THE 245 - ESCHATOLOGY:
The Study of Last Things

ALSOM

ORIENTING INFORMATION …

ESCHATOLOGY

"In the End is My Beginning and Sad things Come Untrue"

Eschatology is the doctrine, or study, of last things. It is concerned with what Scripture says about the end of the age and the beginning of the eternal New-Heavens-and-New-Earth.

The word "eschatology" is derived from two Greek words:

- Eschaton - the end or goal
- Logos - Word or teaching.

Therefore, "the word / teaching about the end."
The study or teaching or doctrine of the last things, the end of the age and what comes after.

From the earliest days of the Church there has never been universal agreement on the doctrine of Eschatology. Because Scripture is not clear on the issue, there have always three broad categories of understanding, with various details understood differently even among adherents within each category.

When the Church has never universally agreed on a doctrine the Christian minister or teacher MUST be aware of that and must be aware of the various orthodox perspectives. It is a mistake to be familiar only with your own denominational perspective.
Therefore, this material is designed to provide a brief overview of the orthodox eschatological perspectives and their understanding of some of the important relevant Scripture passages.

This variety of perspective is understandable. From the New Testament forward, there has always been a variety of opinion within the Church about eschatology (personal and cosmic), water baptism, the relationship of grace to law, the security of the believer, the relationship of Jews and Christians, and some other matters.

There are numerous topics within eschatology, and a variety of perspectives on each topic. Here are some of the topics and the several options:

- **Topics**
  - **Options**
- Communal eschatology
  - The end and eternity of God's people: Jesus' followers, the Church
  - The end and eternity of other people of faith and the irreligious
- Personal eschatology
  - The intermediate state
    - Unconsciousness (soul sleep) until the resurrection and final judgment,
    - Conscious in hell or heaven until the resurrection and final judgment.
  - The eternal state

        - For the saved, conscious in God's Presence in glorified resurrection bodies in the New Heavens and New Earth forever,
        - For the lost, eternal conscious torment (ECT) in hell
        - For the lost, Annihilation - temporary punishment / torment based on the nature and depth of sinful deeds, then annihilation (making the punishment eternal/permanent).
    - The requirements for living eternally with God
        - Personal faith in Jesus Christ, or
        - Personal faith in Jesus Christ plus perseverance in holy living, or
        - Personal faith in a Creator God through natural revelation, or
        - Personal faith in a Creator God and righteous living, or
        - The sovereign grace of God simply determining who is saved or lost.
- Cosmic eschatology - what happens to the Earth and the cosmos at the last judgment and eternally.
- *Conservative Christians can have differing doctrinal views on all of these matters.*
- Different Denominations often have some differences in their eschatology even within the denomination.
- Some denominations allow more freedom to both ministers and laity to hold different views.

In this class we will examine …

1. The historic positions on communal eschatology and their development
2. Major eschatological passages and their interpretation by the different schools
3. We will not have time to consider the various orthodox Christian perspectives on personal eschatology (eternal conscious torment, annihilation, etc.)

Classic (Historic) Premillennialism and Amillennialism

- Classic Premillennialism is also called Historic Premillennialism.
- **The vast majority of the Christian Church has always adhered to either Classic Premillennialism or Amillennialism.**
- **Only Classic Premillennialism and Amillennialism can be found in the writings of the Church Fathers all the way back to the most Ancient Church and into the New Testament.**
    - *Best resource: Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity, by Charles Hill.*
- Postmillennialism seems to have appeared in about the 4th century.
- Classic Premillennialism and Amillennialism are interpretive systems which do not create the inconsistencies pervasive in the Dispensationalist system of interpretation.
- The Developmental histories of Classic PREMIL & AMIL do not share the level of controversy, hermeneutical questions, and rejection by Christian Scholars that does Dispensationalism.
- Some early Pentecostals shared these concerns about Dispensationalism. There have always been inconsistencies with which our best scholars have been concerned.
- Classic Premillennialism and Amillennialism as eschatological perspectives are both biblically solid, yet there are differences.
- Dispensational Eschatology is a modern theology, created in the 1830's. We will examine how it developed, who developed it.
- ***Stating the facts correctly, one scholar said,*** *"What the historic Christian church has never officially believed or stated, in any Creed, in any Confession of Faith, or discussed in any ecumenical council is the idea of a rapture being a separate event from the return of Jesus according to promise. In no*

Biblical passage where harpazo is used is there the idea of Christians disappearing from earth for seven years only to return again."

- Because Classical Premillennialism, Amillennialsm, and Postmillennialism are more historic positions of the church, they have much more robust scholarship behind them.
- Popular Dispensationalism produces much more "Christian Fiction," "prophecy," sensationalizing of news headlines, speculations, predictions, etc., than it does *real* *bible scholarship*.
- Dispensationalist writers sometimes try to call their system simply "Premillennialism." That is a deceptive attempt to confuse the distinction between Dispensationalism and Historic Premillennialism.
- **Good Scholars will write honestly, giving honest assessments, even of other systems with which they disagree.**

There are many good summary tables listing the major differences among the eschatological perspectives. Here are two:

	Postmillennialism	Amillennialism	Historic Premillennialism	Dispensational Premillennialism
Hermeneutics	Context and genre are important interpretive considerations			Strong inclination toward literalism
Second Coming	Christ's 2nd coming takes place after the millennium. This coming initiates a general resurrection, the judgment of al men, and the eternal state for believers and unbelievers		Christ's 2nd coming takes place before the millennium	Christ comes in a rapture and then again after a 7-year tribulation to establish an earthly kingdom
Timing of the Kingdom	God's kingdom is a present earthly reality that started with Christ's first advent		There is a present reality to the kingdom, but this will give way to a future fulfillment of 1000 years	An earthly kingdom lasting 1000 years will be established by Christ after His 2nd coming
Nature of the Kingdom	The kingdom is spiritual in nature. It will grow to fill the whole earth	The kingdom is spiritual in nature.	The 2nd coming will establish a literal 1000 year kingdom on earth	The literal 1000 year kingdom on earth will be primarily Jewish in nature
Millennium Description	We are in the millennium now. It will slowly and progressively become a "golden age."	We are in the millennium now. The millennium is the church age.	The millennium is future. Christ will reign with absolute control.	The millennium is future. The Old Testament Jewish economy will be restored.
Millennium Duration	A prolonged period of time greater than a 1000 year period. The 2nd coming follows the millennium.		Exactly 1000 years. The 2nd coming precedes the millennium	
Satan's Binding and Current Status	At Christ's death and resurrection Satan was bound with respect to his ability to deceive the nations and prevent them from hearing the truth about God.		The future 2nd coming of Christ will cause Satan to be bound 1000 years. He is not bound now, but rules the kingdom of this present world.	
Tribulation	Took place in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.	The church is in tribulation in this age.	A future 7 year tribulation will precede the 2nd Coming. The church will go through this tribulation	A future 7 year tribulation will precede the 2nd Coming. The church will escape this tribulation by being "raptured."
Rapture	The Rapture and the 2nd coming take place at the same time.			The Rapture precedes the 2nd Coming by 7 years.

Four Views of the End Times

	Dispensational Premillennialism	Historical Premillennialism	Amillennialism	Postmillennialism
Will Jesus return physically?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
When will Jesus return?	After a 7-year tribulation; before the millennium.	After tribulation; before the millennium.	Anytime; a detailed time frame is not important.	After the millennium.
Do the rapture and second coming of Christ occur at the same time?	No, they are events separated by either 7 years (pre-tribulation rapture) or $3^1/_2$ years (mid-tribulation rapture).	Yes	Yes	Yes
Will there be a great tribulation?	Yes	Yes	The tribulation occurs any time Christians are persecuted or wars and disasters occur.	Tribulation is either the first-century Jewish-Roman War or the ongoing conflict between good and evil prior to millennium.
Will Christians suffer during the tribulation?	Christians are either raptured before the tribulation (pre-tribulation rapture) or $3^1/_2$ years into the tribulation (mid-tribulation rapture).	Yes, Christians will go through the tribulation and endure suffering and persecution for the cause of Christ.	Yes, Christians will suffer and endure persecution until Jesus returns; persecution will increase in the end.	Yes, Christians are called to share the gospel, and tribulation will occur when that gospel is opposed.
Will there be a literal 1,000-year millennium?	Yes, after the 7-year tribulation, Christ will return and reign for 1,000 years.	Yes, after the tribulation, Christ will return and reign for 1,000 years.	No, the millennium refers to the reign of Christ in the hearts of his believers.	No, the millennium refers to a period of peace when the gospel reaches all people.
Who is saved?	Christians only	Christians only	Christians only	Christians only
Is the modern state of Israel relevant to the prophecies in Revelation?	Yes	No	No	No
When was this view most held?	Became popular about 1860. Has increased in popularity.	The earliest view of the end times, emerging at the end of the first century.	Popularized in AD 400. Continues to be accepted today.	May have been popular as early as AD 300. Less popular today.

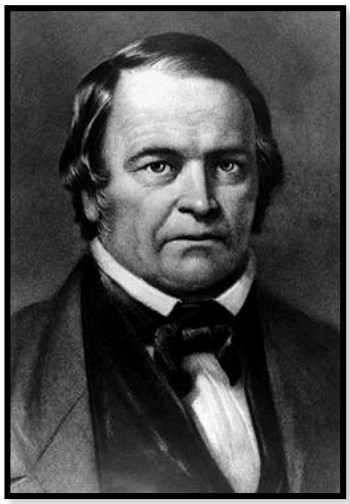
All summary tables oversimplify at some point. The detailed positions of all of these positions can only be correctly understood by studying the writings of their respective proponents. The best resources for studying and understanding the four major eschatological perspectives are listed in the bibliography for this course.

This study will concentrate on two fronts: 1. The origins and development of Dispensationalism since most students are not familiar with that; 2. The best interpretation of some key eschatological biblical passages and the hermeneutical principles essential to understanding them. There is not time or space for more detailed study.

DISPENSATIONALISM - The origins and development of a new interpretative system.

ESCHATOLOGICAL EXPECTANCY - The 1800's - 1900's were times of great eschatological expectancy in America. Because of the wars, economic and social upheavals, and technological advances, some Christians thought they were living in the "last days." Many were speculating about the end of days.

William Miller (1782-1849) Farmer, Baptist Preacher



Millerite Chart, 1843

Beginning in the early to mid 1800's various kinds of eschatological schemes began to be promoted in American evangelicalism. One of the more prominent was the Millerite movement.

Many aberrant movements began in the "burned over district" of western New York and Pennsylvania. The emotionalism of the Second Awakening, camp meetings, and Finney-ist Revivalism had waned and disappeared.
Residents of the region were left suspicious of evangelical-type Christianity. Church attendance had once again declined.
Aberrant movements that arose include …

- Spiritualism
- Mormonism
- Adventist sects

Miller was highly intelligent and well-read, but had no formal higher education, *no formal theological education.*
1822 – Miller completed years of study, especially Daniel and Revelation, calculating the Christ would return in 1843 or 1844.
1831 – Miller begins publicly teaching his doctrines. Millerism grows into large movement via publishing, teaching. Miller calculated and promoted a specific date for Christ's return in 1844.
1844 – Thousands of Millerites gathered on Miller's large New York farm. The original date passed, successive recalculations yielded three new dates. The passing of the final date, October 22, 1844, became known as the Great Disappointment.
Many abandoned the movement, but many stayed.
Numerous sects evolved from Millerism, including the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.
MANY Eschatologically oriented sects continued to appear throughout the century.

Ellen G. White (1827-1915)

Founder, Seventh-Day Adventism.

White was seriously injured when struck in the head by a rock as a child.

White and her parents were Millerites, present at the 1844 Great Disappointment. Shortly thereafter, she began going into trances and having visions. The remainder of her life she had many such episodes, many strange visions, and many failed prophecies.

The primary focus always remained eschatological visions, prophecies, and teaching "Adventist" doctrine - emphasis on the coming of Christ.

White had over 2,000 visions yielding many prophecies / teachings which are clearly wrong:

- "Seventh-Day" - Sabbath-keeping is required by God, a mark of the true church
- Sunday-keeping is a mark of the Beast, the Roman Catholic Church
- Jerusalem's Future: Mrs. White would be alive when Jesus returned
- England would attack the United States (1862)
- The Civil War is a sign Jesus is about to return
- In 1850's Mrs. White said Jesus will return "in a few months"
- Adventists living in 1856 will be alive when Jesus returns
- Mrs. White saw Enoch on Jupiter or Saturn. Jupiter is populated by very tall people.
- **Earth is only 6,000 years old**
- **Noah's flood was global – humans and animals had sex and produced some of the lesser races**

For many identifiable reasons, eschatological expectancy intensified through the 19th century and into the 20th century:

- Reaction to modernity, industrialization, scientific advancement, societal change, population dislocation to cities
- Various wars: Mexican, Civil, Spanish-American, etc.
- Dispensationalism - simplistic, made-to-order for ministers and laity with poorer educations, suspicion of educated elites, susceptibility to conspiracy theories, etc.
- Dispensationalism pushed even non-dispensationalists toward speculation
- Speculators, particularly dispensationalists, were always searching for current events that could be tied to their particular readings of biblical prophecy
- *Eschatological expectancy(ies) of various kinds became threads in fabric of American evangelicalism*
- 1900 saw the typical turn-of-the-century hyper-speculation found among eschatologically oriented Christians at the turn of every century or millennium. *Remember 1999-2000?!*

DISPENSATIONALISM

It was during these decades - 1830s - 1900's that a new scheme of biblical interpretation arose.
This new system of interpreting the Bible was invented in the 1830's by cessationist British pastor John Nelson Darby.
Darby divided human history into *dispensations* of time (7), each beginning with a new method of God's dealing with man.

Each dispensation ends badly, and God starts over in the next dispensation.
Dispensationalism is, by definition, cessationist: It teaches that the supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit (miracles, miraculous spiritual gifts, etc.) ceased with the death of the last apostle or with the completion of the New Testament.

Almost all orthodox (Protestant, evangelical, Anglican, RCC, etc.) scholars rejected Darby's theology, but it gained a foothold among clergy with less formal training.
Darby's system teaches 2 separate plans of salvation for Israel and the Church.

From 1830 through the 1950's, Dispensationalism grew in popularity within the American Evangelical churches.
Dispensationalism has always been a small, sectarian minority within the Christian church as a whole.
The following churches have never been Dispensationalist: Classical Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, Lutheran, most Evangelicals, and most Baptists.
No Southern Baptist college or seminary has ever been officially dispensationalist.
Dispensationalism was never as popular overseas and was never believed by a majority of American Evangelicals.

Because Pentecostalism arose among Evangelicals who happened to be Dispensationalist, many early Pentecostals were Dispensationalist.
However, other early Pentecostals were Premillennial, Postmillennial, or Amillennial.
Dispensationalism became dominant in the Pentecostal movement for a season.
Almost all of the crazy prophecy speculation comes from within Dispensationalism.
The largest number of Dispensationalists were independent Baptist Fundamentalists, with a minority found among other Baptists groups, a few Presbyterians, and the Pentecostals.

Since the 1960's, Dispensationalism has been dying among its own scholars.
Fewer seminaries remain officially dispensational.
Almost all Evangelical and Pentecostal scholars reject Dispensationalism, with its unique doctrines.
Almost all of them are premillennial or amillennial in their eschatology.

WHEN DARBY INVENTED DISPENSATIONALISM, THIS NEW WAY OF INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE, numerous new doctrines were taught that had never been taught before …

- The Dispensational Ages, as opposed to the Covenantal Epochs (of Grace).
- Israel & the Church as completely distinct peoples of God with separate plans of salvation.
- The Complete Decline of the Church at the end of the Apostolic Age.
- The Complete Cessation of all supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit at the end of the Apostolic Age (very few people had taught before).
- The "Church Age" is a parenthesis in God's dealing with humanity because God's dealing with humanity is really all about Israel.
- Scripture should be interpreted in a "literalistic" way, with little regard for types or figures of speech or genre of literature and many other accepted principles of hermeneutics.
- The Second Coming will be in two stages, a "rapture" (catching away) of the Church, followed 7 years later by a public "revelation" of Christ at his return to earth.
- The time between the "rapture" and the "revelation" of Christ is a 7 year period of first peace and then great tribulation.
- Christians would be persecuted by a personal antichrist with absolute world power.
- Jews will rebuild their temple and fully install the O.T. sacrificial system, which God will accept.

