

How to Study Eschatological Scripture

Lesson 3

It's A Dangerous Business

- Bilbo Baggins (J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*) said, *"It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door. You step into the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to."*
- Studying the end times is a 'dangerous business.'
 - Unwarranted, wild-eyed speculation
 - Shoulder-shrugging cynicism
- Our goal is to understand what the scriptures have to say about the end times, and Jesus is the central focus of all scripture – even of scriptures that describe the end time. [John 5:39](#)
- The Old and New Testaments are about Jesus. [2 Timothy 3:15](#)
- What we are seeking is a deeper recognition of the majesty and sovereignty of Jesus in all of life – including the end times.
- To say that an event is near means it is the next major occurrence on the prophetic calendar.
- Prophecy is God's way of giving us fair warning so we can prepare our hearts and minds to be ready for what is ahead.

The Last Days Have Already Begun

- God will end the world as we know it at some specific time and in a specific way.
 - This is what we call the ‘End Times.’
 - But it isn’t the end of ‘time’ for which everyone ‘groans’ What all creation expectantly awaits is the revealing of Jesus alongside a redeemed multitude of brothers and sisters ([Romans 8:18-23](#))
 - God’s plan has always been to display His glory throughout the cosmos in and through Jesus. ([Ephesians 1:9-10](#), [Hebrews 12:2](#))
- Through the work of Jesus on earth, the last days have already begun.
 - The work of Jesus on earth accomplished God’s victory and inaugurated a kingdom that he will consummate at the end of time. And so the Biblical authors were able to describe the entire period between Jesus’ victory over death and the end of time as “the last days.” ([Acts 2:16-17](#), [Hebrews 1:2](#))

We Need To Be Ready For Jesus' Return **NOW!**

- There's a true story told by Denis Lyle, a Baptist pastor in Belfast, Northern Ireland.
 - A tourist who visited a beautiful mansion on a lovely lakeshore in Switzerland
 - The house was surrounded by well-kept gardens connected by tidy pathways
 - The tourist asked the gardener, "How long have you been caretaker here?"
 - Over twenty years
 - And during that time how often has the owner of the property been in residence?
 - Four times.
 - And to think all these years you've kept this house and garden in such superb condition. You tend them as if you expected him to come tomorrow.
 - Oh no, said the gardener, I look after them as if I expected him to come any minute.
- The more aware we are of Jesus' impending return, the more motivated we'll be in our work for Him in these Last Days as He may return any minute.

Why Study The End Times?

- Receive the blessings (Revelation 16:15)
- Be Informed. The apostles of Jesus commanded God's people to search the Scriptures ([2 Timothy 3:14-17](#), [2 Peter 1:19-20](#)), and Scripture testifies that God will bring the world as we know it to an end. ([Isaiah 65:17-25](#))
- Jesus repeatedly reminded his disciples to watch for his future arrival. ([Matthew 24:42](#), [25:13](#), [Mark 13:35-37](#), [Luke 12:37](#))
- Paul said to his audience, "But you brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief ... let us be awake and sober." ([1 Thessalonians 5:4](#), [6](#))
- One of the 6 most pivotal events of all time
 - **Creation**
 - **The fall of Man**
 - **The flood**
 - **First coming of Christ**
 - **Second coming of Christ** (Establishing The Kingdom of God)
 - **The End of The Millennium** (Completion of God's Master Plan)
- Studying prophecy motivates us to live Godly lives
- Studying prophecy motivates us to live pure and obedient lives

The Right Focus

- Paul: Even though he wasn't afraid to speak of the end times, advised the Thessalonians ([2 Thessalonians 2:16-17](#)) to not focus on the details of how time might end, rather on the sufficiency of Christ.
 - God will bring about the end in his own time through Jesus.
 - Jesus is the goal of God's plan and the ultimate sign of God's work in human history.
 - Because Jesus perfectly fulfilled His Father's will, the last days are already underway and God's triumph is guaranteed.
 - That emphasis gives us certain responsibilities:
 - To be ready for Jesus to return at any time.
 - To proclaim the Gospel all the time.
 - To unswervingly know that God will make the world right again.

