

Can You Understand Bible Prophecy?

Can anything be more fascinating, more mysterious than some of the prophecies of the Bible? The book of Daniel, with its great image composed of various metals and miry clay; the beasts with their many horns and the “little horn” which came up among them to uproot three other beasts; the book of Revelation with its mysterious seals and trumpet plagues, great dragons, a woman clothed with the sun, a symbolic “bottomless pit”—surely there is much in biblical prophecy to fascinate, puzzle and mystify!

Approximately one third of the Bible is *prophecy*! The “major prophets” include Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and the minor” prophets (so-called because their prophecies in the Bible are of lesser duration) include Hosea to Malachi.

Few realize that Jesus Christ was the greatest prophet of all; that His “Olivet prophecy” (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) provides a vital key to the understanding of all prophecy.

Believe it or not, there are prophecies found from Genesis to Revelation; some of the Psalms are prophetic in nature, and it is truly *impossible* to understand the very purpose for human life on this planet; impossible to understand *why you were born* without understanding prophecy!

Can Just Anyone Understand Bible Prophecy?

At the end of the book of Daniel, Gabriel the archangel is concluding his exposition of the *longest* single prophecy in the Bible by explaining to Daniel that Palestine will be occupied by a great northern military power. In the twelfth and final chapter, following Daniel 11, the longest, and one of the most detailed prophecies in the Bible, Gabriel said, “And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be *a time of trouble* such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:1–2). In Jesus’ famous “Olivet prophecy” He said, “for then shall be great *tribulation* [a time of trouble], such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (Matthew 24:21–22). Obviously, the prophecy of Jesus Christ and this prophecy delivered to Daniel by the archangel Gabriel are speaking of the *same time*!

Jeremiah said “Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it: It is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it [meaning he shall go through it, not be saved from it!] For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more

serve themselves of him: But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will *raise* up unto them” (Jeremiah 30:7–9).

This is the famous Great Tribulation of biblical prophecy! Notice that Gabriel said to Daniel, “At that time thy people shall be delivered!” Remember, Daniel was in *captivity*, together with many thousands of his Jewish brethren, in *Babylon!* The northern ten-tribed house of Israel had been taken captive *many decades* earlier by the armies of Shalmanezzer, king of Assyria!

It is obvious, then, that the great tribulation of biblical prophecy is a time of trouble upon God’s people of Israel (remember, Jacob’s name was *changed* to Israel!).

Surely, millions are familiar with the term “the Great Tribulation.” It is a common expression understood to connote a time of great, global warfare, a time of unparalleled trauma, suffering, heartache, disease, earthquakes and tidal waves, destruction, and loss of human life in war!

Now, notice what happened!

“But thou, O Daniel, *shut up the words*, and *seal the book*, even to the time of the end; Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased” (Daniel 12:4).

Notice that Daniel’s prophecies were to be *shut up*, closed. But for how long? Were they to be closed so that no human being could ever understand them? No! They were to be shut up and sealed “*even to the time of the end!*”

You are living in “the time of the end”! Later, Daniel asked “How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?” (Daniel 12:6).

“And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swear by Him that liveth forever that it shall be for a *time, times, and an half*; and when he shall have accomplished to *scatter the power of the holy people*, all these things shall be finished, And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed *till the time of the end!* Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand!” (Daniel 12:6–10). So the prophecies of Daniel *are to be understood*—but not until “the time of the end”!

Eschatologists and students of Bible prophecy have known down through many centuries that the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation are both interrelated. It is as if Bible prophecy were like one of the picture-type puzzles one may buy in a game store. In order to fill in the complete picture, you must have *not only* the book of Daniel but the book of Revelation, together with many other prophecies, not the least of which is Christ’s Olivet prophecy, to *complete the picture!*

It is for this reason there have been any number of books published by theologians over the years concerning both Daniel and the Revelation.

Notice what John said of his book of Revelation: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which *must shortly come to pass*; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John” (Revelation 1: 1). The book of Revelation was given to show, not to hide or conceal. But, notice it is given to show unto “His servants” those things which are to happen!