- All of the O.T. and N.T. prophecies and apocalyptic passages must be interpreted in a literalistic manner.
- The Jewish Temple and sacrificial system will be utilized by the Jewish people throughout a literal 1,000 year millennium and will be acceptable to God.

KEEP IN MIND, THE DISPENSATIONAL SYSTEM is inherently cessationist, and if you adhere to the interpretive principles Darby developed, it leads to a cessationist position. Most Pentecostals who subscribe to Dispensationalism do not know that. So, to be Pentecostal and Dispensational, is a bit problematic IF you consistently apply HIS principles as he did.

A few of the problems with Dispensationalism include …

- Inconsistent Hermeneutic: claims to be literally interpreting Scripture, but is inconsistent, interpreting some passages literally and others figuratively
- Plays loose with Genre & Literary Type, plays loose with History & Culture, plays loose with linguistics - such as Apocalyptic and Figurative language.
- "Plays loose" – does not follow interpretive rules consistently
- RESULT ? The text does not determine the doctrine: Dispensationalist doctrine determines the meaning of the text. This is NOT the best way to do theology.
- Tends to shoe-horn texts to fit the predetermined dispensationalist theological system. This teaches us bad Bible reading skills, including Proof texting.

A PROBLEMATIC SHADOWY ORIGIN …

MARGARET MCDONALD

- Scottish Teenager, Apocalyptic Visions.
- News of the girl's visions of tribulations, Anti-Christ, etc., spread and became religious chatter. Many shared apocalyptic elements with Darby's Dispensational System.
    - Darby claims he developed the system *before* hearing of the visions. Historians have concerns about this claim because of similar content, timing. Very coincidental.
- Margaret had her visions in 1832
- Darby claims he developed his teachings in 1827, we have no substantial record of this, but it may be true.
- Nevertheless, scholars have considered Darby's claim suspicious
    - As a cessationist, Darby and his later followers would not want the origins of their system associated in any way with the trance visions of a teen-age girl in a new sect.

DISPENSATIONALIST POPULARIZERS

Two men became popularizers of Darby's Dispensationalism through "study" Bibles they created: C. I. Scofield and Finis J. Dake. This influenced a significant number of Pentecostal ministers and laity.

CYRUS INGERSOLL SCOFIELD (1843 – 1921)

- **Dispensationalist Teacher (1888+)**
- **Scofield Reference Bible (1909)**

Scofield was a partially trained attorney with NO theological education.
Left his first wife and two daughters, never supporting them, later remarried and fathered a son.

Scofield was appointed a District Attorney in Kansas, then forced to resign "under a cloud of scandal" because of questionable financial transactions, that may have included accepting bribes from railroads, stealing political contributions intended for a political candidate, and forging signatures on bank notes. Converted in 1880's, Scofield eventually became Dispensationalist, began writing, became known as a Dispensationalist teacher, and began calling himself "Doctor." He became an independent Baptist pastor. **Scofield systematized Darby's Dispensationalism, and created a "study" Bible with simplistic Dispensationalist notes in 1909.**

The Scofield Reference Bible was Cessationist and Fundamentalist, but it became popular among many Pentecostals.

The Scofield Study Bible has sold ever since, only beginning to decline in the past few decades.

Scofield's Bible shaped many poorly educated ministers and laity into Dispensationalists.

When the new Assemblies of God Executive Presbytery recognized the anti-Pentecostal notes in the Scofield Reference Bible, they banned its advertisement in the Pentecostal Evangel for two years (1924-1926). Then, the EP relented to pressure from grassroots AG people and began advertising Scofield's reference Bible in the Pentecostal Evangel.

FINIS J. DAKE (1902 – 1987)

- **Prophecy Charts / Teaching (1928)**
- **Dake Study Bible (1963)**

Dake was credentialed first with the Assemblies of God, then with the Church of God, then became independent.

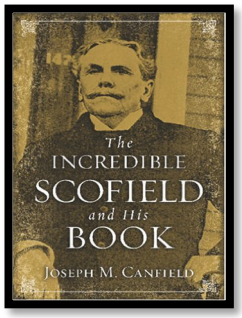
He began teaching Dispensationalist eschatology in the late 1920's, producing large colorful charts.

While pastoring in Illinois in 1937, he took a 16 year old girl across state lines, registering in 3 different hotels. Facing prison, he pled guilty, was convicted of violating the Mann Act, and was defrocked by AG. *Dake created a Pentecostal Bible similar to Scofield's in 1963.*

Dake held many eccentric or heretical perspectives many of which he included in his study Bible:

- Holy Trinity – each member of the Trinity has a personal body, soul, and spirit
- Jesus was not fully God while incarnate
- Jesus' resurrection body was not physical in any way
- Grace is conditional on obeying God and doing good works
- Sickness results from willful unbelief and disobedience or sin
- God lives in a mansion on a material planet called Heaven and is invisible to us only because He is so far away that we cannot see Him
- Humans are miniatures of God in attributes and power
- Disease germs are related to demons
- God wants the races to remain separate as they were originally and will be in eternity.

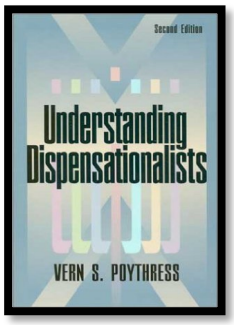
The Scofield, Dakes, and Ryrie study Bibles are very poor, minority perspectives, containing only PERSONAL commentary, and should never be used or recommended. These study bibles are never recommended by any Assemblies of God schools or scholars.



Good **resources on the origins of Dispensationalism …**

The Incredible Scofield and His Book,
by Joseph M. Canfield

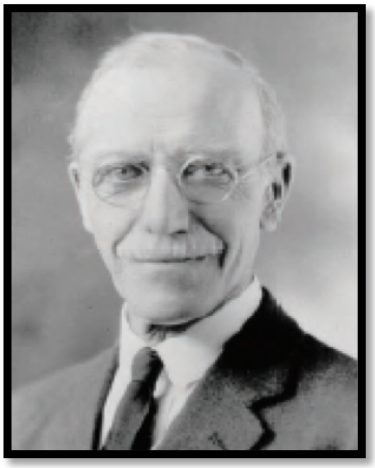
Understanding Dispensationalists,
by Vern S. Poythress



In the early decades of the Assemblies of God, even though the official majority position was dispensationalist, there was a fair amount of diversity. This is explained in the following article: **"D. W. Kerr and Eschatological Diversity in the Assemblies of God,"** Dr. Glen Menzies and President Gordon Anderson, NCU of the AG.

Daniel Warren Kerr was one of the most influential founding fathers in the Assemblies of God. "The statement of Faith approved at the 1916 Council was largely the work of D. W. Kerr,"[1] yet he held a most unusual view of the Rapture and Tribulation, one which even in his own day was eccentric and which has never become popular. Moreover, since he believed in two raptures and that at least part of the Church will go through the Tribulation, it appears that according to the Assemblies of God Bylaws he held to what is now a disapproved doctrine.

Surprising? Not really, when one understands how and why the Assemblies of God was formed and the way the founders viewed the role of doctrine in relation to the mission of the church. In a nutshell they believed that unity of purpose is more important than unity of doctrine, and that the Movement would be well served by allowing latitude in some doctrinal issues, as long as those issues did not become divisive.



Daniel W. Kerr

CONCLUSION

Daniel W. Kerr believed in the imminence of the blessed hope, the rapture of the saints. While he believed in the rather unorthodox theory of at least two Raptures separated in time by 7 years, he did not divide the church by promoting this view. Following his lead, the Assemblies of God has wisely never insisted on absolute uniformity in these peripheral doctrinal matters or it would have excluded men such as D. W. Kerr from its ranks.

As we approach the end of the 20th century and look back on more than 70 years of Assemblies of God history, it seems we can be helped again by D. W. Kerr and our founders. They organized for a mission—to evangelize the world—and they held to a few doctrinal fundamentals, leaving room for alternate opinions as long as those holding them did not become divisive. Today we face the specter of the organization itself replacing the mission, and doctrinal litmus tests returning us to the debilitating controversies our founders wanted so much to avoid. Let us reaffirm again our fundamentals. Jesus is coming! Be ready, preach His imminent return, and evangelize the world until He calls us home.

For Pentecostals "unity of the Spirit" has always been more important than "unity in the faith." Maranatha!

Differences among Early Pentecostals:

- Early Pentecostals came from varied class and educational backgrounds.
- Spirit-filled believers struggled with issues that taxed their effectiveness, such as purchasing property, being financially accountable, and being rejected by existing denominations.
- Pentecostals disagreed about four major points of doctrine:
    1. Tongues as required evidence of Spirit baptism;

2. The nature of sanctification (instantaneous, as opposed to starting at conversion and continuing); and
3. The Trinity (One God, Jesus only, as opposed to one God, three Persons).
4. The events of the Second Coming of Christ.

- Other differences arose over which form of church government was correct: Congregational, Modified Presbyterian, or Hierarchical.

THE NECESSITY OF SOUND HERMENEUTICS

Point:

1. *We must <u>never</u> <u>bring</u> our own meaning to God's Word.*
2. *The Bible was written FOR us, but it was not written TO us.*
3. *God has intended meanings for His Word. It is our job to discover that meaning by applying proper hermeneutics.*

Eiso-gesis → *Reading meaning INTO the text. This is always wrong.*
Exe-gesis → *Mining the meaning OUT of the text, which already exists. This is always right.*

Now, we may read the Parable of the Sower, and make different applications due to the different circumstances of our lives, struggles, *<u>but the text means what it m</u>*eans.
So, we should *<u>never</u>* say "to me this verse means such & such," "to me it means this & that."
And we must always guide God's People to *<u>never</u>* say such things OR ELSE it actually leads us away from rightly understanding the word God has given.
Remember, we are separated from the Bible by … Distance:

- **Of Time –** at it's youngest, the Bible is 2,000 years old.
- **Of Culture** – we live in the in 21st Century America, the Bible was written in the ANE by pre-scientific people.
- **Of Language** – Biblical Hebrew is a dead language. Biblical Greek is a dead language.
- **Of Genres** – The Bible is a Library of different genres. Just like books, movies today. Jurassic Park is not a documentary. Avengers is not based on a true story. You don't watch Transformers the same way you watch a Romantic Comedy. You instinctively know you must interpret them differently. Well, there are many genres which exist in the Bible, which we DO NOT have today. And if we don't LEARN those genres & other literary devices, we will misinterpret God's Word.
  POINT → ***There's a great distance between us & the Biblical World, Authors.***
- **They write from a different time, culture, & understanding of reality.**

RATHER than trying to COLLAPSE the distance, we have to learn to rightly <u>CROSS</u> the distance to understand WHAT THEY MEANT THEN when they wrote in this way, using their literary methods.

EXAMPLE: The Apostle Paul writes an Epistle to Timothy.
Epistles are basically letters. ***Paul's letters read very much like non-Christian Greco-Roman letters of that day.***
Both Paul's Epistles and non-Christian epistles contain:

1. *Greetings, Well-Wishes, Thanksgiving*
2. *Mentions of "peace" to the recipient from the gods or God.*
3. *Updating of personal circumstances.*
4. *Prayers for the health of recipient.*

5. *Commands to follow, orders to obey.*
6. *Benedictions & Blessings & Goodbyes.*

Paul's chose a GENRE common to his day, that his readers would easily recognize & understand. Let's take a quick look at this letter written TO Timothy, but also written FOR us as Christians.

2 Timothy 2:15 "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

"Do your best" – is an imperative in the Greek.

- An imperative is a COMMAND. It is the kind of word a military commander would give to a soldier because it is the strongest way to say something.

"correctly handles" – means *according to its design*. Was a particular passage designed and inspired using figurative language of some kind, or particularly symbolic words, with identifiable literary techniques like chiasms, in a particular genre? Then we MUST read it that way! That is the only way to "correctly handle" that Word of God.

- You do not attempt to cut a steak with a spoon. It is not designed to do that, and you'll end up with a pathetic mound of meat. Our principles of interpretation are like a sharp knife to help us correctly handle / rightly divide and not make a mess.
- Do you want your surgeon to use a spoon or a scalpel? You want him to use the right tools, or he does painful damage and is not worthy of his title and position.
- Likewise, we must use the right tools, lest we do injustice to God's Word and potentially damage His people.

ESCHATOLOGY & HERMENEUTICS: A BROAD OVERVIEW

THE FREQUENT USE OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN ESCHATOLOGICAL PASSAGES

The following hermeneutical principles (principles of interpretation) are *NOT* matters of opinion. They are established literary standards, understood, accepted, and practiced by scholars of Scripture beginning 3,500 years ago. Well-trained pastors and teachers know and use these principles.

Eschatology deals with a LOT of figurative language.

- *The Bible is permeated with figurative language – figures of speech, words and phrases that use an image, a picture, to make a point or communicate a truth.*
- *Simile, metaphor, symbols, parables, phenomenological language, accommodation, and so forth, are NOT meant to be taken "literalistically."*
- *They are explicitly meant to be understood "literarily" as a literary convention commonly used in literature.*

"LITERALISTIC" – means reading something as if the word, words, phrases, or passage MUST be taken at simplistic face value ("plain" meaning).

"Literalistic" reading collapses all time and distance between us and the original authors and readers of Scripture. It ignores the vast differences in culture, language, imagery, and worldview.

- *Most people who say we must read the Bible "literally" really mean "literalistically." They just don't know they mean that.*
- *"Literalistic" reading often refuses to accept the differences in literary genre, figures of speech, and so forth.*
- *"Literalistic" reading claims that all people, regardless of training, can simply read all Scripture at face value and interpret it via common sense and the Spirit's leading. That is a disaster waiting to happen. MORE ON THIS LATER.*

RULES → IDENTIFYING / DIFFERENTIATING LITERALISTIC and FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

1. IF the genre of the book and the immediate local context is …

a. Plain prose narrative, or
b. Plain declarative letter (epistle),
c. With no poetic, symbolic, or figurative speech,
THEN, look for the straightforward (plainest) meaning of that passage …
i. As the original author and audience would have understood it,
ii. Within their literary, historical, cultural context,
iii. Within the theological intent of the book.

2. Having looked for the straightforward meaning as just described,

a. IF that "plain, literal" message does not make sense,
b. THEN look more closely for figurative speech: allusions, symbols, metaphors, similes, types, and so on.

3. Look for a clue or key in the genre and context.

a. **Genre** *tells you what kind of literature you are looking at, how to approach it, how to read it, what to expect, and how to interpret it.*
b. *Genre* and *context (immediate passage & of the book) tells you whether to look first for literal language or look first for figurative language.*
c. If the book or passage is high prose, poetry, or apocalyptic, then **do NOT** look for literalistic language first. Expect figurative and symbolic language, and theological content.

4. Be alert for several kinds of "cues" or signs that you are dealing with non-literal language. These are clues that you are dealing with *theological* rather than chronological or "literal" content:

a. Figurative language
b. Dischronology – events/time out of order
c. Accommodation
d. Phenomenological language
e. Anthropomorphic language
f. Other literary conventions *associated with narrative* … narrative patterning, structure, chiasms, etc.

Phenomenological means describing something as it appears, as you see the phenomenon with your eyes.

Anthropomorphic means giving human characteristics to non-human beings or objects. "trees wave their arms" "the eyes of God." Scripture says God is Spirit, therefore when he is described as having eyes, ears, hands, etc., that is figurative language describing God in a way to which humans can relate.

EXAMPLES of Some Comparative Figurative Language

1. Similes - "His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod" 1 Sam. 17:7.
2. Metaphors - "The Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God" (Deuteronomy 4:24).
3. Anthropomorphisms - "I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:16).

4. Personification - "Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?" (Proverbs 8:1).

Figurative language is a literary convention TELLING you, "Do NOT interpret this literally (literalistically)!"

