

God's Master Plan In Prophecy

Lesson 1 – Introduction & Foundations

Introduction

Any study of prophecy should be prefaced by the realization that in many areas the study will not be of precise details but will at the best be examining scriptural possibilities. Because many of the events that we will be studying have not yet transpired and have at the most only a few obscure verses of scripture relating to them, we cannot always be completely sure of the details of their fulfillment. For some, this makes eschatology, as the study of end time events is called, to be somewhat frustrating but such is – and pardon the prophetic pun – the nature of the beast! It is good to remember that some things are provable, some things are probable, and yet other things only possible and in prophecy it is good to always try to distinguish between the three. We will never know every possible fulfillment of every scripture until it happens and neither will we ever be completely sure of the timing of many things until they take place. The greatest Biblical scholar will one day look back and say, “oh, that’s what he meant” as they realize what God was doing – that is just how God always seems to work. There are, however, some events that are so detailed and so fully described in the Bible that the amount of scriptures that are devoted to them let us know that God wanted us to know about them and to understand them greatly.

Some things are provable, some probable, and others only possible.

While our studies will explore many possibilities and other things that are probable but not totally provable from scripture, let us never forget that we should major on the main doctrines and that of the main points all can believe them and be sure about them. Let’s forego any pretense and establish some things that I feel are provable and key doctrines of the Bible and not negotiable. This Bible Study is written upon some basic tenants:

- The Bible is the inerrant, infallible Word of the one, true, and living God.
- The Rapture or “Catching away of the Saints”¹ is a literal event that has not yet happened.
- The Millennial Reign of Christ is a literal event that has not yet happened.
- God will turn back to the Jewish people after the Era of Grace is over and give them a chance at redemption.
- God will not force His church to go through His wrath.
- The Rapture or “Catching away of the Saints” ends the Era of Grace, so
- No Gentiles will be saved as per the Era of Grace after the Rapture of the church.
- There is a literal hell and a literal heaven and a literal New Jerusalem and none of these are on earth right now.
- All prophecy has not been fulfilled.
- Prophecy can be understood to an extent and it is not harmful for a Christian to study.
- Prophecy can be studied while keeping a proper perspective on other important doctrines of scripture.

If some of these events or terms are unfamiliar to you, do not worry because we will learn of them in the coming lessons. Perhaps, though, we should elaborate on the last two points just given; many Christians are not interested in studying end time events, or have been taught that to study end time events is wrong or dangerous. I believe the opposite: that to *not* study end time events and just ignore them is dangerous. The prophetic book of Revelation draws to a close with these words:

Rev 22:18-19 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

The best way to ensure that we do not add extra instruction that is not found in the end time prophecies or that we do not fail to teach something that is clearly taught is to study carefully what the Word of God says about such things. To ignore prophecy and end time events altogether is to become in danger of both adding and taking away from God’s Word.

Written by R. Jeremiah Sibley, all rights reserved.

This is the 3rd revision of what was previously known as the "Dispensation Prophecy Bible Study."

Copies of this study may be freely distributed for not-for-profit use only.

Unless otherwise noted, scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE © Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Prophecy #1 – Introduction & Foundations

Again, the fact that God commanded John and Daniel and many other writers to write down such prophecies indicates to us that He intended for us to study them and even understand them. In Revelation 10:4, John was commanded to not write down the events of the seven thunders that he had just seen and heard. Obviously, God did not want us today to know what those seven thunders were. It follows, then, that what God did command and allow John to write about, He wanted us to know and understand. It is true that many great men of God have erred in their interpretations of prophetic events and this in itself has caused many people to shy away from eschatological study. Furthermore, many other people quickly reach errant conclusions from their study because they begin with a core system that is false. For this reason, we are taking this first lesson to highlight some foundational and core truths about scripture and prophetic passages.

John was not allowed to record the 7 Thunders because God didn't want us to know about them.

