

40 Common Mistakes About Last Days Bible Prophecy Cleared Up

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BIBLE PROPHECY CLEARED UP**

BY

DON STEWART

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INTRODUCTION

When we look at the subject of last days Bible prophecy we find that there are a number of common mistakes and misconceptions that need to be cleared up. This book has been written to clear up some of these errors.

At the outset we want to make it clear that we do NOT consider everyone who make these mistakes, and teaches them to others, are either false prophets, insincere, ignorant, or lacking spirituality. The great majority who teach on the subject are none of these!

What we are saying is this: all of us have “blind spots” that need to be cleared up with further knowledge and added study. Hence, when we bring up these inaccuracies we are not belittling people who genuinely believe that these popular mistakes are what the Scripture teach about a particular subject. We can be sincere but we also can be sincerely wrong.

We can avoid making these mistakes by carefully studying what the Scripture actually says. In other words, let us be good Bible students and not make these following mistakes that are often made.

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No Christian should be engaged in date-setting. It is impossible to predict the correct day or year for the rapture of the church or for the Second Coming of the Lord. In fact, the Bible tells us specifically not to do this.

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Nobody should claim that Christ is coming soon! He is coming but we do not know the precise time frame. Furthermore, the word “soon” has different connotations to different people.

MISTAKE 3

Do not blindly follow any so-called prophecy specialist to the degree that you take whatever they say as gospel. Be like the Bereans who “searched the Scripture to see if these things were true” (Acts 17:11). Also, “test all things, hold on to that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

MISTAKE 4

There continues to be sensationalistic claims that are used as evidence that we are living in the last days. They include new understandings of what the Bible really teaches, as well as claims of secret codes in the Bible which reveal what will happen in the future. Ignore them all.

MISTAKE 5

We cannot calculate anything about the time of the end by looking at signs from the sun, moon, or stars. The signs in the heavens will occur during the final seven year period, the “70th week of Daniel,” the “time of Jacob’s trouble.” They are NOT signs that will take place during the age of the church. It is a mistake to look for them today.

MISTAKE 6

We've listed 7 do's and don'ts that we should follow in our study of last days Bible prophecy. This includes not making our system of interpretation of the end times as a test of fellowship with other Christians as well as not assuming that we have all the answers. In addition, we look at some extremes that we should avoid when we consider this all-important subject. Putting these into practice will keep us from making a number of common mistakes.

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The seven churches listed in Revelation 2 and 3 are not meant to be viewed as seven successive periods of the history of the church. There is no evidence for this whatsoever. Basically, there are two common mistakes that are made by those who promote this. First, there is nothing explicitly stated in the text that would cause us to see Jesus' words as prophetic of the future course of the church. Second, and even more damaging, we should NEVER attempt to form any conclusions about future events from something that supposedly is implicit in the text. This is a dangerous way of interpreting Scripture.

MISTAKES 21 AND 22

Two common mistakes are connected with Jesus' words to the church of Laodicea. First, the church of Laodicea should not be equated with the apostate church of the last days. Second, Jesus' words "hot" and "cold" in Revelation 3:14-15 to Laodicea are both used as positive terms. "Cold" does not have a negative connotation in this context.

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Do not confuse the rapture of the church with the Second Coming of Christ. They are two distinct events. At the rapture Jesus comes for His church while at the Second Coming He returns to the earth “with His church.” In addition, the rapture is always recorded as a joyous occasion while the Second Coming always has the theme of God’s judgment.

MISTAKE 38

It is important that we understand biblical idioms and figures of speech before they can be authoritatively cited as evidence of predictions about the last days. Many common mistakes are made when they are misunderstood. Unhappily this often leads to conclusions about coming events that are not biblical.

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Do not assume that a word or phrase in one passage will mean the same thing in another passage. In fact, we give examples where just the opposite is true.

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We must remember that our message to the world is the First Coming Of Jesus Christ, not the Second Coming. Our calling is to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the world: His sinless life, death for our sins, His resurrection from the dead and His offer of eternal life for those who believe. Lest we forget...

APPENDIX 1 FIGS AND FIG TREES IN THE BIBLE

In this appendix, we look at all the uses of the words fig and fig trees in the Bible. It will become clear that the fig tree is never equated or compared to the nation of Israel. Therefore, the often repeated idea that the fig tree is symbolic of Israel is a mistake.

APPENDIX 2 THE VARIOUS WAYS THE PHRASE “THIS GENERATION” IN THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE HAS BEEN INTERPRETED

It may come as a shock to many but the phrase “This generation” used by Jesus has been interpreted a number of different ways by Bible students. In this appendix, we look at the various ways in which it has been understood

APPENDIX 3 THE USE OF THE PHRASE “ALL THE TREES” IN THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE IN LUKE 21:29 HAS NO SYMBOLIC MEANING

The evidence is clear that Jesus was using a proverbial saying, something well-known to everyone, when He illustrated that it was a sign that summer was near when the fig tree, as well as all of the trees, sprouted their leaves. Therefore, it should not be claimed that the fig tree was symbolic of Israel and all the trees symbolized other nations.

APPENDIX 4 UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHAT THE BIBLE RECORDS AND WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS IS TRUE

While every statement in the Bible is recorded accurately, not everything that was said is true. Simply put, a person cannot pick up the Bible, find a verse or passage that says something that they believe is profound, believe it is true, then quote it to others as God’s truth. It is not that simple.

MISTAKE 1

WE SHOULD NEVER SET DATES FOR THE RETURN OF CHRIST

Since the time Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, there have been Christians who have set dates for His return. Indeed, every year we find people making headlines by telling us they know the exact year or even the precise day when this event, prophesied long ago in Scripture, will literally take place. As we know, all of them have been mistaken in their calculations!

Accordingly, it is wrong to claim that Christ is coming back at such and such a date or that He is coming back “soon.”

We can make a number of observations about this mistake that many people have made.

MISTAKE AFTER MISTAKE AFTER MISTAKE

There was a certain Christian radio broadcaster in 1971 who did a series of broadcasts as to why he believed that Christ was coming back in that very year, 1971. During the commercial break, however, he was promoting his Israel trip in 1972!

There was also the infamous book *88 Reasons Why Christ is Returning in 1988*. It goes without saying that this book has not been reprinted!

Not only have people attempted to tell us the precise year that the Lord would return, others have predicted the exact day that this would happen. Harold Camping of *Family Radio* predicted the rapture of the church would happen on May 21, 2011. Many people believed him. However, he was wrong.

Regrettably, Camping had previously written a book predicting that 1994 would be the “year” that Christ would return. Obviously he was also incorrect in this prediction of the precise year.

Sadly, I watched an interview with him in early 1994 with the venerable broadcaster Larry King. Larry asked him, “If Jesus doesn’t come back in 1994 does that make the Bible wrong?” Camping then stammered, not really answering.

It was a very good question to ask this so-called Bible prophecy specialist but it was heartbreaking to watch this needless spectacle.

The list of unfulfilled predictions, concerning the day or year of the return of Christ, goes on and on.

CAN ANYONE KNOW THE DAY OR THE YEAR?

This brings up an obvious question: Can we, or even should we, attempt to set dates for future events such as the rapture of the church and the return of Jesus Christ to the earth? Is it even biblically possible to do this?

WE SHOULD PAY ATTENTION TO THE WORDS OF JESUS

With respect to the time of Jesus’ return, we are clearly told by our Lord Himself that date setting is not possible. He said:

No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father (Matthew 24:36 NIV).

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Based upon these words of Jesus, we should ask the date-setters to answer this question: What part of “no one knows” do you not understand? If the Lord Jesus said, nobody knows, then the matter is settled, nobody knows. End of story.

Yet, there are those who tell us that nobody knew during Jesus’ time when He would return but we can now know either the year or the day. The problem with this idea is that Jesus gave no limits as to when nobody would know the time of His return. In other words, nobody knew then and nobody can know now.

This being the case, nobody should attempt to set dates for yet to be fulfilled Bible prophecies. If we do so, we contradict the specific words of the Lord Jesus!

MISTAKE 2

DO NOT SAY CHRIST IS COMING BACK SOON!

Another common mistake is that we should never claim that Jesus Christ is returning soon! There are a couple of reasons why this is so. They are as follows:

First, we do not know when He is coming back to the earth. While the signs are obviously setting the stage for His return this does not mean that it will happen in our lifetime. There is nothing in Scripture that compels the Lord to return in any particular time frame. In other words, He has not limited Himself as to the time of His return. What He does tell us is that we do NOT know when He is coming!

There is also the problem of what someone means by “soon.” Is it days, weeks, months, or years? Sadly, when many hear that Christ is coming back soon they assume it will be a matter of days or months. While that may not be the intention of the person who makes the claim, there will be people who interpret it in this way.

There is something else to consider. This type of behavior of date setting, or saying the Lord will return soon, causes the unbelievers to mock Christians as well as their faith in the Bible. Indeed, it gives the wrong impression that the Bible somehow is incorrect. Supposedly Scripture gives an incorrect prediction of the return of the Lord when it does no such thing.

SOME PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

As one who has been in the ministry for over 50 years, I can personally testify to many heartbreaking examples of people who have abandoned the faith because they were taught the “soon coming of Christ.”

As the years go by, and Christ has not returned, they questioned if the other “truths” they were taught about Christ were indeed true. In the end, they concluded that Jesus Christ was not the One whom He claimed to be because He did not come back in a “soon time-frame” as they were taught that He would.

Sadly, many of these people have become scoffers, anti-Christians, mocking the Christian faith because they were led to believe that Christ must come back within a definite window of time.

In one sense, their disillusionment is understandable. Let me give just a few personal examples (unhappily I have many more).

I heard one famous Bible teacher, who emphasized the imminent coming of Christ throughout his ministry, say the following to an audience in 1971 about the Lord’s soon return:

I believe that all these things will take place by 1975.

Being there when this was said, I can testify to the excitement of the people who heard and believed this. One can only wonder what they thought after 1975 came and went.

I have another sad example in the late 1970’s with this same Bible teacher. A huge rally was held at a local packed convention center, with multiple thousands attending. After listing all the latest events as to why Christ was coming soon the invitation was given to come forward and believe in Jesus. He told the people who had come forward, and prayed the prayer to receive the Lord these closing words.

Syria is presently massing their troops on the Israeli border for an immediate invasion. He then said, “well you just made it in under the wire, but at least you got in.”

Again, I wonder what those who came forward that night, over 40 years ago, now think about the “soon” coming of Christ?

I had a friend whom I met in 1980. We would often drive by a church that had a big sign painted on the wall of the back of their Christian bookstore which read: Jesus Christ is Coming Soon.

We noticed over the years that the paint would fade and that it had to be repainted over and over again. Finally, after about twenty or so years, there was a different message painted on the wall of the bookstore.

We then asked each other this question: What would people think who read the same message for these twenty odd years and now see something different. Is Christ not coming soon?

In 1993, prophecy specialist Dave Hunt wrote a book called *When Will Jesus Come?: Compelling Evidence for the Soon Return of Christ*. This is another example as to why we should never use the word “soon” when we talk about the coming of the Lord.

One last personal illustration. In the late 1970’s I traveled a couple of hours to speak at a large church in a particular city. I stayed the night at a beautiful house of this very lovely young Christian couple. In the morning, I commented how gorgeous their house was. I asked if they owned it. I’ll never forget their reply. They said, “Oh no, we wouldn’t waste the money buying a house now because we know Christ is coming soon.”

Again, I wonder how they now feel about this, some forty plus years later.

We could go on and on but I believe the point has been made.

In sum, these types of predictions and statements made by well-known Bible teachers should never have been made! Never!! Yes, the Lord is coming back. Yes, the signs of the coming are everywhere.

But as to the timing of His coming, none of us knows how “soon” it will be. Hence, we should never claim that He is coming “soon.” Indeed, we can see the damage that saying something like this can do.

OBJECTION: BUT DOESN’T THE SCRIPTURE SAY THAT CHRIST IS COMING SOON?

Whenever we urge people to stop saying that “Christ is coming soon” there always seems to be someone who objects by quoting Scripture. For example, we read the following in the first chapter in the Book of Revelation:

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must happen very soon (Revelation 1:1 NET).

The events recorded in Revelation are going to happen “soon.” The Greek phrase used here ἐν τάχει (*en talkhe*) is defined as follows:

tachos ... In the NT only in the combination ἐν τάχει, immediately, without delay... soon ... Rev 1:1 and 22:6 (*Eerdmans Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*).

We should note that in Revelation 1:1, as well as in 22:6, the meaning is “immediately” or “soon.”

Then the angel said to me, “These words are reliable and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must happen soon (Revelation 22:6 NET).

From these two verses we find the claim that the predicted events will happen “soon.”

This is confirmed by another verse in the first chapter of Revelation:

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy aloud, and blessed are those who hear and obey the things written in it, because the time is near! (Revelation 1:3 NET).

The Eerdmans Exegetical Dictionary defines this Greek word ἐγγύς (*en goose*), translated as “near,” as follows:

pert. to being close in point of time, near ... of the future...Mt 26:18; Rv 1:3; 22:10.

Again, we have the emphasis that the timing of these events is near.

JESUS SAYS HE IS COMING SOON

Furthermore, in the last chapter of Revelation, the Lord Himself makes this claim that He is coming “soon.”

Look! I am coming soon! (Revelation 22:7 NET).

While technically the speaker is not identified in this verse, all agree that it is referring to Jesus.

The *Eerdmans Exegetical Dictionary* explains the adverb translated “soon” in this manner:

ταχύ: soon, in a short time ... right away, quickly, immediately, without delay ... It occurs 6 times in Revelation in the phrase ἔρχομαι ταχύ (*air come eye talk ool*) [I am coming quickly] (2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12,

Again, the idea is that this is going to take place in a short period of time after the prediction.

SO HOW ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND THESE PREDICTIONS?

So when we put these passages together, how are we to understand that Jesus is coming back “soon?”

OPTION 1: THE PASSAGES REFER TO A RAPID OCCURRENCE ONCE THE EVENT START

There are those who argue that it refers to “a brief extent of time once the events begin.” In other words, it will take place “suddenly or swiftly” once things start to take place.

The problem with this view is that none of the passages have this meaning as Fanning notes:

None of these [passages] seems to mean “rapid occurrence once started” (Buist Fanning *Revelation, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament*, 2020, p.)

OPTION 2: IT IS EMPHASIZING THE NEARNESS OF THE EVENT ... SOON, WITHOUT DELAY

A second option understands that the meaning of the word “soon” has to do with time. In other words, the time is near for these events to occur. This meaning is consistent with all of the uses we find in the Book of Revelation.

Therefore, we conclude that these statements refer to the time frame when these predicted events will take place. In other words, these expressions clearly mean that all these events prophesied in Revelation will occur “soon” or “without delay?”

THE PROBLEM: CHRIST DID NOT RETURN SOON AFTER THESE PREDICTIONS WERE GIVEN

But herein lies the problem. It has been almost two thousand years and Christ has still not returned. How then, can we understand the predictions that His coming will be soon? There are three possible ways to answer this.

OPTION 1 THE NON-CHRISTIAN ANSWER: IT IS A FALSE PROPHECY

Non-Christians contend that “soon” means soon! Since it did not happen in a short time frame, namely soon after these things were predicted, then we are dealing with a false prediction. Indeed, it has been over 1,900 years since this was written. Of course, Bible believers reject this option.

OPTION 2 THE PRETERIST ANSWER: THE PROPHECIES WERE FULFILLED

Those who hold to the preterist view, that the events in Revelation would take place soon after they were predicted, claim this is precisely what took place. The predictions were fulfilled. Therefore, we have no contradiction.

The problem with this view is that it is hard to reconcile with the facts. Indeed, it is difficult to see how, in any sense, that these predicted events including the coming of Christ, have been fulfilled.

OPTION 3 GOD’S TIMETABLE IS DIFFERENT THAN OURS

The best answer is to realize that the Scripture is not trying to give us an exact time frame for the Lord’s return. In fact, God’s perspective of time is not the same as ours. Peter recognized this:

Now, dear friends, do not let this one thing escape your notice, that a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years are like a single day (2 Peter 3:8 NET).

HIS COMING IS SEEN AS IMMINENT

Simply put, the translated word “soon” has the idea as “imminent” in the sense that it can happen at any time. In other words, imminency describes an event that is possible to occur on any given day, and impossible on no day. Robert Thomas notes:

The purpose is to teach the imminence of the events foretold, not to set a time limit in which they must occur (Robert Thomas, *Revelation*, Moody Press, Volume 1, 1-7).

Buist Fanning observes:

It is better to understand that these expressions reflect a “soon” occurrence not in the sense of an exact chronology but in a prophetic time frame, describing what is certain to occur and could occur at any time without any delay. The timing, however, is subject to God’s calendar, whose timetable is different from human calculation (Buist Fanning, *Revelation, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament*, 2020).

The Cornerstone Bible Commentary understands the word “soon” in the following way:

The events that must soon take place. This would be better translated, “the things necessary to be in God’s timing” (*The Cornerstone Bible Commentary*)

Indeed, it is “soon” in God’s timing which is certainly not the same as ours!

The respected Bible commentator, Leon Morris, provides a wise summation of this issue:

This revelation is concerned with prediction. It is expressly said that it is to show God's servants things that must happen soon. Soon is not defined. The exact expression occurs again in 22:6, and a similar one in 2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20. This could mean that the fulfilment is expected in the very near future. But we must also bear in mind that in the prophetic perspective the future is sometimes foreshortened. In other words the term may refer to the certainty of the events in question. The Lord God has determined them and he will speedily bring them to pass. But this refers to his time, not ours, to the quality of the time rather than the quantity. With him one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day (2 Pet. 3:8). (Leon Morris, *Revelation, An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, Second Edition, 1987).

Well said. Therefore, our emphasis should always be that Jesus Christ will return at a time which He alone knows.

The Main Reason Why Soon Cannot Refer To Jesus' Return

Simply put, there is one main reason as to why we should never say that Jesus Christ will "come at any moment," or that "the return of the Lord" will happen soon."

Why? Well, every reference in the Book of Revelation that speaks directly about His "coming" refers to His return to the earth.

However, we know His Second Coming will be preceded by all the events described in Revelation chapters 6-18. This is referring to a "seven year period" known as the "time of Jacob's trouble" or the "70th week of Daniel." It is also called the "Great Tribulation" but technically this is speaking only of the second half of that last three and one half year period. In other words, the time of distress and suffering is followed by the second coming of Christ.

Since these references in Revelation refer to the Second Coming of Christ, not to the rapture of the church, there is no chance that a return to earth by the Lord Jesus could be characterized as "soon" in our understanding of the term by any stretch of the imagination!

Therefore, Christians should never claim that Christ is coming soon. At the earliest, His return is at least seven years away!

On the other hand, the rapture of the church, the "catching away" of living believers to meet the Lord in the air, can indeed happen at any moment. However, there is nowhere in Scripture that tells us that it will happen soon.

To sum up, the references to the Lord coming "soon" in Revelation cannot have anything to do with nearness in time, at least in the way that we understand time.

SUMMARY

While Scripture does say that Christ is coming "soon" we need to understand it from God's perspective. His coming is "imminent" in the sense that it could happen at any time. However, this does not mean "soon" in the way that we usually understand the English word. This should be obvious since it has been over 1,900 years since the Lord gave us these predictions.

Again, this is why we encourage people not to claim that Christ is coming soon—namely in the sense that it must be near. When people hear this, they often think of weeks, months, maybe a year or two. Yet, as we have observed, this is not the sense in which it is used in the New Testament.

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The point is that Jesus Christ could return at any moment, but He certainly has not restricted Himself to any specific time frame. This being the case, we must always be ready for Him to return.

Finally, since every reference in the Book of Revelation to Jesus' coming refers to His return to the earth, the Second Coming, then it is "imprecise" to say it will happen "soon." Indeed, as we just mentioned, there is a seven-year period of numerous judgments that the world will experience before He returns.

Therefore, Jesus' return to the earth to set up His kingdom cannot be an event that will take place "soon" in the way we normally understand the meaning of the term.

MISTAKE 3

DO NOT BLINDLY FOLLOW ANY WELL-KNOWN BIBLE TEACHER OR BIBLE PROPHECY SPECIALIST

Over the years I've heard numerous times that what I have said or written contradicts what some well-known Bible teacher, or some Bible prophecy specialist, has stated. Unhappily, their criticism is put in such a way that their preferred mentor must be right. In other words, how dare you question what they say!

Sadly, when I ask them to consider the possibility that their favorite teacher may be wrong on this matter I'm often met with incredulity. Of course, they cannot be wrong.

When I appeal to the Scripture, or to undeniable evidence, many times it still does not make any difference. In sum, they blindly follow this person no matter what. This is beyond tragic.

Instead of uncritically taking whatever any Bible teacher says as "the truth," we should be like the Bereans. Note how they are described in the Book of Acts:

And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth (Acts 17:11 New Living Translation).

These individual searched the Word of God to discover if the teaching they heard matched what was written. We should always do the same.

In a similar manner, the Apostle Paul gave the following commandment about those who made prophetic utterances:

But test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21 New Living Translation).

This is a good rule for each and every one of us. We are to weigh and evaluate what anyone says with respect to the Bible and what it teaches.

WE ALL HAVE BLIND SPOTS

Why should everything be checked out from Scripture?

Simply put, the nature of fallen humanity is that each of us has "blind spots." I love how John MacArthur explained it. It went something like this:

Of course, I have blind spots, but I don't know where they are, if I did they wouldn't be blind spots!

All of us should be able to say something like this. None of us has complete or perfect knowledge. That's why each and every Bible teacher should have their teachings weighed and evaluated.

MISTAKES COME IN TWO DIFFERENT CATEGORIES

Over the years, in discovering mistakes in the teaching of others, as well as my own mistakes that I have had to be clear up, I've noticed that they seem to come from two different directions.

OPTION 1 MISTAKES FROM WELL-MEANING PEOPLE

Most of the common mistakes that have been made, with respect to interpreting Scripture, have come from well-meaning people who have not gotten their information correct. Either they relied on something that someone else had said, or in their own study they have arrived at an interpretation that does not fit the facts.

This can come about by a number of ways. Sometimes the sources they are using are insufficient or outdated. Other times they have quoted a godly Bible teacher who had earlier made the mistake. Many times they have not checked with other godly Bible teachers who have a different view on the matter. Whatever the case may be, they are teaching or believing something that does not line up with Scripture.

All in all, these are well-meaning people who just don't know any better. When confronted with further evidence, many will indeed admit they had insufficient information on the subject and will immediately correct what they have said. This is certainly the proper way to approach the issue. I can personally testify that I have had to do this a number of times!

There is nothing to be ashamed about in admitting that we got it wrong. None of us know everything, hopefully we are all continuing to learn.

WE NEED TO BE TEACHABLE!

As we live our lives in anticipation of the coming of the Lord, and we study the Scriptures about the events surrounding His return, all of us need to be teachable.

In fact, Paul wrote about the qualifications of those in leadership in the church. They must be. . . “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2).

My good friend and world class Greek scholar, David Black, emphasizes that the word translated here “able to teach” can also mean “teachable.”

This applies to every believer in Jesus Christ. None of us “have arrived.” In other words, each of us should be teachable with respect to that which the Lord has revealed concerning the things to come.

May the Lord help each and every one of us learn the lesson to be teachable when it comes to understanding the truths of the biblical predictions of the “last days,” as well as how we should live in light of these truths.

To the point, when we discover mistakes in the teachings of well-meaning Bible teachers, we should always give them the benefit of the doubt. In other words, we should understand that they have taught certain things with the best of intentions with the knowledge that they currently possess. In other words, we should never doubt their godliness or sincerity.

OPTION 2 MISTAKES FROM FALSE TEACHERS

Sadly, there are other mistakes that are made by those who are not trying to correctly teach the Scripture. The Bible warns us about false teachers and false prophets:

But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will bring sudden destruction on themselves. Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality. And because of these teachers, the way of truth will be slandered. In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed (2 Peter 2:1-3 NLT).

Notice that, among other things, we are warned that these false teachers are after our money! We are advised to beware of them.

Whatever the case may be, whether mistakes come from well-meaning teachers, or from false teachers who do not care about the truth, the result is still the same: these mistakes need to be corrected.

It is important that we lovingly correct those who are teaching something that is not supported by Scripture. And if we are on the receiving end of correction, we should always remember the words that Paul wrote to the Galatians:

Have I now become your enemy because I am telling you the truth? (Galatians 4:16 NLT)

WE SHOULD HAVE A GENUINE CONCERN ABOUT PROPHECY SPECIALISTS

There is one more important thing that needs to be said. In the past, as well as today, there have been a number of people who become known as “prophecy specialists,” for lack of a better term. Basically their entire ministry is preaching, teaching and writing about last days Bible prophecy. While there is certainly nothing wrong in doing this, in and of itself, unfortunately it has become apparent that many of these high-profile teachers lack training in other fields of Bible knowledge.

In other words, some of the most important truths of the Christian faith are either never taught, or if they are taught it is with an insufficient biblical knowledge of the subject.

Therefore, it is crucial that those who desire to be high profile in this field pay close attention to the admonition of James:

Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly (James 3:1 NLT).

In sum, for those who are following these specialists, make sure that they have a correct understanding of what the Bible teaches on all of its major subjects. This includes the reliability of Scripture, the nature of God, the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and the Person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Without having a solid biblical understanding of these subjects, it is possible to fall into error. May each of us resolve to study the entirety of Scripture, not merely last days Bible prophecy.

MISTAKE 4

BEWARE OF SENSATIONALISTIC CLAIMS THAT SUPPOSEDLY CONFIRM WE ARE IN THE LAST DAYS

There continues to be sensationalistic claims that are used as evidence that we are living in the last days. They include claims of newly made discoveries, new understandings of what the Bible really teaches, as well as claims of secret codes in the Bible which reveal what will happen in the future.

We are assured that all of these sensational claims have something to do with last days Bible prophecy. Hence we are told that it is important that we too must have this knowledge. This is what we are led to believe.

However, nothing could be further from the truth.

