will of anyone else, it includes a purpose for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—which is the nation of Israel.
 - a. This plan for Israel includes promises that they will regain all the land promised by God, and they will be a worldwide blessing to the nations.
 - b. Many of the promises to national Israel are yet future, therefore, God is not finished with Israel.
 8. Dispensationalists also agree that God’s plan from all eternity includes a purpose for the church.
 - However, this is a parenthetical phase that began with the Day of Pentecost in **Acts Ch. 2** and will end with The Rapture.
 - After The Rapture, God will return His attention to completing His plan for Israel.
 9. Dispensationalists understand the main purpose in God’s master plan for history is to glorify Himself through Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the goal and hero of history.

NOTE: Prominent dispensationalist scholars, teachers, and institutions today include: Billy Graham, Charles Ryrie, Hal Lindsey, Charles Swindoll, Dwight Pentecost, John MacArthur, Tim LaHaye, Warren Wiersbe, J. Vernon McGee and John Walvoord. It is the position of The Masters College, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Moody Bible Institute.

B. COVENANT THEOLOGY – This is another important term to understand, especially in the church era in which we now live.

NOTE: **Covenant Theology** is effectively the polar opposite of dispensationalism.

1. The overarching principle of Covenant Theology is.....the issue of covenants.

- a. Covenant Theology sees two basic theological covenants in Scripture—the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.
- b. The Covenant of Works was introduced in the Garden between God and man in which God promised mankind life for obedience and judgment for disobedience.
 - The Covenant of Works was re-emphasized at various points of Old Testament history. For example, there was the Mosaic Covenant which required strict compliance with an elaborate system of laws and rituals.
2. The future Covenant of Grace was alluded to in several OT passages, but it was clearly introduced in the NT while the Covenant of Works was still in effect.
3. One verse that is often quoted by covenant adherents is **Luke 22:20**.
 - a. It concerns The Last Supper, and particularly that moment when Jesus said, *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”*
 - b. This New Covenant is the promise that Jesus made with humanity that He will forgive sin and restore fellowship with those who place their faith in Him.
4. Another verse that covenant supporters use a great deal is **Galatians 3:28**.
 - a. Paul wrote **Gal. 3:28** to combat some of the divisions that arose in the early church between the Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews).
 - There were some pressures to conform everyone to various elements of the Mosaic Law, and so Paul said, *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*
 - Many covenant adherents use this verse to claim that God has done away with His specific promises to the Jews and to Israel. That is not what this passage is saying.
 - Therefore, Covenant Theology does not see any distinction between Israel and the Church. It sees both groups as one continuous people of God with one ultimate destiny.
5. The problem with this position is it presents only partial truth - - and in partial truth lies full deception.
 - a. The result is, many covenant adherents choose to see no significance to the current Nation of Israel.
 - b. This position requires them to actively discount those prophecies in God’s Word concerning Israel and the Jews.
 - It’s why many covenant adherents have claimed the church has – in effect – replaced Israel. This is a heresy known today as ‘Replacement Theology.’
 - It’s why many scholars, denominations, and churches which embrace a “covenant-based” view have even shown some strong prejudice against Israel and the Jews.
 - This is why most covenant subscribers cannot tolerate a literal interpretation of Bible Prophecy, especially when it comes to the purpose and definitions of The Tribulation, the promise of a literal physical Millennial Kingdom, and Israel’s future expansion of her borders.

- Covenant adherents must therefore hold to an allegorical or symbolic view of Bible Prophecy, or avoid it altogether – as this is the only way they can arrive at their desired outcome.
 - It also explains why there are so many different views in the covenant camp because the boundaries of interpretation are not clear
 - Most Reformed denominations today (that is the bulk of churches), subscribe to one grade or another of Covenant Theology. This is why many of them refuse to teach Bible Prophecy, as they cannot do this properly and still hold to the denominational views they want to have.
6. There is an obvious problem with many in the Covenant camp, and it is that they have to change the rules of interpretation – This is what people do when they don't want to believe that the Scriptures literally mean what they are literally saying. Unfortunately, this happens,....a lot!
- a. There is a big problem with this...
 - Once you do that, you don't know what the Bible is really saying, nor does anyone else.
 - You convince yourself that large portions of the Bible are meant to be confusing. And if you accept that premise, then maybe God Himself is confusing.
 - Everything begins to break down because God's divinely-inspired rules no longer apply (by choice!)
7. **IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND:** The problem many covenant adherents have is the same problem that atheists have. They've branded themselves as believing in something that does not exist.
8. Take amillennialism as a case in point. These are folks who do not believe in a literal future 1000 year reign of Jesus Christ, headquartered in Jerusalem.
9. The Bible is very clear about this, so if you call yourself an amillennialist, you have to **FIRST** state what you don't believe
10. Then one must consider all the many passages of scripture that teach about the millennium and argue that they are not saying what they are saying.