Foundational Truths to Understanding Prophecy

Let us begin by laying a foundation of four very important truths to keep in mind at all times:

1. *Scripture must be interpreted through the truth of Apostolic doctrine.*

The scriptures declare that the Lord our God is one and that He was revealed in visible form in the flesh of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. It also teaches that the essentiality of believing in Christ, repentance of sins, water baptism in the name of Jesus, the infilling of the Holy Spirit as on the Day of Pentecost and in the book of Acts, and the living of a holy and separated lifestyle in order to be saved in the Era of Grace. It follows then, that when we interpret scriptures that deal with the closing of the "time of the Gentiles" which is Grace, the last judgments, the revelation of Jesus Christ to this world, and the final punishment of sin that we must do so through a basic understanding of what the Apostles taught for doctrine. Practically, any view of prophecy that has Gentiles being saved before the Millennial Reign of Christ by any other way than obeying the instructions of Peter on the Day of Pentecost is false and errant¹.

Likewise, we must view what are labeled as "traditional" views of prophecy that were established and invented by men who did not fully understand key Apostolic truths with great care and make sure that they are Biblically sound. To believe something about the Bible just, "because it is what I've always been told is right," or "because many, many other people believe this" is not a proper way to study scriptures about any subject. Nevertheless, many Christians who would never take such a tack when studying key doctrines such as the identity of God or water baptism do so when it comes to prophecy. Specifically, there are three traditional views of prophetic events and all were coined and formulated by men who did not have a good grasp of the true identity of God nor who believed in the necessity of water baptism in Jesus' name. Most of them did not even have the infilling of the Holy Spirit as per the book of Acts! Those three traditional views are commonly known as: the pre-tribulation view, the mid-tribulation view, and the post-tribulation view². I believe that all three traditional views each have an element of truth to them but also several points where they horribly err from the clear teachings of scripture³. Part of the reason for this is that men who formulated these theories did not study scripture from the light of great Apostolic truths⁴.

2. *Scripture must interpret scripture.*

A key to understanding any subject in scripture is that the scriptures do not contradict themselves in any way. If I want to learn what God's view of any subject then I must take all of the scriptures that teach on that subject and interpret them in such a way that they harmonize. The correct interpretation will be that which causes all of the scriptures to be in harmony and that does not contradict any scripture and my interpretation has been derived from the scripture only.ⁱⁱ Such a mode of interpretation is a Biblical one:

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

¹ See Acts 2:38.

² Or "pre-trib, mid-trib, and post-trib" in everyday vernacular.

³ The view that I will teach in this study has become very popular with several key scholars, most notably Marvin Rosenthal, and it is he who has coined the term "pre-wrath" to distinguish from the other, more traditional views.

⁴ The most commonly found viewpoint in modern, mainstream Christianity is the pre-tribulation view which has been greatly advertised through the recently popular "Left Behind" Series and all of its offshoots. I believe the "Left Behind" series is good fiction and nothing resembling Biblical truth.

Prophecy #1 – Introduction & Foundations

“All Scripture” certainly includes those verses that deal with end time events! To ignore prophetic passages would be to ignore the vast majority of the Bible record. This volume of scriptures is precisely the reason why so many people do not make studying prophecy a priority because to interpret it correctly, one must take all of the scriptures on the subject, and in certain areas of prophecy, there is a large number of scriptures that deal with a particular subject and must be read and understood. And such passages tend to be scattered throughout the Bible: the prophet Isaiah taught that the doctrines of the Lord would be found “here a little, and there a little.”⁵ Accordingly, our approach to studying the key prophetic passages will be to try to find other scriptures that deal with the same subject and place them side by side to complete the picture that God’s Word is trying to paint for us. Such is a sound method of Biblical study.

2 Peter 1:20-21 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

It is also important to grasp that no prophecy is a matter of one’s own interpretation. Some people have believed that God left the prophetic passages purposefully ambiguous so that everyone could do what they want to with the passages. While it may be true that some people seem great at twisting scriptures to try to support their dubious doctrines, this teaching of Peter tells us that such is not a way to find the truth of scripture. Where two people disagree as to what a passage means may not be a “heaven or hell” issue, but one of them is wrong as there can only be one possible interpretation that God meant. That is not to say that scriptural passages – particularly prophetic passages of the Bible – cannot be understood and interpreted at different levels of application. Which leads us to our next key foundational truth:

Often a key to understanding a NT prophecy is to find an OT scripture that goes with it. be the

3. *The Law of Spiritual Application does not annul the literal interpretation of a passage.*

All scriptures can be viewed from two different perspectives: the literal, natural meaning and a spiritual principle or truth that can be derived from the passage. We must never forget that every scripture was written within a specific context and time period with a specific audience in mind. Yet, people in all situations and eras can learn from the timeless principles of the Word of God and that is why God had those scriptures written down and preserved for us. The key point to remember is that a later, valid spiritual truth being derived from a scripture does not erase the literal interpretation of the passage as it was for the people to whom it was written and vice versaⁱⁱⁱ.