THE TWISTING OF SCRIPTURE

Often times these claims come about by the twisting of Scripture. One passage that is regularly quoted to justify them is found in the Book of Daniel:

I heard, but I did not understand. So I said, "Sir, what will happen after these things?" He said, "Go, Daniel. For these matters are closed and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made clean, and refined, but the wicked will go on being wicked. None of the wicked will understand, though the wise will understand (Daniel 12:8-10 NET).

It is the last phrase in verse ten that is often quoted, "the wise will understand." This phrase has been used to promote a number of these sorts of claims.

Some of the false claims that have become popular include the following:

FALSE CLAIM ISAIAH 9 PREDICTED THE 9/11 ATTACK ON THE WORLD TRADE CENTER

This claim was made in a book that sadly became quite popular. It is an example of how not to interpret the Bible. Isaiah 9 is not prophetic of the United States, neither has it anything to do with the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. The passage in Isaiah is not a prediction of events that indicate that we are at the time of the end.

FALSE CLAIM THERE ARE SECRET CODES IN THE BIBLE

Time and time again we find people making sensational claims with respect to secret codes that are contained in the Bible. They supposedly give insight as to what will happen in the last days.

Consider the following headline:

The Wise Shall Understand: The Daniel 12 Code Revealed

Then we have this:

Bible Code: 2/3 of the World's Population Will Die by September 2021 as prophesied by Zechariah

Well, this codebreaker sure got it wrong!

The Bible is not a code book. The message has been plainly written so that all are able to understand it, not merely a select few.

We have dealt with this issue of secret codes in the Bible in considerable detail in an appendix to our book *Is The Bible The Ultimate Source of Authority?* As always, it is a free download on our website educatingourworld.com under the heading of *The Bible*.

FALSE CLAIM THE ARK OF THE COVENANT HAS BEEN DISCOVERED

There have been a number of instances in recent years where someone has claimed to have discovered the long lost Ark of the Covenant. None of the claims have proven to be true. The ark, if it does indeed still exist, has yet to be discovered.

We have documented this in our book *In Search of the Lost Ark: The Quest for the Ark of the Covenant*. It can be found under the section of *Bible Prophecy* at our website.

FALSE CLAIM NOAH'S ARK HAS BEEN DISCOVERED

A number of sensational claims have been made about the discovery of Noah's ark. None of them have been proven to be true. If it were discovered someday, the entire world would know about it.

FALSE CLAIM THE COVID VACCINE IS THE MARK OF THE BEAST

One popular claim in recent time has been that the vaccines of the Covid 19 virus are actually the predicted "mark of beast" that we are warned about in Revelation 13.

There are so many things wrong with this idea, not the least of which is that you cannot have the mark of the beast without the beast himself! The beast, the Final Antichrist, has not showed up yet upon the world stage.

Furthermore, his mark will be something that people willingly take to demonstrate their allegiance to him, as well as their worship of him. It will not be something that people will be tricked into receiving.

We also believe that genuine Christians will not be around when the mark is administered. We deal with the subject of the mark of the beast in our book *The Final Antichrist*. It can be also found under the section of *Bible Prophecy* at our website.

FALSE CLAIM AS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH, EVIL ANGELS ARE HAVING SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH WOMEN AND PRODUCING OFFSPRING (THE NEPHILIM)

This is one of the strangest of all. Since Jesus told us that the last days will be like the days of Noah this has caused some people to claim that it includes fallen angels producing offspring with human women as supposedly took place at Noah's time. However, there is no such teaching in Scripture that angels had sexual relations with human women. We have dealt with this subject in considerable detail in an appendix to our book *Evil Angels, Demons, and the Occult*. It can be found under the category *The Unseen World* on our website educatingourworld.com.

SUMMARY

We could go on and on about these so-called sensationalistic discoveries but the point is clear, they are simply false. These claims often gain a huge following but never turn out to be true. Sadly, many of the same people keep making sensational claims and people continue to believe them. This is a mistake that no Bible believer should make!

MISTAKE 5

WE SHOULD NOT LOOK FOR ASTRONOMICAL SIGNS TO FULFILL BIBLE PROPHECY IN THIS PRESENT AGE

It has become popular today in some Christian circles to look for “signs in the heavens” for a fulfillment of specific predictions found in Scripture. Is this a correct way of interpreting the Bible? As we draw nearer to the coming of the Lord, are we to look for signs in the sky as a direct fulfillment of what Scripture predicts?

THERE ARE END-TIME FORECASTS OF SIGNS IN THE SKY

The Bible does indeed speak of certain signs in the heavens occurring at the time of the end of this age. In fact, the Old Testament lists images that will occur at the time of the end.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

For example, we read in the Book of Joel that the sun will be darkened and the moon will turn to blood in the last days:

I will produce portents both in the sky and on the earth—blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sunlight will be turned to darkness and the moon to the color of blood, before the day of the Lord comes— that great and terrible day! (Joel 2:30-31 NET).

THE GOSPELS

As we examine the gospels, we also find predictions of heavenly signs at the time of the coming of the Lord. Indeed, Jesus said the following would occur:

Immediately after the suffering of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man arriving on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:29-31 NET).

We read similar statements by Jesus in Mark 13:24–27 and in Luke 21:25-28.

SIGNS IN THE SKY ARE PROPHESED IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

We also find examples of predicted signs in the sky in the Book of Revelation. They include the following:

STARS FALLING TO THE EARTH AND THE MOON TURNING INTO BLOOD

Then I looked when the Lamb opened the sixth seal, and a huge earthquake took place; the sun became as black as sackcloth made of hair, and the full moon became blood red; and the stars in the sky fell to the earth like a fig tree dropping its unripe figs when shaken by a fierce wind (Revelation 6:12-13 NET).

BURNING FIRE FROM HEAVEN

Then the second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain of burning fire was thrown into the sea. . . . Then the third angel blew his trumpet, and a huge star burning like a torch fell from the sky; it landed on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water (Revelation 8:8,10 NET).

THE DARKENING OF THE SUN, MOON, AND STARS

Then the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. And there was no light for a third of the day and for a third of the night likewise darkening of the sun, moon, and stars (Revelation 8:12 NET).

A GREAT SIGN IN HEAVEN

Then a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet, and on her head was a crown of twelve stars (Revelation 12:1 NET).

Clearly Scripture predicts that those living upon the earth will see signs in the sky at the time of the end of this age.

THE QUESTION IS: WHEN WILL THEY OCCUR?

From an examination of Scripture, there is no doubt whatsoever that heavenly signs will occur. However, this is not the question we are examining here.

It is not *whether* or not signs will appear, because they will. The issue that must be examined has to do with the *timing* of the signs. When, in God's program for time and eternity, should humans expect to see these signs in the sky? This is the real issue.

Mistakes have been made by those who believe that these heavenly signs will appear during the present age of the church. We will provide two illustrations.

CLAIM: REVELATION 12 WAS TO BE FULFILLED ON SEPTEMBER 23, 2017

There were a number of people who predicted that the "great sign" mentioned in Revelation 12:1-6 would be fulfilled on a precise date: September 23, 2017. The text reads as follows:

Then a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet, and on her head was a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was screaming in labor pains, struggling to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: a huge red dragon that had seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadem crowns. Now the dragon's tail swept away a third of the stars in heaven and hurled them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. So the woman gave birth to a son, a male child, who is going to rule over all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was suddenly caught up to God and to his throne, and she fled into the wilderness where a place had been prepared for her by God, so she could be taken care of for 1,260 days (Revelation 12:1-6 NET).

Citing a unique astronomical event that was to take place on September 23, 2017, it was claimed that Revelation 12:1-6 would be fulfilled on that very day!

Obviously, it did not take place. What, then, were some of the problems with this prediction?

CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT

The problem of doing this, in the present age in which we live, is found in the context of Revelation 12. Earlier, Scripture speaks of three "woes" that are to come upon the earth in the future:

As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: “Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!” (Revelation 8:13 NIV).

After the first woe was completed we read the following:

One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things (Revelation 9:12 NKJV).

There were still two “woes” to come.

Likewise, Scripture tells us that the second woe had also passed and the third woe was predicted to come soon thereafter:

The second woe has come and gone; the third is coming quickly (Revelation 11:14 NET).

THE CONTEXT OF REVELATION 12

We now move to the context of Revelation 12:1:

Then a great sign appeared in heaven (Revelation 12:1 NET).

The great sign in heaven appears *after* the aforementioned two woes have already taken place. In fact, it will come quickly after the second woe is completed.

Therefore, if we think about it logically, if the predicted first woe has not yet come to pass in our world, and neither has the second woe, then it is *not* possible that we are going to see the third woe before we see the other two!

Add to this Revelation 11, the second woe, tells us of the appearance of two witnesses who will arrive upon the earth and proclaim the message of Jesus Christ for three and one half years. After which, they will be put to death by the Final Antichrist who has, at that time, arrived on the scene.

Their bodies will lie unburied in the city of Jerusalem. Three and one half days later they will rise from the dead in full view of the entire world! After this, a great earthquake will take place in Jerusalem, destroying part of the city, and the Ark of Covenant will then be seen in heaven.

Do we really need to tell anyone that these events have not happened yet? However, Revelation 12:1-6, and its “great sign,” appears *after* all these things have taken place.

Indeed, if we look at the predicted events that are to take place before the “great sign” in Revelation 12, it will become obvious that none of them has yet occurred. Therefore, it is unbiblical to look for this sign before any of the other events take place.

We could also add to this that the heavenly phenomena associated with Revelation 12 will occur at an unknown time in the future. The date of September 23, 2017, was a time when a “known” astronomical phenomenon took place! In other words, the date could be determined ahead of time.

THE SO-CALLED SIGN OF THE BLOOD MOONS

Another example of incorrectly claiming that “heavenly signs” would fulfill Bible prophecy can be found in the so-called “blood moons” that occurred in 2015.

Basically, these “blood moons,” or eclipses were supposed to signal the return of Jesus Christ to the earth or some other last days event. They were given the name blood moons because of the reddish tinge that an eclipse would have on a heavenly object.

This fulfillment of Bible prophecy was supposed to occur during the Feasts of Passover and Tabernacles in 2015. Obviously, it too failed.

PROBLEMS GALORE WITH THE IDEA OF BLOOD MOONS

Another example of incorrectly claiming that “heavenly signs” would fulfill Bible prophecy can be found in the so-called “blood moons” that occurred in 2015.

Basically, this series of “blood moons” were supposed to have hailed the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. His Second Coming, or some other last days event, was supposed to coincide with these “blood moons,” or eclipses. They were given the name blood moons because of the reddish tinge that an eclipse would have on a heavenly object.

This fulfillment of Bible prophecy was supposed to occur during the Feasts of Passover and Tabernacles in 2015. Obviously, it too failed.

There were a host of problems concerning this theory of the blood moons. We will merely cite a few of them.

PROBLEM 1: OTHER PHENOMENA IS CONNECTED WITH THE MOON TURNING UP TO BLOOD

One of the biggest problems with the idea of blood moons is what the Scripture says will also occur when the moon turns into blood:

Then I saw him open the sixth seal. A violent earthquake occurred; the sun turned black like sackcloth made of hair; the entire moon became like blood; the stars of heaven fell to the earth as a fig tree drops its unripe figs when shaken by a high wind; the sky was split apart like a scroll being rolled up; and every mountain and island was moved from its place. (Revelation 6:12-14 CSB).

Notice the moon turning into blood is merely part of the celestial phenomena. The sun will turn black and stars will fall from the sky. Obviously none of this happened in 2015 when the so called “blood moons” appeared.

PROBLEM 2: THE TIMING OF THE BLOOD MOON

This moon turning into blood occurs during the final seven year period before the coming of Christ. It is also known as the “time of Jacob’s trouble” or the “seventieth week of Daniel.” It does NOT occur previous to it.

Therefore, to claim that the blood moons that appeared in 2015 are to be viewed a sign of the end is just plain wrong. The final seven-year period has not yet begun!

PROBLEM 3: NOBODY KNOWS THE DAY OR THE HOUR

A third problem is that these blood moons were to arrive at a certain date. However, Jesus said nobody knows the day or the hour of his return:

But as for that day and hour no one knows it—not even the angels in heaven—except the Father alone (Matthew 24:36 NET)

Yet, these so called “blood moons” were an astronomical phenomenon that took place on a known date. What kind of supernatural sign takes place at a time when everyone is expecting it to happen?

PROBLEM 4: THERE IS ONLY ONE BLOOD MOON

Finally, the moon only turns into blood once! Biblically, there is no such thing as blood moons. There is only one time that the moon will turn blood-like: not *many* times!

These are just a few of the many problems that are associated with the attempt to make “blood moons” as a sign of the end.

THE CONTEXT OF THESE HEAVENLY SIGNS IS THE TIME OF THE END

The main problem with any prediction about heavenly phenomena being a biblical sign, is a misunderstanding of the timing of these prophesied events.

Indeed, these events take place during the last seven years before the Lord returns. The period known as the “70th week of Daniel,” the “time of Jacob’s trouble,” or the “Great Tribulation,” begins with a certain covenant, or agreement, made by the coming Antichrist with the nation of Israel:

The ruler will make a treaty with the people for a period of one set of seven, but after half this time, he will put an end to the sacrifices and offerings. And as a climax to all his terrible deeds, he will set up a sacrilegious object that causes desecration, until the fate decreed for this defiler is finally poured out on him (Daniel 9:27 NLT).

Since this has not happened yet, none of the heavenly phenomena attributed to that period, could not, by definition, have happened yet!

Therefore, we can conclude that all future predictions about specific signs in the sky will be incorrect. By definition, they cannot occur until this final seven year period begins.

Consequently, in our present age, we should not be looking for signs in the sky in fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Indeed, it is a mistake to do so!

MISTAKE 6

DO'S AND DON'TS AND EXTREMES TO AVOID IN STUDYING LAST DAYS BIBLE PROPHECY

There are a number of common mistakes that Christians make when studying last days Bible prophecy as well as some extremes that we need to avoid. They include the following:

1. WE NEED TO CORRECTLY FRAME THE ISSUES

Any question regarding last days Bible prophecy must be properly stated or “framed.” It is important that we understand the precise issues as well as why people hold to the various positions which they embrace.

Therefore, whether we agree with them or not, we should take the time to know why each position believes what they believe. Consequently, we must examine the *best* arguments which are put forward for each side.

This being the case it will not do to find the weakest arguments for one particular point of view and then attempt to refute them. On the contrary we should attempt to find the most persuasive arguments which each side offers and then interact with them.

The fact that some people have offered poor or simplistic arguments in the past should not be an issue. We don't want to seek out the worst arguments each side proposes. Instead we want to find the best. Only then can we come to a proper conclusion on the matter.

Therefore, we should not cite only selective verses or passages which promote *our* particular position while deliberately ignoring other passages which may contradict what we believe. Full disclosure is absolutely essential.

2. WE SHOULD NOT PREDETERMINE THE OUTCOME OF OUR STUDY

In looking at this question, as to what the Bible teaches about the end times, our goal should be to discover the *truth* of the matter. Thus, the outcome should not be pre-determined before we examine all of the evidence. If the evidence leads us to a different position than what we have previously held, then we must change our position. In other words, we should not try to change the evidence! While this may not be easy to do it is something that must be done if we are going to be intellectually honest.

3. WE MUST PUT THESE ISSUES INTO PROPER PERSPECTIVE

Once we understand these issues, we must then put them into proper perspective. There are two extremes in which we must avoid. The first sees the study of prophecy as of little or no importance. Basically, people who hold this view assume it is irrelevant to everyday life. There are more important matters which deserve our attention. Thus, this subject receives little or no consideration.

The other extreme sees this subject matter as primary. The study of the last days is placed alongside the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the nature of the Bible and the doctrine of salvation as an essential point of Christian teaching. Neither of these extreme approaches is correct. The answer lies somewhere in the middle.

4. WE MUST NOT MAKE OUR VIEWS AS A TEST OF FELLOWSHIP

This cannot be stressed too strongly. After our study of this subject, or perhaps even before we have made a serious study of the topic, we may have a view which we sincerely and deeply hold. There is nothing wrong with this.

However, what is wrong is to make our particular view the basis on which we associate with other Christians. While it is probably important that we go to a particular church that holds similar views as we do on these subjects, it is certainly not essential. The study of last days Bible prophecy is an important matter but there are a number of other issues which are of greater importance. This should never be forgotten.

5. WE MUST REALIZE THAT THERE ARE NO QUICK, EASY ANSWERS TO SOME OF THESE QUESTIONS

There are some end-time issues which may be difficult for us to form a conclusion. For example, to discover the exact identity of the woman known as “Babylon the Great” in the Book of Revelation is not an easy quest.

Thus, as far as coming to conclusions, we must understand that in a number of cases there may be no simple answers to our questions neither is there any quick solution. If there were, then all Christians would be in agreement on these end times topics. The fact that godly men and women, who are learned in the subject matter, may disagree on particular issues should make this clear.

To the point, any conclusion that is arrived at must be able to account for *all* of the objections brought against it. The theory must be able to give reasonable answers to specific questions.

6. WE MUST NOT THINK WE HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS

While this point can be applied to any biblical subject under discussion it seems especially appropriate here. Too many people claim to have all the answers with respect to the questions concerning the last days. This includes people on every side of this issue!

Obviously, everyone cannot be correct, somebody has to be wrong. Human nature is such that *we* think *we* have the correct answer while the other person has the wrong answer. While that may indeed be the case, it is also possible that the other person has the correct answer and we are the ones which are wrong! We always have to allow for this possibility.

Even if we believe we have the correct answer, it is still our Christian duty to graciously and lovingly treat others who disagree with our conclusions. We should not assume that we are more intelligent or more spiritual than those who hold differing perspectives.

Unfortunately, there is way too much name-calling going on from people on all sides of this issue. This should not be our approach in tackling this question. We need to discuss the issues surrounding these coming events with a large dose of Christian charity. This is what pleases the Lord.

7. SCRIPTURE ALONE MUST BE OUR GUIDE

This last point is crucial. At the end of the day, what solves these questions is not what certain people may have taught in the history of the church or what we think current events may be telling us. While we may look at what others in the past have said about these matters, as well as what is presently going on in the world, the ultimate authority is the Scripture and the Scripture alone.

Every conclusion we arrive at, concerning these last days issues, must ultimately come from the Bible and only from the Bible. The teaching of God’s Word on this subject is the only thing which really matters.

These “do’s and don’ts” should be kept in mind as we go about examining this particular issue, the study of last days Bible prophecy.

SOME OF THE EXTREMES THAT WE SHOULD AVOID IN PROPHETIC STUDY

While the subject of Bible prophecy is found in a large part of Scripture, there are two extremes that we should avoid when conducting a study of the subject. They can be summed up as follows:

EXTREME ONE: OVEREMPHASIZE THE SUBJECT OF BIBLE PROPHECY

While the subject of prophecy is certainly important, it must always be studied in the context of the overall teachings of the Bible. In other words, merely studying Bible prophecy, especially predictive prophecy, by itself, misses the main message of Scripture.

Unhappily, many Christians spend their time examining the passages concerning future events while neglecting the main teachings of Scripture. The Person and work of Jesus Christ becomes secondary to their attempt to discover what the Bible says about the future.

THE BIBLE WARNS OF ENDLESS DEBATES AND SPECULATION

Unhappily, many Christians spend way too much time engaging in endless debates as well as speculation about the specific details of coming events, many of which New Testament Christians will not be around to observe! Paul wrote about certain issues in his day that caused endless speculation:

Don't let them waste their time in endless discussion of myths and spiritual pedigrees. These things only lead to meaningless speculations, which don't help people live a life of faith in God (1 Timothy 1:4 NET).

He also said:

But reject foolish and ignorant controversies, because you know they breed infighting (2 Timothy 2:23 NET).

The same advice holds true today for those engaging in endless questions and speculation about certain aspects of the future which we cannot know anything about. We should avoid doing this!

PEOPLE ADD MORE DETAILS THAN THE SCRIPTURE PROVIDES

There is also the tendency to go beyond what the Scripture clearly says in order to find more details than the text of the Bible provides. This always results in guesswork as well as unnecessary speculation. We should never try to add more details than the Bible itself gives. Paul wrote:

I have applied these things to myself and Apollos because of you, brothers and sisters, so that through us you may learn "not to go beyond what is written," so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of the one against the other (1 Corinthians 4:6 NET).

This cannot be emphasized enough! We must not go beyond that which was written.

EXTREME TWO: PEOPLE NEGLECT THE STUDY OF BIBLE PROPHECY

As a reaction to this first extreme, there are those who neglect the subject entirely. Indeed, many Christians, when hearing about the various views that Bible believers hold, and all the never-ending debates that are taking place, decide to give up and ignore entirely the subject of Bible prophecy. This is tragic.

THE KEY IS TO FIND A BALANCE

As we have emphasized, Bible prophecy is an important subject to study. But it should always be examined in the light of the totality of Scripture. However, to many, a balanced understanding seems unattainable, so some Christians abandon careful study of the end times entirely.

This is unfortunate. We should give attention to this most-important of subjects but always in context of the overall teaching of Scripture.

MISTAKE 7

THE SCRIPTURES ARE SUFFICIENT: WE DO NOT NEED ANYTHING ELSE!

In dealing with our biblical understanding of what is going on in the world today, one of the common mistakes that people make concerns claims about things that are not found in Scripture. This includes dreams, visions, celestial phenomena, etc.

Basically, they claim that we need to understand things that are not found in the Bible that will help us in our comprehension of last days Bible prophecy. Simple put it is the Bible...and...

These sorts of claims are tragic. Indeed they contradict what the Lord has already revealed to us. Three observations need to be made.

OBSERVATION 1 WE ARE NOT TO GO BEYOND THAT WHICH IS WRITTEN

First, we are not to go “beyond that which is written.” Paul wrote:

Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying: “Nothing beyond what is written” (1 Corinthians 4:6 CSB).

OBSERVATION 2 EVERYTHING NECESSARY HAS ALREADY BEEN REVEALED TO US

In the Scriptures, God has revealed everything that is necessary for us to know about Him and His plan for time and eternity. Jude wrote:

But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people (Jude 3 NLT).

The faith has been “once and for all delivered” “once for all time.” God has told us everything that needs to be said. Therefore, we derive our information from the Bible and from it alone. We do not go elsewhere to discover what will happen in the future.

OBSERVATION 3 WE ARE TO READ THE BIBLE FOR WHAT IT SAYS, WE DO NOT READ BETWEEN THE LINES

We are to read the Bible at face-value. In other words we do not have to read between the lines to find hidden messages. Paul wrote:

Our letters have been straightforward, and there is nothing written between the lines and nothing you can't understand (2 Corinthians 1:13 NLT)

The Amplified Bible puts it this way:

For we write you nothing other than what you read and understand [there is no double meaning in what we say]. And I hope you will [accurately] understand [divine things] until the end (2 Corinthians 1:13 AMP)

To sum up, we go to the Bible alone for our information about the future and in doing so we read the Scriptures in a straightforward manner. There are no hidden messages or any double meanings in the text.

Along this line, I have included from my book, *What Everyone Needs To Know About The Bible*, an explanation of the sufficiency of Scripture. Hopefully this will provide further understanding as to why we must go to the Bible and to it alone. As always, this is a free download on our website educatingourworld.com. under the heading of *The Bible*.

WHAT IS THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE?

One of the most important doctrines with respect to the Bible, and how we are to understand it, is known as the “sufficiency of Scripture.” The sufficiency of Scripture can be simply defined as follows: In the Bible alone, God has given humanity all things that are necessary for the proper understanding of who He is, who we are, how He has acted in the past, and what He expects from us.

The basic idea behind the sufficiency of Scripture is that nothing else needs to be revealed to the human race about God, or His plan for the human race. The Bible is the record of all of the things that God thought we needed to know about Him. In other words, the Scriptures are complete and sufficient for belief and behavior. Nothing needs to be added to them!

The following points need to be made about the sufficiency of Scripture.

1. THE BIBLE ALONE HAS THE ANSWERS TO LIFE’S MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

The Bible contains the things, which God thought that we humans should know, on a number of different topics. His teaching on any subject is sufficient for us. In other words, we do not have to go elsewhere to find answers. The Bible says the faith has been once-and-for-all entrusted to believers. Jude wrote:

Dear friends, although I have been eager to write to you about our common salvation, I now feel compelled instead to write to encourage you to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints (Jude 3 New English Translation).

Consequently, people are able to search the Bible for themselves and find out the important truths about God in its pages. His Word is enough.

For example, the Bible alone holds the key to salvation from sin. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy:

And how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15 ESV).

Paul emphasizes that it is from the Bible alone that we learn that forgiveness of sins must come through Jesus Christ. We do not have to look elsewhere for answers concerning how we are to be saved from sin.

James confirmed that God used the words found in Scripture to bring the message of salvation or the “new birth.” He wrote:

He wanted us to be his own special people, and so he sent the true message to give us new birth (James 1:18 Contemporary English Version).

Therefore, the Holy Scripture provides us everything that we need to know about the central questions of life. It alone is where we go to find the answers.

2. EVERYTHING THAT WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GOD HAS BEEN REVEALED TO US: NOT EVERYTHING WE MAY WANT TO KNOW

While the Scriptures contain everything humanity needs to know about God, it does not reveal everything that we may desire to know. The truth that God has revealed in the Bible is sufficient, but it is not exhaustive. There are many things that God has not told us. Moses wrote:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law (Deuteronomy 29:29 NIV).

Therefore, many things about God are still unknown to us.

3. THE INFORMATION ABOUT GOD WAS SUFFICIENT AT ALL STAGES OF HUMAN HISTORY

Through the various stages of human history, God has given His people sufficient information to believe in Him. They always have had enough information to know that He existed, as well as what He required from them. Consequently, the human race was never left in the dark about God's existence, or how He expected them to behave.

For example, Adam and Eve were given insight into future salvation from sin. The Book of Genesis says God gave the following words of punishment to the serpent who tempted Eve:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel (Genesis 3:15 NIV).

The offspring of the woman would be Jesus Christ—the Savior.

Later, we read of Cain and Abel. They each were commanded to bring an offering to the Lord:

At harvesttime Cain brought to the LORD a gift of his farm produce, while Abel brought several choice lambs from the best of his flock. The LORD accepted Abel and his offering (Genesis 4:3-4 NLT).