Now, turn to Amos 3:7: “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but *He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets!*” God says His true servants on this earth will understand Bible prophecies!

He says, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy...” (1 Corinthians 12:7–10).

The apostle Paul revealed that “God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers...” (1 Corinthians 12:28).

Therefore, a gift of the Holy Spirit of God—that of understanding Bible *prophecies*—was predicted to be in God’s true church! He plainly says that He will give that gift of prophetic understanding, uniquely, to a certain few of His true ministers! Others, who may be called to perform other functions, either pastoring a local congregation, or being sent by others to preach the gospel (as were Peter and John; Acts 8:14) may not necessarily have this gift of *understanding prophecy*.

Therefore, we see that Almighty God has deliberately *guarded* the prophecies of the Bible! They are not given as a curious “plaything” for various would-be spiritual leaders or the organizers of cults. They are not for those like the ancient Babylonian soothsayers, astrologers, stargazers, and dealers in witchcraft; and they were not given to provide a plaything for speculators, fanatics, self-proclaimed “prophets,” and would-be religious leaders!

The gift of understanding prophecy, so says your Bible, would be a part of the true Church of God!

What is Prophecy?

Prophecy is *history—written in advance!*

Prophecy is the outline of the overall plan of God as He knew it would work out, according to the vagaries of human nature—coupled with those *interventions* of God which He requires from time to time, in order to fulfill His plan!

Almighty God is not engaged in playing games. His biblical prophecies are not to merely arouse curiosity, titillate the mind, or give away “secrets” to a *few* so that they may claim divine revelation.

Actually, the prophets of God usually brought both a witness and a warning. They were sent to *indict* God’s people, reminding them of their great sins, nationally and individually, and the *consequences* of those sins, and to call upon them to *repent!*

Notice an outstanding example: “Hear O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people *laden with iniquity*, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters; they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers.... Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah” (Isaiah 1:2–9).

Here, Isaiah contrasts the dumb ox who knows its way to the barn and the precise stall where its feed is waiting, as opposed to sinning *Israel* which has completely *forsaken God!*

Then, the analogy of the *body* is given; the “head” would stand for the heads of government, industry, business, education, science and the military; and God says the “whole head is sick!”

Perhaps the *heart* is the national conscience, will and resolve; the muscle and sinew of the body the labor force; the nervous system and circulatory system air and surface transportation and communications; and so on.

God shows that from the “sole of the foot even unto the head” there is nothing but “wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores.”

Then, the people are seen as crying out that, except God had *spared* a very small remnant, God’s own peoples would have been utterly destroyed just as were Sodom and Gomorrah! The prophecies of Isaiah contain many indictments against the national sins of Israel! Could *anything* be more specifically accurate, or cogent to the modern nations

of the United States, Great Britain, some of the democratic nations of Northwestern Europe, including Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, as Isaiah 3:12?

God says, “As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.”

Today, this prophecy of Isaiah has special poignancy.

None of the Prophets Volunteered

Jeremiah was especially called of God even before he was born (Jeremiah 1:5), and like all the other prophets, did not *volunteer* for the job!

Rather, when the Word of God came to Jeremiah he said, “Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Eternal said unto me, say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak” (Jeremiah 1:7).

Now, notice the indictments against God’s people Israel commencing in the second chapter. Jeremiah says, “I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination....” He asks, “Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, *be horribly afraid*, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord” (Jeremiah 2:11–12). Even Ezekiel, though he prophesied from a condition of captivity (Ezekiel 1:1), was given a message of terrible indictments against God’s people Israel!

“Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads...” (Ezekiel 3:4–9).

Ezekiel was also given a special commission to the House of Israel! He was told, “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the House of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; *but his blood will I require at thine hand*. Yet if thou warn the wicked and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou has delivered *thy soul!*” (Ezekiel 3:17–19).

Thus, God placed a *heavy, personal responsibility* on the shoulders of His prophets! Their performance in the carrying out of their individual callings related directly *to their own salvation!* If they *failed* to warn the wicked, and the wicked died, God held the *prophet* accountable!