A good example of this principle is when Gideon fleeced the Lord by asking for a sign that he should obey God’s commandments to stand for truth and fight the enemies of Israel.⁶ Gideon first placed a piece of fleece out on the ground and said that if in the morning the fleece was wet with dew and the ground was dry around it, that he would know that God would deliver Israel. After God obliged, Gideon still was not convinced and placed the fleece out again this time asking for the exact opposite to happen: that the ground around the fleece would be soaked and yet the fleece dry. It was only after the next morning that Gideon found the fleece and ground just as he had requested that he was convinced that God would give him the victory.

There is a tremendous spiritual lesson to be learned from this story. For thousands of years, the nation of Israel was God’s only blessed people and it was to the nation of Israel that God inundated with great blessings, anointings, and promises. Spiritually, the nation of Israel was “soaked with God’s blessings” while the lands around them were dry. Sadly, that first sign failed to convince them that God had come to deliver them so they rejected their deliverer, Jesus Christ. Now God has chosen to pour out his blessings upon “whosoever will” which includes the Gentile nations. At the same time, the majority of Israel, with their rabbinic traditions and self-righteousness, have dried up spiritually. It can be said that the land around Israel is drenched with the blessing of God and the Holy Ghost, while Israel is spiritually dry: and that better be all the sign that we need to know that God can deliver us even today! What a tremendous lesson, but just because there is a spiritual lesson to be learned from Gideon’s fleece does not mean that it did not actually happen to a literal fleece. That is, just because we can understand the spiritual principle being taught, it does not replace or become more correct than the literal interpretation.

The literal application of this text is that most humanity is like Gideon in that we tend to doubt the Word of God when God first asks us to step out in faith and do something great for Him and yet God is often accommodating with our human frailty and merciful and patient with us and does not revoke His calling to us if we do not immediately respond but keeps trying to draw us to move out in faith as He has pronounced. Which two applications of that text is correct? Both are and

⁵ See Isaiah 28:10.

⁶ The story is found in Judges 6:37-40.

Prophecy #1 – Introduction & Foundations

one is the literal application and one is a deeper spiritual application from a study of the rest of scripture. Both conclusions have many other scriptures to support them and so both are valid. The spiritual principle derived from a passage does not annul the literal interpretation and vice versa!

A common area in prophecy that people err by not understanding this principle is in studying the 21st chapter of the book of Revelation. There we find a description of the "New Jerusalem" and the city is referred to as the "bride, the Lamb's wife".⁷ Because of that description, some people⁸ teach that this is not a literal city but a spiritual view of the bride of Christ, the church. While these verses can be used to learn spiritual principles about the bride of Christ, the church, and what the Apostolic church should be, they also describe a literal city because it is physically measured in the passage⁹. To believe that the city is a literal city with streets of gold is the literal interpretation of this chapter and to believe that we can learn spiritual principles about the church from studying the description of the city is the spiritual interpretation of this chapter. Both are correct, but one does not erase the other. That is, we cannot allow the spiritual to negate the literal meaning of these verses. Such a principle holds true for all other prophetic passages.

4. There is a Law of Double Fulfillment of Prophecy in scripture.

The principle of "double fulfillment of prophecy" is probably the most important concept to grasp if we are to properly interpret end time events. This principle states that for every prophecy in the scriptures, there is an immediate fulfillment and a distant fulfillment. That is, for every prophecy given in the Bible, there is always a soon fulfillment that is closer in time to the giving of the prophecy and also another distant fulfillment that happens at a much later date. Each prophecy applies to both time periods.

Again, the best way to grasp this principle is to examine a couple of actual examples. Let's start with a popular scripture in Isaiah:

Isa 28:11-12 Indeed, He will speak to this people Through stammering lips and a foreign tongue, 12 He who said to them, "Here is rest, give rest to the weary," And, "Here is repose," but they would not listen.