They realized that some payment was necessary for sin. The Lord said to Cain:

You will be accepted if you respond in the right way. But if you refuse to respond correctly, then watch out! Sin is waiting to attack and destroy you, and you must subdue it (Genesis 4:7 NLT).

Before Jesus Christ came into the world, people were saved by looking forward to His coming. After listing a number of godly characters from the Old Testament, the writer to the Hebrews put it this way:

Every one of those people died. But they still had faith, even though they had not received what they had been promised. They were glad just to see these things from far away, and they agreed that they were only strangers and foreigners on this earth (Hebrews 11:13 CEV).

They died “in faith” looking forward to the promises of God. In fact, we are told that Moses “suffered for Christ.” We read the following in Hebrews:

He [Moses] considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward (Hebrews 11:26 ESV).

Jesus said Abraham looked forward to seeing His day. We read Him saying the following in the Gospel of John:

Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to my coming. He saw it and was glad (John 8:56 NLT).

While their knowledge was limited, they were still able to act in faith towards God's promises. They had saving faith without knowing the exact details of Jesus Christ's sinless life, His death, and resurrection from the dead.

The key is that they trusted God's words. It is clear that their knowledge was sufficient to act in faith toward God. Therefore, we find that Scripture has always been adequate to meet the needs of the people.

4. WE DO NOT NEED SOME AUTHORITY FIGURE TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE FOR US

Sometimes it is argued that Scriptures are not clear in-and-of-themselves. Thus, believers need some type of external authority to properly interpret and understand its teaching. This may come from some church, a creed, or the teaching of some church leader.

However, the facts speak otherwise. The Bible is able to be understood by the great majority of the people. Every believer should study the Scriptures for themselves. Nowhere do we find the Scripture telling believers that they should only listen to some special spiritual leader to know the truth.

5. GOD WOULD NOT GIVE US A CONFUSED REVELATION

There is something else. It is unreasonable to say, as some have done, that God would give humanity a revelation of Himself that could not be understood by the masses.

To the contrary, the Bible is written in such a way that people in every age are able to understand it. Jesus made this point clear when He spoke about the nature of God the Father:

Which one of you fathers would give your hungry child a snake if the child asked for a fish? (Luke 11:11 CEV).

The answer of course is none! If earthly fathers look after their own children, then how much more does our heavenly Father look after us!

Humanity needs a clear Word from God. God, who is compared to a loving Father, gives only good things to His children. Therefore, He would not give us a confused, or contradictory, revelation of Himself.

6. THE CREEDS AND CHURCH COUNCILS ARE INSUFFICIENT TO ESTABLISH TRUTH

Although some claim that creeds, belief statements, or the conclusions of church councils, are alternatives to Scripture, they cause more problems than they solve. Creeds and councils, no matter how orthodox, are still the pronouncements of human beings. There is no guarantee that any pronouncements they make are to be considered infallible.

The Holy Scripture alone contains all things necessary for believers. There is no need for anything to be added to them. They are sufficient.

7. JESUS ASSUMED THAT THE SCRIPTURES WERE SUFFICIENT TO ANSWER OUR QUESTIONS

The answers to the basic problems that humanity faces, such as our identity, purpose, and destiny, can be found in the pages of Scripture. Jesus acknowledged that the religious leaders of His day did indeed search the Scriptures to find answers to these questions. He said:

You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life (John 5:39,40 NRSV).

While Jesus condemned the religious leaders for a number of their practices, He did not condemn them for searching the Scriptures.

It is interesting to note that the King James Version is different from other English translations here. It reads this as a command of Jesus—not merely a statement of what they were doing. It says:

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me (John 5:39 KJV).

The translation of the King James Version is possible—the Greek text can be read either as a command “search the Scriptures” or as a statement of that which they were already doing “you search the Scriptures.”

Either way, the point is the same, the Scriptures need to be searched!

8. PAUL EMPHASIZED THAT EACH BELIEVER SHOULD THOROUGHLY SEARCH THE SCRIPTURE FOR ANSWERS

Like Jesus, the Apostle Paul emphasized that people should thoroughly search the Scriptures. He wrote the following to Timothy:

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15 NRSV).

The Scripture is the “word of truth.” The reason the Scripture should be studied is because it is God’s divinely inspired Word. Paul also wrote to Timothy:

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NRSV).

According to Paul, those who study the Scripture can be thoroughly equipped for “every good work.” Scripture is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. We need nothing else to live the Christian life.

9. THE BIBLE HAS PROVED SUFFICIENT FOR US

We also should note that Scriptures have proved themselves to be sufficient. Those who read and study the Bible discover that the Scripture provides everything necessary to understand the plan of God and live a godly life. Peter wrote:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness (2 Peter 1:3 NIV).

The psalmist equates God’s blessing with obeying His Word. He wrote:

Our Lord, you bless everyone who lives right and obeys your Law (Psalm 119:1 CEV).

This is a further indication that obedience to God consists of obeying His Word.

Therefore, the Bible itself is sufficient for human beings to know who God is, and what He wants from humanity. Consequently, nothing needs to be added to Scripture.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FROM THE DOCTRINE THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

The doctrine of the sufficiency of the Bible has a number of important implications for believers. They include the following.

WE CAN FOCUS ON GOD’S WORD ALONE

Because the Bible contains sufficient answers to our deepest questions, we can make it our focus to find these ultimate answers. There is nowhere else that we must go.

Therefore, we do not have to spend our time finding out what various Christians leaders, or church councils, have said on a particular topic. Any conclusions they may have reached cannot be considered as either authoritative or infallible. It is only the Bible that is completely trustworthy.

Consequently, nothing outside of the Scripture has any binding authority over believers. We are not obliged to obey any command or teaching of any “Christian” group if it is not either explicitly or implicitly taught in the Bible. Guidance will come from God’s Word—not from the commands or suggestions of others.

WE CAN EVALUATE EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE

The fact that the Scriptures are sufficient does not mean that we ignore what others have written or have said in the past. Indeed, it simply means that whatever they have said must be evaluated in light of Scripture. We do not disregard what others have taught on particular topics, but we do evaluate their words in light of our only trustworthy source—the Bible. While the conclusions of others may be helpful, they are not authoritative in any sense of the word.

HOW THIS RELATES TO OUR STUDY OF LAST DAYS BIBLE PROPHECY

In sum, understanding the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is crucial in our study of last days Bible prophecy. Too often, we are told that we need the Bible as well as something else to understand the times in which we are living. However, as we have observed from Scripture itself, the Bible is indeed all that we need.

Let us not, therefore, attempt to go outside of Scripture in a desire to understand what is taking place in our world with respect to the time of the end. The Bible gives us all of the answers that we need!

MISTAKE 8

THE EZEKIEL 38,39 INVASION IS NOT THE SAME MILITARY CAMPAIGN AS THAT OF ARMAGEDDON

There have been a number of Bible students who believe that the Ezekiel 38, 39 invasion of Israel describes the campaign of Armageddon as recorded in Revelation 16. However, a closer examination of these two events will demonstrate that they are not speaking of the same episode.

UNDERSTANDING ARMAGEDDON AND THE EZEKIEL 38,39 INVASION

Before we look at this mistake that needs to be cleared up, we should have a proper understanding of Armageddon as well as a basic understanding of the Ezekiel 38,39 invasion.

WHAT IS ARMAGEDDON?

While Christians often speak of “the battle of Armageddon,” the Bible never uses that phrase. In fact, the word Armageddon is used only once in the Bible:

Now the spirits gathered the kings and their armies to the place that is called Armageddon in Hebrew (Revelation 16:16 NET).

John transliterated the Hebrew phrase *har Megiddo* which means “the hill,” or the “mountain of Megiddo” to create the word Armageddon. Transliteration is taking the letters of a word from one language and then making up a new word in a different language.

The Hebrew word Megiddo means the “place of troops” or the “place of slaughter.” It is a geographical area in Israel in the lower Galilee. It is also called the “Valley of Jezreel” and “Plain of Esdraelon.” The total area is about fourteen miles wide and twenty miles long. Napoleon called it “the most natural battlefield of the whole earth.”

PAST EVENTS AT MEGIDDO

It was on this plain that a number of battles have taken place both biblically and non-biblically.

It is where Barak defeated the armies of Canaan (Judges 5:19).

Gideon met the Midianites at this place (Judges 7).

King Saul lost his life there (1 Samuel 31).

This natural corridor was also used by Titus and his Roman army on their way to Jerusalem where they eventually destroyed the city and the Temple in A.D. 70.

In the Middle Ages the Crusaders also traveled though it as did the British General Allenby when he defeated the Turkish armies in the First World War in 1917.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT ARMAGEDDON?

The passage in Revelation concerning the campaign of Armageddon has the armies of the nations of the world gathering together to fight. Through their demonic powers the unholy trinity, the devil himself, the final Antichrist, and the false prophet, will cause the nations of the world and their rulers to assemble their armies

However, the writer of Revelation, John, makes it plain that all these massive military movements are taking place according to the plan of Lord. In other words, He has arranged everything:

And I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs leap from the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. They are demonic spirits who work miracles and go out to all the rulers of the world to gather them for battle against the Lord on that great judgment day of God the Almighty (Revelation 16:13-14 NLT)

Demonic miracles will impress these rulers to the extent that it will cause them to join the campaign.

Interestingly, while the Gentile nations of the world will view Armageddon as a military campaign, to God, it will be only a “dinner for the birds of the sky!” The Bible says:

Their entire army was killed by the sharp sword that came from the mouth of the one riding the white horse. And the vultures all gorged themselves on the dead bodies (Revelation 19:21 NLT).

In Zechariah 12 and 14 it describes this event from the point of view of Israel. Recall, that “the beast,” the final Antichrist, has set up his image in the temple at Jerusalem. Since many of the people of Israel will not bow down and worship him, the Holy City of Jerusalem will be the object of their campaign.

Yet the Scripture is clear that it is not merely the Jews who are involved. Indeed, the living God has a purpose for the Gentile, the non-Jewish, nations as well.

The outcome of the campaign is recorded in Revelation 19. The Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth and defeats these enemies that have defied Him. Long ago, the psalmist wrote of an event such as this:

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure (Psalm 2:4-5 New King James Version).

In sum, the armies of the world who have gathered against Him and His chosen people, Israel, are destroyed at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

THE EZEKIEL 38,39 CAMPAIGN

In contrast to Armageddon, the invasion recorded in Ezekiel 38,39 is of an entirely different nature. We can make the following observations about the differences between these two events.

DIFFERENCE 1 THE COMBATANTS ARE DIFFERENT

To begin with, Ezekiel 38 provides the names of the specific combatants that unite to invade Israel in the last day. They are limited to a few nations:

Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya will join you, too, with all their weapons. Gomer and all its armies will also join you, along with the armies of Beth-togarmah from the distant north (Ezekiel 38:5-6 NLT).

In fact, a number of countries will “sit out” the battle:

Sheba and Dedan and the traders of Tarshish with all its young warriors will say to you, “Have you come to loot? Have you assembled your armies to plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to haul away a great amount of spoils?” (Ezekiel 38:13 NET).

On the other hand, Armageddon will involve all the nations of the earth:

For they are the spirits of the demons performing signs who go out to the kings of the earth to bring them together for the battle that will take place on the great day of God, the All-Powerful (Revelation 16:14 NET)

For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to wage war; the city will be taken (Zechariah 14:2 NET)

Hence, at the outset we find an entirely different cast of characters for each battle:

DIFFERENCE 2 THERE ARE DIFFERENT LEADERS IN EACH BATTLE

There are different leaders in these two military campaigns. The Ezekiel 38,39 invasion is led by a personage with the title “Gog.” He is the leader of a regional group of nations.

The armies of Armageddon are led by the Final Antichrist who is last ruler of the revived Roman Empire. His domination will be worldwide.

DIFFERENCE 3 ISRAEL IS NOT “AT PEACE” WHEN ARMAGEDDON HAPPENS

In Ezekiel, the Bible says that Israel will be “at rest” or “living securely” when they are invaded by these various nations. In other words, they are unsuspecting that an invasion is about to occur:

A long time from now you will be called into action. In the distant future you will swoop down on the land of Israel, which will be enjoying peace after recovering from war and after its people have returned from many lands to the mountains of Israel. You and all your allies—a vast and awesome army—will roll down on them like a storm and cover the land like a cloud (Ezekiel 38:8 NLT).

You will say, “I will invade a land of unwalled towns; I will advance against those living quietly in security - all of them living without walls and barred gates (Ezekiel 38:11 NET).

On the other hand, the campaign of Armageddon takes place at the end of the Great Tribulation period where the world is anything but “at peace” and “rest.”

Indeed, many from Israel will have fled into the wilderness to be supernaturally protected by the Lord for some three and one half years.

When the dragon saw he had been thrown down to the earth, he hunted for the woman who had given birth to the son. But the woman was given the two wings of a great eagle so she could fly to the place prepared for her in the desert. There she would be taken care of for three and one-half years, away from the snake (Revelation 12:13-14 New Century Version).

Other Jews will have been persecuted and killed before this escape.

DIFFERENCE 4 THE ARMIES ARE DESTROYED BY DIFFERENT MEANS

Furthermore, in Ezekiel, the armies are destroyed by various shakings of nature which include hail, torrential downpours, fire and sulphur:

I will summon the sword against you on all the hills of Israel, says the Sovereign LORD. Your men will turn their swords against each other. I will punish you and your armies with disease and bloodshed; I will send torrential rain, hailstones, fire, and burning sulfur! In this way, I will show my greatness and holiness, and I will make myself known to all the nations of the world. Then they will know that I am the LORD (Ezekiel 38:21-23 NLT).

However, at Armageddon they are destroyed by the personal appearance of the King of Kings, the Lord Jesus Christ on His return to the earth:

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the world and their armies gathered together to fight against the one sitting on the horse and his army. And the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who did mighty miracles on behalf of the beast—miracles that deceived all who had accepted the mark of the beast and who worshiped his statue. Both the beast and his false prophet were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Their entire army was killed by the sharp sword that came from the mouth of the one riding the white horse. And the vultures all gorged themselves on the dead bodies (Revelation 19:19-21 NLT).

DIFFERENCE 5 THE TWO MILITARY CAMPAIGNS HAVE A DIFFERENT PURPOSE

The Ezekiel 38,39 invasion will be to plunder the land of Israel:

I [the leader Gog] will go to those formerly desolate cities that are now filled with people who have returned from exile in many nations. I will capture vast amounts of plunder, for the people are rich with livestock and other possessions now (Ezekiel 38:12 NLT).

The campaign of Armageddon will be for the purpose of obliterating the Jewish people:

Watch, for the day of the LORD is coming when your possessions will be plundered right in front of you! I will gather all the nations to fight against Jerusalem. The city will be taken, the houses looted, and the women raped. Half the population will be taken into captivity, and the rest will be left among the ruins of the city (Zechariah 14:1-2 NLT).

DIFFERENCE 6 THE DIRECTION FROM WHICH THE ARMIES COME IS DIFFERENT

Part of the armies that meet at Armageddon will come from the “kings of the east:”

Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great Euphrates River, and it dried up so that the kings from the east could march their armies toward the west without hindrance (Revelation 16:12 NLT).

However, the Ezekiel 38,39 will be led by armies from the “north:”

Therefore, son of man, prophesy against Gog. Give him this message from the Sovereign LORD: When my people are living in peace in their land, then you will rouse yourself. You will come from your homeland in the distant north with your vast cavalry and your mighty army (Ezekiel 38:14,15, NLT).

I will turn you around and drive you toward the mountains of Israel, bringing you from the distant north (Ezekiel 39:2 NLT).

DIFFERENCE 7 GOD’S INTERVENTION CAUSES THE WORLD TO SEE HE IS SUPERNATURALLY WORKING WITH ISRAEL

The Lord will use the His miraculous intervention of the invasion of Ezekiel 38, 39 to cause Israel to see that He is working with them again:

I will display my majesty among the nations. All the nations will witness the judgment I have executed, and the power I have exhibited among them. Then the house of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God, from that day forward (Ezekiel 39:21,22 NET).

The Lord’s protection of Israel becomes clear at least by the midpoint of the final seven year period:

In this way, I will make known my holy name among my people of Israel. I will not let anyone bring shame on it. And the nations, too, will know that I am the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. That day of judgment will come, says the Sovereign LORD. Everything will happen just as I have declared it (Ezekiel 39:7 NLT)

On the other hand, the campaign of Armageddon occurs at the very end of this final seven year period. It ends with the Second Coming of Christ to the world. At that time the world will know that God the Father, and the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, are the Ones punishing the unbelieving world:

Then everyone—the kings of the earth, the rulers, the generals, the wealthy, the powerful, and every slave and free person—all hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. And they cried to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to survive?” (Revelation 1:7 NLT).

DIFFERENCE 8 THE ARMIES ARE DESTROYED AT DIFFERENT LOCATIONS

The armies at Armageddon will fill the land of Israel and reach Jerusalem:

For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to wage war; the city will be taken, its houses plundered, and the women raped. Then half of the city will go into exile, but the remainder of the people will not be taken away (Zechariah 14:2 NET).

At the time of those events,” says the LORD “when I restore the prosperity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather the armies of the world into the valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will judge them for harming my people, my special possession, for scattering my people among the nations, and for dividing up my land. (Joel 3:1,2 NLT),

However, in Ezekiel, this Russian led coalition will be is destroyed on “the mountains of Israel”

Son of man, prophesy against Gog. Give him this message from the Sovereign LORD: I am your enemy, O Gog, ruler of the nations of Meshech and Tubal. I will turn you around and drive you toward the mountains of Israel, bringing you from the distant north. I will knock the bow from your left hand and the arrows from your right hand, and I will leave you helpless. You and your army and your allies will all die on the mountains. I will feed you to the vultures and wild animals (Ezekiel 39:1-4 NLT)

DIFFERENCE 9 CHRIST RETURNS TO THE EARTH AT ARMAGEDDON, NOTHING IS SAID ABOUT THAT IN EZEKIEL

Finally, at the end of the campaign of Armageddon, Jesus Christ returns to the earth. Nothing whatsoever is stated about this in Ezekiel.

To the point, the Bible makes it quite clear that there are two major invasions of Israel during the last seven year period.

SUMMARY

Therefore, we can sum up the differences between the Ezekiel 38,39 invasion and the campaign of Armageddon as follows.

1. The military campaigns will be in different locations
2. They will have different combatants

40 Common Mistakes About Last Days Bible Prophecy Cleared Up

3. Israel is not at peace when Armageddon happens
4. The combatants are destroyed by different means
5. The two military campaigns have different purposes
6. The direction from which the armies come from are different
7. God's intervention in the Ezekiel invasion causes the world to see He is supernaturally working with Israel. This truth is already well known at Armageddon
8. The armies are destroyed in different locations
9. Jesus Christ returns at Armageddon, He does not in the Ezekiel 38,39 invasion.

It is clear that we are dealing with two different events that are still to take place in the future.

MISTAKE 9

THE UNITED STATES IS NOT IN LAST DAYS BIBLE PROPHECY

When we look at the lineup of the nations involved in the Ezekiel 38,39 invasion, we discover a number of things. Not only will there be certain nations in the geographical area around Israel that will not participate in the invasion of Ezekiel 38, 39, there is something else missing from this battle—there is no superpower who will rally to Israel’s side at the time of the end. So, where, we ask, is the United States of America?

We can make the following observations about the scenario the Bible provides for us.

THE EVIL THOUGHT OF GOG

The Bible explains the motivation of Gog—the leader of this “last days” coalition:

Thus says the Lord God: On that day, thoughts will come into your mind, and you will devise an evil scheme and say, ‘I will go up against the land of unwallled villages. I will fall upon the quiet people who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having no bars or gates,’ to seize spoil and carry off plunder, to turn your hand against the waste places that are now inhabited, and the people who were gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell at the center of the earth (Ezekiel 38:10-12 ESV).

Interestingly, we see that an evil thought comes across the mind of the leader. When he has this thought, there is seemingly no hesitation on his part to carry through with his plan. In other words, he hasn’t the slightest worry that some superpower will come to the aid of Israel.

THE WEAK RESPONSE FROM NATIONS IN THE VICINITY OF ISRAEL

In fact, the only response we are told about comes from Sheba and Dedan—the modern day Gulf States including Saudi Arabia. They are merely protesting the invasion:

Sheba and Dedan and the traders of Tarshish with all its young warriors will say to you, “Have you come to loot? Have you assembled your armies to plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to haul away a great amount of spoils?” (Ezekiel 38:13 NET).

To the point, these countries, while protesting, will not intervene militarily on the side of Israel.

DOES THE UNITED STATES PROTEST?

Some have tried to equate “the traders of Tarshish with its young warriors, or young lions” in Ezekiel 38:13 as referring to the United States. In other words, the U.S. does protest the invasion but does not get directly involved.

The problem with this view is that it is anything but clear that the “young lions” of Tarshish can be confidently identified with the USA.

We discuss this in one of our other common mistakes that people make with respect to last days Bible prophecy: The young lions of Tarshish is not referring to the United States (Ezekiel 38:13).

THERE WILL BE NO INTERVENTION BY OTHER NATIONS

Finally, as the invasion occurs, nothing is said about any nation coming to the aid of Israel. Nothing is said about any other nation wishing to send any help to Israel.

To sum up, Israel is left on its own when this attack takes place.

SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN TO THE UNITED STATES

This scenario assumes that something will happen to the United States where it cannot, or will not, come to the aid of Israel. While we do not know exactly what will take place, there are a number of possible scenarios.

POSSIBILITY 1 THE UNITED STATES DOES NOT EXIST

While frightening to think of, it is possible that the USA will no longer exist. Some type of nuclear attack, terrorist attack, plague, etc. could make the United States a wasteland.

Can it happen? Yes. Will it happen? Nobody really knows.

However, we should not rule it out as being beyond the realm of possibilities. If the United States was not in the picture at all, this would explain why this leader, Gog, had no second thoughts about invading Israel.

POSSIBILITY 2 THE UNITED STATES DOES NOT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO GET INVOLVED

A more likely scenario is that the United States has reduced its military force to such a degree, or that it is spread so thin around the world, that it would not be possible for it to come to the aid of Israel in any meaningful way.

In other words, while possibly being willing to help, the USA would find itself in a position that it could not help the Israelis.

There could be other factors that would not allow the United States to become involved. Whatever, the case may be, the USA may be willing to help Israel, but for some unstated reason, they are not able.

POSSIBILITY 3 THE UNITED STATES IS NOT WILLING TO GET INVOLVED

Sadly, it is possible that the United States, while having some capacity to intervene on Israel's behalf, does not wish to. For whatever reason, America chooses to stay out of this battle. This would cause a horrific judgment by the Lord upon the USA.

A WARNING TO THE UNITED STATES

As we documented in "Sign 2" in our book *25 Signs We Are Near The End*, the Bible made it clear that those nations who have attempted to undermine Israel will be punished by God. We documented the fact that five ancient peoples, the Amorites, Moabites, Amalekites, Philistines, and Ammonites, no longer exist because of their repeated attempts to destroy Israel.

This supernatural protection of Israel, promised by God, has never been rescinded. This will be particularly true in these last days with Israel back in the land, as the Bible has predicted. According to Scripture, Israel *must* exist to the very end.

We can only hope and pray that this does not become the situation in the United States. If indeed it eventually does happen, then the United States will be judged by God for undermining Israel. There is no doubt about this.

GOD WILL INTERVENE ON BEHALF OF ISRAEL

One final thing should be mentioned. Israel does indeed have someone who will intervene on their behalf during this invasion—it is the Lord Himself. The Bible explains what will take place in this manner:

As for you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say: “This is what the sovereign Lord says: Look, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal . . . You will fall dead on the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the people who are with you. I give you as food to every kind of bird and every wild beast. You will fall dead in the open field; for I have spoken, declares the sovereign Lord. I will send fire on Magog and those who live securely in the coastlands; then they will know that I am the Lord’ (Ezekiel 39:1,4-6 NET).

Scripture records the Lord completely destroying the invading armies. Hence, at the end of the day, we find that it is God Himself who will fight for Israel and defeat their enemies.

THE BIBLE IS ALL ABOUT ISRAEL, NOT THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In 1889, James Brookes offered a fitting summary of why we do not find America in Bible prophecy:

The vast American republic is not mentioned distinctly in prophecy nor are the Power of Europe, except to announce their doom, while Israel is constantly before the mind of Jehovah through the sacred Scriptures. With Israel was inseparably bound up the fate of the mightiest empires of antiquity, as Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, and so in the future, as the chosen hand for inflicting God’s righteous judgments, it will become the center of His earthly government, and the source of earthly blessings to the nations when Jesus comes to reign (James Brookes, *Maranatha, The Lord Cometh*, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1889, pp. 398, 399).

Lest we forget, God has given us a timepiece, a clock for time and eternity—the nation of Israel. For whatever reason, we, the United States of America, is not a “player” in last days Bible prophecy.

MISTAKE 10

THE YOUNG LIONS OF TARSHISH IN EZEKIEL 38:13 IS NOT REFERRING TO THE UNITED STATES

In the Book of Ezekiel, chapters 38 and 39, the Scripture predicts a last days invasion of Israel by a number of nations. This includes the modern countries of Russia, Iran and Turkey. When the invasion takes place there are a few nations who will protest what is taking place. Ezekiel records their objections:

Sheba and Dedan and the traders of Tarshish with all its young warriors will say to you, “Have you come to loot? Have you assembled your armies to plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to haul away a great amount of spoils?” (Ezekiel 38:13 NET).

Most commentators believe that Sheba and Dedan are located in the modern country of Saudi Arabia or somewhere in that locale in the Persian Gulf.

However, there is no consensus of opinion as to location of the “merchants, or traders, of Tarshish or its “young warriors,” literally “young lions.” Indeed their identity is highly debated.

Some have attempted to equate Tarshish with Britain or Spain and the young lions, or young warriors, with the United States. In other words, it is claimed that the United States is mentioned in last days Bible prophecy.