If they succeeded in warning the wicked, even though their message was spurned and rejected, the prophet would be spared.

None of God's prophets volunteered!

Isaiah said he was a man of "unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5), but God, through a vision, caused Isaiah to see "one of the seraphim" who, "having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said [Isaiah!], Here am I; send me" (Isaiah 6:5–8). In each case, God's prophets had to be *made willing* to carry the message!

Surely the most outstanding example of this is the prophet *Jonah* as he attempted to *flee* from the responsibility God was imposing upon him. Jonah became shipwrecked and was swallowed by a specially-prepared giant fish that vomited him up onto the shore. Jonah was *humbly willing* after the ordeal.

Notice what Amos said to his antagonists after he had been ordered to get out of his immediate country and *not speak* anymore of God's judgments!

"Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: And the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel. Now therefore hear thou the Word of the Lord: thou sayest, Prophecy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac. Therefore thus saith the Lord; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land!" (Amos 7:14–17).

Thus, God specially called certain men from various previous occupations, gave them *His message*, and commanded them to go to His stiff-necked wayward, rebellious, God-rejecting people with a message.

Always, they were rejected! Rebellious Israel spurned the message and warning of God, as she continues to do unto this day!

Jesus referred to this in His blistering indictment of the Pharisees. He said, "Wherefore behold, I send unto you prophets. and wise men and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify, and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that *killest the prophets*, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children

together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (Matthew 23:34–38).

Perhaps the summarization of *all the prophets* could be found in God’s words through Jeremiah to Israel: “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, *that it may be well with you*. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart and went backward, and not forward. Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers.... thou shalt say unto them, This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the Lord their God, nor receiveth correction; truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth!” (Jeremiah 7:21–28).

Because of the great sacrifice made by these great men of God; because of their enormous contribution to biblical literature, and their example for us today, Jesus Christ said they are a part of the very *foundation* of the New Testament Church of God!

Notice! “For through Him [Christ] we both [Jews and Gentiles alike] have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief Cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:18–20).

The Duality Principle

Much of Bible prophecy is *dual*—that is, it consists of pronouncements which are both thesis and antithesis; type and antitype, or a *prior* (usually immediate) fulfillment and a final, latter-day fulfillment.

As a matter of fact, type and antitypes, “shadows” of reality, figures of speech, metaphor, simile and analogies are used liberally throughout the Bible, just as they are in much of our literature and everyday speech.

Perhaps one of the greatest examples of duality is in the prophecy of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem, given by Jesus Christ in Matthew 24 (also read Mark 13; Luke 21).

Notice that at the very beginning of the prophecy Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here *one stone upon another*, that shall not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:2).

Then follows the Olivet prophecy of false Christs and false prophets, wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, all of which are described as “the beginning of sorrows,” or the commencement of the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21).

Following the tribulation is a description of the heavenly signs (Matthew 24:29), followed by the appearance of the “sign of the Son of man in heaven” (verse 30) and the Second Coming of Christ (verses 30–31).

The chapter concludes with Christ’s warning, “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only...” (verse 36), and His admonition that at the time of His imminent return human beings would be living as if they hadn’t a care in the world, completely *oblivious* to the meaning of the times (verses 37–39) and His examples of those who were not watching and who were caught unawares (verses 48–51).

Applying the simple test of *truth* to this prophecy, you can easily see it was *dual* in nature.

Jerusalem *was destroyed* approximately forty years after this prophecy! Josephus writes of the most bestial and hideous bloodletting one can imagine; the protracted siege, horrible famine and starvation, the ultimate conquest of the city, the impaling and torturing to death of tens of thousands of Jews; the prizing apart of the very stones of the upper portions of the wall surrounding the city and the leveling of its buildings, together with the desecration of its famous temple.

True to the predictions of Jesus Christ, that living generation *did not pass* before the things of His Olivet prophecy came to pass!