The prophet Isaiah lived in the time of Israel immediately before the time that Israel was taken into captivity. Immediately after this prophecy, the Assyrian army invaded the northern ten tribes of Israel and took them away. Scholars say that the Assyrian language was full of short, guttural sounds that almost sounded like they were stuttering and stammering. This prophecy then was immediately fulfilled by the invasion of the Assyrian people; that is what it meant to the people of Isaiah's day.

In the New Testament, though, the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out with people speaking in "foreign tongues" or by the Spirit speaking through people causing them to speak a language that they had never learned before. Anyone who has ever seen someone get the Holy Spirit knows that stammering lips are often a sign that precede the actual breakthrough into the infilling of the Spirit! Peter, in preaching about the Holy Spirit quoted this passage in Isaiah, and the Apostle Paul – while later teaching on speaking in tongues and its proper uses in the church service – quoted this very verse and said that it taught us about the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ Therefore, the tongues that accompany being filled with the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the distant fulfillment of the prophecy. Both fulfillments of the prophecy of these verses were very important and both are true. The immediate fulfillment of this prophecy was before the first coming of Jesus Christ and the second fulfillment is before the second coming of Jesus Christ!

Another good example of the double fulfillment of prophecy is found in Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Standing with the disciples, Peter preached that the events of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost was a fulfillment of the prophecies of the second chapter of Joel and even quoted the prophet extensively:

Acts 2:16-21 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 17 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; 18 EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy. 19 'AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. 20 'THE SUN WILL BE TURNED

⁷ See Revelation 21:9.

⁸ Again, this is a commonly held tenant of the false view of preterism.

⁹ See Revelation 21:15-17.

¹⁰ See Acts 3:19 and 1 Corinthians 14:21-22 respectively.

Prophecy #1 – Introduction & Foundations

INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME. 21 'AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.'

We cannot argue with Peter as he was anointed of God to write and interpret scripture and had been given the "keys to the kingdom" and thus his interpretation of this scripture must be correct! But read verses 18-21 again: did the sun literally turn to darkness on the Day of Pentecost? Did the moon turn to blood? What literal wonders in the heavens were present? Eventually in our study we will come back to this passage and a careful comparison of this passage of scripture and others that describe a future event known as the wrath of God will show that Joel's prophecy can also be interpreted to coincide to some of the visions later predicted by John the Revelator as yet to happen.¹¹ Who was correct in their interpretation, Peter or John? The truth is that they were both correct. The prophecies in the 2nd chapter of Joel were fulfilled in a spiritual way immediately after Jesus' first coming; they will be literally fulfilled again after Jesus' second coming. The Day of Pentecost was the immediate fulfillment of these prophecies and the coming Day of the Lord will be the second fulfillment!

We have learned something important here. Not only do all prophecies have an immediate fulfillment and a distant fulfillment, but usually the immediate fulfillment happens in conjunction with Jesus Christ's first coming – that is, the coming of Christ as recorded in the Gospels – and the distant fulfillment usually happens in conjunction with Christ's second coming which is yet to happen. It was a failure to grasp this concept that led to the Jewish religious leaders of New Testament day to reject and crucify Jesus Christ. The scribes and Pharisee's main scriptural argument as to why they could not accept Jesus as the Messiah was the last prophecy found in the Old Testament:

A failure to grasp the Law of Double Fulfillment led to the Jews rejecting Jesus as their Messiah!

Mal 4:4-6 " Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. 5 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. 6 "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

The prophet Malachi prophesied that Elijah would come again to Israel before the "day of the Lord." The biggest argument that the scribes and Pharisees had against Jesus Christ was "if He is the Messiah, then where is Elijah?" This argument obviously won some of Jesus' disciples away from Him and even caused some doubts to enter into the minds of Peter, James, and John for we find that the experience of the event known as the Mount of Transfiguration was a rebuttal to this question:

Matt 17:1-3 Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

Jesus took His three key disciples upon the mountain and to their astonishment, they saw Him talking face to face with Moses and Elijah! Notice that Moses and Elijah are the two prophets mentioned in the prophecy of Malachi that was being used against Jesus.