However, as we shall see, because there are so many uncertainties with this view, it is a mistake to make such a claim. The evidence is as follows:

TARSHISH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

As was true of Sheba and Dedan, the geographical area of Tarshish is said to be made up of merchants or traders. From the various descriptions in Scripture we can make a number of conclusions.

To begin with, we read in the Old Testament about the “ships of Tarshish” which were large oceangoing vessels. We read earlier in Ezekiel:

The ships of Tarshish were the transports for your merchandise. “So you were filled and weighed down in the heart of the seas” (Ezekiel 27:25 NET).

Furthermore, these ships would carry valuable cargo including gold and silver. We are told the following about King Solomon:

The king had a fleet of trading ships at sea along with the ships of Hiram. Once every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons (I Kings 10:22 NET).

“Trading ships,” in Hebrew has the literal meaning of, “a fleet of Tarshish [ships].” This probably refers to large ships either made in Tarshish, or capable of traveling to the distant western port of Tarshish.

Elsewhere the Bible states that the ships of Tarshish brought people from afar. Isaiah wrote:

Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish, bringing your children from afar, with their silver and gold, to the honor of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor (Isaiah 60:9 NET).

Thus, we can conclude that Tarshish was a distant port from Israel. These merchants also traded in iron, tin, and lead as Ezekiel had earlier written:

Tarshish did business with you because of your great wealth of goods; they exchanged silver, iron, tin and lead for your merchandise (Ezekiel 27:12 NET).

From these various passages in Scripture, we discover that the ships of Tarshish were the largest seagoing vessels known to the Ancient Near East. Furthermore, the name was eventually applied to any large ocean-going vessel. Indeed, the ships of Tarshish became a proverbial expression of sea power.

WHERE WAS TARSHISH?

From Scripture we can deduce that Tarshish was some distant seaport from the coast of Israel. But exactly where in the ancient world was Tarshish located? Many answers have been given.

OPTION 1 THE SEPTUAGINT: CARTHAGE (MODERN DAY TUNISIA)

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, renders Tarshish with the Greek word which refers to ancient Carthage. Today this would denote the modern North African country of Tunisia. Many of the ancient Hebrew lexicons, or dictionaries, agree with this designation.

OPTION 2 THE LOCATION IS UNCERTAIN

However, many contemporary lexicons assume that we do not know the location with any certainty. One of the standard Hebrew lexicons had this to say about Tarshish:

The actual site within the lands of the Mediterranean has not been established (Koehler Baumgartner)

Thus, while the older lexicons accepted the identification with Carthage, the modern ones are more skeptical. Other Bible commentators also take this same position—the exact location is unknown.

OPTION 3 BRITAIN

In the past, there has been the suggestion that Tarshish can be identified with modern day Great Britain. However, this identification has not convinced many scholars though it is still popular in some circles.

OPTION 4 SPAIN

The best answer seems to be that Tarshish was a wealthy trading community on the extremity of the Mediterranean world. It is the ancient “Tartessus” which is in the present-day nation of Spain. Ralph Alexander writes:

Tarshish is . . . commonly thought to be located in southern Spain. An inscription from Esharhaddon’s reign implies that it is located at the west end of the Mediterranean Sea (Ralph Alexander, *Ezekiel*, Expositors Bible, Commentary, Zondervan, p. 794).

THE ANCIENT PHOENICIANS

If this view is correct, then the merchants of Tarshish are in some way connected with the seafaring Phoenicians of 3,000 years ago. These Phoenicians merchants established trading posts that were scattered along their various routes in the Ancient Near East during the time of Solomon and thereafter.

WITH ALL ITS (YOUNG WARRIORS, LEADERS, YOUNG LIONS, VILLAGES)

Along with Tarshish we have the phrase that has been variously translated, “with all its young warriors” “leaders,” “with all its young lions,” “with all its villages.” Why do we find these different translations?

In a nutshell, here is the issue.

THE REASONS AS TO WHY THE VERSE IS VARIOUSLY TRANSLATED

The present Hebrew text reads, “with all its young lions.” Yet this does not solve the question. The original Hebrew text consists of consonants only—there are no vowels. The vowel points were added in the seventh century A.D. by Jewish scribes known as the Masoretes.

The vowel points the Masoretes placed in this verse makes the text read, “young lions.” However, the same set of consonants could be repointed with other vowels to read “with all its villages.”

In fact, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, has translated the Hebrew as, “with all its villages.” The ancient Syriac version also has this reading.

The NIV of 2011 follows this understanding of the Hebrew text. This explains why certain translations, and certain commentaries, will refer to the traders of Tarshish “with all its villages.”

However, most Bible commentators believe that the “young lions” was the original reading.

YOUNG LIONS IS OBVIOUSLY SYMBOLIC

If “young lions” is how the original text read, then the question becomes what do these words mean? Obviously, “young lions” is used symbolically in this context. But who is it referring to?

IT REPRESENTS THE STRONG LEADERS OR GREEDY RULERS OF TARSHISH

Young lions seems to refer to the *nature* of the rulers of Tarshish. Charles Feinberg writes:

The young lions of Tarshish are taken to mean either strong leaders or princes or greedy rulers of these commercial communities (Charles Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 223).

Ralph Alexander concurs:

Young lions are often used as figures of energetic rulers (Ralph Alexander, *Ezekiel*, Expositors Bible, Commentary, Zondervan).

The classic Old Testament commentary of Keil and Delitzsch agree:

The lion is a figurative representation of a powerful and victorious ruler (Keil and Delitzsch, *Ezekiel*)

We should note that Keil and Delitzsch cite two passages from earlier in Ezekiel that would help us define the young lions:

What a lioness was your mother among the lions! She lay among young lions; she reared her cubs. She reared one of her cubs; he became a young lion. He learned to tear prey; he devoured people (Ezekiel 19:2-3 NET).

They comment on this illustration:

It is not so much the strength and courage of the lion as its wildness and ferocity that are the points of resemblance in the passage before us. The mother brings up her young ones among young lions, so that they learn to take prey and devour men (Keil and Delitzsch, *Ezekiel*).

We find Egypt compared to a lion in another passage in Ezekiel:

Son of man, sing a lament for Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say to him: You were like a lion among the nations (Ezekiel 32:2 NET).

Keil and Delitzsch offer the following comment on this illustration:

The lion is a figurative representation of a powerful and victorious ruler (Keil and Delitzsch, *Ezekiel*).

Therefore, Keil and Delitzsch make the following conclusion about the meaning of “young lions” in Ezekiel 38:13:

... their young lions, are the rapacious rulers of these trading communities, according to Ezek. 19:3 and 32:2 (Keil and Delitzsch, *Ezekiel*).

This is why we find the English Standard Version translating the verse in Ezekiel 38 as “all its leaders:”

Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish and all its leaders will say to you, ‘Have you come to seize spoil?’ (Ezekiel 38:13 ESV).

This option seems to be the best way of understanding the phrase.

Now the question is this: where are these powerful rulers in Tarshish located today? Herein lies the problem.

These leaders of Tarshish, who will question the coming invasion of Gog, must be from some definite geographical location. Indeed, the two other names in the text Sheba and Dedan represented specific geographical areas at the time of Ezekiel. They are now part of the “Gulf States,” including Saudi Arabia.

So what are we to make of the reference to the “leaders” of Tarshish?

IT REPRESENTS OTHER WESTERN NATIONS

Some see the phrase “the young lions” will be leaders from the nation that ancient Tarshish eventually became—namely Spain. If so, then Spain is likely representative of some larger confederation in the last days.

Tarshish, the farthest known land to the west of Israel, could be representative of all the nations of Western Europe.

It has also contended that this reference to the far western colony of Tarshish was meant as a representation of the large “last days” empire of the Final Antichrist. This is also possible.

Consequently, it has been suggested that Tarshish, or modern Spain, could have been used by Ezekiel to represent all of the western nations, like European, which join with those Persian Gulf states in responding negatively to this invasion by Gog and his allies.

Others see it differently. They believe that this as a reference to the nations of Central and South America and possibly the United States since Spain was involved in discovering North America and ruling over parts of it for a time.

Yet the context in Ezekiel is speaking of those who ruled in the specific geographical area of Tarshish, not some far away country, like the United States of America, which did not exist at the time. Since the young lions are linked with the leaders of Tarshish, this seems to rule any place in a different geographical location.

IF VILLAGES IS ACCEPTED AS THE CORRECT READING

Now, if “all its villages” is accepted as the proper reading here, some commentators believe the text is telling us that some of the countries, or villages, that will come from ancient Tarshish will be involved in this “last days” scenario.

However, this is assuming way too much. Indeed, what the Scripture is saying is that the leaders of Tarshish, along with Sheba and Dedan, the modern day Gulf States, are somehow involved in these questions to the leader of this invading force, Gog.

Since we are dealing with specific geographical areas that will exist at the time of the end, as they did in the days of Ezekiel, it has nothing to do with any nations that might have sprung from the location of ancient Tarshish.

Therefore, the claim that Tarshish and “all its villages,” has something to do with the United States of America is going way beyond the evidence. Therefore, it is a mistake to insist that it is a reference to the USA.

Add to this, “all its villages” is unlikely the proper way to translate the text in Ezekiel. As we mentioned, “young lions” is generally assumed to be the proper reading of the text and young lions, as we have noted, is representative of the rulers or leaders of Tarshish.

So what exactly is Ezekiel referring to?

The best answer seems to be what this geographical area, which is now modern day Spain, will represent in the last days. As we have mentioned, there are several possibilities, including the western nations, most likely European, who will join the modern day Gulf States in protesting the invasion of Gog and his allies. This interpretation fits with overall picture that the Bible gives us of the time of the end.

MISTAKES 11 AND 12

THE PROPER MEANING OF TWO PHRASES IN DANIEL 12:4: “MANY SHALL RUN TO AND FRO” AND “KNOWLEDGE SHALL INCREASE”

In Daniel 12:4, there are a couple of phrases that have caused people to come up with some mistaken interpretations as to what they mean. We read the following:

But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase (Daniel 12:4 ESV)

The New English Translation puts it this way:

But you, Daniel, close up these words and seal the book until the time of the end. Many will dash about, and knowledge will increase” (Daniel 12:4 NET)

What do these phrases mean: “many shall run to and fro” or “many will dash about,” and “knowledge will increase?”

IT DOES NOT REFER TO INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AND THE EXPLOSION OF KNOWLEDGE AT THE TIME OF THE END

It is common to hear people say that “running to and fro” in the last days has the idea of people traveling globally. It is also often claimed that the statement “knowledge will increase” indicates that there will be a worldwide explosion of knowledge at the time of the end.

Hence, they see the fulfillment of these predictions in the ability to travel internationally at a moment’s notice, as well as the vast growth of knowledge which we now have in our modern times.

Is that what is predicted here in Scripture? No, it is certainly not.

THE MEANING OF “PEOPLE WILL RUN TO AND FRO”

The idea behind these words is that people will go everywhere in an attempt to understand the meaning of the prophecies of Daniel. We have this same idea in the Book of Amos where people will seek the word of the Lord:

Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it (Amos 8:11,12 ESV)

They will wander everywhere to seek the word of the Lord but will not find it.

Therefore, to run “to and fro,” or “dash about,” has the idea that many will attempt to understand the meaning of these prophecies of the last days. In doing so, they will search everywhere to try to discover what these prophecies mean.

WHAT IS “THE KNOWLEDGE” THAT WILL INCREASE

The second prediction is clear: as time passes “the knowledge” of the meaning of the prophecies that Daniel wrote about would increase. The Hebrew has the article “the” before the word “knowledge.” In fact, this increase of “the” knowledge was specifically promised in the Book of Daniel:

Many will be purified, made clean, and refined, but the wicked will go on being wicked. None of the wicked will understand, though the wise will understand (Daniel 12:10 NET).

As we get closer to the time of the end, we are specifically told that many will seek to find answers. The wicked will never understand the meaning of these words of Daniel but the wise will indeed understand what these predictions mean.

Therefore, the going to and fro is not predicting more people traveling at the time of the end but rather they will be going everywhere looking for answers as to the meaning of what Daniel wrote. The knowledge that will increase is not knowledge per se, but rather knowledge of the meaning of the predictions found in the Book of Daniel.

To the point, the believers living at the time of the end will be able to make sense of those things which Daniel wrote about so long ago. Warren Wiersbe offers a sensible perspective to these statements:

“Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased” is not a reference to automobiles and jet planes or the advancement of education. It has reference to the study of God’s Word in the last days, especially the study of prophecy. Amos 8:11-12 warns us that the day will come when there will be a famine of God’s Word, and people will run here and there seeking for truth but won’t find it. But God’s promise to Daniel is that, in the last days, His people can increase in their knowledge of prophetic Scripture as they apply themselves to the Word of God. Some interpret “to and fro” to mean running one’s eyes to and fro over the pages of Scripture (Warren Wiersbe *Be Series, Daniel* 12:4-5).

Stephen Miller gives an excellent summation of this passage in Daniel 12:

Gabriel therefore was instructing Daniel to preserve “the words of the scroll,” not merely this final vision but the whole book for those who will live at “the time of the end” when the message will be needed. This future generation will undergo the horrors of the tribulation (“time of distress”) and will need the precious promises contained in the Book of Daniel—that God will be victorious over the kingdoms of this world and that the suffering will last for only a brief time—to sustain them.

An increase in travel toward the end of the age is not the idea of the phrase “will go here and there.” In a number of Old Testament passages (e.g., 2 Chr 16:9; Jer 5:1; Amos 8:12; Zech 4:10), [the] Hebrew ... denotes “to go here and there” in search of a person or thing, and that is the meaning here. An “intense” searching seems indicated by the verb form. The purpose of this search will be “to increase knowledge.” Yet Gabriel was not predicting a mere surge in scientific “knowledge,” and so forth, in the last days. The article appears with “knowledge” (lit., “the knowledge”), showing that a particular kind of “knowledge” was intended, that is, when and how Daniel’s message is to be fulfilled. As the time of fulfillment draws nearer, the “wise” will seek to comprehend these prophecies more precisely, and God will grant understanding (“knowledge”) to them (Stephen Miller, *Daniel*, The New American Commentary, Broadman Holman).

Daniel himself did not understand what he saw and heard at the time he recorded this prophecy. It is humbling to know that we, living at this time in history, are able to see so many of the things falling into place that the ancient prophets wrote about. The words that the Lord Jesus said to His disciples are pertinent to us living at this time in history:

40 Common Mistakes About Last Days Bible Prophecy Cleared Up

But your eyes are blessed because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it (Matthew 13:16,17 NET).

We are indeed blessed to be living at this time! This should be the lesson that we learn when we correctly understand the meaning of Daniel 12:4.

MISTAKE 13

THE LOCATION OF THE FIRST AND SECOND TEMPLES WAS ON THE TEMPLE MOUNT NOT 1/3 OF A MILE SOUTH OF IT

The author first heard this odd theory in the 1990's when he received a book by a man named Ernest Martin. Martin argued that the Temple Mount was never the site of the two Temples in the history of Israel. I was incredulous about his thesis and his conclusions.

As one who had visited the Temple Mount dozens of time, who had done intense study on its history as well as its geography, it was hard to believe that someone would come up with a theory so wrong-headed.

Well, as Solomon said, there is “nothing new under the sun.” This theory has been revived in recent years and has gotten a lot of traction through the internet.

Rather than re-invent the wheel, and write my own evaluation on the subject, I've decided to list the conclusions of three world class archaeological specialists on this matter: Henry Smith, Dr. Scott Stripling, and Scott Lanser.

They wrote the following summary of some of the errors of those who would claim that the Temple Mount was not the location of two temples in Israel's history. They belong to a wonderful group known as biblical research associates. Their website is biblearchaeology.org. If you are looking for a worthwhile group of Christians to financially support you could not do better than them.

The following is their summary on the matter:

SUMMARY OF REVISIONIST ERRORS

1. Jesus did not predict that every single stone in every single building in first century Jerusalem would be torn down to bedrock by the Romans. This hyper literalizing of Jesus' words is not supported by the context of his statements, the point he was making, or the archaeological evidence (Mt 24:1–2, Mk 13:1–2, Lk 21:5–6, Lk 19:41–44). Paradoxically, revisionists (wrongly) claim the existing Temple Mount platform was actually the superstructure of the Antonia Fortress. If this were the case, and the hyper literal interpretation of Jesus is correct, then why is the platform consisting of 30 courses of stone still there?
2. The present-day Temple Mount was not the superstructure of the Roman Antonia Fortress. Its remnants have been found on the northwest corner of the Temple Mount, confirming Josephus' statements about its location and its destruction by Jewish rebels during the Great Revolt.
3. Josephus did not claim that an entire Roman legion could have been housed or must have been housed in the Antonia Fortress. The word Josephus uses to describe the Roman legion is distorted by the revisionists to support this claim.
4. Archaeological evidence unearthed from around the Temple Mount is entirely Jewish in nature. This includes inscriptions and iconic objects near Robinson's Arch, gentile prohibition and the place of trumpeting inscriptions, opus sectile pavers, and Jewish ritual baths (*miqvaot*). If the Temple Mount was the Roman Antonia Fortress instead, there would be no such archaeological evidence.
5. Revisionists misinterpret future looking prophetic passages in Joel and Ezekiel to claim that there must have been a spring in the Temple complex. Nowhere does the Bible say that there was a spring inside the Temple complex in antiquity.

6. The Temple did not need a spring inside its complex to operate the biblical sacrificial system. Millions of gallons of water were available by way of cisterns, aqueducts, and *miqvaot*. Water could also be brought by manual labor from the Gihon Spring, and also from the Strouthian Pool, and the Pools of Bethesda and Siloam. Thus, the Temple did not have to be over or next to the Gihon Spring.

7. Upon close examination and analysis, ancient sources which purport that the Temple had a spring within its precinct are problematic and unreliable. The *Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates* (§§83–120) is the best-known example. As it pertains to the geography of Israel, *Aristeas* is unreliable. The letter states that the Jordan River flows into the Mediterranean Sea! It clearly was not authored by someone who had visited Jerusalem. Dr. Stripling and Dr. Craig Evans will examine *Aristeas* and other sources in detail in a forthcoming article in the *Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin*.

8. Archaeological evidence from the City of David has irrefutably shown that a massive garbage dump was there in the first century, right where the revisionists claim that the Temple stood. This makes it physically impossible for the Temple to have stood in the City of David in the days of Jesus.

9. All relevant biblical texts indicate that the Temple was built on Mount Moriah, not in the City of David.

10. Revisionists wrongly argue that the statement “Solomon repaired the millo” means he built the Temple in the City of David (1 Kgs 9:18, 9:24, 11:27). The biblical texts say no such thing, and they clearly distinguish the Temple from the millo: “And this is the account of the forced labor that King Solomon drafted to build the house of the Lord and his own house and the Millo and the wall of Jerusalem and Hazor and Megiddo and Gezer” (I Kings 9:15).

11. The use of the term “Zion” in the Bible does not necessitate that the Temple was in the City of David. The meaning of Zion changed over time and was used differently depending on the context. “Zion” is used over 150 times in the OT, often as a synonym for Jerusalem. “For out of Zion shall go forth the Law [Torah], and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3). The term is not limited to the City of David, and often encompassed what it now the Temple Mount. The phrase “Mount Zion” is also used many times and is not limited to the City of David.

12. Archaeological discoveries found in and around the Temple Mount indicate that the Temple stood there, not down in the City of David. Archaeological evidence does not migrate uphill. Erosion migrates archaeological material downhill. This is *Archaeology 101*.

13. Solomon brought the ark of the covenant **UP AND OUT** of the City of David and into the Temple. Thus, the Temple was not in the City of David. “Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers’ houses of the people of Israel, in Jerusalem, **to bring up** the ark of the covenant of the Lord **out of the city of David**, which is Zion” (II Chronicles 5:2).

14. Araunah’s threshing floor was not located in the Jebusite fortress in the City of David (2 Sam 24:18–25, 1 Chron 21:18–30, 2 Chron 3:1). The threshing floor and the Temple itself were on Mount Moriah: “Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to David his father, at the place that David had appointed, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite” (2 Chronicles 3:1).

15. A large city wall from the time of Hezekiah on the eastern slope of the City of David has been discovered just south of the Gihon Spring. This wall stood at the time when the revisionists claim that the Temple and its massive superstructure stood in the same place. This discovery, like the garbage dump from the time of Jesus, makes the revisionist theory physically impossible.

16. Qualified, trained, and credentialed archaeologists disagree with one another on just about everything regarding the archaeology of Israel with one salient exception—the location of Solomon’s and Herod’s Temple on the modern-day Temple Mount in Jerusalem!

We strongly urge professing Christians to reject theories and arguments which advocate (re)locating the Temple in the City of David. The arguments are vacuous and do not advance the case for the reliability of the Bible or the Gospel itself.

This article was from biblearchaeology.org titled *Temple Mount Revisionism, Requisite in Pace! (Rest in Peace)*

To sum up, the idea that the Temple was located any place other than the Temple Mount is ludicrous. As the writers mentioned in point 16, there is complete agreement among all experts in the field as to the general location of the Temple, it was on the Temple Mount.

WHERE DID THE TEMPLE STAND ON THE TEMPLE MOUNT?

Having said this, there is no agreement whatsoever as to where the precise location of the Temple was on the Temple Mount.

The following is what I have written in my book *The Jews, Jerusalem and the Coming Temple* (it is a free download on our website educatingourworld.com under the section on *Bible Prophecy*).

Since the Temple Mount is presently under Muslim control, any on site work to determine where the Temple had once stood is simply impossible. The Muslims, for their part, do not even acknowledge there ever was a Jewish Temple located on the Temple Mount.

The fact that archaeological excavation on the Temple Mount is not possible has not stopped scholars from attempting to locate the Temple site through other means.

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF POSSIBLE LOCATIONS AS TO WHERE THE TEMPLE STOOD

There have been various theories as to where the ancient Temple stood. They include the following popular ones:

1. The Temple stood over the site of the Dome of the Rock Shrine. The sacred rock was where the Holy of Holies was located.
2. Another view says that the sacred rock was where the altar of sacrifice stood, not the Holy of Holies. The altar was located slightly east of the Temple proper. Therefore, the Temple would have stood slightly west of the Dome of the Rock.
3. The Temple stood 106 meters to the north and the west of the Dome of the Rock shrine. A small monument known as the “Dome of the Spirits” or the “Dome of the Tablets” stands today where the Holy of Holies once stood.
4. The Temple originally stood to the south of the Dome of the Rock—between it and the Al Aksa Mosque. A large fountain stands today where the Holy of Holies once stood.
5. Another recent theory says the Temple originally stood even further to south of the Dome of the Rock, near the Al Aksa Mosque.

6. One other theory, which has not gained any prominence among scholars, for obvious reasons, is that the present-day Temple Mount is not the site of the Temple. The Temple was actually built about one third of a mile to the south of the Dome of the Rock in the ancient city of David.

We can summarize them in the following manner.

OPTION 1 THE TEMPLE STOOD OVER THE PRESENT-DAY DOME OF THE ROCK

The most generally accepted view among scholars is that the Dome of the Rock shrine was built over the location of the First and Second Temple. The Dome was built over a rock-mass known to the Muslims as *as-Sakbra*. This rock-mass, where it is thought that the Holy of Holies was located, is the highest point on the Temple Mount.

Because it is believed that this golden Dome was purposely erected over this rock-mass to keep the Jews from ever building another Temple, the site of the Dome of the Rock has been a popular choice for the original location of the Temple.

OPTION 2 THE TEMPLE STOOD WEST OF THE DOME OF THE ROCK

Another possibility is that the Temple stood west of the sacred rock. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* notes:

The most probable site of the Temple is just west of the “Dome of the Rock” in the center of the Mosque of Omar. The bronze altar was probably built upon this rock. The mosque was built over a rock the traditions of which are sacred; probably the site was the same as that of the temple which Hadrian erected to Jupiter. This in turn was the site of Herod’s temple, which would naturally be that of Solomon’s. The persistency of sacred sites in the East makes this most likely (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, p. 139).

According to this theory, the sacred rock was the where the altar of sacrifice stood—not the Holy of Holies. This would place the location of the Temple a little to the west of the Dome.

WHAT WAS THE ROCK?

As we have just noted, there is disagreement among those who propose the Dome of the Rock site as to where the Holy of Holies stood. Some believe the rock-mass marks the spot of the Holy of Holies. Others believe the Holy of Holies was further west on the Temple Mount. The rock-mass was where the altar of sacrifice stood.

Each of these theories asserts that the “sacred rock” was an integral part of the First and Second Temple. In recent years, the Dutch architect, Leen Ritmeyer, has made a solid case for the Dome of the Rock site as the original location for the Temple with the sacred rock as the location for the “Holy of Holies.” As mentioned, this is the generally accepted view of where the ancient Temples stood.

OPTION 3 THE THEORY OF ASHER KAUFMAN: THE DOME OF THE TABLETS

There is another theory as to where the Temple had originally stood—one that has been proposed by a plasma physicist and an observant Jew, the late Dr. Asher Kaufman. In 1974, Kaufman began to explore the subject of the original location of the Temple.

Being an observant Jew he faced an immediate problem. According to Jewish Law, no observant Jew is allowed to walk on the Temple Mount for fear he might accidentally walk upon the Holy of Holies. This rule seemed to keep Dr. Kaufman from making a first-hand examination of the Mount.

However, he discovered that a non-priest could walk upon the area if he were considered to be cleaning, repairing, or rebuilding the Temple. Though the rebuilding for him was purely theoretical, this allowed him to walk upon the Temple Mount and do his research.

THE APPROACH OF KAUFMAN

Kaufman's approach combined a number of methods. These included the study of ancient Jewish sources that describe the Temple, and its vicinity, along with the Temple rituals. He also applied techniques from modern methods of measurement, astronomical observations, as well as onsite inspection. In 1977, Kaufman wrote:

An air of mystery surrounds the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Where was it situated in the Temple area (Haram ash-Sharif)? What did it look like? For generations, scholars in general, clergy, archaeologists, engineers and historians have attempted to answer these two questions. The rock as-Sakhra in the Dome of the Rock plays a central role in the vast majority of these deliberations. It is regarded as the site either of the Holy of Holies or of the Altar of Sacrifice. A third question—is there any visible sign of the Temple today?—was answered by Simons (1952, p. 435) in the negative: “In contrast, however, with the principal monument of ancient Athens the buildings within the sacred precincts at Jerusalem have utterly disappeared.”