But there were no “heavenly signs”! The “sign of the coming of the Son of man” did not appear in heaven! Jesus did not return at that time! Furthermore, while the city was destroyed, there were thousands of stones which were left intact, and which are there yet today, if one is to take Jesus’ prediction that there would “not be left one stone atop another” literally!

It is obvious to serious students of the Bible and Spirit-filled believers that Jesus’ Olivet prophecy was *dual*. It had a previous “typical” fulfillment in the sack and destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Titus of Rome in AD 70–71. Shockingly, there is to be a yet future destruction of the city of *Jerusalem*—yes, the *modern* city—according to Bible prophecy!

A couple of other examples of duality are found in the descriptions of the King of Babylon (Isaiah 14:4) and the Prince of Tyre (Ezekiel 28:2).

All the Bible commentaries are universal in their acceptance of the duality of these two chapters in their description of human, physical kings of empires or city states, and a description of Satan the devil!

The King of Babylon is a *type* of Satan, who is described in Isaiah 14:12–14. The Prince of Tyre is a type of Satan, who is described commencing in the middle of verse 12 of Ezekiel 28 and concludes in the latter part of verse 17 of that same chapter.

There is a third shadowy meaning in both of these chapters, in that both the ancient King of Babylon and the Prince of Tyre are shadowy types of the famous “beast” of a coming military dictatorship in Central Europe—the “King of the north” of Daniel 11:40, etc.—the great future world dictator who is in alliance with the “false prophet” and who will be destroyed at the Second Coming of Christ (Revelation 19:20).

There are many Bible examples of shadows and types, as well as duality.

Thus, there is the Old and New Testament, the Old and New Covenant, the first man Adam (Adam of the flesh, in the Garden of Eden) and the “second man Adam” (Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:45–46). Pharaoh was a symbol of Satan the devil; Moses and Aaron are typical of the “two witnesses” of Revelation 11; Egypt was a type of sin, and the physical Israelites a type of God’s spiritually redeemed.

The plagues that fell upon ancient Egypt at the time of the Exodus are typical of the great trumpet plagues to be poured upon the beast power; the release of the Israelites from captivity is typical of a yet *future* regathering of God’s people at the Second Coming of Christ (Isaiah 10:20–21; Isaiah 11:11–12; Isaiah 11:15–16; Isaiah 19:23–24; Jeremiah 50:18–19; Ezekiel 11:17–20; Hosea 1:10–11; Joel 2:18–20; Zechariah 1:17; Zechariah 8:3–8, etc.).

The escape of the children of Israel through the parted waters of the Red Sea is symbolic of *baptism* (1 Corinthians 10:1–4), and their sojourn in the “wilderness of sin” is symbolic of the *life of overcoming* confronting the newly-baptized Christian.

The crossing of the river Jordan into the “promised land” is a symbolism of the Christian inheritance of the Kingdom of God; and the forty years’ wandering (forty is a number symbolizing trial or testing in the Bible) symbolic of the life of trials and tribulation confronting each newly-begotten Christian (John 16:33). There are literally dozens of types in the Bible which are shadowy examples of God’s plan.

Thus, each of the annual holy days are shadows of the reality of God’s purpose; they are prophetic, in that sense:

(1) *The Passover*, with the shedding of the blood of the paschal lamb, was symbolic of Christ’s sacrifice. In the New Testament, Christ instituted the memorial of His death by giving His disciples unleavened bread and a sip of wine, symbols of His broken body and shed blood (Matthew 26:26–28). The Christian’s partaking of the “New Testament

Passover” (or Lord’s Supper) symbolizes his acceptance of the shed blood of Jesus Christ as his personal Savior to atone for his sins (1 Corinthians 11:23–30).

(2) *The Days of Unleavened Bread* symbolize living a life of overcoming; leavened bread symbolizes being “puffed up,” or filled with the baser elements of human nature such as vanity, ego, jealousy, greed, etc. The eating of unleavened bread for seven days (originally, in direct connection with the Passover in Egypt and the Exodus) is symbolic of the Christian’s life of overcoming after acceptance of Christ and baptism (1 Corinthians 5:2–8; Leviticus 23:5–6).