Peter, as he usually did, began to babble on and was interrupted by an audible voice from heaven which commanded them to listen to what Jesus was saying.¹² Immediately after the voice spoke, Jesus led the three disciples down from the mountain and while still alone, they finally asked the question that was bothering them:

Matt 17:9-10 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, " Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." 10 And His disciples asked Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

This question that had been asked by the scribes and Pharisees had been bugging even Jesus' innermost disciples and the question was "where is Elijah?" If Jesus were really the Christ, then shouldn't Elijah first come just as the scriptures said?

¹¹ The Day of Pentecost occurred around A.D. 30 and the book of Revelation was written around A.D. 90-100.

¹² Every time in scripture an audible voice came from heaven, it was for the people's sake who were witnesses to convince them of something that was very important. Compare John 12:28-30.

Prophecy #1 – Introduction & Foundations

Realizing that doubt was entering the minds of His chosen leaders, Jesus had taken Peter, James, and John up to the mountain top where they had witnessed His conversing with the very prophets mentioned in the scriptural passage from which the question had been pulled. And they had also heard an audible voice of God telling them to listen to Jesus' teachings. The doubt was now gone, but the disciples still wanted their question answered and so Jesus did:

Matt 17:11-13 And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; 12 but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." 13 Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

Jesus said that Elijah "is coming" one day, but unto the disciples in that time period He said "Elijah already came." The disciples then realized that John the Baptist was the "Elijah" for Jesus Christ's first coming. This explains why when the angel told John the Baptist's father that he was to be born, that it also said that the prophet would be "in the spirit and power of Elijah."¹³ What the scribes and Pharisees did not understand was that Jesus Christ, their Messiah was coming *twice*, once to die as the sacrifice for sin and then again as the reigning King of Kings! As Jesus said, Elijah will still come one day before Jesus Christ's second coming and we will study him in more detail when we get to the two witnesses of Revelation chapter 11, but John the Baptist was the Elijah for Jesus Christ's first coming. There is no discrepancy or contradiction here, rather a failure to grasp a key concept of scripture.

The point here is that the scribes and Pharisees missed their "time of visitation" because they did not understand the Law of the Double Fulfillment of Scriptures and we who live immediately before Christ's second coming cannot afford to make the same mistake! Every prophecy has an immediate fulfillment and a distant fulfillment. Many people today look at prophecy and how that many of them were fulfilled before Jesus Christ's first coming and say that all prophecy has been fulfilled and that it cannot apply to future events, but they are forgetting about the distant fulfillment! To be accurate, we must take both the immediate and the distant fulfillment into account. In this study we will endeavor where possible to understand both.^{iv}

Common Myths of Modern Prophecy Teaching

Let's end our introduction by briefly dispelling some common myths that are widely taught and propagated today in modern prophecy teaching. Chances are that you have been taught either directly or subtly one of these myths and we need to comment on them before we get to actual prophetic passages.

1. *All prophecy has been fulfilled.*

This view is the main thesis of the errant doctrine now commonly known as preterism. Instead of spending much time here refuting this argument, I will let the entire lessons of this study speak for themselves. One quick look around you should be enough to convince that you are not living in "heaven on earth."

2. *The book of Revelation is written in chronological order.*

Revelation is more like a newspaper than a novel.

Usually people believe this because they were told to believe it and it is not usually a result of a comprehensive study of the book. The book of Revelation is a series of visions that were revealed to the Apostle John on the isle of Patmos. These visions read more like a newspaper than a novel and while they were written down in the order that they were shown to John, to interpret them as in chronological order leads to some irresolvable difficulties.

For example, there are two different accounts of the fall of Babylon, one in Revelation 14:8 and the other in 18:2. If the book of Revelation is in chronological order from front to back, then how many times does the city of Babylon fall? Is it rebuilt between those two chapters? The truth is that Babylon falls once, but John is shown part of the story in the 14th chapter and the rest of the story in the 18th.

As we will see, a careful study will reveal the events of the 6th seal, 7th trumpet, all of the Bowls of Wrath are the same event. For example if you believe that the book is in perfect chronological order, then there are five different earthquakes prophesied and the wrath of God is *begun* to be poured out seven different times. A chronological view of Revelation also

¹³ See Luke 1:17.

Prophecy #1 – Introduction & Foundations

has a rough time explaining the “lamb that was slain” – a portrait of the cross and Calvary – in the 4th and 5th chapters of the book and the birth of Christ being presented in the 12th chapter.