THE TEMPLE WAS IN A DIFFERENT LOCATION THAN USUALLY BELIEVED

Dr. Kaufman's research led him to a startling conclusion—the site of the Temple is not the Dome of the Rock! According to Kaufman, the Temple's original location was 330 feet to the north and the west of the Dome. The site has a small shrine, or cupola, known as the “Dome of the Spirits” or “Dome of the Tablets.” He believed that the flat rock, which this small shrine covers, was the location of the Holy of Holies—where the Ark of the Covenant stood. He wrote:

It is almost axiomatic among scholars that no trace of the Jewish Temple is to be found on Jerusalem's Temple Mount. . . . Despite this scholarly consensus, there *are*, however, traces of remains—a line of stones, a worked rock-mass, a cistern—and these ancient relics are sufficient, when added to the literary sources to locate the Second Temple, and even to trace out the First Temple, on the Temple Mount.

One of the most surprising conclusions from this evidence is that the golden Dome of the Rock in the middle of the Temple Mount was *not* built on the site of the Temple but to the south of it. The Original Temple site is approximately 330 feet (100 meters) to the northwest of the Dome of the Rock (Asher S. Kaufman, “Where The Ancient Temple of Jerusalem Stood,” *Biblical Archeological Review*, Vol. IX No. 2, March/April 1983, p. 42).

THE DOME OF THE SPIRITS

Kaufman believed that the title of this small shrine may be a reminder of its original purpose. He wrote the following:

In Arabic this cupola is called Qubbat el-Arwah, Dome of the Spirits. Has this Arabic name preserved an ancient memory of the holiness of the site? In Sinai, where the glory of the Lord appeared before the whole community of Israel, Moses and Aaron addressed the Lord as “God of the spirits of all mankind” (Numbers 16:22; see also Numbers 27:16, Ezekiel 37, Job 12:10). Dome of the Spirits is certainly an appropriate name to mark the dwelling place of the Lord's name, the center of his Divine presence (Kaufman, *Biblical Archeological Review*, p. 45).

The biblical basis for this name, the Dome of the Spirits, is possibly found in two passages in the Old Testament Book of Numbers. We read these words:

But Moses and Aaron fell face down and cried out, “O God, God of every human spirit, will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?” . . . May the LORD, the God of every human spirit, appoint someone over this community (Numbers 16:22; 27:16 NIV).

THE DOME OF THE TABLETS

The shrine has another name, the Dome of the Tablets. Kaufman noted its significance:

But this cupola has another Arabic name: Qubbat el-Alouah, Dome of the Tablets. In the Holy of Holies of Solomon’s Temple was kept the Ark of the Covenant, now lost, containing the two stone Tablets of the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai. According to M. de Vogue, the name Dome of the Tablets was given to this cupola because it is dedicated to the memory of the Tablets of the Law. Once more a name preserves the ancient memory of the location of the Holy of Holies (Kaufman, *Biblical Archeological Review*, p. 45).

Kaufman traced the tradition regarding the Dome of the Tablets back to the seventh century A.D. Some Christians, Jews, and Muslims have accepted his view as the actual site of the Temple. However, his theory has been rejected by other scholars and archaeologists. Again, only time will tell whether or not this was the original site.

On a personal note: The author became good friends with Asher Kaufman and had the privilege of touring the Temple Mount, as well as the Mount of Olives, with this wonderful and brilliant man. I’ll be forever thankful for hours we spent discussing the location of the Temple.

OPTION 4 SOUTH OF THE DOME

A fourth possibility is that the Temple stood on the southern side of the Temple Mount. This would place it between the two later structures built upon the Mount—the Dome of the Rock Shrine and the Al Aqsa Mosque. The *Jewish Encyclopedia*, though noting that people in the past have argued for a southern location of the Temple, dismisses the theory:

There can be no doubt that the Temple of Solomon was situated upon the more easterly of the two hills which form the present Haram area in Jerusalem, in the center of which is the Mosque of Omar. Ferguson, Trupp, Lewin and W.R. Smith held that the Temple was built in the southwest corner of the present Haram area: but this view is false. That site is a part of an artificial extension of the level of the Temple area over the Tyropeon valley and probably was not made before the time of Herod (*Encyclopedia Judaica* p. 114).

However, there have been some recently discovered facts that may provide evidence that the Temple did stand on the southern part of the Mount. Israeli architect Tuvia Sagiv has presented a case for the southerly location. However, as with the case of Asher Kaufman’s “northern hypothesis,” not everyone is convinced by his evidence.

OPTION 5 THE TEMPLE STOOD FURTHER SOUTH ON THE MOUNT

Similar to the previous option, is a new theory that claims the Temple stood even further to the south of the Dome of the Rock—at the site of the Al Aksa Mosque rather than between these two structures. Only time will tell if this theory gains any traction among the experts.

OPTION 6 IT WAS NOT BUILT ON THE TEMPLE MOUNT

This is the theory of the late Bible scholar Ernest Martin. He concluded that scholars have made wrong conclusions with respect to the site of the ancient Temple. His view is that the Temple was located some one

third of a mile south from the present-day Mount in the area of the ancient City of David. The problem is that this theory has never gained any traction with qualified scholars (as we have just illustrated!).

ONLY TIME WILL TELL AS TO WHERE THE TEMPLE STOOD

This is a brief summary of some of the more popular theories which have been proposed as to where the Temple originally stood. In fact, about twenty different sites on the Temple Mount have been suggested for the exact location of the Temple. It would take an entire book to examine the arguments for each site, pro and con.

In sum, we again emphasize that only time will tell which theory is correct since it is presently impossible to do any excavating on the Mount.

However, what we can conclude is that the First and Second Temples were indeed built upon the Temple Mount and not to the south of it as this popular new theory claims.

MISTAKE 14

THE NEXT TEMPLE WILL BE THE TRIBULATION TEMPLE: CHRISTIANS SHOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH ITS CONSTRUCTION

Along with the incorrect view that the Temple in Jerusalem stood somewhere besides the Temple Mount there is another incorrect view that has recently gained traction: the next Temple built will be the one in which Jesus rules and reigns from.

However, the next Temple will be the “tribulation Temple” not the one that Jesus will rule from when He returns. Consequently, Christians have no business encouraging the building of the next Temple.

THE LORD WILL RULE FROM THE TEMPLE

It is true that the Bible speaks of a future time when the people on the earth will visit Jerusalem where the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, will rule and reign. Isaiah wrote about this:

This is a vision that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

In the last days, the mountain of the LORD’s house will be the highest of all—the most important place on earth.

It will be raised above the other hills, and people from all over the world will stream there to worship.

People from many nations will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of Jacob’s God.

There he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths.”

For the LORD’s teaching will go out from Zion; his word will go out from Jerusalem.

The LORD will mediate between nations and will settle international disputes.

They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will no longer fight against nation, nor train for war anymore (Isaiah 2:1-4 NLT).

We believe that this prediction will be literally fulfilled in the future. However, this will not be the next Temple that will be constructed in Jerusalem.

Indeed, there will a structure built in unbelief of Jesus on the Temple Mount. It will be center-stage, ground zero, for the main events that will take place in the last days.

We have fully documented this in our book, *The Jews, Jerusalem, and the Coming Temple*. It can be downloaded for free from our website educatingourworld.com under the heading of *Bible Prophecy*.

To sum up, at the end of the day, there will be four Temples that will have been built upon the Temple Mount. Two have already been constructed and two are still to come.

ISRAEL’S FOUR TEMPLES

When all is said and done, the nation Israel will have had four Temples built upon the Temple Mount in its history. They include the following.

1. The First Temple was Solomon’s, although the idea came from his father David. It was built in 967 B.C. and destroyed in 587 B.C. by the Babylonians.

2. The Second Temple was that of Zerubbabel, a smaller version of Solomon’s Temple. It was built after the destruction of the First Temple, and then later enlarged by King Herod.

This is the Temple to which Jesus came. He predicted its destruction, and, as predicted, it was destroyed by the Roman army in the year A.D. 70.

3. The Third Temple is yet to be built. It will be built in unbelief of Jesus. Most likely it will be destroyed some time before He comes again.

4. The Fourth Temple is the Millennial Temple—the Temple of the Messiah Jesus. It will be built *after* He returns to the earth and it will be constructed to honor Him (see Ezekiel 40-48). It will be an entirely different structure than the Third Temple.

Let us not make the mistake of confusing the third and fourth Temple. The Third Temple will be an abomination to the Lord since it, by definition, rejects Jesus as the genuine Messiah by offering animal sacrifices for sin.

In the Fourth Temple there will be no need for sacrifices for sin. Indeed, He has once and for all paid the price for our sins. The writer to the Hebrews put it this way:

... and so when he had accomplished cleansing for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3 NET).

He sat down because His work was finished! As believers, we continually thank the Lord for this amazing truth.

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIANS AND THE FUTURE TEMPLE

Since we know what the Bible predicts about a coming Temple that will be built in the last days, Christians are confronted with some important questions as to their involvement with the rebuilding of the Temple.

What should a Christian do and not do?

THIS IS NOT OUR CAUSE

Though we know from the Scripture that a Third Temple is predicted, and will indeed be built, Christians should *not* participate in its planning, promotion, or construction. This is not our cause.

Some have argued that there was Gentile participation in building the First Temple so the same should be true with the “Coming Temple.” However, Gentile participation in the building of the First Temple does not serve as a precedent for Gentile participation today. Those involved in building the First Temple were not Gentile believers. Their involvement was not due to their devotion to the God of Israel—rather, their services were conscripted. Therefore, to assert modern day Gentiles should help with the rebuilding of the Temple finds no Biblical basis.

THE TEMPLE WILL BE BUILT IN UNBELIEF OF JESUS

There is something else to consider. While the New Testament teaches that a Third Temple will be built, it also declares it will be built in unbelief of Jesus as the Messiah. The Third Temple will be ground zero, center stage, for the activities of the man of sin, the final Antichrist. The future events surrounding the Third Temple will not honor Jesus in any way.

THERE IS NO FURTHER NEED FOR A TEMPLE

For the Christian there is no more need for a physical Temple. Jesus said about Himself, “something greater than the Temple is here” (Matthew 12:6).

When Christ died for the sins of the world, He made direct access to God the Father possible. The Bible says:

For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human (1 Timothy 2:5 NET).

The need for a Temple, and the sacrificial system, is now gone. Indeed, all of these things were fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ by His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. No more sacrifices are necessary! Those Christians who participate in the rebuilding efforts of the Third Temple would be sharing in the unbelief of the Jews.

WE CANNOT HASTEN THE COMING OF THE LORD TO THE EARTH

The motive of some, “to hasten the coming of the Lord,” is equally a wrong motive. For one thing, God is running this universe according to His schedule, not ours.

Furthermore, those Christians who want the Temple built should realize that this will lead Israel into their worst Holocaust ever. There is no moral or Biblical justification in becoming involved in the building of the Third Temple. It is a Jewish cause.

In sum, we need a proper understanding of the distinction between the Third Temple, that of the Final Antichrist, and the Fourth Temple, that of the Lord Jesus. Let us not confuse the two.

MISTAKE 15

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THE RED HEIFER

An announcement was made on Thursday, September 15th, 2022, that five red heifers, bred by a Christian rancher in the state of Texas, had arrived in Israel. This has caused much excitement in certain quarters of those following last days Bible prophecy.

Why? It is contended that these red heifers meet all of the biblical requirements for sacrifice. Supposedly, the sacrifice of a red heifer is absolutely necessary before the Third Temple can be built. The fact that finally an appropriate heifer now exists is claimed to be a major step in the rebuilding of a Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

IT IS NOT A SIGN OF THE SOON COMING OF CHRIST

Is this something for Bible believers to get excited about? Is this a sign of the soon coming of Christ? The answer is a categorical, “No!” Indeed, it is a mistake to claim that it is.

Why do I say this? Well, first let’s take a trip down memory lane.

In the early 1980’s I started doing a detailed study on Bible prophecy with an emphasis on the predictions in Scripture that a Third Temple was to be built in the last days. The First Temple, built by Solomon, was destroyed in 587 B.C. while the Second Temple, built after the Jews returned from Babylon and then later enlarged by King Herod, was destroyed in A.D. 70.

It was also at that time that I first got acquainted with Israeli activists who wanted to see a Third Temple built. This eventually led to my book “The Coming Temple” (co-authored with Chuck Missler).

Since then I’ve written other books on the issue, the latest being *The Jews, Jerusalem, and the Coming Temple*. (this is a free download at our website educatingourworld.com... it can be found under the heading *Bible Prophecy*.)

Among the subjects that were dealt with included the spreading of the ashes of a sacrificed red heifer for the purpose of removing the defilement from the Temple Mount. It has been claimed that this is necessary before a new temple can be built.

In the early 1980’s there was excitement about the discovery of a red heifer that seemingly fit the biblical requirements. An American farmer who lived in the state of Mississippi claimed that he had bred a red heifer that was biblically acceptable.

Since I was working on the book about the coming Temple, as well as speaking on the subject, I would often be asked about this supposed claim. The questions were, “Does this mean the Temple will be built soon?” Is this a sign of the soon coming of Christ?

For questions such as this. I always gave the same reply, “No, it has nothing to do with the soon coming of the Lord.”

So, why did I say this some forty years ago as well as saying the same thing when this new announcement was made? Well, there are a number of reasons.

THE JEWS DO NOT HAVE THE TEMPLE MOUNT UNDER THEIR CONTROL

First and foremost, a sacrifice today would be worthless according to Jewish hopes of building a new temple. Why? To begin with, the real estate where a new temple will be built, the Temple Mount, is not in the hands of the Israelis but rather continues to be controlled by Islam.

In June 1967, when the Jerusalem was liberated, and the Temple Mount was back in the hands of the Israelis for the first time since A.D. 70, there was excitement that a new temple would soon be built. However, ten days after the liberation of the Temple Mount the defense minister Moshe Dayan met the Muslim leadership and agreed to give back the custodianship of the area to Islam.

THERE IS STILL NO FREEDOM OF WORSHIP ON THE TEMPLE MOUNT

Supposedly the Jews were to have freedom of worship on the Temple Mount but that never became a reality. To this day, the Jews, instead of worshipping on the Mount have to settle with worshipping at the Western Wall of the Temple Mount complex. In other words, there is no Jewish or Christian worship allowed on the Mount. No praying, no overt worship of any kind is tolerated.

So, Jews cannot even openly worship on the Temple Mount, let alone plan to build a Third Temple. Therefore, the idea of sacrificing a pure red heifer in anticipation of building the next temple is literally out of the question.

THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT HAVE YET TO SUPPORT FREEDOM OF WORSHIP ON THE MOUNT

Add to this, the various Israeli governments since 1967, have not looked favorably on allowing the freedom of the Jews to openly worship on the Mount, let alone constructing a new temple.

So, this is why, when I'm asked the question about the subject of the red heifer and the soon return of Christ I continue to give the same answer as I did four decades ago.

Sadly, there have been numerous Christians, who believed that the coming of Christ was imminent, because of the signs that were taking place, that have now been deflated by the passing of time. Some have left the faith while others have become scoffers. It is heartbreaking to talk to such people.

Why? Because they were assured that the Bible predicted that Christ must come soon after certain events took place. Since He did not, they assumed the Bible was in error; rather than those who misinterpreted what it taught on the subject.

Hopefully, from this discussion we can learn some valuable lessons. Yes, Christ is returning. Yes, there are many signs that are setting the stage for His return. However, this issue of the red heifer is NOT one of them.

Furthermore, as the Bible says, we do NOT know the day nor hour of His return. He has NOT limited Himself to returning by any particular date.

Will it be soon? We do not know. I asked people in the 1980's what if Christ does not return in the next few years? There is nothing that requires this to happen. Usually, I was met with derision. He's coming back soon I was told. Soon, to them, was in a few years at the most. As we know, that did not happen.

I repeated the same question to believers in the 1990's, the 2000's, 2010 to 2020. Unhappily I usually got the same response. He must come back soon. No, He does not have to.

He certainly may return in the near future but there are no circumstances, or biblical requirements, forcing His immediate return.

40 Common Mistakes About Last Days Bible Prophecy Cleared Up

In the meantime, we should be going about our lives living for Him and preaching the message of His First Coming. The cross of Jesus Christ remains the message that we are to proclaim, though it often gets lost when people talk about “last days” Bible prophecy. Please do not let it happen to you!

MISTAKES 16, 17 AND 18

THREE COMMON MISTAKES CLEARED UP FROM THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE IN MATTHEW 24:32-35

There are three common mistakes that are widely made when the parable of the fig tree in Matthew 24 is examined, namely the fig tree does not represent Israel in Matthew 24:32, the budding of the leaves in the parable is not symbolic of their return to their national homeland in the last days, and the term “this generation” in Matthew 24:34 is not meant for us to calculate the end of the church age, when the rapture and then the Second Coming of Christ take place.

We can make the following observations:

THE BACKGROUND

The teaching of Jesus in Matthew 24 and 25 is known as the “Olivet Discourse.” The name derives from the location where He delivered it to His disciples, on the Mount of Olives. This occurred a few days before His death. In it, He is answering a couple of questions that the disciples asked:

Now as Jesus was going out of the temple courts and walking away, his disciples came to show him the temple buildings. And he said to them, “Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone will be left on another. All will be torn down! As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, his disciples came to him privately and said, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:1-3 NET).

His disciples wanted to know the signs of His coming which would mark the end of this present age. In other words, what signs do we look for that indicate Your kingdom will be established upon the earth?

In giving the answer, as recorded in Matthew 24:4-15, the Lord gave eleven different signs of the end. After listing these signs, Jesus then gave the parable of fig tree:

Learn this parable from the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also you, when you see all these things, know that he is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (Matthew 24:32-35 NET).

What did our Lord mean by this? What does the “fig tree” represent? Was it used as a symbol of Israel, and its budding leaves was a fulfillment of the prediction of their “last days” return to their ancient homeland? Was this what this particular sign meant?

Many Bible students believe this is precisely what Jesus meant. The parable was meant to inform them that when Israel returns to their ancient homeland in the last days the prophetic clock then starts. Indeed, the generation that is alive at the time of the return of the nation will not all pass away until He returns to the earth and sets up His kingdom.

Therefore, it is a monumental sign of His soon coming. Indeed, it is “the” sign that believers are to look for that inform us that He will return soon.

THE ARGUMENT THAT THE FIG TREE PREDICTS ISRAEL'S RETURN AT THE END OF THE AGE

If this is the case, then there are a couple of important questions that need answering. First, when does this prophetic clock start? Is it with the re-establishment of the modern state of Israel in their land in 1948, or is it at the time of the re-unification of Jerusalem in 1967?

The second question is “how long is a generation?” Is it forty years, fifty years, or is it longer?

When Israel became a modern state in 1948 a number of believers thought the prophetic clock started at that time and that a generation was a forty year period.

This is why some people were predicting the Second Coming of Christ would occur in 1988 and the rapture of the church some seven years earlier in 1981.

The seven-year difference refers to the period known as the 70th week of Daniel, the time of Jacob's trouble, or the more popular, but not the precise term, the Great Tribulation.

Well, obviously, that was not the correct interpretation of the parable! Indeed, neither of these events happened in those years.

This caused some to put the starting date to 1967 with the reunification of Jerusalem. Hence, the Second Coming would take place in 2007 with the rapture occurring seven years earlier in 2000.

Of course, that did not work either.

Some of those who continue to cling onto this view now contend that the “generation” lasts longer than forty years. In fact, it has been argued that it could be as many as one hundred years! Therefore, the prediction remains to be fulfilled in the future.

Is this the way we should attempt to understand what Jesus was telling us?

THREE COMMON MISTAKES ARE MADE

The answer is, “No.” As we mentioned at the outset, there are three common mistakes that those holding this view make, namely that the fig tree represents the nation of Israel, that its leaves that bud represent the nation's rebirth in the last days, and that the generation that sees their return to their ancient homeland, or the reunification of Jerusalem, is promised to see the Second Coming of Christ.

We can list the following five problems with this view:

FIRST PROBLEM THE FIG TREE IS NEVER EQUATED WITH ISRAEL IN THE BIBLE

There is the problem of attempting to equate the fig tree with the nation of Israel. Consider the following:

Fig Tree

sykê is a term denoting a literal “fig tree” in each of the sixteen contexts in which it is found (cf. Matt. 21:19ff.; 24:32; Mark 11:13ff.; 13:28; Luke 13:6ff.; John 1:48ff.; Jas. 3:12; Rev. 6:13). (*Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*).

After examining the evidence, the conclusion is that the Greek word *sykê*, translated fig tree, is always used of a literal fig tree in each of its occurrences in the New Testament.

The following is a summary of the use of “figs” and “fig trees” in the Old Testament:

Figs and fig trees in the Old Testament symbolize both blessing and judgment. They indicate security and prosperity in the land of Canaan (cf. 2 Kgs. 18:31; Isa. 36:16; Mic. 4:4; Zech. 3:10). In Joel 2:22; Hag. 2:19 they signify promised renewal, after the inflicting of divine judgment. In contrast, the deprivation of figs and fig trees is often a clear sign of Yahweh punishing his people for their covenant disobedience (cf. Jer. 5:17; 8:13; Hos. 2:12; Joel 1:12; Amos 4:9; Hab. 3:17). Rotten figs are also symbolic of divine judgment (cf. Jer. 24:1ff.; Hos. 9:10; also Nah. 3:12) (*Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*).

We should note what is not said, namely, that fig tree is ever used symbolically for the nation of Israel. It is not.

In sum, the evidence is that the fig tree is NEVER used symbolically for the nation of Israel in the entire Bible! See Appendix 1 for full documentation of this.

SECOND PROBLEM JESUS' WORDS, “WHEN YOU SEE ALL THESE THINGS”

The parable of the fig tree is given in Matthew 24:32-35 *after* Jesus lists eleven specific signs that will take place in the future. He makes it clear that the fig tree analogy only fits when *all* of these signs have taken place!

Learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see all these things, recognize that he is near — at the door (Matthew 24:32,33 CSB).

One of these eleven signs, the Abomination of Desolation, occurs mid-way through the last seven year period, known as “the seventieth week of Daniel.” We read about this in Daniel 9:27:

The ruler will make a treaty with the people for a period of one set of seven, but after half this time, he will put an end to the sacrifices and offerings. And as a climax to all his terrible deeds, he will set up a sacrilegious object that causes desecration, until the fate decreed for this defiler is finally poured out on him (Daniel 9:27 NLT).

“Putting an end to sacrifices and offerings” is another way of saying the abomination that causes desolation. At the halfway point of this seven year period, the sacrifices are stopped and something abominable is placed in the Temple.

Jesus explained that this abominable act will set in motion the final three and one half year period, the Great Tribulation:

Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place-- let the reader understand-- then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get things out of his house. And whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those women who are pregnant, and to those who are nursing babies in those days! Moreover, pray that when you flee, it will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will again (Matthew 24:15-21 NASB 2020)

This causes an insurmountable problem for those who argue that the rebirth of Israel is predicted in the parable of the fig tree.

Why?

Among other things, for this particular event to take place Israel must have come back to their ancient homeland, formed a modern state, and eventually built a Third Temple where they instituted animal sacrifices. Indeed, you cannot put an end to the sacrifices unless they have already started!

Hence, for all this to happen, Israel has to become a modern state *before* this last seven year period can begin! Their rebirth cannot come about after the abomination of desolation takes place. Indeed, this event begins the Great Tribulation, which is the last three and one half years of the final seven year period before the return of Christ.

Accordingly, the parable of the fig tree cannot be referring to the rebirth of the modern state of Israel. Indeed, that has to happen before *any* of these eleven signs occur.

THIRD PROBLEM NOTHING IN THE CONTEXT SIGNIFIES ISRAEL'S RETURN FROM EXILE IN THE LAST DAYS

There is an even a bigger problem. The context of Matthew 24-25 says nothing about Israel's removal from their homeland and then their return in the last days. In fact, the "last days" return of Israel to their homeland is not predicted anywhere in Matthew's gospel! Furthermore, Israel was still in the land when our Lord gave the parable.

Merrill Unger makes another important point as to why the fig tree cannot speak of Israel's regathering in the last days:

There is a keen temptation to associate the illustration with the exciting truth of the end-time revitalized nation. But this interpretation here is indefensible ... historically. The establishment of the Israeli state (1948) took place in the church age and could scarcely be a "sign" of the nearness of Christ's advent in glory, when the rapture, which is pretribulational, had not yet taken place, not to mention the Tribulation itself (Merrill Unger, *Unger's Gospel Commentary*).

FOURTH PROBLEM IF ISRAEL IS THE "FIG TREE" THEN WHO ARE "ALL THE OTHER TREES?"

In the parallel account in Luke's gospel we read Jesus saying the following:

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the other trees. When they sprout leaves, you see for yourselves and know that summer is now near" (Luke 21:29,30 NET).

Hence, there is not just one tree in view, but many trees. So if the fig tree is Israel, then who are these other trees? The fact that they were told to consider "all the other trees" indicates that it is merely an illustration from nature, one in which they would all be aware of.

Furthermore, if the fig tree is used literally in all of its occurrences in the New Testament, then in Luke, when Jesus spoke of "all the trees," we should understand it literally there also, since it is in the same context.

FIFTH PROBLEM: THE LENGTH OF A BIBLICAL GENERATION IS ABOUT 40 YEARS

Another fatal problem is the assumed length of a biblical generation at the time the New Testament was written. It was around 40 years. We can provide four examples:

EXAMPLE 1 A GENERATION IS DEFINED AS FORTY YEARS

The writer to the Hebrews defines the length of a generation:

There your fathers tested me and tried me, and they saw my works for forty years. Therefore, I became provoked at that generation and said, "Their hearts are always wandering and they have not known my ways" (Hebrews 3:8,9 NET).

Note that the generation is defined as being 40 years.

EXAMPLE 2 JOB LIVED TO THE FOURTH GENERATION, 140 YEARS

We are told the following about the patriarch Job:

And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations (Job 42:16 ESV).