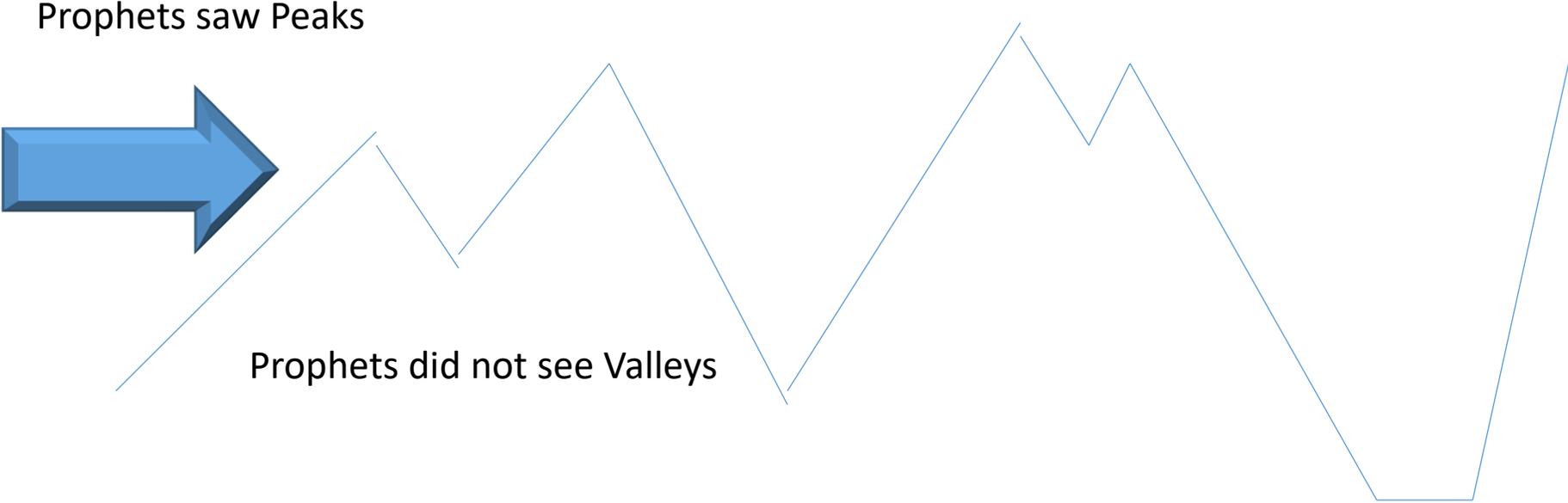
The Big Picture

- God created the world and mankind for His glory
- Man was disobedient, condemned to eternal separation from the Holy, Just God. All of creation was impacted.
- God promised Adam & Eve that He would send a savior (Messiah) that would redeem mankind and all of creation from eternal separation from God.
- God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham to be God's people.
- God sent Jesus as the Messiah to redeem mankind and all of creation from eternal separation from God. Through Jesus' ascension, The kingdom of Christ is now underway and will be consummated upon Jesus' return.
- Jesus made a new covenant with his followers through the Apostles.
- Jesus said he would 'return' and establish his Kingdom on earth.
- There are four widely held views on how God will fulfill his covenant with Abraham, Israel and the Church.
- There are four widely held views on how to read, interpret and understand the prophetic writings of the Bible.
- What all Christendom holds as essential is in the belief of Jesus' return (End Times), God will raise (resurrect) the dead, and Jesus will judge all peoples.

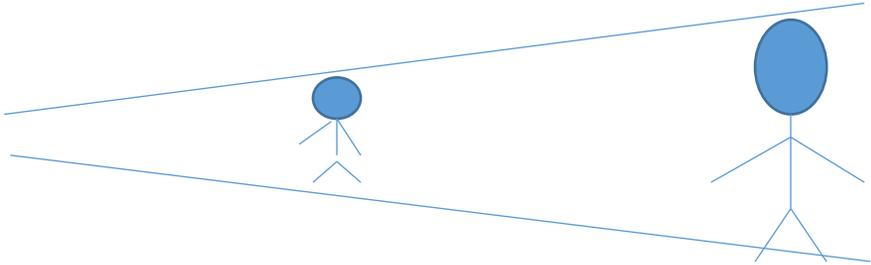
Understanding Prophetic Writings

- The Biblical texts that tell us about the end of time were penned in a specific historical context that deeply influenced how the authors recorded God's words and subsequently their true meanings.
- Many of these end-time texts drew from literary backgrounds that had their own unique expectations for how readers would understand images and patterns in the book.
- If Scripture came about because people "spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit ([2 Peter 1:21](#)), the very Spirit of God was involved not only in the content of these texts but also in the styles and genres that were chosen.
- To interpret these texts without knowing their original contexts and literary styles is to risk missing the point completely

The Challenge With Prophecy



Prophets saw
prefigured
prophecy



The Problems Interpreting The Bible

- Example 2,000 years from now archeologists discovering comics of today.
- When Christian leaders throughout church history have urged people to search the Scriptures for the '*sensus literalis*' – The literal sense or literary sense of the text. This meant to read the text within the literary style and historical context in which the text was originally written; often this includes seeing symbols and typologies in the Biblical text.
- At the same time, some aspects of moral interpretation and spiritual interpretation of a text may rightly reflect the *sensus literalis* as well.