"The Rocks will cry out" … "the trees will wave their arms" - these are examples of anthropomorphic figurative language. These things do not "literally" happen. Figurative language is used to make the *theological* point that all of creation in some way speaks of, speaks to, or praises our Creator God.

APOCALYPTIC FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

What is called "*collapsing universe*" language is often used to signify *catastrophic judgment* from God, the *fall of nations*, and *the end of epochs, POLITICAL UPHEAVEL ON EARTH.*

The destruction of Babylon in 539 B.C. . . .

> "the *stars of heaven* and *their constellations will not flash forth their light*; The *sun will be dark* when it rises, And *the moon will not shed its light*" (Isa 13:10).

The destruction of Edom in 586 B.C. …

> "All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall..." (Isa 34:4)

The language used to describe each "day of the Lord" was apocalyptic, but metaphorical, not literalistic. Nations fell, epochs ended, new eras began, but NONE of the heavenly catastrophes occurred … *they were never supposed to occur!* The original authors and readers understood this!

Jesus also used this kind of Apocalyptic Figurative Language (collapsing universe language) to prophesy Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD (Matt 24, Mk 13, Lk 21).

Matthew 24:29 "Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'"

Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, Christ was vindicated as Son of Man, and the epoch clearly changed: the Old Covenant was clearly gone forever, and the New Covenant People established as God's People forever. BUT, none of the heavenly catastrophes occurred … they were not supposed to! Jesus and the apostles understood this!

Apocalyptic figurative language permeates the apocalyptic portions of books like Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Revelation. Such language is TELLING us, "Do NOT read this literalistically! READ IT FIGURATIVELY, SYMBOLICALLY!"

NUMERIC Figurative Language

Numbers are often used symbolically in Scripture. …

- THREE – divine perfection; related to God.
- FOUR – whole, whole earth (known to writer); cosmic completeness.
- SIX – incomplete; human; human effort.
- SEVEN – fullness, completion, perfection. (GENESIS)
- EIGHT – a new beginning, new order; resurrection.
- TEN – many; multiples mean many more; all.

- TWELVE – fullness of God's people; unity in diversity.
- THOUSAND – very many; a very long / complete time.
- Other ancient people used many of these same numbers in similar or identical ways. The use of numbers as symbols was not a brand new supernatural revelation from God. Rather, God was using a literary convention that the Hebrews and surrounding cultures already shared.
- In the ANE, seven was considered a number of perfection and luck, and was also associated with the number of days in a week. It was also the length of time often taken to build a temple in temple-building stories.
- Emperors Hadrian and Commodus minted coins with their images having seven stars above them, symbolizing dominion over the whole / complete world.

BIBLICAL AUTHORS DID THIS WITH GENEAOLOGIES and with AGES IN GENESIS 1-11.
IT WAS COMMON and a COMMONLY ACCEPTED PRACTICE IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST.
THEY WERE MAKING *THEOLOGICAL* POINTS, WHICH WE MUST DIG INTO TO DISCOVER.
BEFORE YOU INTERPRET ANY BIBLICAL NUMBER, MAKE SURE YOU KNOW PRECISELY HOW SCRIPTURE IS USING IT. IF YOU DON'T KNOW, DON'T BE DOGMATIC ABOUT HOW THAT NUMBER IS BEING USED.

Psalm 90 "4 For *a thousand years* in your sight are *like a day* that has just gone by, or *like a watch in the night*. 5 You sweep men away in the *sleep* of death; they are like the *new grass of the morning-* "

- *This is a simile, a word-picture, a figurative, picturesque way of saying something, of making a point. ARE MEN ACTUALLY GRASS ? NO.*

2 Peter 3:8 "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is *like a thousand years*, and a thousand years are like a day. " 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise'

- *In both the Old and New Testaments, the phrase "a thousand years" is a picturesque way of saying "a very long time."*
- *It is Numeric Figurative Language, TELLING us do NOT take this literally!*
- *And, here "a day" means "a short time."*
- In other words, God looks at time completely differently than humans.

The biblical authors – Moses and Peter in this case – are using the phrase and numeric value "a thousand years" to describe "a very long time" in a colorful way in order to make their point more memorable.
The biblical writers often used similes, metaphors, and symbols to help readers remember the real point.
They constantly used these kinds of techniques in poetic passages and apocalyptic passages, but they also used them in narratives (historical accounts), gospels, and epistles (N. T. letters).
The Bible is NOT equating a thousand years with a day.
The Bible is NOT meaning a thousand years "literally."
How can we know if a number is literal or figurative? Context, context, context. Genre, subgenre, argument, context.

Revelation 20 "1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for **a thousand years**. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until **the thousand years** were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time."

The number "1,000" or the phrase "a thousand years" is a figure of speech meaning a very large amount or very long time. It is symbolic, and should be read "literarily," and NOT read literalistically.

Highly stylized numbers, **quantities, or measurements,**
using symbolically perfect numbers or dimensions,
with highly symmetrical language, should also alert the reader to *theological* rather than literal content.

This is the case with Ezekiel's description of the perfect final Temple and city (Ezekiel 40-48).
That account is packed with all of the literary conventions mentioned above.
Therefore, it is NOT a description of a literal physically rebuilt Jewish temple, but of the spiritual house of God, the Church, and the New Heavens and New Earth.

GENRE - *THE PRIMARY KEY TO CORRECT INTERPRETATION ! !*

Genre – Kind. Class. Category. **The kind of literature I'm reading. The category to which this book or passage belongs.**

1. *Genre is God telling me HOW to read this book or passage*.
2. God inspired the genre BEFORE He inspired the words. They are inextricably linked.
3. *If you refuse to accept God's chosen genre and you read the words another way, you are denying inspiration, and destroying God's Word.*

God inspired many different kinds or forms of literature in the Bible.
Every genre used in the Bible is a genre that was common in the surrounding cultures of that day. People reading a biblical book, or hearing it read, would have known *HOW* to read it or hear it.
God and the human authors expected the original readers and listeners to see what KIND (genre) of literature they were hearing or reading, and to therefore know what to expect from that Word, and what NOT to expect from that Word.
"When the Bible employs a literary method, it asks to be approached as (that kind of) literature and not as something else." Leland Ryken
He led the human writers to choose various "genres" in which to write His divine Word to humanity.
Each kind of literature has its own frame of reference, ground rules, strategy, and purpose.

The broadest O.T. categories of literary genres are …
O.T. – Narrative, Law, Wisdom, Poetry, Prophecy, Apocalyptic
Narrative – Genesis, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, etc.
Law – Leviticus, Deuteronomy
Wisdom – Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job
Poetry – Psalms, many other places
Prophecy – Jeremiah, Isaiah, Malachi, …
Apocalyptic – Daniel, Ezekiel, other prophets, …
Every genre has different literary conventions, and MUST be read differently, according to its own rules.
There are different rules of interpretation for each different genre.

NOTE: A book of the Bible may fall in one genre as a whole book, *but will often have passages embedded within it that are a different genre entirely!*
Examples: Cosmogony embedded in Narrative (Genesis),
Poetry embedded in Epistle, Apocalyptic embedded in Gospel, etc.

GENRE – PROPHECY

Understanding the prophetic books and reading them correctly.

THE PROPHETS – Enforcing the Covenant in Israel
THE NATURE OF PROPHECY

The prophetic books can be difficult to correctly interpret and understand if you *misunderstand* two things:

1. The God-intended FUNCTION of prophecy – what God intended prophets and prophecy to do; its reason for being.

2. The God-inspired FORM of prophecy – the manner in which it was delivered: *APOCALYPTIC LANGUAGE*, context, language, word-pictures, figures of speech, metaphors, poetry, and so forth.

There are several challenges or problems that flow from those two foundational characteristics of prophetic writing. Here are the most common challenges or problems that readers face because they misunderstand the FUNCTION and FORM of prophecy …

1. First Problem – Prophecy is NOT Primarily Foretelling

Most people misunderstand the meaning of the word "prophecy."
They think it primarily means "foretelling" the future, especially the coming of Jesus or the end of the age.
That is wrong. The truth is that …

- Less than 5% specifically describes the New Testament age.
- Less than 2% of Old Testament prophecy is messianic.
- Less than 1% refers to events still to come (the end of the age).

The prophets did foretell the future, but it was almost always the immediate future of Israel, Judah, and the surrounding nations, and NOT our future.
UNDERSTANDING THIS CLEARS UP A LOT OF BAD ESCHATOLOGY ☺
ALL OF THIS AFFECTS *HOW WE DO ESCHATOLOGY*.
No one sets out to be wrong, use wrong principles of reading, but it happens. We need to be careful.

2. Second Problem – Prophetic Books are Collections of Spoken "Forthtelling" Oracles from *Specific Historic Contexts.*

- The primary function of the prophets was "forth-telling."
- They spoke for God to their contemporaries, as God's ambassadors to enforce the covenant. "*You have broken God's Law*! … *Repent, keep the covenant treaty properly, and the blessings written therein will be yours. Refuse, and the punishments written therein are coming!"*
- This fact of prophecy as "spoken" words or oracles (prophecies, warnings, promises) that were *later written down* accounts for most of our difficulty.
- PROPHECIES WERE NOT one long continuous message, rather, they were numerous messages often over long periods of time and even addressing different circumstances.
- There were hundreds of prophets in Israel's history, but only a few are mentioned:
-

The prophetic books are collections of different oracles …

- given at different times and places, sometimes years apart;
- sometimes written down in non-chronological order,
- hard to know when one oracle ends and another begins,
- and usually written in:
    1. POETIC LANGUAGE
    2. APOCALYPTIC LANGUAGE
    3. A COMBINATION OF BOTH.

"Apocalyptic" or "*collapsing universe*" language is often used to signify *catastrophic judgment* from God, the *fall of nations*
WHEN THE PEOPLE DID NOT KEEP COVENANT WITH YAHWEH, THE PROPHETS USED APOCALYPTIC LANGUAGE TO REMIND THEM OF THE JUDGMENT THAT MIGHT BEFALL THEM and often did befall them, such as being conquered by multiple Empires: Assyrians, Babylonians, Rome, etc.
The Jews knew this, and Jesus and his disciples knew this, as they read the prophetic books.

3. Third Problem – Misunderstanding Historical Distance
The original audiences in Israel and Judah understood the language, culture, and message of the prophets much better than us.
They were intimately involved in the very situation the prophets were addressing. *This was God's word TO them.*
We must pay very close attention and work hard, using all of our study helps, to correctly understand *God's word TO Israel and Judah* through the prophets. Only when we understand God's Word TO THEM, can we *apply* it FOR US.
We are from 2,400 to 3,500 years distant from the prophets and their prophecies.
We are widely separated by our radically different cultures, worldviews, thought patterns, and languages.
Therefore, it is often hard for us to correctly interpret and clearly understand what they are referring to and why.

THE FUNCTION OF PROPHECY - Is often misunderstood because Historical Distance is misunderstood.

1. **The Prophets were covenant enforcement mediators.**

The Law was God's covenant treaty with his servant nation, Israel.
God sent the Prophets to subsequent generations to remind Israel (and Judah) of the Law's requirements, and of the punishments and rewards for breaking or keeping the Law.

- There were corporate blessings for keeping covenant.
- There were corporate curses for breaking covenant.

The Prophets prophesied in the context of the Old Covenant, using the Law's categories of blessing and punishment.
Health, Prosperity, Peace, Famine, Exile, Plague, etc.
Most of the prophecies from about 800 – 600 B.C. are warnings of curses, because Israel and Judah were increasingly turning away from God.
Assyria destroyed Israel in 732 B.C., and Babylon captured Judah in 587-586 B.C.
After that, prophecies are primarily blessings, because after punishment has been given for covenant breaking, and repentance ensues, God returns to his primary goal of showing mercy.

2. The Prophets' message was not their own, but God's.
The Hebrew word for prophet – *nabi / navi* – comes from the Semitic word meaning "to call" – *nabu*.
The Prophets repeatedly emphasize that God called them, and that it is God's word and not their own.

- Exodus 3:1f – God calls Moses.
- Isaiah 6
- Jeremiah 1
- Exekiel 1
- Hosea 1
- Amos 7:14
- Jonah 1

3. The Prophets' word is unoriginal.
The Prophets' do NOT have a new and original word from God. *This is NOT new revelation*. They are delivering what God has already said in his Covenant, the Law of Moses.
THIS RADICALLY CLARIFIES HOW WE DO ESCHATOLOGY !
Consider Hosea 4, where the prophet announces God's judgment for breaking the Law – murder, adultery, lying, etc., etc., are listed.
Not all of the commandments are listed, but the hearers *would have been thinking of all the ways they had broken the Law*.
The Law is not cited verbatim but is restated in clear and arresting ways.

Even the Messianic prophecies are not original.
God had promised the seed of woman, the seed of Abraham, and a prophet like Moses, in the Pentateuch.
Genesis 3:15 "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."
Deuteronomy 18:18 "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. "
The *detail* about Messiah we find in prophets like Isaiah 42, 49, 50, 53 is new, *but the concept of Messiah was already revealed in the Law*.

IN SUMMARY, …

Recognize the challenges or problems in understanding prophecy:
1. First Problem – Prophecy is NOT Primarily Foretelling
2. Second Problem – Prophetic Books are Collections of Spoken "Forthtelling" Oracles from Specific Historic Contexts
3. Third Problem – Misunderstanding Historical Distance
Recognize the Function of Prophecy:

1. The Prophets were covenant enforcement mediators.
2. The Prophets' message was not their own, but God's.
3. The Prophets' word is unoriginal.

REMEMBER THE STATISTICS:

- Less than 5% specifically describes the New Testament age.
- Less than 2% of Old Testament prophecy is messianic.
- Less than 1% refers to events still to come (the end of the age).

The prophets did foretell the future, *but it was almost always the immediate future of Israel, Judah, and the surrounding nations, and NOT our future.*
Deuteronomy 4:25-31 – God promised Israel that if they continue to break covenant, their nation will be destroyed and they will be deported into exile, but that he would bring them back to the Land. That happened for Judah with Babylon: God brought them back from exile. They returned under Ezra and Nehemiah, and prophecy ceased as they waited for Messiah.

AND SO, the Torah - the Law of Moses (Pentateuch: Gen, Exd, Lev, Num, Deut) - was written TO Israel/Judah, IN the Land. That covenant, with its requirements, blessings, and curses (punishments) was given corporately to Israel (not individually to Israelites), IN the Land.
That Law was not written TO us but it was written FOR us: The ritual aspects can teach us principles about God's character and his desires for our character, but the rituals do not apply to us. The MORAL aspects as interpreted through the fuller revelation of Christ and the Gospel DO apply to us.

THEREFORE, the prophets were speaking TO Israel/Judah IN the Land. Their prophecies can teach us principles about God's character and his desires for our character, but the rituals do not apply to us. The MORAL aspects as interpreted through the fuller revelation of Christ and the Gospel DO apply to us. Their *FORTHtelling* AND their *FOREtelling* were TO (meant for) Israel/Judah, they must be read that way, and then interpreted through Christ and the New Testament.

NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION of PROPHECY

The N.T. writers wrote not only under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but with the direct instruction of Jesus Christ regarding … - the correct understanding of all Scripture, and - *the correct principles for interpreting all Scripture.* ***WE MUST INTERPRET PROPHECY IN THE SAME WAY THEY DID!***

JESUS taught the apostles how to see a fuller meaning in *some* O.T. texts.
Examples of N.T. writers finding a fuller meaning in an O.T. text include …

Matthew 2:15 "where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."
Hosea 11:1 "1 "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."
(As taught by Jesus, Matthew saw Jesus as the One True Jew, True Israel, who never failed.)

The same Holy Spirit who inspired the O.T. writers also inspired the N.T. writers and was able to show them where a secondary or fuller sense was intended in reference to Christ.
FURTHERMORE, as God's Son and Messiah, Jesus Christ knew the true meaning of the entire O.T., including the fuller sense of any passage.
For three years before his Passion and resurrection, he taught his disciples.
For forty days between his resurrection and ascension, he taught his disciples, opening their minds to understand the Scripture.