The various visions within the book are in chronological order with themselves. For instance, the seven trumpets are in their correct order and that is why they are numbered; the vision of the woman clothed with the sun in the 12th chapter is in chronological order with itself. But like a newspaper tells of different stories that happened on the same day, so do the visions sometimes overlap or reveal more details of what is happening in another area within the same time frame.

3. Revelation 4:1-2 is the Rapture of the Church or the “Catching Away of the Saints.”

This is a commonly held belief in modern Christianity today but one that I believe finds no support in any other scriptures and that has been created as an “out” to skip studying prophecy altogether. If you believe that the book of Revelation is written in chronological order and that this passage is the Catching Away of the Saints, then you can afford to ignore the rest of the book. Before I give some reasons as to why I believe that this teaching is a myth, let’s read the actual verses:

Rev 4:1-2 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, " Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things." 2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.

This verse marks the point of transition where John moved from writing down direct words of God for the existing churches of his day and began to see prophetic events beginning with a portrait of heaven as it now is. I do not buy into the spiritualization of this passage into the Catching Away of the Saints because of the following reasons:

- *To believe such a theory is necessarily also to believe that the Book of Revelation is in perfect chronological order.* That is not true for the reasons that we just discussed.
- *If this is the Rapture of the Church and the Catching Away of the Saints then John, who was male, symbolically represents the church, the bride of Christ.* Without exception throughout the Bible, the church is rightfully portrayed as a bride and God is always presented in the male gender. *Nowhere* in scripture is a man used to represent the collective Bride of Christ. If John is being was a representation of the bride of Christ, then symbolically speaking God is breaking His own principles as regards to the definition of marriage. Obviously John, who was filled with the Holy Ghost, is a part of the collective Bride of Christ, but to say that he singly represents the bride of Christ is to produce symbolism of which there are no other examples found in scripture.
- *John did not hear a literal trumpet but booming voice that sounded “like a trumpet.”* The scriptures says that says that the Rapture of the church will take place at the "last trump."¹⁴ It does not say that it happens at a voice that sounds "as it were of a trumpet."
- *This is not the last time that John heard such a voice.* In Revelation 10:8 the same voice that spoke as a trumpet to John in the 4th chapter spoke again. If this voice is the trump spoken about in 1 Corinthians 15:52 that signals the Catching Away of the Saints, then technically the voice in Revelation 10:8 is the “last trump.” Why not make that the Rapture of the Church? To believe that Revelation 4:1 is the Catching Away of the Saints is to not only contradict many other scriptural teachings but to ignore the later “voices that sounded like a trumpet” in the book of Revelation.

4. The Church is not mentioned again in the book of Revelation after Revelation 4:1.

This is another fanciful theory to try to reinforce myth #3 that we just discussed. It simply is not true. Here are some places that the Church is mentioned in Revelation after the fourth chapter: 8:3-4; 6:10-11; 7:9-17; 11:18; 12:17; 13:7; 14:12; 14:15-16; 15:3; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:1-10; 20:4-5; 20:9; 21:1-22:21.

While various names are used for the church such as the righteous, saints, those washed in the blood of the Lamb, those clothed in white linen, those having the testimony of Jesus, all refer to the Apostolic church. The nation of Israel is never referred to as “saints” in the book of Revelation.

¹⁴ See 1 Corinthians 15:52.

Prophecy #1 – Introduction & Foundations

Final Preparatory Thoughts

Having laid some basic foundational principles to guide our study of prophecy, let us close this introduction by reading on final prophetic passage:

Dan 12:8-10 As for me, I heard but could not understand; so I said, "My lord, what will be the outcome of these events?" 9 He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time. 10 " Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand.

It was not for Daniel to understand how all of those wonderful visions would be fulfilled because they were “sealed up until the end time.” They would, however, be revealed and understood by those who lived in the time of their fulfillments and certainly we who are alive today are very much living in what can be called the “end time.” I believe that many wonderful and powerful teachings await us in the prophecy part of scripture and it is God’s will for us to understand at least the basic framework of end time events.

John’s writing is called “the book of Revelation” and not, as commonly mispronounced, “the book of Revelations.” It is the ultimate revelation of Jesus Christ and the underlying point of prophecy is to have Jesus Christ revealed to us more greatly. If we miss that in our studies of end time events – if we miss how great and how magnificent our Savior truly is – then we have missed the point!