NOTE: Prominent covenant scholars, teachers, and institutions today include: R.C. Sproul, J.I. Packer, Kim Riddlebarger, Tim Keller, John Calvin, Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Piper. Covenant Theology is the position of Reformed Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary, and Fuller Theological Seminary.

NOTE: For those of you that may be wondering where I personally stand in all this – I am a staunch dispensationalist. I believe this is the position of greatest humility and responsibility when it comes to the Bible. Therefore:

- ❖ When it comes to teaching what I find in God's Word, I will not teach what is NOT there – nor will I avoid teaching what IS THERE....
- ❖ I will always take the Scriptures at face value – I will explain to you, to the best of my abilities, what I believe the Scriptures are telling us....

- ❖ I won't pretend the Bible doesn't mean what it says, nor will I tell you it's saying something it's not. I won't impose a doctrine on any passage that is plainly moving in a different direction.
- ❖ I will also, therefore, not engage in any political correctness. This is not a matter of tact; it IS a matter of truth.
- ❖ If the Bible states it, so will I. Political correctness has invaded and corrupted the church, and it is not a part of sound Biblical doctrine or of any truth in general.
- ❖ Concerning some of the views of Bible prophecy which do not hold to the rules of responsible interpretation, I'll review them so you are informed about them - but I won't teach them with same time or conviction as I will teach the correct view.

V. QUESTION: WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO PROPERLY STUDYING BIBLE PROPHECY?

- A. **Exhorts to Godly Living** – It is common to find New Testament passages concerning the End Times paired with an exhortation to living a Godly life (if you live in the expectation of an imminent Rapture, you're less likely to gamble with bad choices).
- B. **Comfort and Hope**
 - **(Cf. Philippians 1:21)** *"To live is Christ and to die is gain,"* – We can be sure of the future that is coming, and we can be sure of our position in it
 - **(Cf. Titus 2:13)** *"...while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ* – All Christians should live in the hope and expectation of The Rapture
 - **(1 Thessalonians 4:18)** *"Therefore comfort one another with these words"* – (This is speaking of the events of The Rapture, it is a truth that should comfort us).
- C. **Blessing**
 - **(Cf. Revelation 1:3)** *"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near."* – (Speaking of the book of Revelation and the prophetic truths that are in it).
 - How can you get a blessing if you do not consider Bible prophecy a priority, study it and learn about it?
- D. **Stability**
 - **(Ephesians 4:14)** *"Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming."*
 - To avoid becoming a Christian who are 'tossed about' by false teachers and truth deniers. A proper study of Bible prophecy provides stability in the midst of competing views and ideas.
- E. **Protection**
 - **(Cf. Ephesians 6:11)** – (This is "The Armor of God" passage) - Proper interpretation of Scripture is like properly wearing armor; it is able at that point to properly do its job
- F. **Essential part of spiritual health** – (Paul taught 'new Christians' in **1 Thessalonians** the basics of Bible Prophecy after being with them only 3-4 weeks).

G. Avoids Ignorance

- **(Cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13)** *“But we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those having fallen asleep, so that you should not be grieved, just as also the rest, those having no hope.”*
- We are less effective as believers if we are ignorant about the doctrines of life and death and those truths that are contained in Bible Prophecy.
- **Helpful in counteracting materialism**
 - **(Cf. 2 Peter 3:10)** *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.”*
 - **Luke 12:20)** *“But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’”*
 - These two verses are two views of the same issue. This heaven and earth will pass away – so don’t get too attached to it, and be careful with your plans in the here and now. Keep them in proper perspective because you cannot take your possessions with you when you die,
- **An understanding of apostasy and the times we live in**
 - **(Cf. 2 Peter 3:4)** *“They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.”*
 - A proper study will help us understand the wrong views / actions of others – that includes those that are in the world as well as those that are in the church
- **Purifies against unholy living**
 - **(Cf. 1 John 3:3)** *“All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”*
 - This is a passage speaking of The Rapture and of the time when “we will be like Him”
 - It compels us to live with an eternal perspective. A perspective that helps to govern our decisions and our views while on earth
- **Helps us to watch and worship**
 - **(Cf. Luke 19:11-27)** – this is the Parable of the Talents and the master that went away for a while
 - This passage helps us to see that our decisions now need to include a commitment to watchfulness.
 - The attitudes we cultivate now will affect our rewards and responsibilities later

CONCLUSION:

Question: Does “the end” matter?

Answer: It matters to God.

- Studying the future as God’s Word lays it out is the whole point of everything else, including the beginning and the middle.
- Bible Prophecy is as divinely-inspired as the rest of the Bible. God has given us a massive amount of text devoted to matters of eschatology and the future. It therefore MUST matter!
- God placed prophecy in the Bible, not to have us overlook it or diminish it, but to understand it and see it as part of the faithful Christian experience.
- If God intended us to be taught these things and to understand them, they are extremely important. If we arrive at a position where we feel they are not important.....then our position is not of God.