(3) *The Feast of Pentecost* (Acts 2; Leviticus 23:9–16) is the feast of “firstfruits” and is a shadowy type of the fact that God is not trying to save the whole world *now*; that He is calling but a “firstfruits” unto the Lord; that Jesus Christ is the “first” of the firstfruits, and that the great, latter-day harvest of human lives is yet to follow. “Pentecost” merely means “fiftieth,” and is an anglicized version of the Greek name for the “Feast of Firstfruits” which fell fifty days after the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

(4) *The Feast of Trumpets* (Leviticus 23:23; Numbers 29:1) is a festival which primarily focuses on the “last trump” (1 Corinthians 15:52), which sounds at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, although it includes the meaning of all of the “trumpets” connected with the plagues of God revealed in the book of Revelation (Revelation 8:6–10) and symbolizes an announcement, a warning to the inhabitants of the earth of the imminent arrival of Christ. As such, the Feast of Trumpets is also a celebration connoting the work of God which is to be accomplished on earth—that of preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God as a witness and a warning (Matthew 24:14).

(5) *The Day of Atonement* (Leviticus 23:27–29) contained many shadowy types and examples in its original observance, and is still observed today by fasting (Acts 27:9, margin). It is a day which symbolizes “at-one-ment” with God; it portrays the time in the future when the whole world will ultimately be reconciled with God.

(6) *The Feast of Tabernacles* symbolized the sojourning of ancient Israel, and the fact that they “dwelt in booths” (tabernacles) as a temporary dwelling-place. The Christian is, today, “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people...as strangers and pilgrims...” (1 Peter 2:9–17). Primarily, however, the Festival of Tabernacles is the “feast of ingathering” in the fall of the year, a festival celebrating the great harvest. It foretells the coming of the Kingdom of God to this earth; it was a time of great rejoicing (and is still so celebrated by those who understand that these days are to be observed) portraying the soon-coming Kingdom of God on earth.

(7) *The Last Great Day* (Leviticus 23:39), falling immediately after the Feast of Tabernacles, is the seventh of God’s annual holy days. It portrays the “great white throne judgment” (Revelation 20:11) and the second resurrection (Revelation 20:5), when, during a period of an apparent one hundred years (Isaiah 65:20), a time of judgment (not

sentencing!) will take place for all those who were never called and never given a true opportunity for salvation during their lifetimes.

Thus, in the seven annual festivals or annual holy days is seen a complete type or shadowy representation of the very plan of God!

There are literally dozens of shadowy types in the Bible. A few are: Abraham, as a shadowy type of God the Father being willing to offer His own Son, Jesus Christ, when Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac, and, when God found him willing, a ram was provided instead. Moses is, in a sense, typical of both God the Father (in the giving of the law) and Christ the Son (as an intermediary between God and Israel). Moses and Aaron together are typical of the two witnesses of Revelation 11. Jannes and Jambres, the two “magicians” of Pharaoh’s court, are symbolic of the two witnesses who are saying “let my people go.” David is a type of Jesus Christ. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel, all of whom figured prominently in the delivery of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity, are symbols of Jesus Christ.

Poetic Illustrations

Remember, too, that a good deal of the Bible was written as *poetry*. There are many poetic books (such as Psalms, the Song of Solomon, etc.), and many passages in some of the Major Prophets are poetry.

A few examples of poetic meaning would include the placing of the live coal upon Isaiah’s lips as if to cleanse him from being, as he claimed, a man of “unclean lips” (Isaiah 6). Other notable examples are Jeremiah 13:1–10; 25:15; 27:2–3; Ezekiel 3:2–3; and 4:4–6. Some of the examples of the poetic expression of the joy of deliverance are found in Isaiah 35:1–7; 55:12–13; and Joel 2:21–30.

Biblical Symbolism

Often, the Bible uses *symbols* to express thoughts and ideas. The Holy Spirit is likened unto some of the physical manifestations of power. Examples include water (John 3:5; Ephesians 5:26; 1 John 5:6; Revelation 22:1, 17), fire (Acts 2:3; 1 Peter 1:7; Revelation 3:18), and wind (John 3:8; Acts 2:2).