Endnotes

Throughout this study I will tend to use the phrase “Catching Away of the Saints” instead of the more traditional “Rapture” to refer to the event when Jesus Christ comes back in the clouds and takes the church, the Bride of Christ, to be with Him in heaven. I prefer to use scriptural terms for scriptural things and the term “Rapture” – while commonly used and understood – is not a scriptural term.

ⁱⁱ What happens too often is people begin with a premise that they believe and then they begin to search the scriptures for something that supports what they already believe. And when they find a scripture that they think supports their view, they stop searching the scriptures or discard any that seem to contradict their view. Such a method – while common – is dangerous and leads to serious doctrinal error. We must take all of what the scripture has to say on a subject and take it all into account to form doctrinal basis.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, the laws of Moses as found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy were given to Moses by God specifically for the children of Israel of that time period. Their literal interpretation is that they were day-to-day instructions given for the Israelites to follow while under the Era of Moses’ Law. We, today, are under a new era of Grace and are no longer bound by Moses’ law, but it is a mistake to think that studying and reading those books of the Bible is a pointless, waste of time. Because the principles taught by the various laws of Moses and the stories that surround them are timeless and applicable to every generation. They also help us understand the teaching of the New Testament more fully. Try this: explain to someone why Christ had to die on the cross without using any Old Testament scripture or allusion. It’s impossible; it’s impossible to grasp why Christ and Calvary without using such terms as “sacrifice, lamb, Passover, and atonement.” We must have the Old Testament to understand the New Testament and a key to understanding prophecy will be in finding an Old Testament passage that elaborates and expands a teaching of a New Testament event. Pastors and preachers build God’s kingdom by regularly emphasizing the spiritual application of Old Testament scripture but that does not mean that the people of Moses’ day did not take it literally.

You may be wondering why I am spending so much time and effort to point out this principle when we are supposed to be studying prophecy. In actuality, many errors are made by people in prophecy by only interpreting the scripture in the spiritual sense and discarding the literal meaning. One of the most common mistakes is to teach that the Apostolic church is now the "spiritual Israel." That is, we have replaced the Jewish covenants and literal seed of Abraham as the children of God. Because of this, we can read passages of scripture in the Old Testament and learn spiritual principles for our walk with God today. A good example of this is the often misquoted scripture, "God inhabits the praises of his people." That verse in that exact form is not anywhere in the Bible! The verse that is being misquoted is Psalms 22:3:

Ps 22:3 Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

The term “enthroned” can also be translated as “inhabits” or “dwells in” and actually carries the idea of a king coming in and setting up his throne to dwell and rule and bless in a place. At the time the scripture was written, the nation of Israel were the ones who were in a covenant relationship with God. The spiritual principle that can be learned from this verse is thus "God inhabits and sets up shop in the praises of those who are in a covenant relationship with Him." That is why when a church body gathers together and begins to praise God, the presence of God moves into that building and can be literally felt! God has inhabited and become enthroned in the praises of the people who are in a covenant relationship with Him. When Israel was in such a relationship with God, He inhabited their praises as well. The point not to miss here is that after the "time of the Gentiles be fulfilled" God will one day return to the literal seed of Abraham, the Jewish people. Yet many people believe that God has completely rejected Israel and will never turn again to them despite the many, many scriptures that contradict that belief. They have “thrown the baby out with the bath water” and made a very gross error in their interpretation to the point of getting into false doctrine. And all of their error is a result of not realizing that the spiritual interpretation of a verse does not negate the literal meaning!

^{iv} Sometimes it will not be possible to fully understand what both applications of a prophecy are. For example, the prophecy of a virgin conceiving in Isaiah 7:14 undoubtedly has its distant fulfillment in the birth of Christ through the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary. There was obviously some sort of immediate fulfillment in Isaiah’s time that the king would have understood, but how this happened and the exact details of the matter are not revealed to us today. It is good to remember that although we may not be able to know both the immediate and distant fulfillment of all prophecies found in the Bible, both fulfillments existed. And not knowing one doesn’t negate the importance or the truth of the other. Furthermore, many of the prophecies of the Bible can be studied from both sides and where applicable and relevant we will endeavor to see both.