PRINCIPLES for INTERPRETING PROPHETIC "FORETELLING"

Foundational truths for interpreting O.T. prophecy:

1. O.T. prophecies *do NOT* have to be fulfilled in only precise literalistic ways. There are numerous ways in which Jesus and the Apostles affirm that O.T. prophecies have been fulfilled.
2. Jesus and the Apostles established the interpretive principles to be used in understanding O.T. prophecies, and we are required to use the same principles of interpretation that they have established.
3. Jesus and the Apostles have established that the O.T. prophecies are fulfilled in some way by Jesus Christ in his First or Second Comings, and by his followers.

We must remember several general characteristics of biblical prophecy.

1. **First, the OT prophets understood** that history has two major periods - the present age and the age to come - even though their writings did not always make clear distinctions between the two.
   Most OT prophecies refer to the present age, even when referring to the distant future.
   When referring to the "age to come" the prophets usually used introductory phrases as "in the latter days," "last days," "in those days," the "days are coming," a nd so forth.

2. The OT prophets have a telescopic view of the future.

They sometimes saw a series of future events as if they immediately succeeded each other, when there was really a lot of time intervening between the events.
Isaiah 9:6-7 "6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this."

Isaiah wrote as if the birth and reign of David's son would all occur in one lifetime.
The NT sees Christ's first coming as the inbreaking of the Age to Come, and *the beginning of the last days of this present age*.
From our perspective, a long time passes between Christ's first coming and his second coming.
Like many OT prophets, Isaiah telescopes these events into one group of immediately succeeding events.
SO, when interpreting the foretelling aspects of OT prophecy, we must examine each oracle very carefully to be sure where and when it applies - Christ first advent and the present age, **OR** Christ's second advent and the Age to Come.

3. **An OT prophecy may have more than one fulfillment, one near the prophet's lifetime and one long past it.**
   - In 2 Samuel 7:12-16 God promised David that his son Solomon would succeed him as king. This was fulfilled in 1 Kings 1-2.
   - BUT, Hebrews 1:5 also applies 2 Samuel 7:14 to Jesus, not just as Son of David but also as Son of God.
   - AND, the details of the prophecy, and each successive "fulfilling", *may be slightly different.*
     2 Samuel 7:14 "I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men."
     Hebrews 1:5 "For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"?

     These successive historical fulfillments do NOT have to be precisely identical in all details.

4. **New Testament teaching associates *ALL* prophetic fulfillments with some aspect of Christ's first or second comings.**
   That means we should be very careful in suggesting that any contemporary event "fulfills biblical prophecy" *unless we can also show that it also implies the imminent return of Jesus.*
   - Yet, remember → Jesus said there would be NO SIGN, but that his return would be unexpected and sudden

5. **Many OT prophecies are *conditional*, NOT absolute. Their fulfillment *depends* on two things:**
   a. The sovereignty of God (his freedom to do or not do as he pleases).
   b. The status of relationship between the people and God (their rebellion or repentance).

The Many Ways of Fulfillment - *OT prophecy CAN be fulfilled in more than one way.*

1. **Historical Fulfillment - Prophecies are sometimes fulfilled in a seemingly literal way, by historic events, sometimes a short time later and sometimes decades or centuries later.**
   Examples:

a. Elisha predicted that Samaria would have inexpensive food by the next day despite the Syrian siege. 2 Kings 7:1-2, 19:20f.
b. A prophet predicted that Josiah would desecrate the altar at Bethel, and 300 years later he did. 1 Kings 13, 2 Kings 23.
c. Isaiah predicted a forerunner would prepare Messiah's way, and John the Baptist did. Isaiah 40:3-5, Luke 3:3-6.
d. Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, and this was fulfilled in 70 AD. Matt 24, Mark 13, Luke 19:41-44.

2. **Frustrated or Suspended Fulfillment** - Some prophetic books lead readers through a series of surprising, incomplete fulfillments that really point to a fulfillment beyond the book's own historical perspective. (Isaiah, Amos) Some prophecies are "filled up" a little at a time.

3. **Historical-Figurative Fulfillment** - Some prophecies are fulfilled in unique, *other-than-literal*, figurative ways.
Example:
a. Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.
Zechariah 13 7 "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!" declares the LORD Almighty. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones. 8 In the whole land," declares the LORD, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. 9 This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.' "

Matthew 26:31 "Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: " 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"
In the original passage, God judged the shepherd for his own sins, and two-thirds of Israel was killed.
Jesus and the NT clearly did not view a literal historic fulfillment as necessary for the prophecy to be fulfilled, for in the fulfillment of this prophecy …
a. Jesus was without sin,
b. Eight (2/3) of the disciples were not killed,
c. *and* the remaining 4 disciples blessed.
Clearly, the prophecy was adequately fulfilled in a figurative sense.

4. **Historic-Spiritual Fulfillment - Some OT prophecies were and are fulfilled by historic events, but in a spiritual manner rather than a literal manner.**
Example:
a. David's Fallen Tent
Amos 9:11-12 11 "In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, 12 so that they may possess the remnant of Edom ***and*** all the nations that bear my name, " declares the LORD, who will do these things.
Acts 15:14-18 "14 Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. 15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: 16" 'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, 17 that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things' 18 that have been known for ages."

Amos had prophesied the restoration of David's monarchy and its political rule over Edom and other nations.
The original context implies nothing other than a historical-literal fulfillment.
HOWEVER, in the Jerusalem Council, James declares that the ultimate real fulfillment of Amos 9 is the inclusion of the gentiles in God's people through faith in Jesus Christ.
James declares that the rule and reign predicted by Amos has been fulfilled by Christ's spiritual rule over gentile Christians in the church.
James, the Apostles, and the entire Jerusalem Council - *made up almost exclusively of Jewish Christians* - declared Amos' prophecy to be **fully fulfilled** in a **historical-spiritual way**, through Christ's reign as David's Son over the gentiles who were now God's people, the Church.

b. Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant was not fulfilled by the end of the OT period. There was **no** historical-literal fulfillment.
Instead, the NT writers considered it fulfilled by the death of Christ and through the Church.
This is another *historical-spiritual* fulfillment.

READING THE NEW TESTAMENT WELL

The key hermeneutical principle of the New Testament is *FULFILLMENT* …

Luke 24:26-27 "26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."*

Jesus and the Apostles wrote the New Testament as the fulfillment of the Old Testament

1. *In the person and work of Jesus Christ*
2. *in the People he was redeeming from every nation (people-group).*

They viewed God's plan and People as flowing in *continuity* from Old Testament Israel, into Jesus Christ, where God's People were resurrected, renewed, recreated, restored.

JESUS WAS *TRUE ISRAEL*. He kept covenant with the Father. And those IN CHRIST, Jew and Gentile, are also TRUE ISRAEL.

a. Jesus is Abraham's One True Seed. Galatians 3:15.
b. Jesus is David's prophesied Son. Matthew 1, Acts 2, Isaiah 11, Jeremiah 23.
c. The Church, made up of believing Jews and gentiles, is God's one true people. Ephesians 1-2, Galatians 3, Romans 4. This truth is repeatedly stated in these Pauline passages!
d. Matthew's entire Gospel presents JESUS as True Israel.
e. Luke's Parables highlight Jewish rejection of Jesus, and God's subsequent rejection of *unbelieving* Israel. This culminates historically in the Destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, Luke 21, Matthew 24, Mark 13. *Believing* Israel, those Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah, constitute the remnant who are resurrected, renewed, recreated, restored IN CHRIST along with believing Gentiles, becoming God's People, all in fulfillment of O.T. prophecies.
f. The Jewish and gentile NT writers consistently call the church the "ekklesia," the *precise word used by the Jewish translators of the OT into Greek (the Septuagint) to describe Israel as a congregation or spiritual community*.
g. This perspective is a settled fact in the N.T., and throughout church history.
h. The Lord Jesus Christ, his Apostles, and the other writers of the New Testament give us the divinely revealed interpretation of the entire Old Testament.

i. *Theirs is the AUTHORITATIVE interpretation and method, and all other interpretation and methods MUST accord and agree with it.*

GENRE – GOSPEL … Four Portraits of Christ

1. Matthew—the promised King (lion). Jesus is the promised Messiah, reconstituting Israel in and around himself. He is the Son of David, and True Israel follows Jesus.
2. Mark—the suffering Servant (ox). Jesus is leading his renewed people on exodus out of sin and bondage.
3. Luke—the perfect Man (man). Jesus is the authentic human, the True Man, who walks in the Spirit bringing good news to the outcast, the poor, the women.
4. John—the Divine One (eagle). Jesus is the True Light, the source of all Life and giver of the Spirit for all the world.

Jesus Fulfills the Old Covenant

The Gospel writers make many allusions to the OT and to Israel in the life of Jesus.
Jesus is portrayed as the fulfillment of all OT types, promises, prophecies, hopes, and trajectories.
Jesus is the embodiment of Israel: The gospel writers use many allusions to O.T. Israel to describe Jesus and the events of his life … here are a few …

a. He is called out of Egypt,
b. He is called God's Son in Israel's place,
c. He passes through baptism, into the wilderness,
   (as Israel passed through the sea and into the wilderness of Sinai)
d. He is tempted for 40 days, but without failure or sin,
   (as Israel was tried for 40 years in the wilderness, failing many times)
e. He is David's True Son,
   (David, and all of his other sons, failed)
f. He reconstitutes Israel, beginning with the 12 apostles,
   (alluding to 12 patriarchs and tribes, then renews/recreates Israel just as prophets like Ezekiel predicted)
f. He perfectly keeps covenant in the Land, offers the perfect sacrifice, as the perfect priest and king, the True Israel.

Wherever you see the word "assembly" or "church" in the NT, it is "ekklesia", the word used for the congregation of Israel in the OT.
Many words which were applied to Israel are now applied to the Church: saints, holy ones, chosen people, holy nation, kingdom of priests, people of God, assembly of God, synagogue, etc., etc.
THIS SAME PRINCIPLE IS TRUE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT'S APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE!
In the Apocalypse - the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ - whenever the names and phrases formerly applied to ethnic Israel in the Old Covenant are used, they now apply to the Church.

THIS IS OFTEN MISCHARACTERIZED AND WRONGLY REFERRED TO AS "REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY"
The Church DID NOT replace Israel.
The Church is the FULFILLMENT of what God intended.
People from all nations, all cultures, Jew and Gentile, recreated into ONE PEOPLE, A NEW HUMANITY.

GENRE - APOCALYPTIC …. Guidelines for Interpretation

1. Look for a meaning in the context.

2. Look for a meaning in the history/culture of the writer.
3. Look for a meaning in previous apocalyptic literature.
4. Look for a parallel in the great events of the salvation story.
5. Apocalyptic includes Daniel (parts), Ezekiel, Zechariah, the Olivet Discourse, Revelation.

APOCALYPTIC Literature

Apocalyptic writing flourished mainly from about 200 BC - 200 AD.

There were numerous Jewish apocalypses (also books that had a lot of apocalyptic in them),etc.

Again, it was a STYLE or GENRE of literature with its own customs, literary conventions and techniques, with its OWN UNIQUE RULES for reading, interpreting, and understanding it correctly.

Characteristics …

1. Apocalyptic uses images, pictures, fantastic descriptions that are wild and bizarre. It is the imagery of fantasy used to describe history, events, people, and things in picturesque ways.
    - The images, numbers, and so forth are SYMBOLIC - they have rich meanings deeper than a mere natural description could evoke.
    - The language is meant to be EVOCATIVE, and THEOLOGICAL - we are supposed to use our imaginations to grasp the theological truth the author is getting at.
    - *It is a serious error to interpret these images literalistically, or to impose new / modern meanings on them. They must be interpreted as the ORIGINAL author and recipients did.*

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU INTERPRET IMAGERY LITERALISTICALLY?
YOU PRESENT AN UGLY PICTURE, OF WHAT IS SUPPOSED TO BE BEAUTIFUL

Reading the Song of Solomon, you know instinctively NOT to read the symbolism, metaphors, imagery, as literal. Song of Solomon is EASILY recognizable as poetry.

BUT MOST BIBLE GENRES are NOT so easily recognizable. And if we do not learn the proper tools of interpretation, our teaching can be mis-shapen, de-formed, and even unintentionally dangerous. Entire systems of bad theology have built because of Bad Hermeneutics.

EX: Word of Faith, Prosperity Gospel, Mormon Theology, Jehovah's Witnesses, Apostle & Prophets movement, and A LOT of TV prophecy & end times teaching looks like this ugly picture to our best scholars & pastors, because they understand how so many good rules of Bible interpretation are being twisted & broken.

And it stirs up fear, anxiety, among God's people, and it even fleeces them of their money at times.
JESUS WILL JUDGE THAT.

THE APOCALYPSE - Revelation

The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Please note: It is "Revelation" SINGULAR! It is *NOT* plural! No "s".)

Literary Genre (type of literature): The introduction tells us this book contains at least 3 genres …

- Apocalyptic - 1:1
- Prophecy - 1:3
- Epistle - 1:4

Author: John on Patmos (apostle or elder)
Date: ca. 95 AD (minority say 69-70)
Recipients: Persecuted Christians in Asia Minor (Turkey)
Subject: The Gospel and Victory of Jesus Christ the King

REVELATION → SCHOOLS OF INTERPRETATION

1. Historicist - The whole book applies to all of history and is talking about various ages of the Church. Now believed by very view people. There is *no* reason to view it this way.
2. Futurist - Says that Chapters 4-22 all apply to the future. *This is full of problems*:
   a. *Whose future? When? Why?*
   b. *First readers could not have understood it. …*
      i. *This violates fundamental hermeneutical principles.*
   c. *Only some "final generation" would find any meaning / relevance in the book.*
   d. *No legitimate reason to view it this way.*

3. Idealist - Says whole book is symbolic encouragement for the church of all time to persevere in our struggle, because Christ has died, risen, and shall ultimately be victorious.
   a. *This is clearly the case in ONE sense.*
   b. *We must interpret the book this way in APPLICATION to the Church's life through history.*
4. Preterist - the book applies to the first century churches to which it was addressed, both regarding events they had already experienced (a little persecution, etc.), and events which were very soon to come upon them. Those events that were predicted as about to come upon them were eventually fulfilled: There was great persecution and suffering, but Rome fell, the Church endured victoriously.
5. **ECLECTIC - Just as there are multiple genres within the book, there are also multiply intended interpretive chronological perspectives.**
   a. Historicist regarding Chapters 1-3 - We know that there were churches in those seven cities, that their historical circumstances do reflect what we see in Chapters 1-3.
   b. Preterist regarding Chapters 4-18 - All of the images, language, themes, etc. in chapters 4-18 match what we know of Rome, the church, Asia Minor, and the rest of Scripture at the time that John wrote Revelation and in the following decades through the 4th century. Chapters 4-18 apply to those churches, what they went through during those years, and have been fulfilled.
   c. Partly Idealist regarding Chapters 4-22) - The spiritual war between Christ-and-the-Church and the beastly empires of this fallen world will continue until Christ returns. The principles in these chapters are directly relevant to the church of all ages.
   d. Futurist regarding Chapters 20-22 (mostly) - Christ has yet to return in glory, defeat all enemies of God forever, conduct final judgment and reward, and transform the cosmos into the New Heavens and New Earth forever.

The Eclectic perspective is the most faithful to the text, to the historical circumstances, and is the perspective of most scholars today.

Revelation contains multiple genres & literary types,

It makes the most sense to deal with each type according to its own rules of interpretation.
Remember what we said about books having various genres woven throughout them. For example,

- Paul uses poetry about Jesus in his Philippians epistle.
- Mary sings OT Messianic Prophetic Imagery in Luke's Gospel.
- Jesus taught literal moral truths, but also used non-literal parables.

Revelation contains multiple genres, and therefore, we deal with each kind of text accordingly.

THEMES OF REVELATION ANNOUNCED EARLY → Read Revelation 1-9

Rev. 1:1 "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must **soon** take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed is the one who reads 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."
4 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.
7 Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.
8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."
9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."