Job lived 140 more years after the tragic events in his life. He lived to see his children and their children to the fourth generation. Therefore, if we divide 140 years by 4 we get a generation being about 35 years in length.

EXAMPLE 3: THERE WERE FOURTEEN GENERATIONS FROM THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY UNTIL CHRIST

Matthew, the same writer who recorded Jesus giving the parable of the fig tree, gives an approximate time for one generation:

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to Christ, fourteen generations (Matthew 1:17 NET).

He stated that there were fourteen generations from the people being deported to Babylon until Christ was born.

If we calculate the time it took from the last group to be deported to Babylon, 587 B.C., until the time of Christ, the fourteen generations would average about 41 years.

EXAMPLE 4: THE DEFINITION OF THE WORD GENERATION FROM A GREEK DICTIONARY

The *Olive Tree Enhanced Strong's Dictionary* says the following about one of the definitions of the Greek word *genea*, generation:

The whole multitude of men living at the same time . . . an age (i.e. the time ordinarily occupied by each successive generation), a space of 30 - 33 years.

This is another indication that a biblical generation was considered to be anywhere from 30 to 40 years, nothing longer!

WHAT ABOUT PSALM 90?

Some may point to Psalm 90 to argue for a longer length of a generation, seventy to eighty years:

The days of our lives add up to seventy years, or eighty, if one is especially strong (Psalm 90:10 NET).

However, this Psalm of Moses was speaking of the possible length of a person's life, it is not to be confused with the biblical definition of a generation.

Indeed, we should note how a biblical generation is calculated. The standard New Testament Greek Lexicon, or Dictionary, called BAGD, has this to say about the meaning of the Greek word *genea*, generation:

the time of a generation, age (as a rule of thumb, the time between birth of parents and the birth of their children (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature*).

Therefore, it has nothing to do with the life span of a person.

In sum, the length of a biblical generation would contradict any attempt to use the rebirth of the modern state of Israel in 1948, or the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967, as being the possible starting point for the budding of the fig tree. The timing just does not work.

THE LOGICAL RESULT OF MAKING THIS CLAIM

Therefore, for anyone claiming that Jesus' employment of the fig tree is representative of Israel, and its budding is a prediction of the return of the nation in the last days, or perhaps the reunification of Jerusalem, and then His return will occur before the generation that sees the fig tree budding passes away, is faced with a huge problem. The fact that a biblical generation is forty years makes it clear that this interpretation, not only will not work, it would make Jesus, in this case, giving a false prediction, something that He has never done.

In fact, Jesus made this prediction after giving the parable:

I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (Matthew 24:34,35 NET).

Let us pay close attention to what He stated.

First, Jesus prefaces His statement by the solemn words "I tell you the truth." Then He goes on to say that His words have an everlasting meaning. In other words, in the strongest of terms, the Lord is guaranteeing the truth of the meaning of the parable of the fig tree.

Yet, if one makes His illustration refer to Israel, and to the generation that sees their return to their ancient homeland, then His claim would NOT be true!

Therefore, those making such a claim, whether they realize it or not, are, in essence, making Jesus out to be a liar! Hopefully, this will begin to sink in, namely to those who continue to make such claims.

THE ANSWER: THE FIG TREE IS AN ANALOGY FROM NATURE

Accordingly, if the fig tree in Jesus parable is not a symbol of Israel, the budding leaves are not indicative of their return in the last days, and the precise number of years in a generation is limited to 40 years at its longest, then what does this parable mean in the context of Matthew 24?

Simply put, the fig tree is an analogy from nature. Unlike most trees in the Holy Land, fig trees lose their leaves in winter. When a fig tree begins to bud in the spring, and put forth its leaves, it indicates that summer is near. In the same manner, when "all of these signs" occur, the nearness of the Lord's return is at hand. Indeed, the generation that sees *all* of these signs will see His return.

In fact, in Matthew 24:33 the Greek text uses the adverb οὕτως (*who toes*) meaning "in this manner" or "in this way." In other words, as they were well aware, the budding of the fig tree meant that summer was near. In the same way, when you see all these signs you know that the end is near. This assumes that the fig tree is an analogy from nature. Otherwise, the connection would not make sense.

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Since one of the signs, the Abomination of Desolation, occurs in the midst of the final seven year period, three and one half years before Jesus' Second Coming, there will be those who are living at the time that will not die until they experience His return.

Therefore, the budding of the fig tree represents the culmination of the eleven signs that Jesus indicates in Matthew 24:4-15. When *all* of them occur, then the world will know that His coming is near.

This is the idea behind the parable.

In sum, in Jesus' parable, the fig tree does not represent Israel, it has nothing to do with the people of Israel returning to their ancient homeland in the last days, neither is it meant for believers to attempt to calculate the time of Christ's return for His church, the rapture, or His Second Coming.

It is a mistake to claim that Jesus' words in this context mean any of these three things.

MISTAKES 19 AND 20

THE SEVEN CHURCHES THAT JESUS ADDRESSED IN REVELATION 2-3 ARE NOT PREDICTIVE OF SEVEN PERIODS OF CHURCH HISTORY. ATTEMPTING TO CLAIM THIS, SAYS MORE THAN THE SCRIPTURE SAY

There have been a number of Bible commentators who have believed and taught that the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3 outline the course of church history from the First Coming of Jesus Christ to His Second Coming. In other words, these seven specific churches with all their problems and virtues were predictive of the seven stages that the church would endure throughout their history.

THE TWO COMMON MISTAKES

We will find two common mistakes that are made by those who promote this. First, there is nothing explicitly stated in the text that would cause us to see Jesus' words as prophetic of the future course of the church. Add to this, commentators are divided about when these periods start, when they end, as well as how to characterize them.

Second, and even more damaging, we should NEVER attempt to form any conclusions about any biblical teaching, including future events, from something that is supposedly implicit in the text. This is a dangerous way of interpreting Scripture.

WHAT IS BEING TAUGHT?

In viewing these churches as prophetic of what will take place in the future, we will give an example of one way of looking at it.

Ephesus would be indicative of the apostolic church. Next comes Smyrna, which would represent the period of the persecuted church. Pergamum characterized the church merging with the state and thus becoming secularized. The period of Thyatira was predictive of the church of the Middle Ages characterized by non-biblical teachings and practices. Sardis, on the other hand, was foretelling the future of the church at the time of the Protestant Reformation. Philadelphia was predictive of the missionary expansion of the church.

Finally, Laodicea is supposedly representative of the church in the last days, the apostate church. From this perspective many conclude that the coming of the Lord must be near at hand since the organized church is supposedly now in the age of Laodicea.

This is just representative of what has been taught. Not every commentator sees the divisions in this way.

THERE IS NO BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR THIS VIEW

While many well-meaning and respected interpreters have held this perspective there is no evidence for it. We can state the following reasons as to why this is so:

REASON 1 THERE IS NOTHING IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION THAT SUGGESTS THIS

To begin with, there is nothing in the context of these letters of Revelation 2 and 3 that remotely suggest that they had any other meaning than what is explicitly stated. In other words, a normal look at these two chapters will reveal that they are specific letters written to churches to deal with the actual problems that they faced. Nothing more.

REASON 2 THERE IS NEVER EXACT AGREEMENT AMONG INTERPRETERS ABOUT THESE AGES

We have another problem. There is a lack of agreement among interpreters as to when one era began and the previous one ended, as well as how to best describe the era. When one compares how the various interpreters explain what each era meant, we find there are many differences of opinion. If so, then who has it right? Which interpreter is correctly explaining it? Who are we to believe?

REASON 3 THERE ARE SPECIFIC PROBLEMS WITH HOLDING THIS VIEW

There are also a number of specific problems with this view.

For example, Ephesus is supposed to represent the apostolic church that was faithful in their doctrine but had lost their fervent love for Jesus. However, as we discover, a number of the other six churches addressed, who were operating at the same time in history, had not been faithful to the Lord's doctrine but rather had allowed false teaching in their midst.

So we may wonder how Ephesus could be a picture of the apostolic era when we find some of the churches in the same geographical area, and existing at the same time, portraying an entirely different picture. Indeed we could merely cite the New Testament and the problems found in the churches Paul addressed, such as Galatia and Corinth. It is clear from these letters that they were anything but pristine.

Again we ask, how could Ephesus accurately represent the apostolic era?

Robert Thomas provides another example of the lack of correspondence between what is taught about these churches and the reality of them:

There is also the idea of the progressive development of evil portrayed in these messages is indicative of their prophetic character. Yet one cannot fully agree with this trend when he finds for example, in Sardis one of the two worst spiritual states and in Philadelphia, one of the two best spiritual states. To describe accurately the growing failure of the church, Philadelphia should have been placed early in chapter 2, certainly before Sardis and not vice versa, if declining spiritual states were of mark of these two chapters (Robert Thomas, *Revelation*, Moody Press, Volume 1, 1-7, pp. 508,509).

Again, we see that theory has many problems.

REASON 4 THE FULFILLMENT WOULD NOT BECOME EVIDENT UNTIL THE TIME OF THE END

One of the biggest problems with holding such a view is that it would be basically meaningless until the time of the end. In other words, since this understanding of Jesus' words is implicit, not explicit, nobody would know that these chapters were meant to be prophetic of the history of the church. It is only by looking in the past that we discover this hidden truth.

REASON 5 THERE COULD BE NO IMMINENT RETURN OF CHRIST

If one accepts that these churches represent seven different periods of the church on earth, then it would not be possible for the Lord to return until the last historical period, Laodicea, had arrived. This causes a number of huge problems.

Not only would there not be a "blessed hope" of the return of the Lord while waiting for this final period, there would be no way of knowing which of the seven periods the church was presently in!

To illustrate, where would the information come from that the worldwide church has moved from the sixth historical period, Philadelphia, to the seventh Laodicea? There are no indications whatsoever as to how anyone could know this.

REASON 6 THE EVALUATION OF THE CHURCH ON EARTH CAN NEVER BE UNIVERSAL

One of the criticisms of this theory concerns the lack of global understanding of where the church was at during any time in its history. For example, there are many churches today in western countries which have little or no influence. Nobody doubts this

On the other hand, the church in Iran is presently the fastest growing church in the world. The church in China has an estimated 100 million members despite the constant persecution. It has been claimed that as many as 38% of the people in North Korea have a faith in Christ. Other countries also have churches that are thriving. Therefore, to claim that the last days church is like the one in Laodicea whom Jesus addressed, is simply not relevant to a good part of our world.

Interestingly, James Boyer, who holds to the prophetic view, made the following comments about the church of Laodicea and how it relates to the present day:

For example, the Laodicean church is not the theologically liberal church down the street, nor the apostate church of the end times. It is the Bible-believing evangelical church which possesses and upholds the light of the gospel, but which is conforming to the values of the world and refusing to get overly involved in the Lord's work. It is materially rich and increased with goods, needing nothing, but it is unaware that it is spiritually wretched and poor and miserable and blind and naked (3:17). It is lukewarm—not cold and unresponsive to the things of God, but not hot and “on fire” for the Lord who bought it. Rather it is somewhere in between. It is trying to enjoy the good things and to avoid the unpleasant things of both worlds. Is this the case with us and with the people in our churches? Then ours is a Laodicean church. And to the degree that Laodicea characterizes the churches—the true gospel churches—of our time, may we hear what the Spirit says to the churches: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent” (Rev 3:19) (James Boyer, *Are the Seven Letters of Revelation 2-3 prophetic?* Grace Theological Journal, Fall 1985).

His example actually proves the point as to why the prophetic view does not work.

Can we apply the rebukes to the Laodicean church to the millions of Christians who today live in these non-Western persecuted countries? In so many instances, these believers in Christ are living in poverty, barely having enough to survive, as well as being constantly persecuted. Yet they keep the faith.

Therefore, in what sense are they the “apostate church” of the last days? Obviously they are not!

REASONS 7 THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA THRIVED FOR CENTURIES

Finally, as we document in our forthcoming book *Revelation 1-3: Introduction To Revelation and An Examination of the Letters of Christ to the Seven Churches*, the church at Laodicea was not “vomited out of the mouth of Christ” as He warned them. To the contrary it was a thriving church for centuries. In fact, their existence stretches all the way to at least A.D. 1450.

Add to this until the geographical boundaries of the land were changed in 1923, there was still a functioning Christian church in that near vicinity. Therefore, we should NEVER equate Laodicea with the last days apostate church. They were anything but that!

THE SECOND HUGE MISTAKE: ASSUMING SOMETHING IS TAUGHT IMPLICITLY IN SCRIPTURE

The real problem with this point of view is that there is nothing explicitly taught in the Bible about these churches being prophetic. Those who hold this position admit this. This means that it must be believed that this truth is implicitly taught. But herein lies the problem!

We are to study the Bible for what it specifically teaches, not what we think that it may imply. God has clearly spoken to us in His Word about Who He is, why we are here upon the earth, and what He expects from each person. All of these truths are explicitly taught, there is no doubt about this. Furthermore, we are told to study them, to study the Scriptures:

Make every effort to present yourself before God as a proven worker who does not need to be ashamed, teaching the message of truth accurately (2 Timothy 2:15 NET)

Teaching the truth accurately means carefully looking at what the Lord has revealed in His Word. However, once we start finding things that we may think are “implicitly” taught in the Bible, then we have a huge problem.

Indeed, where do we stop? By affirming that we can discover a number of implicit truths in Scripture there is seemingly no yardstick for one to know whether the newfound implicit truth is actually there!

The Apostle Paul made this clear as to how we are to approach the Scripture:

I have applied these things to myself and Apollos because of you, brothers and sisters, so that through us you may learn “not to go beyond what is written,” so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of the one against the other (1 Corinthians 4:6 NET).

We should never go “beyond what is written.” Indeed, we read the text for what it says, not what we may think it is possibly saying, or may be implicitly teaching.

Therefore, the idea that we can find some important biblical teaching about the last days, by assuming it is implicitly taught, is not the correct way of handling God’s Word.

WHY WERE THESE SEVEN CHURCHES CHOSEN?

Of course there is the question as to why these specific churches were addressed. There were other churches in the vicinity of these seven churches in Asia Minor such as Hierapolis (Colossians 4:13) and Colosse.

Speculations abound as to why the Lord Jesus would address these seven churches and no others. The simple answer is that we are not told. What we do know is that there is nothing that indicates that we should see them as progressively revealing the history of the church.

THE VALUE OF THESE CHAPTERS

Instead of arbitrarily looking at each of these churches and trying to place them in some sort of historical time slot, we should closely examine these chapters for their practical value. What we find in these two chapters is that people and churches remain the same throughout history, the same good qualities as well as the same problems.

As the writer of Ecclesiastes said so long ago:

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History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new. Sometimes people say, “Here is something new!” But actually it is old; nothing is ever truly new (Ecclesiastes 1:9,10 NLT).

Indeed, nothing is really new. As fallen human beings, we all face the same problems as our ancestors. Fortunately we have a guidebook, an instruction manual, that tells us how we should live.

Therefore, these two chapters in the Book of Revelation should be thoroughly studied so that we can understand some of the issues that churches have historically faced in the world and will continue to face until the Lord returns. In doing so, we should do our best to avoid these problems by following the exhortations found in the New Testament.

In sum, we should learn a valuable lesson from all of this. The Scriptures are given to us as our guidebook for living. Therefore, we must pay attention to what it says. However, none of us have any right to find more in the Bible than what the Lord has revealed.

This is especially true when we wish to learn as much as we can about what the Lord predicts will happen in the last days. Too many people are finding “truths” in Scripture that just aren’t there. Let us be careful not to make this mistake!

MISTAKES 21 AND 22

TWO COMMON MISTAKES NEED TO BE CLEARED UP ABOUT WHAT JESUS SAID TO THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA

When Jesus addressed the seven churches in Asia Minor, recorded in Revelation 2 and 3, we read His harsh words to the last church on the list, Laodicea:

To the angel of the church in Laodicea write the following: “This is the solemn pronouncement of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God’s creation: ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot! So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth! (Revelation 3:14-16 NET).

When the subject of last days Bible prophecy is discussed invariably there are two popular misconceptions about the church of Laodicea that Jesus addressed in Revelation 3.

The first misconception holds that Laodicea should be equated with the apostate church that will exist in the final days before the return of Christ.

The second misconception is when Jesus addressed them and said, “I wish that you were either cold or hot,” He is exhorting them to be either for Him (hot) or against Him (cold).

Each of these common beliefs is not what the Bible is saying. We can make the following observations:

MISCONCEPTION 1 LAODICEA IS NOT THE APOSTATE CHURCH OF THE LAST DAYS

In another one of our popular mistakes that need to be cleared up, we have illustrated in some detail that the seven churches of Revelation are not predictive of seven periods of church history with Laodicea representing the apostate church of the end time. This is a common mistake that seems to be almost universally held among those who study end times Bible prophecy.

However, there is no biblical evidence whatsoever for this belief. Therefore, we should not use the phrase “we are at the time of Laodicea” or “we are living in the days of Laodicea.” We are not. (For a detailed explanation see our *The Seven Churches That Jesus Addressed In Revelation 2-3 Are Not Predicting Seven Periods Of Church History*.)

MISCONCEPTION 2 HOT AND COLD ARE NOT REFERRING TO SPIRITUAL FERVOR OR SPIRITUAL DEADNESS

It is important that we understand precisely to what Jesus was referring when He wanted the believers in Laodicea to be “cold or hot.” Often it is taught that to be “hot” means to have a spiritual fervor for the Lord, an intensive desire to serve Him.

On the other hand, cold is often characterized as people who have no spiritual life. They do not warm up to the things of God. Simply put, their hearts are cold.

Therefore, it is contended that the Lord wanted them to be one or the other in the sense of “on fire” for Him or else “frigid” in their feelings. In other words, do one or the other.

The fact that they were neither, but rather lukewarm, caused the Lord to use the analogy that He wanted to vomit them out of His mouth.

However, this is not at all what this passage is saying. To discover the meaning, we must understand the situation of the city of Laodicea at the time the Lord Jesus addressed them.

WHAT WAS GOING ON IN LAODICEA?

Near the ancient location of the city of Laodicea stood two cities famous for their water. The city of Hierapolis was known for their warm mineral baths. On the other hand, the city of Colosse, some six miles away, was noted for the cool refreshing water which they drank. Lacking a natural water supply the wealthy city of Laodicea got their water from these two cities. Therein, lies the problem.

The notes of the NET Bible explains what was taking place in Laodicea and why cold and hot were not describing two contrasting types of behavior of the people:

Lukewarm is often seen as a comment on the behavior of the people. He would rather have them hot or ice cold. Laodicea was near two other towns, each of which had a unique water source. To the north was Hierapolis which had a natural hot spring, often used for medicinal purposes. To the east was Colossae which had cold, pure waters. In contrast to these towns, Laodicea had no permanent supply of good water. Efforts to pipe water to the city from nearby springs were successful, but it would arrive lukewarm. The metaphor in the text is not meant to relate spiritual fervor to temperature. This would mean that Laodicea would be commended for being spiritually cold, but it is unlikely that Jesus would commend this. Instead, the metaphor condemns Laodicea for not providing spiritual healing (being hot) or spiritual refreshment (being cold) to those around them. It is a condemnation of their lack of works and lack of witness (Note New English Translation on Revelation 3:14-16).

In sum, the wealthy city of Laodicea was not able to have cold water for drinking or hot water for bathing as well as for drinking. Instead the water was tepid or lukewarm, when the desire was for either hot or cold water. Therefore, hot and cold are both positive terms.

THE LORD DOES NOT WANT PEOPLE TO BE COLD!

Since hot and cold are often seen as two types of spiritual behavior, many commentators have argued from this statement that the Lord wants people to either show spiritual fervor or to be cold to the things of God. However, this is not what this passage is teaching:

The ingenious efforts of multiplied commentators to explain why God would prefer a cold condition in the church to lukewarmness have occupied endless pages of commentary. The present commentator even admits to having made the same attempts in his early preaching of the book. All such attempts have one thing in common. They do not square with the text as given . . . to suggest that the living Lord preferred ice cold aloofness in its reaction to the things of God as opposed to lukewarmness is clearly preposterous (Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, The New American Commentary, Nashville, Broadman and Holman, 2012).

The Moody Bible commentary concurs:

Both words are positive in context. Like the healing hot springs near Hieropolis, and the refreshing cool springs in Colossae, their testimony was to demonstrate positive attributes. Their spiritual apathy instead mirrored the tepid water of their city (Daniel Green, Moody Bible Commentary, *Revelation*, Chicago, Moody Press).

All in all we can see that hot and cold were not meant to refer to two types of behavior. The recipients of the letter understood well what was meant by these two analogies. Therefore, God is NOT asking people to be cold if they are not going to be hot for Him! He is asking them to be both.

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH MISTAKES IN THE LAST DAYS?

The hot and cold distinction is often used when people discuss the nature of the visible church in the last days. Unhappily, a huge mistake is made: the church at the time of the end is equated with what the Lord said to the church of Laodicea. In other words, we should expect the church of the last days to be lukewarm, not taking a stand either for or against Christ. In other words it is sitting on the proverbial fence.

In sum, let us not make the mistake of assuming this to be true and then exhort one another that the Christ wants us to be either hot or cold in our spiritual fervor. This is not what this passage is talking about!

His desire is that each and every believer in Christ have positive spiritual attributes. He does not want us to be lukewarm in our testimony or our behavior. This is the lesson we learn from Laodicea.

MISTAKES 23,24 AND 25

THREE MISTAKES ARE MADE IN FINDING A PRE-TRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE IN REVELATION 4:1-2

There are three statements in Revelation 4:1-2 that are commonly used as evidence of a pre-tribulational rapture of the church. We will look at each of them and discover why they should not be used in this respect.

The passage in question reads as follows:

After these things I looked, and there was a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said: “Come up here so that I can show you what must happen after these things.” Immediately I was in the Spirit, and a throne was standing in heaven with someone seated on it! (Revelation 4:1-2 NET).

THE THREE MISTAKES

In Revelation 4:1 the Greek words *meta tauta*, translated, “after these things,” is used twice. It is found once at the beginning of the verse and a second time at the end. It has been claimed that each usage provides support for a pre-tribulation rapture of the church.

There is also John hearing the voice like a trumpet that tells him to come up to heaven and he is immediately found in the heaven. This is also used as confirmation of a pre-tribulation rapture.

However, none of the three give biblical evidence that Christ will come for believers before the final seven-year period, the 70th week of Daniel, the time of Jacob’s trouble, or the more popular but less precise term, the Great Tribulation.

THE ARGUMENTS FOR A PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE FROM THESE VERSES

With respect to the first use of this phrase, “after these things,” in Revelation 4:1 the argument is usually as follows:

The second and third chapters of Revelation record the letters of Jesus Christ to seven churches in first century Asia Minor. It is argued that beginning with Revelation 4 we have a major change of subject indicated by the phrase, “after these things.” The new subject now concerns the future.

Often this is coupled with the idea that the seven churches listed in Revelation 2 and 3 are prophetic of seven periods of church history. Therefore, after the mention of the last church, Laodicea, which is assumed to be the apostate church at the time of the end, the church age is complete. Hence, “after the things” which begins verse 1 is speaking of events that will occur *after* the church age is over.

THE SECOND USE OF META TAUTA

This is supposedly confirmed by the second use of the same phrase *meta tauta* at the end of the verse, “Come up here so that I can show you what must happen after these things. These future events are “necessary to take place,” or “must happen,” *after* these things just mentioned, namely when the church is on the earth.

Again, it is understood that Scripture is now dealing with future events after the church age is over. To the point, the church, the true believers in Christ, is no longer on the earth because the rapture of the church has taken place.

This second use of statement is also seen at referring back to Revelation 1:19 where we find the same phrase. It reads as follows:

Therefore write what you saw, what is, and what will be after these things (Revelation 1:19 NET).

This verse is often claimed to be the threefold outline of the Book of Revelation, things what John saw, the things that were presently occurring, and then what will happen after these things, the future.

The following connection is then made:

If Revelation 1:19 is God's inspired outline of this book, then Revelation 4 ushers us into the third division: "the things which shall be hereafter." In fact, that is exactly what God said to John when He summoned him to heaven! It would appear that, in this experience, John illustrates what will happen to God's people when the church age has run its course: Heaven will open; there will be a voice and the sound of a trumpet; and the saints will be caught up to heaven (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). Then, God's judgment of the earth can begin (Arno C. Gaebelein, *Revelation, Believers Bible Commentary*, Thomas Nelson, 1989)

Harry Ironside concurs:

The opening verse begins the third great division of this book—"the things which shall be after these things," the stirring panorama of wonders, both heavenly and earthly, that must take place after the church's history is ended. From the close of chapter 3, we never see the church on earth again throughout the rest of this solemn book. We read of "saints," but they are distinct altogether from the church of the current dispensation. Israel comes into view, as does a great multitude of spared Gentiles who are saved out of the Great Tribulation, but there is no church, no body of Christ, no bride of the Lamb any more upon the earth!

The fact is patent enough for every careful reader to notice it. What is its explanation? Simply this, I believe: we must understand the Rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 as transpiring between chapter 3 and chapter 4. Of this, the rapture of the apostle is the symbol (Harry Ironside, *Revelation*, Ironside Expository Commentaries, Kregel Publishers, Public Domain)

Ironside's statement "I believe we must understand the Rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 as transpiring between chapter 3 and chapter 4" basically sums up the argument. The third division of the book, the things that are to come after these things, is now introduced.