Water, the life-giving substance which is essential to life; wind, or air, which is also essential to life; and fire, which both purges and cleanses (in the case of metals, etc.), or is capable of destroying, are thus used typically of the powerful Spirit of God!

Also, “light” from the sun and the stars is likewise used. Perhaps, had the Bible been written during our day, God would have used nuclear energy and lasers as typical of His awesome power and might.

Notice a few more biblical symbols: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and *all nations* shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the *mountain* of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:2–4).

Here, as in many other prophecies, it is obvious that the “mountain” is symbolic of God’s *government*. It is probably both literal and figurative, in that the Bible predicts that God’s temple, His *headquarters* on earth, will be on the “Mount of Olives,” which will actually cleave in two during the great final earthquake (Zechariah 14:4–9).

When it says the Lord’s house will be established “in the top of the *mountains*” it means above all of the so-called “great powers” or *great nations*, and “exalted above the *hills*” means exalted above all the *lesser nations*!

Stars are used as symbols for *angels* (Revelation 9:1). In the vision of Jesus Christ which John saw (Revelation 1) there were “in His right hand seven stars” (Revelation 1:16). Here is an example of how *the Bible interprets the Bible*. By merely reading on through the description of all that John saw, you come to verse 20, which says, “The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the churches” (Revelation 1:20).

Jesus Christ is referred to as “the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16; 2:28).

A beast, or wild, ravenous *creature*, is usually used to connote a Gentile government, or kingdom. In Daniel’s seventh chapter, for example, four great beasts are pictured. Notice the description: “The first was *like a lion*, and had eagle’s wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man’s heart was given to it. [This refers to Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity and cure.] And behold another beast, a second, *like to a bear*, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. After this I beheld, and lo another, *like a leopard*, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things. I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool: His throne was like the fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire” (Daniel 7:4–9).

Now, notice how *the Bible interprets the Bible* in revealing the meaning of these various creatures. Continuing to read through the same chapter, we come to verse 17: “These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth.” That a king stands for his kingdom is absolutely conclusive by reading the second chapter of Daniel. Here, we see the vision of Nebuchadnezzar, and the great image described in Daniel 2:32–35.

Daniel, through a miracle, was given the interpretation of the dream and revealed it to Nebuchadnezzar. He said, “Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. *Thou art* this head of gold. And after thee shall arise another *kingdom* inferior to *thee*, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters’ clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdoms shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Daniel 2:37–44).

Can anything be plainer? The *head* of the image stood for Nebuchadnezzar, but it is obvious that *king* and kingdom are completely interchangeable, and mean the same thing.

It says, “And after thee shall arise *another kingdom* inferior to *thee* and another *third* kingdom of brass” (Daniel 2:39). Biblical scholars and historians are universal in their acceptance of the obvious succession of the four world-ruling Gentile kingdoms of the Babylonian, Medo/Persian, Greco/Macedonian, and Roman Empires.

What many have *missed* in these obvious prophecies is the fact that both the great image of Daniel’s second chapter and the *fourth beast* of Daniel’s seventh chapter culminate in the Second Coming of Christ. Therefore, it is obvious that the fourth beast, which is the Roman Empire with its many revivals and resurrections down through history, *will be extant* at the final moments before the Second Coming of Christ!

It is “in the days of *these kings*” (Daniel 2:44) that Jesus Christ returns! In this case “these kings” refer to the ten toes of the great image of Daniel 2.

Notice the biblical corroboration: “And the ten horns which thou sawest are *ten kings* which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These

shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful” (Revelation 17:12–14).

That there will be *ten nations* united together in a super-dictatorship in Central Europe by the time of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, there can be no doubt.

“Horns” on the creatures are symbols of the *leaders* of the state, either civil or religious. It is obvious that the “little horn” of Daniel 7 refers to the *papacy* which overthrew various governments during the Middle Ages.