Ways of Interpreting The Bible

Literal	Literal	Moral	Spiritual	Spiritual
Looks for Historical-Grammatical Literalistic Meaning	Looks for Historical-Grammatical-Rhetorical Meaning	Looks for Ethical Meaning	Looks for Typological (Spiritual) Meaning	Looks for Anagogical (Heavenly) Meaning
Method: Take every part of the text at its most literal meaning unless the immediate context makes this meaning impossible.	Seek the meaning intended by the original authors in their historical contexts as conveyed through their words and the literary genre, recognizing that the Holy Spirit superintended their words and their choice of genre.	Method: Seek the underlying moral in each biblical story.	Method: Looks for ways in which parts of the story might prefigure or relate typologically to the life and ministry of Jesus	Method: Looks for ways in which part of the story might relate allegorically to the believer's union with God.
Example: "Temple" must be seen as a physical building.	Example: "Temple" is seen as the physical building in historical genres and contexts, but in other genres, "temple" might, i.e., symbolize the people of God as God's dwelling place.	Example: "Temple" might symbolize the innermost part of the human soul.	Example: "Temple" might symbolize God's people or the church, even in historical contexts where this could not have fallen within the author's original range of intent.	Example: Temple might symbolize union with God in heaven.

General Reasons The End Times Are Not Studied

- **Eschatological** (*future*) passages are too difficult to understand.
- Eschatological passages are irrelevant to our present life.
- I already have studied the views of teachers, preachers, books & friends, don't need to do it for myself.
- Every time I've studied the **end times**, it's unpleasant watching how many become antagonistic with others who hold different interpretations of eschatological passages.
- Lack of knowledge of the importance of understanding God's plan for man
 - The absolute certainty of the return of Christ
 - The substantiation of the Deity of Christ
 - The substantiation of Scripture as the literal word of God
 - The substantiation of our hope in Christ
 - The substantiation that Satan has been defeated by Christ

How We Should Study The End Times

- Study the Scriptures
- Base our own observations on what we understand the Scriptures to say.....
- It is important that we give others the same freedom of interpretation as the Lord has given us.
- In the study of eschatology, Christians who sincerely trust the truth of Scripture have arrived at very different perspectives. This will not change until Jesus himself returns. We must be tolerant and considerate of different views.

Views Of The End Times

- Many Christians believe the apocalyptic events described in Scripture by the Prophets, Gospels, Epistles, & Revelation culminate in the reign of Christ on earth. i.e. the establishment of the ***Kingdom of God***.
- Other Christians hold other views.
- This means there is no single orthodox interpretation of the ***end times***.
- The best approach as we study the end times is to let the Holy Spirit be our teacher. ***“Lord teach us.”***
- ***Always bear in mind the three consistent doctrines held to be true by all Christians since the Apostles:***
 - Jesus will return to earth
 - God will raise the dead to life
 - Jesus himself will judge all humanity.

Four Approaches To Understanding Scripture

Approach	Analogy	Assumption About Biblical Apocalypses	Analysis of Approach	Study Goals
Futurist	A roadmap for the future	Apocalyptic texts tell what will happen in the future, before and during the end times.	Futurism treats the text as a predictive prophecy about events that, even now, have not yet occurred. The emphasis in futurism is on events that will happen near the end of time.	To understand the events that will occur before and during the end times.
Historicist	A History textbook for the past, present and future	Historicism Treats apocalyptic writings as symbolic retellings of certain epochs of history. If someone read Revelation in this way, that person might expect, for example, that John is using lavish language to retell the history of early Christianity, the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, or some other series of events		To understand God's perspective on the events of human history.

Four Approaches To Understanding Scripture (2)

Approach	Analogy	Assumption About Biblical Apocalypses	Analysis of Approach	Study Goals
Idealist	An allegory for all times and places	Idealism treats apocalypses as symbolic expressions of struggles between good and evil that occur in every age. Idealism sees the scenes and symbols in biblical apocalypses as picturesque expressions of the conflict between the reign of God and the powers of evil.		To understand God's perspective on the conflict between the reign of God and powers of evil.
Preterist	An ancient newspaper	The word "preterist" comes from the Latin Praeteritus ("past" or "bygone") and suggests that most or all the events described in apocalyptic text have already passed. A preterist treats apocalyptic texts as descriptions of events that happened near or soon after the time when the text was written. Typically preterists understand the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple in AD 70 as the time when many apocalyptic prophecies were fulfilled.		To understand God's perspective on the events that happens around time in which the text was written.