JOHN BEING CAUGHT UP TO HEAVEN

The third line of evidence for the pre-tribulation rapture in these verses is found in what happens with John. He, as a picture of the church, is immediately caught up to heaven:

A.C. Gaebelein explains it in this manner:

The scene changes suddenly. We are no longer on earth but are transported into heaven. The true church is gone and the apostate Church while still on earth to pass into the judgments of the great tribulation, is no longer owned by the Lord and therefore not mentioned. That is why the word "church" disappears entirely from this book after the third chapter. The open door and the voice which calls "come up hither" and John's presence in glory in the spirit, clearly indicate symbolically the fulfillment of 1 Thess. iv: 15-17. (A. C. Gaebelein, *The Revelation: An Analysis and Exposition of the Last Book of the Bible* (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," 1915), p. 44)

In other words, John has already given us the outline of the Book of Revelation in the first chapter, now it is confirmed in Revelation 4:1-2. One Bible commentary put it this way:

John saw a door ... open in heaven and heard a voice inviting him, Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this. The words “what must take place after this” are similar to those in 1:19, “what will take place later.” Whereas 1:19 indicates that the events will take place later, in 4:1b the Greek word *dei* is used, which means that the events must occur. This points not only to the future but also to the sovereign purpose of God. The similarity of the two expressions confirms the threefold chronological outline given in 1:19. Both the revelation and its fulfillment are chronologically subsequent to chapters 1-3 (John Walvoord, *Revelation, The Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

Therefore, the use of “after these things” twice in verse one, and then the voice calling John to come up, and then his arrival in heaven, are all seen as evidence that the church, the true believers in Jesus Christ, are in heaven during this period that begins with Revelation 6, the Great Tribulation.

To sum up, John gave the outline of the Book of Revelation in 1:19: the book contains the things that have already happened, things that were happening when John lived, and things that will happen in the future. The use of “after these things” in 4:1 is referring to those future events.

Warren Wiersbe concludes:

If Revelation 1:19 is God’s inspired outline of this book, then Revelation 4 ushers us into the third division: “the things which shall be hereafter.” In fact, that is exactly what God said to John when He summoned him to heaven! It would appear that, in this experience, John illustrates what will happen to God’s people when the church age has run its course: Heaven will open; there will be a voice and the sound of a trumpet; and the saints will be caught up to heaven (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). Then, God’s judgment of the earth can begin (Warren Wiersbe, *Revelation*, BE 1985, David C. Cook)

This sums up the three basic arguments as to why Revelation 4:1-2 gives evidence to the pre-tribulation rapture.

RESPONSE: THE ARGUMENTS ARE NOT CONVINCING

While there are a number of excellent commentators who understand Revelation 4:1-2 in this manner, their arguments claiming the rapture in the words “after these things” used twice in Revelation 4:1, and John being caught up into heaven as a picture of the rapture, Revelation 4:2, are unconvincing.

We can make the following observations.

OBSERVATION 1 MANY PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE ADVOCATES REJECT THESE ARGUMENTS

To begin with, there are a number of Bible commentators who do not see the words *meta tauta* used in 4:1 as referring to the rapture of the church happening immediately after the church age is over. Neither do they believe that John being taken up to heaven is a picture of the rapture of the church.

This includes people who believe there will be a rapture, and that it will take place before the final seven year period. However, they assert that Revelation 4:1-2 is not one of the passages that should be used to support a pre-tribulation rapture. This is our position here.

OBSERVATION 2 META TAUTA REFERS TO THE SEQUENCE OF JOHN’S VISIONS

The first use of *meta tauta* in 4:1, after these things, is referring to the sequence of the visions that John had received. Instead of referring to future events, it is merely telling us what took place next in his experience in receiving God’s revelation of the future. Albert Barnes explains:

After this. Gr., “after these things;” that is, after what he had seen, and after what he had been directed to record in the preceding chapters (Albert Barnes, Barnes Notes, Revelation)

In its explanation of *meta tauta* the Baylor Handbook of the Greek New Testament concurs:

The antecedent ... is ... the seven messages of Rev 2–3, perhaps also including Rev 1. The main function of ... is to indicate visionary sequence, not that the events of Rev 4–5 took place chronologically after Rev 1–3 (David L. Mathewson, *Revelation, A Handbook on the Greek Text*, © 2016 by Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas 76798).

In fact, when phrase *meta tauta* occurs throughout the Book of Revelation (4:1; 7:1; 7:9; 15:5; 18:1), in each of these instances, it always denotes a new vision, a sudden change in the content. It is never used to refer to future ages or to some future time period. A number of Bible commentaries make this point:

“After these things I looked” is a clause that, with variations, introduces a new vision each time it occurs in Revelation (cf. 7:1, 9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1). (Thomas Constable, *Revelation, Expository Notes*, 2014).

After this I looked is a formula which, with slight variants, always in this book introduces a new vision (7:1, 9; 15:5; 18:1; cf. 19:1) (Leon Morris, *Revelation, Tyndale New Testament Commentary INTERVARSITY PRESS, PO Box 1400, Downers Grove, Illinois 60515, 1987*)

Robert Thomas, a staunch proponent of the pre-tribulation rapture concurs:

The former occurrence of the phrase *meta tauta...* in verse 1 denotes the sequence in John’s receipt of the revelation. It marks the beginning of a new vision as it does a number of times in the book... It is true that the sequence of visions given to John may coincide with the sequence of events they predict...but whenever *meta tauta* is followed by ... I saw... John’s primary reference is to the beginning of a new vision (Robert Thomas, *Revelation, Moody Press, Volume 1, 1-7, p. 333*).

OBSERVATION 3 REVELATION 2 AND 3 ARE NOT PROPHETIC OF SEVEN AGES OF THE CHURCH

There is a major problem with believing that the pre-tribulation rapture occurs in these verses. Indeed, the idea that the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 are prophetic of seven time periods in the history of the church is not a biblical teaching.

In fact, there is nothing whatsoever to indicate that Revelation 2-3 is speaking about the prophetic future of the entire church age.

We explain why this is not the case in one of our other common “mistakes” that we are clearing up (The seven churches of Revelation 2-3 are not predicting seven periods of church history).

OBSERVATION 4 JOHN BEING CAUGHT UP TO HEAVEN: NOT EVIDENCE OF A PRE-TRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE

The third argument that should not be used to support a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church has to do with John being “caught up” to heaven:

The *Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* makes some important observations about the concept of “doors” in Revelation:

Doors play a prominent role in the final two messages to the churches. While Jesus himself provides the open door for the church in Philadelphia (3:8), the Laodiceans are required to open the door to fellowship

with him (3:20). This image provides a thematic transition to the next section of the book. John's next vision shares many elements with Ezekiel's initial vision, which also begins with heaven being opened (Ezek. 1:1). Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this (4:1) (*The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*).

As they indicate, the "door" image provides a thematic transition to the next section of the book. It has nothing to do with believers being caught up in the "rapture of the church."

Robert Thomas, who is an advocate for a pre-tribulation rapture, admits this and concludes the following:

This summons is best understood as an invitation for John to assume a new vantage point for the sake of the revelation he was about to receive (Robert Thomas, *Revelation*, Moody Press, Volume 1, 1-7).

Other Bible commentators, who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, likewise do not see the rapture in this verse:

While the present commentator holds to the view that the church does not enter the tribulation period and is taken from the world prior to the outbreak of the events described in the tribulation, he does not agree with other dispensational interpreters that any evidence of that can be found in 4:1 (...Endorsing the rapture of the church as prior to the tribulation should be done on the basis of passages other than 4:1. At most, 4:1 may be seen as John's personal visionary experience of what will happen to the church when the Lord returns. To read more than that into the verse would be to miss the point intended here, namely, that John is transported in his vision from the island of Patmos and the things of the churches into the presence of the heavenly throne room so that he can be prepared for the unfolding of the events that will transpire on earth during the great tribulation (Paige Patterson, *Revelation, The New American Commentary*, Nashville, Broadman and Holman, 2012).

The *Moody Bible Commentary*, which also supports a pre-trib. rapture, agrees:

Some see "Come up here" as a reference to a pretribulation rapture of the Church. It is better understood as God's call to John to behold the next vision (see 6:1, 3, 5, 7). He was invited to look through a door in heaven to see events that were yet future (Daniel Green, *Moody Bible Commentary, Revelation*, Chicago, Moody Press).

Keith Essex sums up the problems that are connected with these arguments of the rapture being found in this context:

The Proposal. The first use of "after these things" refers to this event as being after the church age. The mention of heaven, a voice, and a trumpet (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18) with the command to "come up here [to heaven]" and John's entrance into heaven points to this event being the rapture. Thus the rapture is between the end of the church age and the beginning of the tribulation.

Evaluation. The evidence points to this being a statement of John's personal experience in the first century and not the church's future experience. The expression "after these things" marks the beginning of a new vision for John (cf. 7:9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1).

According to 1:10, the first voice like a trumpet that John heard was the voice of Jesus Himself (1:12–16); therefore, the voice referred to here is that of Jesus, not that of the archangel at the rapture, John is summoned by Jesus to heaven to receive revelation of future events. This occurs "in the spirit"; John is transported spiritually to heaven while his body remains on Patmos (Keith Essex *Masters Seminary Journal* 13:2, Fall 2002, p. 229).

Other commentators come to the same conclusion:

In conclusion, it seems that unless one is specifically seeking the rapture of the Church before the Great Tribulation, Revelation 4:1-2 does not naturally lend itself to such an interpretation. In this context, it is best to interpret the passage as the sole experience of John in the ecstatic spiritual state in which he receives his visions. Christ will show John “what must take place after this,” meaning what God will reveal after the throne-room vision of Revelation 4–5 (J. Scott Duvall, *Revelation, Teach The Text*, 2013).

Merrill Tenney writes:

There is no convincing reason why the seer’s being ‘in the Spirit’ and being called to heaven typifies the rapture of the church any more than his being taken into the wilderness to view Babylon [17:3] indicates that the church is there in exile (Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957 p. 141).

SUMMARY

We conclude that none of these three common arguments which are used to claim a pre-tribulational rapture in Revelation 4:1-2 are convincing.

While there is a major break between the end of chapter 3 and the beginning of chapter 4, the first use of *meta tauta* in Revelation 4:1 is merely a reference to the next vision that John would receive after these previous ones. Simply put, the phrase signifies a sequence, moving on from what was previously mentioned to what follows in the order of time. It has nothing to do with the end of seven prophetic periods of the church.

The second use of *meta tauta* in verse 1 is not merely referring to the sequence in which John received the visions, as in the first instance the phrase is used, rather it speaks of a future time frame. This will eventually include the coming of Lord Jesus to set up His kingdom upon the earth (Revelation 19). However, this second use of the phrase neither says, or infers, anything about the rapture of the church or of its timing.

Finally, John being caught up to heaven is the experience of one individual. It was for the purpose of getting a vantage point from heaven to view the last days events that will take place in our world. Again, nothing is said, or inferred, about the rapture of the church taking place at the time of him being taken up.

To the contrary, it is describing in normal language the authentic experience of the Apostle John in receiving this prophetic vision from the Lord Jesus Christ. It is absolutely not pointing to some future event for believers.

In sum, the author certainly believes in a pre-tribulation rapture and has documented it elsewhere (*The Rapture, The Pre-Trib Rapture Defended* a free download on our website educatingourworld.com under the heading of *Bible Prophecy*).

However, these three common arguments from Revelation 4:1-2 should not be used to support the pre-trib. position. Indeed, it is a mistake to do so.

MISTAKES 26, 27, 28 AND 29

THERE ARE FOUR COMMON MISTAKES MADE WHEN REVELATION CHAPTER 9, THE TWO HUNDRED MILLION MAN ARMY, IS EQUATED WITH REVELATION 16, ARMAGEDDON

There are four common mistakes that are often made with respect to the two hundred million man army recorded in Revelation 9:16 with the description of the campaign of Armageddon found in Revelation 16.

Simply put, the two hundred million man army is not a human army, thus the military campaign of Armageddon is not describing the same event as Revelation 9. Hence, the “kings from the east” in Revelation 16 cannot be equated with the two hundred million man army. Add to this, the “east” in John’s day, was never a reference to the “Far East,” namely such countries as China and Japan.

We can clear up these popular misconceptions as we examine the following evidence:

THE BACKGROUND

With the introduction of the sixth trumpet of God’s judgment upon the world, John heard a voice that sounded from the altar, the place of worship in heaven:

The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God. It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind (Revelation 9:13-15 NIV).

An unidentified voice commands this sixth angel to release four destructive angels who have been bound at the Euphrates River. The release of these four angels will cause unimaginable devastation, a third of the human race is to be killed!

THE TWO HUNDRED MILLION MAN ARMY

We then read of a huge army of soldiers on horseback:

The number of soldiers on horseback was two hundred million; I heard their number (Revelation 9:16 NET).

Two hundred million soldiers arrive on horseback!

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS THAT ARISE ABOUT THESE RIDERS

This particular verse immediately brings five questions to mind.

The first question is: Should we assume that this a literal number? Is this an actual army of two hundred million?

The second question revolves around the identity of these riders on the horses: Are they humans or non-human?

The third question, and the most important, is this: Are the riders on the horses in Revelation 9 involved in the same military campaign that we later read about in Revelation 16?

The fourth question, should we equate the two hundred million man army with the “kings from the east.”

The last question concerns what the “east” referred to in John’s day.

IS TWO HUNDRED MILLION A LITERAL NUMBER?

The first question that arises concerns whether we should view this two hundred million as a literal number. How are we to understand it?

The Baylor Handbook to the Greek New Testament explains it as follows:

...the entire expression would then indicate “several units of twenty-thousand multiplied by 10,000” (David L. Mathewson, *Revelation, A Handbook on the Greek Text*, © 2016 by Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas 76798).

Greek scholar Buist Fanning further explains:

The census of the troops (v. 16a) is a staggering number, “twice ten thousand times ten thousand.” This, ... seems to be a way of expressing an unimaginably large body of military forces. A literal count (whether exact or rounded) is not intended but rather the sense that such an army would wreak unspeakable levels of destruction. The fact that such a number is astounding explains John’s narrative aside, “I heard their number,” as an affirmation that this was not merely his own estimate but part of the heavenly vision (Buist Fanning, *Revelation, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament*, 2020, p. 303).

Fanning also comments:

This is why the translation “two hundred million” (CSB, NASB, NET, NLT, NRSV) may seem too precise, though it too is an astonishing size for an army (Fanning, note 60, p. 302).

What we can confidently say is that this expression indicates an extremely large number!

QUESTION 2: ARE THE RIDERS HUMAN BEINGS OR DEMONIC PERSONAGES

The next issue concerns the identity of the riders on the horses: Are they human or not? Is this incalculable number of riders on horses to be viewed as an actual human army or a demonic army?

THE CASE FOR THE RIDERS BEING HUMAN

The following arguments are usually given by those who believe that a human army is in view in this passage in Revelation 9.

ARGUMENT 1 THIS IS THE SAME GROUP DESCRIBED IN REVELATION 16: THE KINGS FROM THE EAST

Often, those who believe that this an extraordinarily large human army listed in Revelation 9 link this passage to the participants in the battle of Armageddon as recorded in Revelation 16, the kings from the east.

Therefore, it is claimed that both passages are speaking of the campaign of Armageddon. Indeed, it is contended that it does not seem possible that two huge armies will gather together, at two different times during the final days of the “time of the end.” To the point, these two passages must be speaking about the same military conflict and the same participants.

Since it is clear that Armageddon definitely involves human armies, we should also assume human armies in this passage.

ARGUMENT 2 THE EUPHRATES RIVERS IS EMPHASIZED IN EACH BATTLE

Another clue which seemingly links these two passages and makes the case for a human army is the Euphrates River. The river is mentioned in Revelation 9 as well as in Revelation 16.

Therefore, we should not assume that two separate military campaigns take place at the time of the end with the Euphrates River highlighted in each one. Consequently, they must be the same battle which is fought by humans. Again, this is particularly true since Revelation 16 definitely involves human armies.

ARGUMENT 3 THE POSSIBILITY OF A TWO HUNDRED MILLION MAN ARMY

When John wrote the Book of Revelation, it has been estimated that the population of the world was somewhere around two hundred million. In other words, there was no possible way that an army of that size could be mustered to fight a battle.

However, today, it is possible. Indeed, it has been estimated that China alone could field an army of two hundred million. When put together with Japan, we find that there would be more than enough soldiers to come from the East to fight this battle.

ARGUMENT 4 THE LORD USES HUMAN ARMIES AS HIS INSTRUMENTS

Those who believe that this is a human army cite the numerous times in Scripture when God uses other similar pagan armies as instruments of His punishing of others, or punishment of the armies themselves. Therefore, it is not out of the question that a human army is in view in Revelation 9.

ARGUMENT 5 THE WEAPONS MENTIONED ARE A FIRST CENTURY DESCRIPTION OF MODERN WEAPONS

It is sometimes contended that the weapons described in verses 9:17-19 are John's best attempt to describe modern warfare, given the limitations of his vocabulary in the first century.

In sum, these are the basic arguments used for those who contend that Revelation 9 is a literal battle with human beings who number approximately, or exactly, two hundred million. That great number is made up of the "kings from the East" seeing that it is possible to field such an army today from nations from the Far East.

RESPONSE TO THE IDEA OF A HUMAN ARMY OF TWO HUNDRED MILLION

While many argue that the army in Revelation 9 is made up of humans on horses, and that it should be linked to Armageddon in Revelation 16, there are a number of reasons as to why this is not so. They include the following:

REASON 1 THE CONTEXT MAKES IT CLEAR THAT DEMONS ARE IN VIEW

In verses 2-10 of Revelation 9, we are introduced to demonic forces in the form of locusts. In other words, we previously have another description of a non-human army in this same context. For example, they are described as follows:

The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. They had what looked like gold crowns on their heads, and their faces looked like human faces (Revelation 9:7 NLT).

In addition, this two hundred-million-man army on horseback, in 9:16-19, has a number of things in common with the locust army previously mentioned. We find that both groups have breastplates, their tails inflict pain, and they have features like lions.

If the two groups are not identical, they are certainly closely related. Therefore, since the first group is obviously non-human, it naturally follows that this second group is likewise non-human.

REASON 2 THE PEOPLE WHO ARE KILLED ARE DIFFERENT IN EACH CONTEXT

In Revelation 9, the armies kill 1/3 of humanity. However, in Revelation 16, the carnage is limited to the invading forces who attack Israel.

REASON 3 THE NUMBER TWO HUNDRED MILLION IS NOT REALLY PLAUSIBLE

An army of two hundred million men would not merely consist of two hundred million people. All armies need supply lines. When we start calculating what it would take to sustain such an army it seems to be an impossible undertaking. In other words, to mobilize such a force, as well as to supply it, does not appear to be realistic.

REASON 4 THE POPULATION OF THE WORLD HAS BEEN DEPLETED

Let us not forget that one fourth of the population of the world has previously been killed due to the judgment of the fourth seal:

And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth (Revelation 6:8 ESV).

Furthermore, the believers in Jesus Christ were previously removed from the world at the time of the rapture of the church. Their numbers also need to be subtracted from the inhabitants of the earth at this time.

REASON 5 DEATH IS INFLICTED BY THE HORSES NOT THE RIDERS

Another indication of the symbolic nature of this account is that death is inflicted upon the people by the horses, rather than the riders of the horses. In fact, the power to kill is in the mouth of the horses as well as their tails:

For the power of the horses resides in their mouths and in their tails, because their tails are like snakes, having heads that inflict injuries (Revelation 9:19 NET).

REASON 6 THE KINGS FROM THE EAST DOES NOT REFER TO CHINA

One of the main arguments for seeing the two hundred million man army as human and not demonic in Revelation 9 is because they are equated with the military campaign in Revelation 16, specifically the kings from the East.

WHERE WAS THE EAST IN JOHN'S DAY?

When Scripture speaks of "kings from the east" it was not referring to what we call the Far East, China and Japan:

In the first-century land of Israel as well as the wider Roman Empire, the “east” meant Mesopotamia and Persia or Parthia (e.g., Isa 41:2, 25; 46:11...), often in connection with fears of invasion and conquest from empires to the east.

Every informed reader in the Roman Empire, especially in places like Asia Minor and Syria-Palestine near the Parthian border, would understand the “kings of the East” as the Parthians; the river Euphrates was the boundary between the Roman and Parthian empires. (Craig Keener)

Parthia was located in what is modern day Iran. Its territory included, among other countries, modern day Iraq and Turkey.

Furthermore, we should not assume that these armies come only from the east. Indeed, in the same context we read:

For they are the spirits of the demons performing signs who go out to the kings of the earth to bring them together for the battle that will take place on the great day of God, the All-Powerful (Revelation 16:14 NET).

Notice that it says that “all kings of the earth” are brought together for this battle.

Give evidence such as this, Buist Fanning warns about making uniformed comments about the Far East:

It is unfortunate to read popular interpreters who look to the Far East and confidently speak of “Oriental rulers” and forces from countries such as “communist China” or Japan, the “Land of the Rising Sun.” In previous centuries interpreters confidently cited Ottoman Turks and other Muslims invading Eastern Europe as the eastern powers. To declare that these specific modern nations are the “fulfillment” of what John speaks of has invariably been an embarrassment to prophetic interpretation in subsequent generations (Buist Fanning, *Revelation, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 420).

He brings up an excellent point. In the past, there were confident assertions by well-meaning Bible commentators that Turkey’s Ottoman empire was in view here, they were the “kings from the east.” However, today, there is no longer an Ottoman empire.

Therefore, we do NOT want to be an embarrassment by making a similar mistakes in our identification of these kings coming from the east as has been done in the past.

SUMMARY

We can summarize our conclusions as follows:

1. No doubt, the number, often translated two hundred million men, refers to an enormous army. However, to translate the Greek text as two hundred million is perhaps being overly precise.
2. There are Bible believers who make the case for this large army on horseback in Revelation 9 as literal humans.
3. However, the totality of the evidence is that the army in Revelation 9 is demonic. Indeed, the context makes it clear.
4. We cannot equate the military campaign in Revelation 16 with what is recorded in Revelation 9. There are major differences between the two.

40 Common Mistakes About Last Days Bible Prophecy Cleared Up

5. In the first century, the phrase, “the kings from the east” referred to the territory of such modern nations as Iraq and Iran. It did not refer to nations of the Far East, such as China and Japan.
6. Too many mistakes have been made by commentators in the past as well, as in the present, attempting to pin down the exact nations referred to as the “kings from the east.” In fact, for a long time, it was assumed that these kings were the Turkish Ottoman empire, an empire that does not exist today!
7. Finally, the “kings from the east” are not the only nations involved in the campaign of Armageddon. Indeed, it is the nations of the world that gather together.
8. Revelation 16 does not mention the number of participants in the campaign of Armageddon.

MISTAKE 30

GOG IN EZEKIEL 38,39 IS NOT THE SAME CHARACTER AS THE FINAL ANTICHRIST

In Scripture, there are evil two personages who are highlighted as major players in the last days: Gog and the Final Antichrist. A common mistake is to assume that they are the same personage. The following points should be understood in order to clear up this mistake:

GOG

First, there is the leader of the invasion of Israel in as recorded in Ezekiel 38,39. His title is “Gog.” He comes from the land of Magog and he will arise as a leader of a coalition against Israel in the “last days:”

Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him (Prepare yourself and be ready, you and all your companies that are gathered about you; and be a guard for them. After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely (Ezekiel 38:1-2,7-8 NET).

Gog is definitely a human being who will be the leader of this “last days” group of nations who will invade Israel.

THE COMING WORLD LEADER

Second, there is a coming world leader. Through the help of his cohort, the False Prophet, the entire world will be forced to worship him and his image. Among other titles, he is known as the Antichrist. John wrote the following about him:

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour (1 John 2:18 NET).

Since these two individuals have certain things in common, Gog and the Final Antichrist, some assume they are the same person. However, this is not what the Bible teaches.

GOG AND THE FINAL ANTICHRIST ARE TWO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

There are a number of reasons as to why Gog and the final Antichrist are not the same person. They can be listed as follows:

DIFFERENCE 1 THEY ARE FROM DIFFERENT GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS

The last days coalition of nations against Israel is led by a leader with the title of Gog. He is said to come to Israel from the “far north:”

Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him (Ezekiel 38:1 NKJV).

Gog is called the “prince of Rosh,” modern day Russia.

We also read that he will come from the “far north:”

Then you will come from your place out of the far north, you and many peoples with you (Ezekiel 38:15 NKJV).

The farthest point north from both Israel and Babylon (where Ezekiel was prophesying from) is modern day Russia.

On the other hand, the final Antichrist will arise from the revived Roman Empire. This the fourth of four kingdoms of Nebuchadnezzar's dream that Daniel explained:

Then there will be a fourth kingdom, one strong like iron. Just like iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything, and as iron breaks in pieces all of these metals, so it will break in pieces and crush the others (Daniel 2:40 NET).

The leader of this fourth kingdom will come from that part of the world, western Europe.

In other words, these two "last days" personages arise from two different geographical areas.

DIFFERENCE 2 GOG IS A MAN OF WAR, ANTICHRIST STARTS OUT AS A MAN OF PEACE

When we are introduced to these two characters, we find completely different descriptions of them.

In our book *The Final Antichrist* we chronicle his career. We find that he rises out of obscurity and becomes known as "a man of peace." It is only after three-and one-half years in the limelight that his true nature is revealed, he is a beast.

Gog, on the other hand, is an established warrior, a man of war. When we are introduced to him it is in the context of invading Israel with a military coalition that is under his control. Gog wants to take something from the chosen people that he, as well as the other invading countries, both want and need.

DIFFERENCE 3 GOG RULES A COUNTY, THE FINAL ANTICHRIST THE ENTIRE WORLD

Gog is a leader of a particular country. Most likely, it is modern day Russia. We have documented this in our book *The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion* Appendix 1. The book is a free download on our website educatingourworld.com under the heading of *Bible Prophecy*.

On the other hand, the final Antichrist will not be the leader of only one country. Indeed, he will rise up to head up a ten-nation confederation. Eventually he will become a worldwide dictator while Gog's influence will be localized to one region. Note how the Scripture describes the Final Antichrist, the beast:

The beast was permitted to go to war against the saints and conquer them. He was given ruling authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation, and all those who live on the earth will worship the beast, everyone whose name has not been written since the foundation of the world in the book of life belonging to the Lamb who was killed (Revelation 13:7-8 NET).

DIFFERENCE 4 GOG SEEMINGLY APPEARS BEFORE THE RISE OF ANTICHRIST

The timing is also different. One of the last days scenarios, though certainly not the only one, has Gog arising before Antichrist. In other words, the invasion of Ezekiel 38 and 39 takes place before the Antichrist rises to prominence. Accordingly, they do not appear on the stage of history at the same time.