Remember what we said about books having various genres woven throughout them. For example:

- Paul uses poetry about Jesus in his Philippians epistle.
- Mary sings OT Messianic Prophetic Imagery in Luke's Gospel.
- Jesus MOVES in the same discourse from literal moral truths, to non-literal parables.

We must pay close attention so that we recognize the shifts in genre.
Likewise, Revelation contains multiple genres, and therefore, we deal with the text accordingly.

1. **SUFFERING** - You have already suffered, some of you have compromised, but you are about to suffer much more. *SUFFERING*!

NOTE: THE CHURCH IS ALREADY IN THE "LAST DAYS" and THIS BOOK IS ABOUT SOMETHING "SOON"!
1:1 - "soon" - the things written in most of this book are going to begin very soon.
1:3 - "the time is near" - this book is largely about what is about to happen to these churches, *NOT* about the far distant future.
The only portion that is about the far distant future are the portions about the Second Coming.
We have no way of knowing when the "very last days" are occurring.
PETER, PAUL, and JOHN all say that THEY are living in the last days.
We know that the era of the Last days began in the New Testament, with the finished work of Jesus & coming of the Holy Spirit. The Bible does not tell us there are "very very last last days" and so we should

NOT characterize OUR CURRENT ERA as anything other than an era which began in the NT, we must NOT sensationalize it.

1 John 2:18 "Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour."

2. FAITHFUL ENDURANCE DURING SUFFERING

John writes to warn and encourage the churches - they must be faithful even unto death.

1:5 - "faithful witness" - Jesus our example, was a martyr (marturios - witness).

"firstborn from the dead" - he was killed but rose again, so do not fear death as final; you will live with Christ.

"ruler of the kings of the earth" - it may look like Caesar and the petty kings are in charge, but it is really Jesus Christ who is ALREADY RULING from heaven.

Since all of this is true, you MUST ENDURE!

3. CHRIST ALREADY REIGNS, AND WE REIGN WITH HIM.

"loves us" - no matter what happens, we must not doubt the love of Christ our God.

"has freed us" - we HAVE BEEN FREED from the guilt and power of sin.

"has made us" - equally past tense; just as we have been freed from our sin, even so God HAS MADE US a kingdom and priests.

That is, we too already reign in a very real sense, even in the midst of persecution and suffering.

John reiterates this in 1:9 …

1:9 - "companion in" - John identifies with his churches because he too is suffering persecution.

"the suffering" - the inevitable result of truly serving Jesus in a God-hating, Christ-rejecting culture. (same now)

"kingdom" - In Christ we already reign even though we suffer;

"patient endurance" - the correct response to suffering for our devotion to Christ. (same now)

As was common in ancient letter forms, John telegraphs most of the letter's main subjects by mentioning them in the prologue / greeting.

John writes this book to SEVEN real churches in cities in Asia Minor (Turkey), to warn and encourage them.

These are real churches really having the specific problems addressed, but they are also representative of the COMPLETE church in Asia Minor and the Roman Empire.

The churches are being pressured to compromise with the idolatrous, immoral, greedy religious, social, economic systems of the *Roman Empire*.

A much greater persecution is about to come upon them to force their cooperation, which would mean betraying Christ.

This persecution DID break out, and continued intermittently, with varying intensity in different places and times, for over 200 years.

The Revelation is *NOT* a book of confusing speculations about catastrophic events that would occur 2,000 years after John wrote it.

It is a book written to specific Christians in a specific place and specific time facing a specific set of problems.

John wrote to warn and encourage the Christians in the 7 churches, and the other churches in Asia Minor and the Roman Empire in 95 AD, that great persecution was coming, but *they must not compromise.*

They must endure to the end, for *this is a spiritual war*, Christ has won the victory, Christ reigns and we reign with him, even if we die.

In dying we enter God's presence in heaven to worship with the saints around God's throne.

The period of persecution and tribulation will be a *little* long (symbolized by 3.5 years), but will not last forever.

God's People THROUGHOUT time, will suffer a little long, but not forever.

A great part of the warfare is recognizing the deceit of Satan, and the Truth of Christ.

However much wealth, power, and pleasure the Empire offers, *it is a LIE!* However poor, weak, or suffering Christ's Kingdom looks in the natural, *it is the WAY OF TRUTH!*

Rome (every world system) is going to be destroyed, and Jesus Christ will someday return to judge the living and the dead, create the new heavens and new earth, and believers will live in his presence forever.

Guidelines for Reading REVELATION:

1. Remember the *primary* genre is APOCALYPTIC … filled with imagery and symbolism that is NOT to be interpreted in a literalistic way. There are passages which cross into other genres.
2. Remember the historical context … Roman Empire, emperor cult in Asia Minor, myth of Nero redivivus (Nero was killed but he is now alive again), persecution, of Christians, etc.
3. Remember the theological context … the New Testament as fulfillment of the Old, the Church as the continuation of Israel, Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of all Old Testament promises and prophecies - Seed of Woman, Seed of Abraham, Son of David, Lamb of God (Passover, etc.), and the theme of Holy War (not Canaanites against Israel for the Land, but the pagans (Rome) against the Church for the Earth, etc.).
4. Remember the Old Testament connections …
   a. 278 out of 404 verses contain OT references;
   b. Most frequent: Psalms, Daniel, Zechariah, Genesis, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Joel.
5. Remember the book is NOT strictly chronological - the principle of RECAPITULATION is critical.
   a. Recapitulation - repeating a previous incident, scene, truth, vision, or story for some reason.
   b. Reasons include another point of view or perspective, further explanation, more detail, fulfillment, etc.
   c. Describing the same event in a different way.

Several of John's visions are recapitulations of a previous vision from another point of view, or to provide a fuller explanation of what is happening.

SYMBOLS / IMAGES

Some are explained by John, some are not.

Some are found in the OT, and still have a similar meaning, but other OT images have had their description or application changed by John.

Some are drawn from the cultures and myths of the pagan world.

IT IS A SERIOUS ERROR TO IMPOSE OUR OWN MEANINGS ON THESE SYMBOLS!

That would be the same thing as twisting God's words, arrogantly insisting that God meant something he NEVER meant.

God inspired the choice of genre – Apocalyptic.

1. God is telling us how to approach the book: Looking first for symbols and figures of speech, and NOT for literalistic, plain descriptions. *God is telling us to read the book as a book primarily of symbols, telling theological truth.*

2. God also inspired John to explicitly tell us that this is a book of signs and symbols, and it should be interpreted that way.

Revelation 1:1 "The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. ***He made it known*** by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ."

"made it known" - ἐσήμανεν / σημεῖον – signified; *revealed in signs or symbols*.

Remember, BECAUSE THIS IS APOCALYPTIC … the rules of interpretation & tools we use are specific to THAT Genre. This is not the same as reading the more literalistic Sermon on the Mount.

John explicitly says the following message is in SYMBOLS / SIGNS!

EXAMPLES → John interprets some of the symbols.

1. The heavenly being is Jesus Christ. → Rev 1:17-19

2. The stars are the Messengers, the lampstands are the churches. 1:19-20

3. The dragon is Satan. → 12:9

4. The woman (17:9 & 18) the great prostitute, is Rome.

5. Other images are "stock" images - metaphors with standardized meanings to John and his readers. Everyone had heard these standard images before.

a. A beast coming out of the sea represented a (usually evil) empire, in this case the Roman Empire.

b. An earthquake represented divine judgment.

c. The four horsemen represented the great evils or tragedies which humans had to endure, usually because of human fallenness and sin (oppression / violence).

d. *Stock images can represent realities as they reoccur throughout human / Christian history.*

6. Visions are meant to be viewed as wholes, without pressing their individual details. The details were often there to make the whole picture more vivid, or to emphasize the *main* point of the vision as a whole. Just as with parables and other stories, the details do *NOT* necessarily have any important meaning. They simply fill out the scene, making it more vivid to the hearer's / reader's imagination.

7. Once an image has been defined by John or by PROPER study, *hold on to that image*, and work *from* there to understand other images.

Example: **The two witnesses** in 11:3f are the witnessing church of Jesus Christ - we have already been told what the lampstands are … the churches!

8. Some images are fluid - the Lion of Judah becomes a Lamb!!

9. The woman in Chapter 12 is a positive image - either of Israel/Mary, or of the Church.

BUT, the woman in Chapter 17 is a negative image - a prostitute / harlot, an image of Rome in particular, and of the religious-economic-political systems of this world in general.

10. **NUMBERS are symbolic!** They are NOT meant to be taken "literally" but literarily.

SYMBOLS / TYPES / ALLUSIONS to watch for when reading Revelation:

1. **The Tabernacle/Temple** - described in Exodus 25-40, 1 Kings 5-7, 2 Chronicles 2-4) were copies of God's heavenly throne room (Hebrews 8:5-6, 9:1-14).
   Revelation contains many allusions to the Temple: 3:12, 7:15, 11:19, 14:15,17, 15:5-16:1, 16:17, 21:22.

Elements within the Temple:

2. The Lamps - 1:12, 4:5.
3. The Living Creatures like Cherubim - 4:6-9.
4. Incense and Prayer - 5:8.
5. Songs of praise like the OT Levitical choirs - 4:8, 11, 5:9-13, 1 Chron 16.
6. A Sacrifice - 5:6,9.

(One of the initial and primary scenes we see in Revelation is of Heavenly Worship. Some parts of Revelation read like a beautiful Worship Liturgy)

7. The Ark of the Covenant - 11:19.
8. The Altar - 11:1.
9. The Outer Court - 11:2.

… And so forth.

Since creation is God's temple and reflects some of his glory (Isaiah 6:3), God's Throne Room is the theological, spiritual heart of the universe.
From here in his Throne Room, God - Father, Son, Spirit - actively rules creation and the kings and kingdoms of humankind.
Here we see true worship continually in progress, which is the pattern and partner of our worship on earth: *Prayer, praise, communion (altar/Lamb), baptism (basin), preaching-teaching (scroll), etc. These images signify what John experienced and refer directly to aspects of Christian worship services.*

NOTE:
Chapter 4-5 is one unified vision of the worship that continually occurs in heave and has been occurring at least as early as the Ascension of Christ over 62 years before John writes.
Everything through Chapter 19 (or perhaps even through 20:6) refers primarily to the struggle John's churches face against the idolatrous, economic, political power of Imperial Rome.

4:1 - In a vision, God invites John into the throne room
4:2 - Immediately we see God rules the universe - he is on his throne
4:3 - He dwells in light, precious beyond calculation, and in eternal covenant with his creation (rainbow)
4:4 - Twenty-four glorious beings reign with him - the angelic representatives-elders of God's People through history *(12 patriarchs/tribes plus 12 apostles - Jews-and-Christians – "All Israel")*
4:5 - Rumblings, lightnings, thunders - divine declarations, often of judgment, come from Almighty God, and are final. The Seven-fold Spirit of God - perfect light and holiness.

Rev. 4:1 - "After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." 2 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. 3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. 4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God"

4:6 - the perfectly pure Sea of Glass - the *basin of washing in the Temple, the basin of baptism in the churches.* Purify yourself before you approach God's Throne, later we see, through the blood of the Lamb.
4:6-8 - angelic beings resembling a representative spectrum of God's created order continually worship this God!

(Drawing on Ezekiel 1 and 10, and Isaiah 6, John describes the exalted beings who worship God, and who represent all of God's creation in worship.)

4:9-11 - the angelic elders of God's people join the exalted beings in worshipping God as all-holy creator. God's People are reminded - *part of our life we are already living in heaven!* Mysterious but true! (Eph 2, Heb 12).

Verses 6 - "Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.
In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. 8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."
9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:
Rev. 4:11 - "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

In Chapter 5 God's people and God's creation follow the lead of their angelic representatives.

CHAPTER 5
5:1 - The Scroll - God's complete (7 seals) redemptive history, God's perfect Word, God's covenants, or plan.
5:2-4 - There is no revelation, understanding, insight, or meaning *UNTIL GOD'S WORD IS HEARD*!!
5:5 - *Jesus Christ and his gospel are the KEY to all of history and all of God's Word. It was ALWAYS all about Jesus! Everything is understood through Christ!*
5:6 - THE KEY - Christ has conquered and reigns because of his perfect redemptive sacrificial death. *The Lamb is Key!!*
He is perfect in power (horns), perfect in wisdom (eyes), perfect in prophetic vision through the prophetic Holy Spirit he has sent into his Church throughout the earth.

Rev. 5:1-5 - "Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" 3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. 4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. 5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."
Rev. 5:6 - "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. 8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song:
"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.
Rev. 5:10 - You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."
Rev. 5:11 - Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12 In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"
Rev. 5:13 - Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped."

5:7-10 - Glorious celebration explodes as the LAMB takes / fulfills / opens God's Plan for Humankind.
The prayer / intercession / worship / songs of the redeemed ascend as incense before God and the Lamb.
God's Renewed Redeemed People from every nation had always been God's Plan, and is already being accomplished.
This is his holy ecclesia / assembly of holy ones / congregation gathered for worship from all of history.

5:11-12 - A vast multitude *(multiples of figurative numbers - 10-1000*) of angels John was unable to number *ascribe the kind of worship to the LAMB (Jesus) that only Almighty God receives.*

5:13-14 - Worship progressively extends from the Exalted Living Creatures, out through the 24 Angelic Elders, out through the numberless angelic multitude, out *through all of God's creation*.
The Father and the Lamb receive ALL worship of ALL creation and created beings FOREVER AND EVER.
The glory of God and of the Lamb is grounded in their ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY!
Humanity is not even in the innermost circle of worship!
SO, a visit to the worship of God in his heavenly throne room prepares us for the battle, and for God's absolute power to defeat our enemies.

STRUCTURE FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE BOOK

John's visions in Revelation are *NOT* meant to be understood as being written down, or coming to pass, chronologically!
The visions / seals / trumpets / bowls / judgments are repetitions / recapitulations of the *same symbolic history* and the *same judgments from God*, *each culminating in the Second Coming.*
They are described in different ways, from different perspectives, to highlight different things, and to ensure that the churches understand Christ's victory is *as good as accomplished* – LITERALLY! AMEN!
AND AGAIN, this is visionary / apocalyptic / symbolical, and by definition the details cannot be made to mesh in a "modern" way. ***The visions are not identical in detail. The visions present different perspectives of same events. Slightly different theological emphases require slightly different images and details. This is John saying, "These battles / sufferings also mean another important truth, so let me describe it to you again in this way … ".***

All of the 7 cycles run parallel, all covering the same period: a symbolic history of the Messianic War
*(the INTER-ADVENTAL period (the time between Christ's First and Second Coming), **specifically** for John's churches).*
Later cycles increasingly concentrate on the most intense phases of the conflict, and on the Second Coming.
There are some variations which could legitimately be made in where to divide these cycles / repetitions, or what to include in each one.
BUT, the only way to make sense of the visions is to see them in this way, as synchronized recapitulations of the same events. (Describing the same things or same periods of time more than once)
In other words, John receives and shares seven visions *of the same war*: The victory of the Lamb and his followers over the beast of Rome.
(INTERADVENTAL: Between the advents, the enemy rages for a limited time, things can and will be bad, but the War is won. We live in the already – not yet.)

THIS IS THE MOST SCRIPTURALLY SOUND, WIDELY ACCEPTED POSITION, AMONG THE BEST CONSERVATIVE SCHOLARS IN THE WORLD.

This is not a sensationalized, "hype heavy" scheme that you will see on the Internet peddling books.
That is because the most scripturally sound, theologically strong scholars around the world do not have webpages or YouTube channels where they push outlandish speculations and peddle new sensationalized books every year.
Genuine scholars and Teachers are in our Christian universities, loving God with all their hearts and minds, teaching future ministers how to read God's word and lead God's people. They see all of their hard study, long hours, deep research, and unseen labor as holy worship, and it is.
Thank God for them and their service. We can reap the fruit of their labor by using their best study helps as we correctly handle God's word.