Physical *Israel* (including both the House of Israel and the House of Judah) is often pictured as a woman. Actually, Almighty God pictured Israel as the bride and Himself as the suitor in proposing the Old Covenant. God “proposed” by giving Israel His laws and promising to become Israel’s protector, sustainer, and provider. When Israel accepted the terms and conditions of God’s law, it constituted a covenant, or an *agreement*, between them.

God used the analogy of a “marriage agreement” and said “I was an *husband* to them” (Jeremiah 31:31–32).

When Israel broke the terms and conditions of the covenant, God called it whoredom, or harlotry. Read the entire chapter of Ezekiel 16, where God depicts Israel as a young, beautiful woman whom He found as an abandoned child, caused her to “multiply as the bud of the field” (Ezekiel 16:7), but who forsook Him and “did trust in your own beauty, and played the harlot” (Ezekiel 16:15). Ezekiel 23 is another important chapter, where the House of Israel (the northern ten tribes) is called “Aholah” and Jerusalem, symbolic of the House of Judah, “Aholibah.”

This chapter again depicts their *harlotry* in forsaking their covenant with God and having concourse with Gentile nations.

The *church* is depicted as a woman “clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars” (in this case, symbolic of the twelve apostles Revelation 12:1). One must be cautious in reading some of the prophecies of the Old Testament, for the description of a *female* called “the daughter of Zion” or “the daughters of Zion” does not always mean the church.

An example is found in Isaiah 3:1: “Moreover the Lord saith, Because the *daughters of Zion* are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go....” This obviously refers to the *women* of the physical nation of Israel!

God also uses the symbol of a *harlot*, or a fallen woman, to depict the great false, universal church! Notice it: “Sit thou silent, and get thee into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called, the lady of kingdoms. I was wroth with my

people, I have polluted mine inheritance, and given them into thine hand: thou didst shew them no mercy; upon the ancient hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke. And thou saidst, I shall be a lady for ever: so that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart, neither didst remember the latter end of it.

“Therefore hear now this, thou that are given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children: But these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood: they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thine enchantments. For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me” (Isaiah 47:5–10). See also Revelation 17:5.

Understanding Time Sequences

God gives certain, specific keys to understanding biblical time sequences.

Notice: “And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of days in the which you searched the land, even forty days, *each day for a year*, shall ye bear your iniquities, *even forty years*” (Numbers 14:33–34).

God plainly tells us that the number of days in which the advance scouts of the nation of Israel searched out the promised land would represent the *number of years* in which they would wander in the land of Sinai.

Now, notice Ezekiel’s fourth chapter. Ezekiel is told to portray a map of the city of Jerusalem on a tile, as a “sign to the House of Israel.” He was to depict, like a child playing in the sand, a walled fortified city, depict armies advancing against it, with all of the siege mechanisms of the day, and then to lie first on one side and then on the other to depict the *number of years* Israel would bear their iniquity.

“For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, *according to the number of the days*, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the House of Israel. And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the House of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee *each day for a year*” (Ezekiel 4:4–6).

To see a practical application of this important key in understanding Bible prophecy, turn to Revelation 12 and 13. Here, you see the woman (which you have learned stands for God’s *true church*) given “two wings of a great eagle” (a symbol of God’s protection—Exodus 19:4), that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a *time*, and *times* and *half a time*, from the face of the serpent (Revelation 12:14).

Later, in the thirteenth chapter, we read that the duration of this persecution under the false prophet and the beast is “forty and two months” (Revelation 13:5).

Yet, in Revelation 12:6, the *same* period of time is called a thousand two hundred and threescore days. Simple arithmetic shows us, using the key that a *day* stands for a *year* in fulfillment, that there was, in fact, a period of one thousand two hundred and sixty years during the Middle Ages when God’s true church experienced terrible persecution; and it tells us, further, that a *prophetic year* consists of three hundred and sixty days of thirty-day months!

Thus, for prophetic purposes, we can come to understand the meaning of the biblical “time.”

