**How to Study Biblical Prophecy**

Revelation 7:4-10

It has been said, “Bible prophecy is not given so we make a calendar – it’s given to mold our character.”

Having established the importance of Prophecy, the question to consider today is HOW should we study (or interpret) biblical prophecy.

The study of prophecy can be confusing, controversial, and daunting.

* How does one determine the meaning of a prophetic text?
* Why do conclusions vary so drastically?
* How do we know which conclusion is valid, accurate, and true to biblical teaching?
* The answer to these questions is largely dependent on ones Method of interpretation, hermeneutics, or lens

Here are some basic things to remember as we begin a study of prophecy:

* Take your time – reach conclusions slowly
* Keep the big picture in mind – don’t get lost in the details
* Be comfortable with not knowing – there are some questions to which we don’t have answers – and that is OK

Daniel didn’t understand it all.

**Daniel 12:8-9** And I heard, but **I understood not**: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? (9) And he said, **Go thy way**, Daniel: for the **words are closed up and sealed** till the time of the end.

The Apostles didn’t have all their questions answered either.

**Acts 1:6-7** When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? (7) And he said unto them, **It is not for you to know** the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

However, there is a lot that God has revealed and we can KNOW about biblical prophecy as long as we understand and implement proper methods of interpretation.

1. **The method of interpretation one uses is the “lens” through which biblical prophecy is understood**

The method of interpretation you use will largely determine the conclusions that you draw.

This issue (hermeneutics) is so important to our understanding of prophecy that Pentecost begins his book *Things to Come* by devoting the first 64 pages and 4 chapters on this topic alone.

Scholars and theologians from the various views of eschatology admit that this is the key issue. Ones understanding of eschatology hinges on the method of interpretation used.

1. **There are two basic interpretive “lenses” which distinguish between the prophetic positions**
2. The Allegorical Method (spiritualizing)

**The definition**: a method by which the literal sense of a text is ignored or rejected in favor of a secondary, deeper, more spiritual and more profound meaning.

Those who hold to this view believe it is impossible to apply the literal method to all of Scripture, especially prophecy.

Oswald T. Allis gives three reasons:

* The Bible often contains figures of speech
* God is a spirit and the Bible teaches spiritual truths through the use of earthly objects and human relationships. Even the apostle Paul said that spiritual things are “spiritually discerned.”
* The Old Testament is preliminary and prepares us for the New Testament which is so obvious it requires no proof

**The history**:

* In the third century, some theologians (Clement of Alexandria and Origen) began teaching that all Scripture was to be interpreted allegorically.
* In the fifth century, Augustine led a movement rejecting the allegorical method of interpretation and reclaimed much of biblical truth with his efforts. However, he taught that only prophecy needs to be allegorized.
* During and after the Reformation, many of the reformers including Luther and Calvin stressed the literal (grammatical-historical) meaning of Scripture in areas of salvation by faith alone and the inspiration of Scripture but continued to use the allegorical method for unfulfilled prophecy.

**The dangers:**

* The allegorical method does not interpret Scripture
* In the allegorical method, the authority of interpretation rests with the mind of the interpreter rather than on the Scripture itself and the intent of the author. The interpretation can be twisted to fit the interpreters doctrinal position, the authority of the church to which he belongs, his social or educational background, and many other factors.
* With the allegorical method of interpretation, there is no means to test the conclusions of the interpreter.
1. The Grammatical-Historical Method (literal)

There are many reasons for the use of this method of interpretation but will consider three here.

* A philosophical reason – the purpose of language itself requires it. God has given us language to be able to communicate with man. God intended to reveal Himself to man through the use of language sufficient enough to convey what He intended.
* A biblical reason – The Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ’s first coming (His birth, His upbringing, His ministry, His death) were ALL fulfilled literally. So too will the prophecies concerning His second coming be fulfilled literally.
* A logical reason – If a literal, normal, plain interpretation is not used then there is no objectivity. With no objective standard there is no way to test the varieties of interpretations that man’s imagination can devise.
1. **Only one interpretation method (and resulting conclusion) can be true and valid**
* Jesus Christ is the focal point of prophecy and the center of God’s kingdom program.

**Revelation 1:1** The **Revelation of Jesus Christ**, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:

* Jesus is the rightful descendant of David and Abraham and is qualified to fulfill the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants.

**Matthew 1:1** The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the **son of David**, the **son of Abraham**.

* All the prophecies and covenants of the Bible are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

**2 Corinthians 1:20** For all the promises of God **in him are yea**, and **in him Amen**, unto the glory of God by us.

* The specific details of the Old Testament promises and prophecies matter and must be fulfilled as predicted

**Matthew 5:17-18** Think not that I am come to destroy the **law, or the prophets**: I am not come to destroy, **but to fulfil**. (18) For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, **till all be fulfilled**.

* Jesus Himself expected a literal fulfillment of prophecies

**Matthew 24:15** When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by **Daniel the prophet**, stand in the holy place, (whoso **readeth**, let him **understand**:)

In the following verses (16-21), He describes how the people living in Judea during this time would need to flee for their lives during these terrible events.

**Daniel 9:27** And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

**Matthew 24:29** Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

**Isaiah 13:10** For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

**Matthew 24:30** And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the **Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven** with power and great glory.

**Daniel 7:13** I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like **the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven**, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

* The New Testament writers understood Old Testament prophecies to require literal fulfillment

**1 Thessalonians 5:2** For yourselves know perfectly that **the day of the Lord** so cometh as a thief in the night.

**2 Peter 3:10** But the **day of the Lord** will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

**2 Thessalonians 2:3-4** Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; (4) Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

**Romans 11:26-27** And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: (27) For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.