GOD'S JUDGMENT DESCRIBED 7 WAYS

1. 6:1 - 8:1 - Seven Seals
2. 8:2 - 11:19 - Seven Trumpets
3. 12:1-14:20 - Symbolic Figures: Israel-Mary-Church, Christ's incarnation, resurrection, ascension, persecution of God's People, preservation, victory over dragon-Satan-Rome, harvest and vintage. *(Note that 12:1-14:20 is the Book's center!)*
4. 15:1-16:21 - Seven Bowls
5. 17:1 - 19:10 - Judgment of Babylon (Rome)
6. 19:11-21 - White Horse Judgment
7. 20:1 - 21:8 - White Throne Judgment
8. 21:9-22:5 - New Jerusalem, New Creation (Heavens and Earth),
   (Note: 4-number for cosmos. 8-perfected cosmos and perfected eternal day).
   (8 is the number for a new beginning, a new age)

SEVEN-FOLD (COMPLETE) WOES

(A Synchronous Recapitulation / Repetition of Woes)
(EX: *Same event* is being described in 6:1-2, 8:7, 16:2, etc.)

		Seals	Trumpets	Bowls
4 Catastrophic Woes				
	1	6:1-2	8:7	16:2
	2	6:3-4	8:8-9	16:3
	3	6:5-6	8:10-11	16:4-7
	4	6:7-8	8:12	16:8-9
Woes Intensify				
	5	6:9-11	8:13-9:12	16:10
	6	6:12-17	9:13-21	16:12-16
(Interlude)		*(7:1-8*	*10:1-11*	*11:1-3)*
The End	7	8:1	11:15	16:17-21
				17 - 18

THERE ARE FAR TOO MANY SIMILARITIES AND CONGRUENCES IN THESE 7 JUDGMENTS or 7 CYCLES FOR THEM TO BE DESCRIBING *DIFFERENT* EVENTS or PERIODS OF TIME.

The conclusion of *each of the 7 series* is CLEARLY CLIMATIC!
John is describing the Messianic War, the Holy War … BETWEEN

1. The dragon and Christ (through Michael the Archangel)

2. The Bride and the Harlot
3. The followers of the Lamb and the earth-dwelling followers of the Beast,
4. The false prophets-religions and the true prophets / the Church,
5. The Beastly Roman Empire and the Kingdom of God
6. All of this is playing out in the life of John's churches and the Roman Empire. (Symbolic of the experience of God's Church until Christ returns)

MODERN APPLICATION

1. SATAN WILL RAGE UNTIL CHRIST RETURNS IN FINAL VICTORY
2. THE CHURCH MUST BE WARY OF HOW THE ENEMY MIGHT WICKEDLY (and subtly) MANIFEST IN OUR PRESENT TIME.
3. CHRISTIANS MUST STAY PURE, KEEP COVENANT, GUARD OURSELVES AND ONE ANOTHER AGAINST COMPROMISE FOR ANY REASON. DON'T MAKE DEALS WITH THE EMPIRE. BE DISCIPLES OF JESUS!
4. THE CHRISTIAN JOURNEY IS A PILGRIMAGE. IT IS NOT SAFE, BUT IT IS GOOD, CHRIST IS VICTOR.
5. The dragon, satan, and the evil spirits, will repeatedly seek new channels to express their rebellion toward God and the Lamb, and their hatred of God's People, until Christ DOES come again in power and great glory.
6. <u>God's People must always be learning from the Revelation, comparing the attributes of the Beast and his followers to our own societies, governments, cultures, times, and selves</u>.
7. We must be continually searching our own hearts, lives, and churches for any sign of compromise with the subtle, deceitful, counterfeit idolatries of the Evil Ones, for they will continually seek to steal, kill, and destroy.
8. We must remember that we are a pilgrim people, we may have to suffer on our pilgrimage, but Christ is on his throne, we are joined to him in Victory.
9. THESE THINGS ARE EQUALLY TRUE FOR JOHN'S READERS, FOR CHRISTIANS IN THE YEAR 1000, AND FOR US TODAY.
10. Jesus Christ could return at any time. His return will be at a time when he is not expected. We must always be ready.

Christ's Present Rule on Earth And in Heaven

Christ has not ruled like a dictator who allows no choices.

- He permits rebellion. He permits suffering.
- One day He will rule with an iron scepter and judge all who have rebelled.

God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom are at war.

- God allows Satan some authority over the earth.
- But in the end, God defeats and vanquishes Satan.

Sometimes God acts as a king and brings justice.

- God punishes sin deservedly,
- But God also shows mercy and offers redemption.

A Final Hermeneutical Principle "Already and Not Yet"

- God's Kingdom has ALREADY COME, but it is not yet FULLY COME. It is not yet consummated. That will happen at Christ's Second Coming.
- Christ's First Advent was like the D-Day Invasion – we are on the Beach, warfare remains.
- We are not yet the Church Triumphant. We are the Church Militant, striving forward.
- Christus Victor. Christ is Victor.
- Think of the apple seed. Within the apple seed lies a future tree and fruit.
- The seed has been planted, God can see everything unfolding in the past, present, future.

- He exists outside of time.
- We only see the past, and the present, we are not told much about the future, but we know Christ is victorious.
- We already have redemption, but we have not yet experienced the redemption of our bodies.
- Resurrection – New Creation. PROTOTOKOS. *The first* … many more, and much more, will follow.

The Holy Spirit Helps Us

"When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come" (John 16:13).

- NOTE: These promises are made to the Apostles AS A GROUP!
- IN COMMUNITY! NOT TO THEM AS INDIVIDUALS!
- The pronouns – you, you, you – are all plural.

WE are not guaranteed that WE will not err, we must never isolate ourselves in our studies, but listen to the BEST VOICES in God's Worldwide Church.

The Holy Spirit gives us pastor-teachers, and scholar-teachers, to help us understand God's Word.

Remember these Key elements of Hermeneutics:

- Genre
- Accommodation
- Phenomenalogical language
- Anthropomorphic language
- Figurative language – metaphors, numbers, symbols
- Fulfillment language
- Narrative patterning
- Repetition, symmetry, parallelism

GENESIS AND REVELATION - DIVINELY INSPIRED BOOKENDS OF THE BIBLE:

Creation of the heavens and earth (Gen. 1-2)
Creation of the new heavens and earth (Rev. 21-22).

The first Adam reigning on earth (1:26).
The last Adam reigning in glory (Rev. 21:5).

Night and seas created (1:5, 10).
No more night; no more sea (Rev. 21:1, 25).

A bride brought to Adam (2:18-25).
The Bride prepared for Christ (Rev. 19:7ff.)

A tree of life in Eden (2:9; 3:22).
A tree of life in the new creation (Rev. 22:2).

Satan utters the first lie (3:1).
Nothing that makes a lie enters the city (Rev. 21:27).

Death and a curse (3:14, 17-19).
No more curse; no more death or tears (Rev. 22:3).

Conflict between Christ and Satan (3:15).
Satan's final doom (Rev. 20:10).

Man driven from God's face (3:23; 4:16).
Men see His face in glory (Rev. 22:4).

REMEMBER: IT IS ESSENTIAL *(ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY)* THAT WE CONSISTENTLY FOLLOW SOUND HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES NO MATTER WHAT BIBLE PASSAGE OR BOOK WE ARE READING.

SCRIPTURE IS HIGHLY STYLIZED: Guided by the Holy Spirit, the authors used many literary genres, conventions, and techniques to communicate their intended meaning.
And the primary message is always theological.
IOW – what is God trying to tell us about Himself, His plan, Ourselves, and His Creation.
He is trying to tell us about *His Purposes* for us both now in His sin-cursed Creation and our future in a New Creation.
We must remember what the Bible is and what it is not:

- The Bible is a Hebraic / Greco-Roman library, highly stylized in the genres, patterns, literary forms of the Ancient Near Eastern world.
- It is NOT written in Modern American concepts, world-views, thought-patterns, literary methods, or Formats.
- We must not read it through 21st century American eyes or we *will* read it wrongly.
- The Bible is *not* a book or collection of books to which WE bring meaning.
- Meaning is already IN God's Word, and we must understand it according to its design or we misunderstand it.
- Being a good student of God's Word is a lifelong journey.

2 Timothy 2:15 "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who *correctly handles* the word of truth."

RECOGNIZE THE CHALLENGES - TAKE GREAT INTERPRETIVE CARE. For example, …

WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS SIGN MEANS?

- **THIS PIC is from England, where football is soccer, coaches are buses, and soccer fans on buses to games are rowdy and prone to fights.**
- **SO ... this sign, hanging at a sports bar in England actually means "NO SOCCER BUSES!"**
- **BUT ... why didn't you know that?**
- *BECAUSE YOU AREN'T FROM ENGLAND.*
- → *You are NOT part of that culture.*

- *Now stop and think, THESE WORDS ARE IN ENGLISH, you can all read them. This picture is modern, it's not even 5 years old. American culture and language descends from British Culture.*
- ***BUT you didn't know what this meant because you are at a DISTANCE from this culture.***
- **Unless you are familiar with the culture of the ANE, and how they use language, you won't understand much of what the Bible says when it reverts to specific STYLES of language & imagery.**
- **Yes, you have Bible TRANSLATIONS of language …**
    - *You can read the English words and you know these words.*
- *But what you don't know is the culture, and the way they USE language. (Just like the soccer bus sign)*

WITH THE FOOTBALL COACHES SIGN, YOU HAD A CULTURAL CHALLENGE.
HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED THAT THE SAME CHALLENGES EXIST WITH THE BIBLE?
THE *DO* EXIST … in a BIG way! Hopefully, we have demonstrated that.
Because the Bible is filled with far greater challenges than the FOOTBALL COACHES sign !

THIS IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE when interpreting passages which employ words, phrases, imagery, and allusions in a way we are not familiar with or do not use ourselves.
JESUS DOES PRECISELY THIS - employs words, phrases, imagery, and allusions we are not familiar with - in His Olivet Discourse.

THE OLIVET DISCOURSE - Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, Luke 21

During the Passion Week, Christ taught His disciples about Jerusalem's destruction and His 2nd Coming in the *Olivet Discourse on the Mount of Olives*.
The best scholars across conservative denominations believe Jesus was actually and primarily describing, the *fall of Jerusalem* and *the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.*, and this was in response to his disciples' question.

Aside from the book of Revelation, there is hardly a more important section of Scripture on the subject of biblical eschatology (End Times) than Matthew 24, the famous Discourse delivered by Jesus to his disciples shortly before his betrayal by Judas. Many Christians simply assume that Jesus is describing the end of human history and his second coming.

HOWEVER, the overwhelming majority of the best scholars across conservative denominations believe Jesus was *actually* and *primarily* describing, the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., and Jesus' teaching on this was in response to his disciples' asking 2 question separate questions.
Scholars who take this view:

- **Gordon Fee,** the world's greatest living NT Exegete, and a retired A/G minister.
- **R.T. France**, possibly the greatest living theologian on Matthew & Mark.
- **N.T. Wright**, Spirit-Filled Anglican, former Bishop of Durham, perhaps the greatest Pauline theologian, one of the greatest NT Theologians.

We will use the grammatical-historical method, which focuses on the following:

1. The grammar the writers chose & literary devices – each of us specifically choose the words with which we speak or write.
2. Historical Cultural context – each of us exist within a certain context.
3. Authorial Intention – what the author meant.

Many prophecy teachers, treat the Bible like a Rorschach Ink Blot.
Instead of following the simple grammatical historical literary method as the easiest, most simple way, most common sense way to determine the meaning of a passage … they interpret with their stream of consciousness, trying to make connections where none exist, they see things which are not there.

WHY WOULD THE *RANDOM THOUGHT* OF A 21ST CENTURY AMERICAN BE PRECISELY WHAT JESUS OR PAUL MEANT IN SOME "CRYPTIC" PASSAGE?

FIRST WE MUST LOOK AT THE CONTEXT LEADING UP TO THIS PASSAGE

We must first observe the context. Jesus has *repeatedly* predicted that a time is coming when God will COME AS JUDGE and punish national Israel for her sin and rebellious rejection of the Messiah

In the preceding chapters we read about Jesus' interactions with Jewish leaders, and their opposition to and rejection of Jesus. Jesus repeatedly warns them what will happen if they reject him …

- **Mt. 21:33-36 (esp. v. 43)** → Parable of Vineyard, Owner Judges the workers who killed his son, The Stone the Builders reject becomes capstone, The Kingdom will be taken away from you (Israel). **JUDGMENT**
- **Mt. 22:1-14 (esp. v. 7);** → Parable of the Wedding Banquet, those invited refused to come, so the King sent his army and destroyed those people and burned their city**. JUDGMENT**
- **Matthew 23:29-36 (esp. vv. 35-36)**
  - **Woes to Pharisees, "Killed prophets," "Fill up measure of your sin."**
  - **They will persecute Jesus' Messengers. JUDGMENT**
- **Mt. 23:37-39 (esp. v. 38). Matt. 23:37** "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. 38 Look, ***your*** house is left to you ***desolate***. (house is the Temple) 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" **JUDGMENT**

JESUS MAKES EXPLICITLY CLEAR THAT BECAUSE THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS SYSTEM, ESPECIALLY THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS, have REJECTED Jesus … JUDGMENT WILL COME UPON THEM *and* THE TEMPLE. IMMEDIATELY AFTER THIS, as Jesus and his disciples are leaving Jerusalem, HE DESCRIBES THIS JUDGMENT, AND HOW IT VINDICATES THAT JESUS' MESSAGE IS TRUE.

Matt. 24:1 "Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 2 "Do you see all THESE things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone *HERE* will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."
Matt. 24:3 "As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will **THIS** happen, **AND** what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

JESUS GIVES *TWO DIFFERENT ANSWERS* because THEY ASKED *TWO DIFFERENT QUESTIONS*: …

1. **Jesus tells them that when the Temple will be destroyed, signs will precede that event.**
2. **Jesus tells them that contrary to their expectations, his Second Coming and the end of the age will *NOT* occur at the same time as the destruction of the Temple.**
   a. In other words, the destruction of the Temple *can* be dated by signs,
   b. BUT the second coming of Christ ***cannot***.
3. The disciples' questions asked in 24:3 are answered …
   a. "When will THIS happen" (destruction of the Temple) - answered in 24:4-35.
   b. "What will be the sign of your coming & the end of the age" - answered in 24:36-25:46.

In 24:36 Jesus begins to answer their question about the end of the age and says …
Matt. 24:36 "**BUT**, *ABOUT **THAT** day or hour*, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

THERE IS NO INDICATION WHATSOEVER, THAT JESUS …

- DENOUNCES the first-century temple in which He is standing (24:1), by declaring it 'desolate' (23:38), And prophesying its total destruction (24:2),

- THEN connects those remarks about THAT Temple to his answer about THAT Temple's 'abomination of desolation' (v. 15) and destruction,
- AND without giving any warning whatsoever suddenly be referring to the destruction of a *totally different temple* some two thousand years (or more) later!" (Gentry, *The Great Tribulation*, p. 24).

If I am sitting at your dinner table, eating cornbread, and I say
"Do you see this cornbread? The time will come when I shall butter it,
and lo it shall be consumed in the fury of my appetite, not one crumb will be left on another."
It would be foolish for you to assume that I am talking about some other cornbread on some other table, or cornbread to be made 2,000 years from now.

NO, that would not make any sense. I am sitting AT YOUR TABLE, YOU JUST ASKED ME A QUESTION ABOUT THIS CORNBREAD, AND NOW I AM *POINTING* AT YOUR CORNBREAD AND ANSWERING YOUR QUESTION ABOUT YOUR CORNBREAD.
The Historical & Linguistic & Geographic specificity is CLEAR… Jesus is talking about THAT 1ST CENTURY TEMPLE. Not another one.

CONTINUING TO ANSWER THEIR QUESTION ABOUT THE DESTRUCTION OF THEIR TEMPLE, JESUS PREDICTS …

FALSE MESSIAHS

Matt. 24:4 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.

a. ***Religious impostors and Messianic pretenders* (v. 5)**
   i. See Acts 5:36-37 - Theudas & Judas the Galilean
   ii. 8:9-10 → Simon the Sorceror → "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power."
   iii. 13:6 → a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-jesus,
   iv. 21:38 → A Roman Commander mistakes Paul for a messianic rebel … → *38 "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?"*
   v. **Josephus** reports that during the reign of Nero deceivers and false prophets were arrested in Palestine on a daily basis.
   vi. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, **Eusebius** refers to the prevalence of false messiahs in this New Testament time period.

b. SO, Christ's prophecy regarding False Messiahs was FULFILLED.