A time is a *year* in Bible prophecy. Thus, “time, times and half a time” means exactly three and one-half years. Three and one-half years consists of forty-two months of thirty days each. Thus, we have twelve hundred and sixty days, forty-two months, or three and one-half years.

Apparently, the Great Tribulation, heavenly signs, and Day of the Lord will fit into this three-and-one-half year period.

Caution: Do not attempt to “set dates” in biblical prophecy! Many have learned, sometimes to their bitter disappointment, that it is a *grave error* to think you have worked out some specific key or other—some table of figures, numerical values to Greek, Hebrew, or English letters, etc.—and then arrive at a specific *date* for the fulfillment of some great prophecy!

Biblical Prophecy Deals in the Overview

The prophecies of Jesus Christ on Mount Olivet are the most *important* for us, during this time! It is *these prophecies* (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) which *interpret the time sequence* of events outlined in the book of Revelation, *specifically* beginning with chapter 6 and 7, and following the general *theme* of tribulation, heavenly signs and day of the Lord as it is developed through the remainder of the book of Revelation.

Notice another major key to understanding the sequence of these great events. Read Joel 2:31, compare it carefully with Matthew 24:29, and then read the sixth and seventh chapters of Revelation.

By this brief study, you will see that the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21–22), or the time of *Jacob’s trouble*, comes before the heavenly signs. You see that the heavenly signs come after the tribulation. You see that the Day of the Lord Comes after the heavenly signs!

By this simple understanding, you can come to understand that those who preach a “secret rapture” where the church is allegedly taken away from the earth prior to the Great Tribulation is a complete error.

Pre-tribulation rapture theorists generally confuse the tribulation period and the Day of the Lord, making them the same thing.

A suggested simple study you might do on your own to aid you in what you have learned is to read the brief description of the great events to befall this earth given by Jesus Christ in the first half of Matthew 24.

As you do so, read Revelation 6 and 7. Notice that the first thing Christ predicted was there would be “false Christs and false prophets.” Now, notice the *first* of the “four horsemen of the Apocalypse” (Revelation 6) is a being who *appears* Christ-like, but who, instead of carrying a “sharp two-edged sword,” carries a *bow*. He goes out conquering and to conquer. Many are confused about this prophecy. Does it mean Christ? Let Jesus Christ Himself do the interpreting!

Notice the *next* of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, the red horse which connotes war. And what did Jesus say would be the second of the great events? “There shall be wars and rumors of wars!”

Once you have established the sequence of events, you can come to understand the meaning of *each* of the “four horsemen” of Revelation 6: (1) false Christs and false prophets, (2) wars and rumors of wars, (3) famine, and (4) death and destruction.

The *fifth seal* symbolizes the tribulation, the *sixth seal* the heavenly signs, and the *seventh seal* the Day of the Lord, which is comprised of seven trumpet plagues.

Notice carefully that the 144,000 and the “great innumerable multitude” (Revelation 7) are not to be sealed of God in their foreheads until *during* or *after* the Great Tribulation (Revelation 7:14). Therefore, they are still on this earth during that time!

Dr. Bullinger, in his *Companion Bible* (Zondervan Press) has an interesting chart which compares Revelation 6 and 7 with Matthew 24 in the appendix.

As a sample study, read carefully Revelation 17. Ask yourself which church sits upon a city of seven famous hills? Which church has ruled over many of the great Gentile kingdoms, including the many revivals of the “Holy Roman Empire”? Which church has become “drunken with the blood of the saints”?

Notice that this great false church will actually help form a coming union of ten nations (verse 12), which will *fight* Christ at His coming! Which great church resides in a “great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth”?

Think about it.

Believe it or not, careful study of *just this one chapter in your Bible*, Revelation 17, will give you a much greater understanding than is possessed by many, including some who have authored *books* about Bible prophecy!

Naturally, the subject I have briefly covered in this booklet could easily be expanded into several large books! There is neither time nor space to do so here. Using what you have learned in this booklet as a guide, perhaps you can now better comprehend and understand many portions of Bible prophecy!

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