WARS & RUMORS OF WARS

"6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."

a. ***Increased military conflict* (v. 6)**
   i. The period 33-70 a.d. witnessed countless military disturbances. An uprising in Caesarea took 20,000 Jewish lives; at Scythopolis 13,000 Jews were killed; in Alexandria 50,000 were slain; 10,000 were killed in Damascus.
   ii. Josephus reports that when the Emperor Caligula ordered his statue to be erected in the temple at Jerusalem (40 a.d.), the Jews refused. As a result, they lived in "a state of fearful anxiety over imminent war with Rome and were in such distress that they even neglected to till the land."

iii. **The *Annals of Tacitus*,** which describes events from a.d. 14 to a.d. 68 describes the turmoil of this period with phrases such as "disturbances in Germany," "commotions in Africa," "commotions in Thrace," "insurrections in Gaul," "intrigues among the Parthians," "the war in Britain," and "the war in Armenia" (cf. DeMar, 62).

iv. **The "end" (v. 6)** refers to the end or termination of Jewish national existence; the end of the city; the end of the temple.

b. ***Political upheaval and turmoil* (v. 7a)**

i. The incredible extent to which political and military revolution were in the air in Palestine alone during the first half of the first century has been documented at length by N. T. Wright in chp. 6 of his book, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

c. SO, Christ's prophecy regarding Wars and Rumors of Wars was FULFILLED.

FAMINES and EARTHQUAKES … NATURAL DISASTERS

7 "There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth pains."

a. ***Natural disasters* (v. 7b)**

Acts 11:27 "During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)"

i. **The famine** described in Acts 11:28 occurred in 44 a.d. It resulted in the disciples at Antioch mounting a huge relief effort to ease the burden of the Christians in Judea (Acts 11:29).

ii. **Three other famines** occurred during the reign of Claudius. The Roman historians Tacitus and Seutonius both mention the prevalence of famines in this period of history (in particular the widespread famine in Rome in AD 51).

iii. **Earthquakes were also common**. See Acts 16:26.

i. **Acts 16:25** **"**About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose."

iv. There were recorded earthquakes in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, Apamea, Campania, and Rome. The cities of Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae were devastated by a quake in 60 a.d.

i. **In 58 a.d. Seneca wrote:**

1. *"How often have the cities of Asia and Achaea fallen with one fatal shock! How many cities have been swallowed up in Syria! How many in Macedonia! How often has Paphos become a ruin. News has often been brought to us of the demolition of whole cities at once."*

ii. **(In Luke 21:11 we read** about "terrors and great signs from heaven," which when taken in the immediate context of famines and earthquakes probably refers to natural phenomena.

1. In particular, we know that a comet appeared around 60 AD during Nero's reign, leading to public speculation that some change in the political scene was imminent.

2. Then *Halley's Comet* appeared in 66 AD. Not long after this, NERO committed suicide.

3. **Josephus** wrote in *The War of the Jews* that "there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year" [6:5:3,742].)
4. (**As v. 8 makes clear**, none of these "sorrows" were meant at any time to mislead Christians into thinking that either his second coming was imminent.

b. SO, Christ's prophecy regarding Famines and Earthquakes was FULFILLED.

PERSECUTION and MARTYRDOM

Matt. 24:9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me."

***a. Persecution and Martyrdom* (vv. 9-10)**

i. Mark's version reads as follows: *"But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them" (13:9).*

i. **The reference to "courts/councils/synagogues" indicates that Jesus has in mind first-century fulfillment. < < <**

1. **After 70 AD** when the Jewish religious and political systems ceased to exist, ***there were no councils or synagogues***! We see fulfillment of this word in Acts 4:1-18; 5:17-40 (synagogues); 12:1; 23:24; 24:27 (governors and kings). See also Acts 8:1.

b. SO, Christ's prophecy regarding Persecution and Martyrdom was FULFILLED.

FALSE PROPHETS and DECEPTION

"11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people."

***a. False prophets* & Deception (v. 11)**

i. One need only remember that much of what we read in Galatians, Colossians, 2 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, 1 John, and Jude was written to counter the activity and influence of ***false prophets in the early church***. See especially Paul's warnings in Acts 20:29-30; Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Cor. 11:13; Gal. 2:4; and Peter's in 2 Pt. 4:1; and John's in 1 John 4:1.

b. SO, Christ's prophecy regarding False Prophets and Deception was FULFILLED.

PREACHING OF THE GOOD NEWS TO THE "NATIONS"

"14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the *whole world* as a testimony to *all nations*, and then the end will come."

***a. Worldwide preaching of the gospel* (v. 14) – "Inhabited world"**

i. The words "whole world" (NASB) are a translation of the term ***holos oikoumene***, which literally means an *inhabited area*, a standard term at that time for the Greek world, then for the Roman empire, and subsequently for the *then known world*. The same Greek word is used in **Luke 2:1** – "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that ***all the world*** should be registered" (***oikoumene***). **This is clearly a reference to the Roman Empire.**

ii. Writing before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, Paul says to the Colossians:

i. **Col 1:5-6** " . . . the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, *just as in* ***all the world*** also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth". **The same literary technique is used in Romans &**

other places to refer to the Empire, AND to use figurative speech to emphasize the size or speed of missionary preaching - hyperbolic or universal figurative speech.

iii. **ALL NATIONS is the key phrase** - God's plan had always been to have a new humanity redeemed from among the nations, Jew-and-Gentile, saved by grace through faith. **There would never be an ethnic test for inclusion.**

iv. Thus, prior to 70 AD the Gospel had spread through much of the Roman Empire, with people of many nations becoming followers of Jesus / part of God's People.

v. In Acts 2, the wind and fire of God had marked Jesus' followers as God's end-time Temple, the dwelling place of his Presence, where humans meet God for forgiveness, cleansing, and worship.

vi. God's Presence and Glory had forever departed from the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus embodied the Presence and Glory, and bestowed that in the Church by the Spirit.

b. SO, Christ's prophecy regarding Preaching the Good News to the nations was FULFILLED.

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

Matt. 24:15 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."

a. The Abomination that makes Desolate (vv. 15-28)

i. **Refers to the one sign** that indicates Jerusalem destruction (God's Judgment of which Jesus spoke) is about to occur. The "*abomination of desolation*" unmistakably confirms the fulfillment of God's judgment against Israel has come.

ii. The most popular identification is **Titus and the armies of Rome**. 70AD.

iii. **Luke 21 connects the Roman legions' advance into the Land, and ultimately Judea, Jerusalem, and the Temple, with this defilement.** - While the city of Jerusalem was still burning the soldiers brought their legionary banners into the temple precincts and offered sacrifices there, declaring Titus to be victor.

iv. The idolatrous representations of Caesar and the Roman eagle on the banners, and then the pagan sacrifices in the temple, would have constituted the worst imaginable blasphemy to the Jewish people.

v. A few hundred years before Jesus, another pagan ruler - the Greek Antiochus Epiphanes - erected a pagan statue and offered a pagan sacrifice in the Jewish Temple which had been rebuilt after Cyrus the Persian allowed the Jews to return to their land.

vi. Guess what THAT previous act was called? Abomination of Desolation (by Daniel).

vii. There are several other possibilities, *including acts that were perpetrated by Jewish Zealots during the siege of Jerusalem*, but the Roman armies with their idolatrous eagles, banners, and sacrifices, are the most likely.

b. SO, Christ's prophecy regarding the Abomination of Desolation was FULFILLED.

Historical records tell us that during these upheavals of increased military persecution, and especially after this event at the Temple … that many Jewish people and Christians fled Jerusalem and went into the mountains & the villages in these terrains to take shelter.

GREAT DISTRESS (TRIBULATION)

"21 For ***then*** there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. 22 If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened."

a. Great distress - the "great tribulation" (vv 21-22)

i. "For then" - at that time. The time frame in which the Jerusalem Temple is destroyed.

ii. "unequaled from … never to be equaled again" - Hyperbolic universal language - intended to emphasize the point that this will be an unbelievably horrible time. As with all Hyperbolic universal language, it is not meant to be read literalistically.

iii. Luke 21 - Jesus warned his followers that when they saw the Roman armies surrounding the city they should flee the city. The Christians remembered the prophecy and fled, many to the city of Pella, and escaped death. The unbelievers who stayed behind suffered horribly.

iv. **Josephus** reports that more than a million Jews were killed during the siege and in the slaughter that followed when the city was taken. There was cannibalism in the city during the siege, with children killed and eaten. Many vultures gathered during the long siege and final slaughter. Much more could be said.

v. The best understanding of Christ's words in the Olivet Discourse and the is that the "great distress" (great tribulation) occurred during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 66-70 AD with the horrendous suffering, slaughter, and death that accompanied it.

b. SO, Christ's prophecy regarding Great Distress (horrible suffering) was FULFILLED.

ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE EARTH WILL MOURN

Matt 24:30-31 30 "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth[c] will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.[d] 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

a. "The sign of the Son of Man in heaven … the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven" - SEE BELOW … (the destruction of the Temple & vindication of Jesus)

b. "all the peoples of the earth" - the best translation is "all the tribes of the land". When the unbelieving Jews see the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and therefore the vindication (exaltation to God) of Jesus, they will mourn.

c. 24:31 - Christ's messengers (angels) preach the good news that our sins have been atoned for through Jesus the Lamb of God throughout the Earth throughout this age until Christ returns.

"Through Christ-commissioned gospel preaching by faithful messengers, God gathers the elect into His kingdom from the four corners of the world (Matt. 28:19; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 13:47; 17:30). The phrase 'from one end of the sky to the other' does not indicate that the place of the action is in the sky (or heaven) above. The phraseology often signifies nothing more than 'horizon to horizon' (Deut. 30:4; Neh. 1:9; compare Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28-29). Thus, it speaks about evangelistic activity spreading throughout the earth. In fact, it parallels 'from the four winds,' that is, the four points of the compass. This, of course, Jesus promises in His ministry, despite the failure of His own people: 'And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness (Matt. 8:11-12; Luke 13:29 speaks about all four points of the compass)" (*Gentry, Storms, Wright).*

d. SO, Christ's words here present no problem at all for FULFILLMENT in 70 AD.

THIS GENERATION - Will See All These Things

"33 Even so, when **you** **see** **all** ***these things***, you know that it is near, right at the door. 34 I tell you the truth, ***this generation*** will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened"

MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL in determining precisely to what Christ, Jesus says that this prophetic scenario applies to *"this generation"* (v. 34). Some try to evade this point by arguing that the word translated "generation" actually means "race" and that Jesus, therefore, was simply saying that the "Jewish race" would not die out until all these things took place.

BUT … that is NOT possible, because …

a. this would require the Greek word *genos*, whereas the word here is *genea*;
b. the word *genea* occurs 27x in the gospels and *never once* means "race" (Mt. 1:17; 11:16; 12:39,41,42,45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36; 24:34; Mk. 8:12,38; 9:19; 13:30; Lk. 1:48,50; 7:31; 9:41; 11:29,30,31,32,50,51; 16:8; 17:25; 21:32);
c. the word "generation" is used elsewhere in Matthew (and the other gospels) of those living in Christ's day (see Mt. 12:38-39; 16:4; 17:17).
d. every time the words "this generation" occur in the gospels they mean ***Jesus' contemporaries***, i.e., the sum total of those living at the same time he did. Read Mt. 11:16; 12:41,42,45; and esp. 23:36;
e. the adjective "this" points to the contemporary nature of the generation Jesus had in mind; if he had in mind a future generation he would more likely have chosen the adjective "that".

OTHER REASONS TO UNDERSTAND MATTHEW 24 (Mark 13, Luke 21) IN THIS WAY …

1. GENRE & LANGUAGE

a. Jesus was speaking to a people saturated by Old Testament language, concepts, and imagery. APOCALYPTIC FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE.
b. Thus, when Jesus spoke to them of things to come he used the prophetic vocabulary of the OT which they would instantly recognize. "*the sun will be darkened, the moon lose its light, and the stars will fall from the sky.*"

Matt. 24:29 "Immediately after the distress of those days " 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

APOCALPYTIC Figurative Language

Jesus used this kind of language to prophesy Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD

- **In the OT, such language was used to portray *NOT what is going on in the heavens but what is happening on the earth*. Natural disasters, political upheaval, turmoil among the nations, etc., are often described figuratively through the terminology of cosmic disturbances.**
- **Jesus was speaking to a people saturated by OT language, concepts, and imagery.**
- **APOCALYPTIC LANGUAGE about Destruction of Temple was clearly used.**
- *REMEMBER: "The interpretation that most clearly accounts for all of the facts in a passage, WITHOUT having to engage in special pleading, verbal gymnastics, explaining things away, or inserting things into the passage, is most likely the correct interpretation."*
- **Practicing sound hermeneutics** by recognizing Apocalyptic Figurative Language, Hyperbolic Figurative Language, allusions to the OT, checking the immediate context (chapters 21-23), checking the book context (other uses of "this generation"), etc., "*WITHOUT having to engage in special pleading, verbal gymnastics, explaining things away, or inserting things into the passage,* most clearly accounts for all of the facts" and yields the interpretation of Matthew 24 being

described here.

2. **THE CONTEXTS pertain to the predictions of God's wrath against that *current* generation of Israel**. This leads to the expectation of fulfillment at that historical moment. "all these things" "this generation" "when YOU see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place" – Roman flags & sacrifices.

3. **THE QUESTION POSED BY THE DISCIPLES pertained to the temple THEN standing in Jerusalem**, out of which they had just departed, at which they were then looking, and about whose prophesied destruction they were wondering. THEREFORE, Jesus' *answer* pertains to the SAME then-standing temple, not some future temple (cf. v. 2).

4. **THE CIRCUMSTANCES DESCRIBED in MATT 24:15-22 are *geographically, historically, and culturally* LIMITED to conditions relevant in the first century**. Not relevant today. Not relevant to some speculative future Temple you hear TV preachers and YouTube teachers talk about.

5. **THE USE OF THE SECOND PERSON PRONOUNS - "YOU" (plural) - The entire section is couched in terms of what his actual (original) hearers - *to whom he is speaking face to face* - are to see, hear, and experience**. One cannot easily dismiss the repeated use of the second person in Jesus' warnings and instructions (e.g., "**you** will be hearing" [24:6], "see that **you** are not frightened" [24:6], "they will deliver **you** to tribulation, and will kill **you**, and **you** will be hated" [24:9], "therefore when **you** see the abomination of desolation" [24:15], "if anyone says to **you**" [24:23], "I have told **you** in advance" [24:25], "even so **you** too, when **you** see all these things" [24:33]).

According to Jesus, what circumstances will these disciples see, hear, experience?

- *Religious Imposters and Messianic Pretenders*
- *Increased Military Conflict*
- *Political Upheaval & Turmoil*
- *Natural Disasters*
- *Persecution & Martyrdom*
- *False Prophets*
- *Religious Insurrection & Indifference*
- *Worldwide (OIKOUMENE - within the Roman Empire) preaching of the Gospel (to Gentile nations)*
- **Did they see, hear, experience it? YES !**

Q: Did we speculate or force any of our interpretation? NO!
Q: Did we use history & culture carefully? Yes
Q: Did we use grammar properly? Yes
Q: Did we use the literary devices of that day correctly? Yes.
We did not seek to COLLAPSE the distance of time, culture, language.
Rather, together, we have wisely crossed the distances … seeking to know what the biblical authors meant when THEY wrote or spoke these words.

NOW, let's review a few specific things from the Olivet Discourse.

AN OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD SECTION OF MATTHEW 24 …
"SEE THE SIGN of the SON OF MAN" - VINDICATION BY ASCENSION

1. " **Sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky…they will see the Son of Man coming on clouds of glory"**
    a. **"See the Son of Man coming…"**
        i. **"See" –** they will "see" his "sign" in the sense that they will "understand", i.e., spiritually *perceive* that he is the vindicated and enthroned King ON HIGH.
            1. **The "sign" -** unclear … could well be the smoke from the many fires of the fallen city rising high into the heavens: *defeat, death, destruction, deportation now await rebellious Israel.*
            2. For "seeing" = "understanding",
            3. This actually refers to Jesus' ascension not his second coming. In the destruction of the temple - which fulfills his prophecy and verifies that Jesus was indeed the Messiah - the rejected Christ is **vindicated** as the ascended Lord and shown to possess great power and glory.
            4. EVERYTHING HE HAS SAID ABOUT THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE HAS COME TRUE, AND THIS *AUTHENTICATES* THAT HE IS WHO HE SAID HE WAS … THE SON OF GOD.
            5. THE FATHER ACCEPTED JESUS' SACRIFICE, RAISED HIM, WELCOMED HIM, AND SEATED HIM AT GOD'S RIGHT HAND.
            6. AT the Destruction of the Temple, the generation of those Jews still alive, remembered Jesus' words of judgment … and the judgment upon the temple VINDICATES Jesus. He was right, they were wrong.
        ii. **"Son of Man" -** *Jesus uses this phrase to identify himself with the figure from the book of Daniel. Jesus is alluding to Daniel to describe what is happening in relation to him at the destruction of the Temple.*
        iii. **"Coming" -** *BUT in Daniel, this figure is not COMING from Heaven to Earth, but coming TO GOD in Heaven; from Earth to Heaven, being accepted into God's Presence.*
            1. SO … this "coming" refers to an event "whereby the authority of Jesus is vindicated over the Jewish establishment which has rejected him"
            2. Jewish religious leaders, will witness events which show that Jesus was not, after all, mistaken in his claim: NO, he actually IS the Messiah, the anointed one, the true representative of the people of Israel, the one in and through whom the covenant God is acting to set up his kingdom."
            3. The Temple's Destruction is a **sign** that at the Ascension, decades before, The Father *HAD* accepted Jesus, the old system is forever obsolete.

ALTHOUGH THERE WERE NUMEROUS IDENTIFYING SIGNS BEFORE JERUSALEM'S DESTRUCTION, THERE WILL BE NO WARNING SIGNS BEFORE THE SECOND COMING of CHRIST.

NOTE: There is no time to consider Matthew 24:36 - 25:46 where Jesus answers the disciples' question about his Second Coming. The points that Jesus repeatedly makes regarding his Second Coming are …

- It may (or may not) be delayed a very long time from that evening that he is speaking.
- There will be no signs warning people that Christ's return is imminent.
- The Second Coming will be completely unexpected.
- There is NO encouragement at all to try and discern the "signs of the times" for Christ's return.
- Life will be going on as normal when Christ unexpectedly returns.
    - **NOTE: 24:37-41 … The analogy between Noah and Christ's return.**
        - Those taken by the flood were taken for judgment and destruction.
        - Those who remained in the ark were saved for blessing: Inheriting the cleansed,

renewed Earth.
    - Those "taken" at Christ's return are taken for judgment and destruction.
    - Those remaining are those saved for blessing: Inheriting the New Heavens and New Earth.
  - Christ's Second Coming will be like that. Everyone simply living their normal lives and suddenly, unexpectedly, it is all over. Christ has come, final judgment and final reward are executed, eternity with God in the New Earth begins.
  - That is the only possible meaning of this analogy.
- Jesus' followers must be faithful, hard-working stewards of everything entrusted to them.
- We must invest and multiply everything entrusted to us, for we will give an accounting to Christ.
- We must ALWAYS be prepared and preparing for Christ's return, which could be at any time.

Q: WHY PAY SO MUCH ATTENTION TO THE BIBLE?

2 Tim. 2:15 "*DO your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.* **"**

1 THESSALONIANS

PAROUSIA, HARPAZO, APANTESIN

- PAROUSIA → *should* not be "escapist" "disappearing"
- The word is used elsewhere to describe the atmosphere before a political or military figure visits.
- While the Emperor/Figure was still on the outskirts, a public herald(s) would come into the town, blow trumpets, announce loudly the soon arrival of Leader.
- At this point, the inhabitants of the city, would GO OUT of the city, TO MEET the Leader, with CELEBRATION, and IMMEDIATELY ACCOMPANY THEM … back into the city.

- **1 THESSALONIANS 4** "13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming (***PAROUSIA***) of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up (***HARPAZO***) together with them in the clouds to meet (***APANTESIN***) the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.18 Therefore encourage one another with these words."

- **PAROUSIA** – Definition: coming, arrival, entrance/presence. The official visit of a ruler / king / god to inspect and assume control of his land / city. The favored citizens go to receive the king. He brings judgment or reward. Celebration and feasting follow.

The word Paul uses to refer to the coming of the Lord here is *parousia*.
As we have already seen, Paul uses this word to speak of the presence or the arrival of someone, sometimes Jesus and sometimes other individuals.

In the Graeco-Roman world, the word was sometimes used to describe either the coming of a deity or the official visit of a ruler to a city. Such visits were important events, and the city would have great celebrations in honor of the visiting king.
The important city officials and the citizens would go out of the city to meet (APANTESIN) the visiting sovereign and escort him back to the city in a glorious procession.
If Paul had this imagery in mind in this context, perhaps a misunderstanding of it is one reason the Thessalonians were confused about those who had died. It is possible they believed that those who had died would not enjoy the honor of going out to meet the coming Messiah in this official *parousia*. If that is the case, Paul puts the concern to rest, telling the Thessalonians that those who are alive "will not precede those who have fallen asleep." Those believers who have died **will** participate in this glorious event and will in fact have a place of honor.

- **HARPAZO** – "Definition of harpazo: verb, to seize (in various applications): AV, catch (away, up), pluck, pull, take (by force). Notice that the word harpazo, as used in the NT, is a verb, not a noun. Also, there is no definite article in any Biblical verse which uses harpazo."

Definition of harpazo: **verb**, to seize (in various applications): AV, catch (away, up), pluck, pull, take (by force). Notice that the word harpazo, as Used in the NT is a verb, **not a noun**. Also, there is no definite article in any Biblical verse which uses harpazo.
Matthew 11:12 "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take [harpazo] it by force [harpazo]."
Matthew 13:19 "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away [harpazo] that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside.
John 6:15 "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take [harpazo] him by force [harpazo], to make him a king,"
John 10:12 "But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth [harpazo] them, and scattereth the sheep."
John 10:28 "neither shall any man pluck [harpazo] them out of my hand."
Acts 8:39 "the Spirit of the Lord caught away [harpazo] Philip,"
Acts 23:10 "the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take [harpazo] him by force [harpazo] from among them, "
2 Corinthians 12:2 "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth such an one caught up [harpazo] to the third heaven."
Revelation 12:5 "And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up [harpazo] to God, and to his throne."
HARPAZO in the NT, is a verb, not a noun. Also, there is no definite article in any Biblical verse which uses harpazo. In other words, you never find "the take … the pluck … the rapture …" used as a noun for a stand-alone event. It is a verb describing an action.

- **APANTESIN** – "When a dignitary paid an official visit (*parousia*) to a city in Hellenistic times, the action of the leading citizens in going out to meet him and escort him back on the final stage of his journey was called the *apantesin*." F. F. Bruce

The word translated "to meet" is the word *apantesin*.

This word was used in the Graeco-Roman world to describe the meeting of a king or other important official who has come to visit a city.
According to Paul, after the dead in Christ are raised, those who are still alive will be caught up together with them so that all will meet the Lord in the air and then be with him forever. Paul does not explicitly say at this point where we will be with the Lord forever. Some suggest that after meeting Christ in the air, we will go with Christ into heaven.[xiii]
However, if Paul is describing the meeting of Christians in the air with the Lord in terms of the known customs involving official visits of dignitaries and kings, then the idea is that believers will meet the coming Lord and escort him back to the earth. The Thessalonians are to encourage one another with these words (4:18).

THE PUBLIC NATURE OF THE ACTION IS STRESSED
Timing of the visit may be secret, Ancient Leaders would often surprise cities & inhabitants to inspect, ensure they were living as good citizens & subjects. Arrival is public
The analogy with a king being met by the greeting committee and then returning to the committee's city is apt and would be well understood by the Thessalonians.
In other words, in the N.T., (and for 1,800 years afterward) there is no concept of the Dispensational "Rapture" of secrecy, fleeing to heaven for a few years to escape tribulation, then returning.

Implications– without a two track model of prophecy fulfillment for two peoples of God, the Dispensational system collapses …

- Why would we expect, after generations of martyrs, that the final generation of Christians would be exempt from bearing the cross or dying for their faith in the final tribulation?
- Dispensationalism's two-stage return of Christ teaches Escapist Theology that is problematic.
- Revelation was written to steel the audience for the possibility of martyrdom, not escape.
- The SECOND COMING is described with the words Parousia, harpazo, and apantesin.
- There *IS* the concept of rapture as we have described.
    - Visiting King, Coming to Inspect & Rule
    - Coming announced by a herald
    - Inhabitants GO OUT TO MEET, ACCOMPANY BACK.
    - This "Rapture" as part of 2nd Coming is the concept affirmed by the Historic Church, affirmed by …
        - Classic Premillennialism and Classic Amillennialism

If you pay attention to Historical-Cultural Understanding of the Grammar, how this word was commonly used & commonly understood, pay attention to hermeneutics, linguistics, etc., then the historic Christian understandings of Christ's return make the most sense.
The overwhelming majority of Christian scholars (not TV preachers with fake doctorates), but TRUE scholars, including all Pentecostal scholars, are either in the Classical Premil or Amil camp.
One thing we do NOT do is cause division in our church. Encountering new information on long held ideas, can be difficult.
When you realize you may have held or even taught some beliefs or doctrines which were not the best interpretation, it can shake you a bit. THIS IS WHY PAUL TOLD TIMOTHY to be a good student, to rightly divide the Word.
This is why the Apostles chose deacons to take care of basic needs of church people so they could do what? … *Dedicate themselves to prayer & study.*

CONCLUSION

A DIVERSE PLURALISTIC FELLOWSHIP

The founders of the Assemblies of God desired a flexible Fellowship, not a rigid denomination, a Fellowship united by experience and mission as much or more than doctrine.

Depending on the local and regional cultures, on the prevailing religious environment, and many other factors, the Assemblies of God has always varied from one part of the U.S. to another.

Styles of music, worship, preaching, ministry emphases, ethos, and even doctrinal emphases have always varied greatly.

No one can look at their own personal, local experience and say "This is what ALL of the AG has always been like."

"WE DO NOT CONTEND" for the phraseology used in the SFTs, nor that they represent all essential Biblical truth.

A FLEXIBLE FELLOWSHIP

- The founders desired a flexible Fellowship, not a rigid denomination, a Fellowship united by experience and mission as much as doctrine.
- Depending on the local and regional cultures, on the prevailing religious environment, and many other factors, the Assemblies of God has always varied from one part of the U.S. to another.
    - Northeast, North Central, Southeast, Mid-America, Northwest, West Coast …
    - Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Fundamentalist, Holiness, UNCHURCHED, ...
- Styles of music, worship, preaching, ministry emphases, ethos, and even doctrinal emphases have always varied greatly. …
    - High Church, Evangelical, Hymns, Gospel Songs, Camp Meeting, Emotional Preaching, Content-focused Teaching, etc.
- No one can look at their own personal, local experience and say "This is what ALL of the AG has always been like."
- SOMETIMES, those with a narrow sectarian experience, especially if influenced by fundamentalism, become very narrow-minded and defensive in their expectations of what the AG CAN or CANNOT BE. Especially as other "WAYS OF BEING AG" invade their territory.

Liberty and Diversity in Unity

There has always been diversity of perspective on some matters in the Assemblies of God.

One area where this is true is eschatology.

GENERAL COUNCIL of the ASSEMBLIES OF GOD BYLAWS …

ARTICLE IX. DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES DISAPPROVED

B. LIST OF DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES DISAPPROVED

Section 3. Eschatological Errors

(*Paragraphs "a" through "d" of Section 3 then proceed to list "errors" … such as The Restitution of All Things, Date-Setting, Post-Tribulational Rapture (which is Classical Premillennialism), Amillennialism, etc., then closes with Paragraph e.) ...*

e. Credentials jeopardized if made an issue. We recommend that those ministers who embrace any of the foregoing eschatological errors refrain from preaching or teaching them. Should they persist in emphasizing these doctrines to the point of making them an issue, their standing in the Fellowship will be seriously affected (Luke 21:34–36; 1 Thessalonians 5:9,10; 2 Thessalonians 1:4–10; Revelation 3:10,19,20).

THE PERSPECTIVE OF "CLOSURE"

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness, and then the end shall come."

SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE IN THE CLOSURE / FULFILLMENT OF the GREAT COMMISSION BEFORE SECOND COMING (OR RAPTURE) CAN OCCUR.
Some AG missiologists and missionaries believe the gospel must be preached to at least a representative number of **every** people-group in the world before the Rapture / Second Coming. This is in direct contradiction to the GC CBL "recommendation" for a belief in *imminence*.
Paragraph c. Post-Tribulation Rapture …" … it is recommended that all our ministers teach the *imminent* coming of Christ, warning all to be prepared for that coming, which may occur at any time, …"

HOWEVER, "closure" IS within the boundaries of exegetical possibility, and so it is orthodox.

SO, while the official position of the General Council of the Assemblies of God is a modified form of Dispensationalism, the General Council bylaws has long recognized that there have always been scholars and ministers in the Fellowship who have held other eschatological perspectives, including the historic Christian perspectives of Classical Premillennialism, Amillennialism, and Postmillennialism.
This is permitted as long as such a person does NOT cause problems or divisions by emphasizing a different perspective to the degree that is becomes "an issue," AND then continues such behavior after being warned to desist.
The primary concern of the Fellowship regarding eschatology is that the "imminence" of Christ's coming be affirmed, but even there another position such as "closure" may be held if it is NOT made an issue.

THE DANGERS and SHAME OF END-TIME SPECULATIONS - Warnings, Predictions

- The shrinking number of preachers who hold to Dispensationalism often make those who still hold to Dispensationalism more aggressive.
- They produce constant speculations, new revelations from the Spirit regarding world events, never before seen secrets from Scripture, new books after their old predictions have proven false, etc., …
  - False teachings like the Shemitah, the Harbringer, Four Blood Moons, etc.
  - *All have proven as spectacularly false as they were spectacularly popular, historically inaccurate, exegetically impossible.*
- These eschatological speculators are unwilling to receive correction or teaching from qualified scholars, or from other schools of interpretation.
- They and their system create conspiracy theory / paranoid mindsets in God's people.
- They distract God's people from systematic Bible study of important topics, from the discipleship process, and from long-term planning.
- They cloak their date setting in barely ambiguous language, giving them a way to spin their failures and date-setting when it does not come to pass.
- They refuse to admit their continual string of failed warnings and predictions, and instead create new rumors based on the latest current events
- *The continual failures of their warnings and predictions bring great shame on the gospel of Jesus Christ!*

UNLESS BROUGHT DIRECTLY TO THEIR ATTENTION → MANY AG Bible and theology scholars never even hear of these error-filled popular-level books because the popular-level writers are clearly unqualified and their books are bad pop theology.
Our scholars and Teachers are like you, they only have so much time, they have families, so they use their studies to engage Scripture with PROPER hermeneutics as a gift to the Body, to churches & pastors.
WE, AT THE LOCAL CHURCH AND GRASSROOTS LEVEL, MUST STOP REJECTING HISTORIC, ORTHODOX, AND EVANGELICAL DOCTRINE, PRACTICE, AND SCHOLARSHIP.

It is nonsense to reject all the perspectives of historic Christianity. Every previous Spirit-revival ended up in cardinal heresy or dissipated by doing this.
The Holy Spirit "blows where he wills" and that includes the non-Pentecostal Body of Christ.
We must REJECT the unqualified preachers/teachers on television and the Internet, and RECEIVE the teaching of truly qualified, properly educated scholars, Pastors, and Teachers.

One thing is certain: As stated in the confession of one very large evangelical denomination, Christ will return in power and glory and we must be ready.

"X. Last Things - *God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord."*