**DIFFERENCE 5 THE ARMY OF GOG IS STOPPED WHEN ENTERING THE HOLY LAND,
ANTICHRIST SETS UP HIS HEADQUARTERS THERE**

The army of Gog is destroyed when they enter the Promised Land:

I will summon the sword against you on all the hills of Israel, says the Sovereign LORD. Your men will turn their swords against each other (Ezekiel 38:21 NLT)

The final Antichrist, on the other hand, establishes his headquarters in the Holy Land:

He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him (Daniel 11:45 NIV).

“Between the seas” means it will be somewhere between the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. The mention of the “beautiful holy mountain” refers to Jerusalem.

Therefore, it seems that Antichrist will set up his headquarters on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem or somewhere north of the city.

This is another indication that they cannot be the same person.

**DIFFERENCE 6 GOG IS DESTROYED BY GOD WHEN HE ENTERS THE HOLY LAND,
ANTICHRIST IS THROWN INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE AT THE RETURN OF
CHRIST**

It also seems Gog dies, along with his entire coalition, the moment they set foot in the Promised Land:

On that day I will assign Gog a grave in Israel. It will be the valley of those who travel east of the sea; it will block the way of the travelers. There they will bury Gog and all his horde; they will call it the valley of Hamon-Gog (Ezekiel 39:11 NET).

He is then buried in the Holy Land.

The Final Antichrist will rule the world for some three-and- one-half years. He will only be stopped at the Second Coming of Christ:

Now the beast was seized, and along with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf - signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire burning with sulfur (Revelation 19:20 NET).

Instead of being buried, the final Antichrist will be thrown alive into the “lake of fire.”

In sum, the conclusion is clear: we are looking at two different persons when we consider what the Scripture says about Gog and the final Antichrist. Hence, it is a mistake to assume that they are the same person.

MISTAKE 31

THE FINAL ANTICHRIST WILL BE A LITERAL HUMAN BEING: NOT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

There are people who see the final Antichrist as an impersonal force, some evil religious system, or even some type of artificial intelligence. However, as we will discover, the Bible consistently speaks of Antichrist as an actual person. If so, then the question is whether this person has already come in history, the preterist view, or whether he is still to come, the futurist view.

The idea that there will be a final Antichrist who is an actual person, who is still to come on world's stage, is based upon a number of things. We can highlight them as follows.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION SPEAKS OF FUTURE EVENTS

The futurist view is based on a literal understanding of the Book of Revelation. While the first three chapters are dealing with issues of that particular time, from chapter four forward the subject is the future.

God has given us the Book of Revelation for a number of reasons and one of them is the explanation of “things to come.” Therefore, when Revelation is read in a *normal* sense, the events spoken about must take place in the future. Indeed, there is no possible way to find their fulfillment in the first century, or at some other time in church history.

This is especially true of what Scripture says about the coming “beast,” the “Antichrist.” The biblical description of who he is, as well as what he will do, remains unfulfilled. Nobody has come upon the scene of history and fulfilled what is written about this biblical “beast,” the “man of sin.”

In fact, Scripture says that this coming man of sin will only be stopped when Jesus Christ returns to the earth. We read the following in the Book of Revelation:

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the world and their armies gathered together to fight against the one sitting on the horse and his army. And the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who did mighty miracles on behalf of the beast—miracles that deceived all who had accepted the mark of the beast and who worshiped his statue. Both the beast and his false prophet were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Revelation 19:19-20 NLT).

Any attempt to say this passage has already been fulfilled is futile. The coming of the predicted Antichrist, as well as his eventual doom, is still a future event.

Therefore, all things considered, the futurist view of Revelation is the most consistent with the facts.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

The idea that the appearance of the final Antichrist is still future is confirmed by the Book of Daniel.

We find that the wars of final Antichrist are described in Daniel 11:40-45. The time of this conflict is declared to be “the time of the end.”

At the time of the end the king of the south will attack him (Daniel 11:40 NET).

There is nothing in the context that would restrict the force of the word “end.” Consequently, the end of all things must be the meaning:

Furthermore, this battle concludes with the destruction of Antichrist in the Holy Land followed by the resurrection of the Old Testament believers

At that time Michael, the archangel who stands guard over your nation, will arise. Then there will be a time of anguish greater than any since nations first came into existence. But at that time every one of your people whose name is written in the book will be rescued. Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace (Daniel 12:1-2 NLT).

Since these predicted events have not yet occurred, therefore the “end” in view here must be the final days of this present age.

THE EVIDENCE THAT ANTICHRIST IS A HUMAN BEING

As for Antichrist being an actual person who is still to come on the stage of history, the following observations should be made.

1. HE IS A MEMBER OF A SATANIC GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS

As we look at the text of Revelation, we find that Antichrist is a member of a satanic group of three individuals. We read the following:

Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet (Revelation 16:13 NIV).

Here the Antichrist, the beast, is compared to the dragon, Satan, and the false prophet. Since Satan is clearly portrayed in Scripture as an actual personage, we should also view the beast and the false prophet in the same manner. It would be inconsistent to interpret one or two of these references literally while the others figuratively. It is important to be consistent in our interpretation.

2. HE IS COMMISSIONED BY THE DEVIL

This personage is commissioned of the devil himself. John explained how the dragon, the devil, gave power to the beast:

The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority (Revelation 13:2 NIV).

This is another indication that we are dealing with a human being.

3. THIS PERSON IS ENERGIZED AND EQUIPPED BY SATAN

We are also told that this man of sin is energized and equipped by Satan. We read the following in Thessalonians:

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9 ESV).

The fact that he is called “the lawless one” indicates that we are dealing with a single person. It is not an institution.

4. ANTICHRIST REMAINS A HUMAN BEING

With all these traits, Antichrist is still a human being. John made this very clear when he wrote the following:

This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666 (Revelation 13:18 ESV).

Here we find that his number is that of a man. This seems to make his identity clear. The Final Antichrist is a human being.

5. HE WILL SELL HIS SOUL TO THE DEVIL

It seems that the final Antichrist will be a human being who personally gives his soul over to the devil. When the devil tempted Jesus, he offered the Lord all the kingdoms of the world. The only requirement is that Jesus would have to bow down to him. Matthew records the following:

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me” (Matthew 4:8–9 ESV)

The Lord would not bow. We read what happened next:

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’” (Matthew 4:10 NIV).

When the devil tempted the Lord Jesus, and offered him the kingdoms of the world, he did not receive the response from the Lord which he was after.

Rather he only received a rebuke. However in the final Antichrist, Satan finds a human being who is willing to sell his soul for the chance to rule the world.

6. HE AND THE FALSE PROPHET WILL BE TORMENTED

Finally, we are told that when Christ returns, this personage will be tormented for all eternity. As we saw earlier, he will be thrown into the lake of fire with the “false prophet” at the return of Christ:

Now the beast was seized, and along with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf - signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire burning with sulfur (Revelation 19:20 NET).

Later, we are told that the devil will eventually join these two in the “lake of fire:”

And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are too, and they will be tormented there day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20:10 NET).

You do not torment an idea, something symbolic, or something built, as in artificial intelligence! You can only punish and torment a living creature! This is a further indication that the final Antichrist is an actual person.

CONCLUSION: THE FINAL ANTICHRIST IS COMING

Therefore, when all the evidence is in, we can conclude the following. The Bible, when interpreted in a normal literal sense, says that there will be a personal final Antichrist who comes on the scene of history shortly before the return of Jesus Christ.

40 Common Mistakes About Last Days Bible Prophecy Cleared Up

This Antichrist will not be an evil influence, an ungodly system, or some type of created artificial intelligence. Instead he will be an actual human being who does the bidding of Satan. His coming is still in the future. This is the consistent biblical view of the subject of Antichrist.

MISTAKE 32

WE SHOULD NOT TRY TO DETERMINE THE IDENTITY OF THE FINAL ANTICHRIST OR THE FALSE PROPHET

The Bible speaks of a personage coming on the scene of history known as the beast, the Final Antichrist. The evidence is clear that he has not yet appeared in history. He will also have a cohort, the False Prophet who will come on the scene after him. This being the case, should we attempt to determine their identity?

In answering this question we will mainly deal with the Final Antichrist. Are believers to specifically look for this coming world leader? We will discover that it is a mistake to do so.

1. THE PRE-TRIBULATION VIEW: THE CHURCH WILL NOT EXPERIENCE THE FINAL ANTICHRIST

There are many Bible believers who say that the Lord never intended the church, the true believers in Christ, to know the identity of the coming Antichrist because they will never experience him in person. While the spirit of Antichrist is certainly alive and well, and working in the world today, the final Antichrist has yet to come.

When he does come, the New Testament church will *not* be upon the earth. The church will first be taken out of the world at the rapture. The living believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. It is only *after* this happens that the final Antichrist can be revealed.

2. ANTICHRIST DEALS PRIMARILY WITH ISRAEL

In addition, according to the pre-tribulation rapture position, the final Antichrist will primarily deal with the nation Israel. Indeed, the time of the appearance of Antichrist is known as the “seventieth week of Daniel.” It is a seven-year period when the Lord once again deals with Israel as a nation. The church is not around at this time.

While Antichrist will indeed persecute the saints, these saints are not part of the New Testament church. The church is never pictured in the various predictions about the final Antichrist.

Therefore, this individual will not become prominent during this present age.

3. ALL ATTEMPTED IDENTIFICATIONS HAVE BEEN FUTILE

It is clear that the many past attempts to identify the final Antichrist have been mistaken. Though many sincere people were absolutely certain that they have correctly identified the coming man of sin with some contemporary personage, their identification has always been incorrect. This should teach us a lesson. It is not for us to know his identity!

4. ALL ATTEMPTED IDENTIFICATIONS WILL BE FUTILE

Indeed, if the pre-tribulation rapture view is correct, then all attempted identifications of the coming Antichrist, by definition, will be futile! His identity will remain unknown until after the time the church is taken out of the world. It is only at that time that he will appear on the scene.

When he does appear, he will start as a relatively unknown person and then work his way up into a position of world leadership. This is further evidence that his identity will not be immediately apparent.

HOW HAS ANTICHRIST BEEN MISIDENTIFIED IN THE PAST?

The answer to this particular question could actually fill up several volumes! The predicted final Antichrist of Scripture has indeed been misidentified many times in the past. Furthermore, it seems fair to say that he will also be misidentified in the future.

However, it must be said that some of these people, who were misidentified as the final Antichrist, could rightly be called “Antichrist” since they have certain of the qualities of the coming man of sin.

Yet, they were not the beast, the man of sin, the final Antichrist, the coming Caesar, which Scripture says will arrive upon the scene shortly before the return of Jesus Christ.

While not desiring to be exhaustive, we can list some of the more interesting identifications which have missed the mark. They include the following.

THE ROMAN GENERAL POMPEY: THE ANTI-MESSIAH

Even before the First Coming of Jesus Christ to the earth, there were identifications by the Jews of an “anti-Messiah.” In a work written before the time of Christ, known as the “Psalms of Solomon,” the Roman general Pompey is called the “adversary of God.”

Pompey profaned the temple by entering the Holy of Holies after his conquest of Jerusalem in 63 B.C. He, therefore, is called “the dragon” in this work written about 60 B.C. Scripture tells us that the final Antichrist will himself profane the temple in an act of defiance against the Lord.

CALIGULA: THE CRAZED ROMAN EMPEROR

During the first century, the Roman Emperor Caligula looked like a good candidate for the predicted Antichrist. Indeed, he ordered a statue of himself to be placed in the Temple in Jerusalem and commanded that the Jewish people worship his image. If this act would have been carried out, then it would have fulfilled the prediction of Jesus. Indeed, the Lord warned the people to look for the following to take place:

So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand) (Matthew 24:15 ESV).

The Temple is to be desecrated by the coming man of sin. Caligula attempted to fulfill this prediction. However, this crazed emperor died in A.D. 41, and his orders were never carried out. While for a time it looked like he would be the one whom Jesus spoke about, his premature death ended any chance of him being the predicted desolator.

NERO: THE EMPEROR WHO BLAMED CHRISTIANS FOR THE FIRE OF ROME

One of the most popular identifications of Antichrist was that of Caesar Nero. In many ways, his life mirrored that of the final Antichrist. For one thing, he blamed the Christians for the great fire of Rome. Nero then set out to specifically target them for persecution.

When he was condemned to death by the Roman Senate in A.D. 68, Nero committed suicide. Since he died alone, the rumors persisted that he was not really dead. While the return of Nero was expected for a number of years after his death, it was eventually realized that this man would not fulfill what the Scripture predicted about the final Antichrist.

DOMITIAN: THE EMPEROR WHO BANISHED THE APOSTLE JOHN TO PATMOS

The Roman Emperor Domitian was the person who banished John the Apostle to the Island of Patmos late in the first century A.D. Since he was the current Emperor at the time of the composition of the Book of Revelation, many saw him as the first beast, the final Antichrist.

In fact, there are some interpreters of Revelation who still believe Domitian was the beast which John wrote about. This perspective holds that most of the events in the Book of Revelation were all fulfilled in the first century A.D., whether literally or figuratively.

DIOCLETIAN: THE EMPEROR WHO ORDERED EMPIRE-WIDE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

The Roman Emperor Diocletian had a number of qualities of the final Antichrist. In A.D. 303, Diocletian instituted the most thorough persecution of Christians to that date. The church historian Eusebius relates what happened in this manner:

It was the nineteenth year of Diocletian's reign [A.D. 303] the month Dystrus, called March by the Romans, and the festival of the Savior's Passion was approaching, when an imperial decree was published everywhere, ordering the churches to be razed to the ground and the Scriptures destroyed by fire, and giving notice that those in places of honor would lose their places, and domestic staff, if they continued to profess Christianity, would be deprived of their liberty. Such was the first edict against us. Soon afterwards other decrees arrived in rapid succession, ordering that the presidents of the churches in every place should all be first committed to prison and then coerced by every possible means into offering sacrifice (Eusebius, *History of the Church* (VIII.2).

This edict concerned three things. Diocletian ordered all Christian churches to be destroyed, ordered all copies of Scripture to be burned, and deprived believers in Jesus Christ of their civil rights. These despicable acts made him a candidate for the predicted Antichrist.

JULIAN THE APOSTATE: HE WANTED TO REBUILD THE TEMPLE

After the rule of Constantine, there was the rise of an anti-Christian Emperor known as Julian the Apostate. This evil ruler attempted to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem in defiance of the words of Christ. In many ways, Julian was an Antichrist, but he was not the final Antichrist.

CHARLEMAGNE: THE MAN WHO WANTED TO REBUILD THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Charlemagne, Charles the Great, was the King of the Franks. He lived from A.D. 742-814. During his rule, he controlled a large portion of Europe. Indeed, he was the first ruler of an empire in Western Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. He was viewed as a possible candidate for the final Antichrist because of his attempt to rebuild the fallen Roman Empire. This will ultimately occur when this future "man of sin" comes upon the scene. Charlemagne, however, died before achieving this lofty goal.

THE PROTESTANT REFORMERS BELIEVED THE POPE WAS ANTICHRIST

At the time of the Protestant Reformation, it almost became an article of faith that the pope and the papacy constituted the biblical Antichrist. In fact, the Protestant reformers were unified in their belief that Antichrist had appeared in the person of the pope in Rome.

Rome, of course, responded to those attacks. Interestingly, one of the arguments which Rome advanced to show that the pope could not be the predicted Antichrist was the fact that the coming man of sin had to be Jewish.

It was assumed that if the Jews accepted the Antichrist as their Messiah, then he would have to be a Jew. Otherwise it would be impossible for him to be embraced by the nation. Since there has never been a Jewish pope, the idea that the papacy was the predicted Antichrist was thoroughly rejected by Roman Catholics.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH BELIEVED PROTESTANTS WERE ANTICHRIST

The Roman Church turned the tables on the Protestants by claiming they were actually the biblical Antichrist! If the Roman Catholic Church was the sole work of Jesus Christ upon the earth, then to resist the church was to resist Christ. Therefore, Protestantism could rightly be called “Antichrist” by the Roman Catholic Church.

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

During the French Revolution there was another popular candidate for Antichrist, Napoleon Bonaparte. As usual, the numbers which were attached to the name of Napoleon could be calculated to equal 666. While Napoleon seemed to have many of the characteristics of the predicted Antichrist, he too left the scene without fulfilling what the Scripture predicted.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR: MANY CANDIDATES FOR THE COMING ANTICHRIST ARISE

During the events leading up to the Second World War, as well as during the conflict, there were a number of books written which identified the final Antichrist as one of the leaders of the Axis powers. The main candidates were Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini, though some people suggested Joseph Stalin or even President Franklin Roosevelt!

PRESIDENT FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

The numerical value of FDR's name was reported to add up to 666. Because of the Great Depression, FDR was the most autocratic United States President of the 20th century. Roosevelt was in office for 12 years. This was longer than any United States President.

HITLER: THE PERSECUTOR OF THE JEWS

Adolph Hitler was a favorite candidate for Antichrist during his rise to power. Indeed, there were many well-respected Bible interpreters who publicly came out and claimed Hitler was the biblical Antichrist.

As with others in the past, it was found that the letters of his name added up to 666. However, with the death of Hitler, and the end of the Second World War, the identification of him with the final Antichrist lost its momentum.

MUSSOLINI: THE ITALIAN ANTICHRIST

Benito Mussolini was also a popular choice among people who attempted to discover the identity of the first beast of the Book of Revelation. In fact, Mussolini seemed like a prime candidate. He wanted to re-establish the Holy Roman Empire, he was from Rome, and he had world domination in mind. Many booklets were written which depicted him as the coming beast, the man of sin.

Sad to say, some of these were composed by reputable Bible teachers. They, too, were caught up in the events surrounding the Second World War and therefore made the mistake of identifying a living person as the beast of Revelation. Like all of the interpreters before them, these godly people were wrong in their claim that Antichrist was alive and living among them.

JOSEPH STALIN: THE GREAT MASS MURDERER

Joseph Stalin, the Russian dictator, is believed to be the greatest mass murderer in history. He is said to have ordered the death of some thirty million people. While most rulers killed those of other nations, Stalin's victims were mostly his own people. He was a despicable human being and therefore seemingly a prime candidate for the biblical Antichrist. Yet, he was not the predicted one.

THE POST-WORLD WAR II ANTICHRISTS

World War II came and went. The final Antichrist had still not appeared. The embarrassments of the identifications of Hitler and Mussolini during the Second World War did not stop others from repeating their mistake. Indeed, after the Second World War there were still candidates for the position of Antichrist among those who appeared on the world scene.

JOHN F. KENNEDY: THE MORTAL HEAD WOUND

For a while, a popular candidate was United States President John F. Kennedy (JFK). He was the first Roman Catholic who became President of the United States. This made him suspect to a number of people because it was believed that he would do whatever the pope asked.

In addition, at the 1956 Democratic convention, where he was nominated for president, Kennedy received 666 votes. When President Kennedy was shot in the head in Dallas on November 22, 1963, it was thought that his deadly head wound would heal. Stories circulated that he was being kept alive in the Vatican. Eventually, the idea that John F. Kennedy would return and become this final Antichrist lost momentum.

HENRY KISSINGER: THE PEACEMAKER

Another popular candidate was the former Secretary of State of the United States, Henry Kissinger. Because of Mr. Kissinger's peacemaking activity in the Middle East, he was labeled the Antichrist by some. However, he eventually withdrew from politics without fulfilling the biblical requirements of Antichrist.

ANWAR SADAT: THE MAN OF PEACE, MAN OF SIN?

Anwar Sadat, the leader of Egypt, was a popular choice for a while as being the biblical Antichrist. It was claimed that he was from the right geographical area, made a groundbreaking peace treaty with Israel and won the Nobel Prize as a "man of peace."

In fact, one Christian book named Anwar Sadat the Antichrist and claimed that this identification was by divine revelation! However, Sadat was soon assassinated and consequently the idea that he was the man of sin quickly faded.

This also illustrates the foolishness of people who claim that their own particular insight into the identity of the man of sin is somehow divinely given!

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV: THE MAN WHO DISMANTLED THE SOVIET UNION

Another favorite during the Cold War was the Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev. He became a prime candidate because of his participation in dismantling the Soviet Union. Yet, this world leader fell from power and thus became a non-candidate.

PRESIDENT RONALD WILSON REAGAN: EACH OF HIS NAMES HAD SIX LETTERS

Strange as it may seem, during the 1980's, there was some speculation that President Ronald Reagan of the United States was the predicted Antichrist. The fact that he had six letters in all three of his names, Ronald Wilson Reagan, caused some to speculate that this popular president was actually the man of sin. As has been true with the other identifications in the past, this one turned out to be incorrect.

SADDAM HUSSEIN: THE BUTCHER OF BAGHDAD

Saddam Hussein, the leader of Iraq, the butcher of Baghdad, was also highlighted as being a possible candidate for Antichrist in the early 1990's. For one thing, Hussein was going to rebuild the ancient city of Babylon whose location is in modern day Iraq.

Yet, like all previous candidates, this identification was incorrect. Hussein was eventually overthrown when Iraq was invaded by the United States and its allies. At the end of 2006, Hussein was executed for his murderous crimes.

The list goes on and on. This has merely been a sampling of the misidentifications of the past with respect to the identity of the final Antichrist.

THE MISIDENTIFICATIONS NEVER STOP

The misidentifications of the person of the Antichrist continue to this day. Indeed, it seems that anyone who becomes a public figure is sooner or later found to have the numbers of his name add up to 666.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THESE MISTAKES

There are many lessons to be learned in these attempts to name the biblical Antichrist. Some of the more obvious ones are as follows.

1. WE SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY ANTICHRIST AHEAD OF TIME

To begin with, we should not engage in such fruitless speculation. People will only know the identity of the final Antichrist when he arrives on the scene and performs certain predicted acts. Until that time, his identity will remain a mystery.

To sum up, it is not possible to know who he is until then.

2. HIS NUMBER IS GIVEN TO CONFIRM HIS IDENTITY, NOT DISCOVER IT

Second, the number of his name, 666, is given to us to *confirm* his identity, not to discover it. In other words, it is to verify what is already believed about this man, that he is the beast, the man of sin, predicted in Scripture. We are not to know who he is ahead of time.

3. IT DOES NOT HONOR THE LORD WHEN PREDICTIONS ARE MADE

Finally, and most important, such public predictions of either the exact identity of Antichrist, or the precise timing of his coming, never honor the Lord. In fact, all they do is bring shame and ridicule to the Christian faith.

40 Common Mistakes About Last Days Bible Prophecy Cleared Up

When unbelievers are told that they need to know that a particular person is the final Antichrist because the great tribulation is about to happen, and the coming of Jesus Christ is near, the message of Christ is shamed and held up to ridicule when the prediction does not come to pass.

In fact, who can blame unbelievers for this response when so-called Bible experts are telling them that they know, or they think they know, the identity of the coming man of sin?

If well-known Bible teachers are wrong about the identity of the final Antichrist, then unbelievers may conclude they are also wrong about Jesus Christ! Why trust anything which they say?

Therefore, hopefully one of the great lessons to be learned from the study of Antichrist concerns what we should not do. Indeed, we should not attempt to identify any living person as Antichrist.

When Antichrist arrives on the scene, there will be no question about who he is. Indeed, when this political leader becomes the beast who dominates the world, there will be little doubt about his identity.

So the lesson we should learn from all of this is that we are not to try to identify any living individual as the Final Antichrist. Indeed, it is a mistake to do so.

MISTAKE 33

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS “MYSTERY BABYLON”

In the Book of Revelation we find passages that refer to a name, or a mark, that is placed upon a person or upon their forehead. These marks identify either the owner of that person or the one who rules them. For example the “mark of the beast” indicates that the beast is the ruler over them:

He [the false prophet] also caused everyone (small and great, rich and poor, free and slave) to obtain a mark on their right hand or on their forehead. Thus no one was allowed to buy or sell things unless he bore the mark of the beast - that is, his name or his number (Revelation 13:16,17 NET)

However, in contrast to this, in Revelation 17:5 the mark on the forehead actually identifies the personage herself. We read the following translation from the King James Version of 1611:

And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH (Revelation 17:5 KJV 1611).

The name of the woman is placed upon her forehead. This has caused people to speak of her as “Mystery Babylon the Great” or simply “Mystery Babylon.”

However, in other translations, such as the English Standard Version, her name is rendered as “Babylon the Great:”

And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations” (English Standard Version)

The New English translation is similar:

On her forehead was written a name, a mystery: “Babylon the Great, the Mother of prostitutes and of the detestable things of the earth (NET Bible)

The note from the NET Bible explains the difference:

Some translations consider the word ...(*musterion*, “mystery”) a part of the name written (“Mystery Babylon the Great,” so KJV, NIV), but the gender of both [the Greek words] *onoma*, “name”) and *musterion* “mystery” are neuter, while the gender of “Babylon” is feminine. This strongly suggests that *musterion* should be understood as an appositive to *onoma* (“a name, i.e., a mystery”).

Therefore, according to the rules of Greek grammar, the word translated “mystery” would *not* be connected with the word translated “name” in the sense that it is part of her name or title. Consequently, this is why we have such translations as we find in the ESV and NET Bible.

Interestingly, the NIV of 2011 has repunctuated the text to reflect the same rendering as most modern Bible translations:

The name written on her forehead was a mystery: BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH (NIV 2011 Edition)

OTHER MODERN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS RENDER THE NAME OF THE WOMAN IN A SIMILAR MANNER

The following is how this verse is rendered in other modern translations:

and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth’s abominations.” (NRSV Revised Edition)

and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” (New American Standard Bible 1995 edition as well as the 2020 update)

On her forehead was written a name, a mystery: BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE DETESTABLE THINGS OF THE EARTH (Christian Standard Bible)

A name—a mystery—was written on her forehead: “Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and the vile things of the earth.” (Common English Bible)

On her forehead was written a secret name: BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND DETESTABLE THINGS OF THE EARTH (International Standard Version)

A mysterious name was written on her forehead: “Babylon the Great, Mother of All Prostitutes and Obscenities in the World. (New Living Translation)

Written on her forehead was a name with a secret meaning: ‘Babylon the great, the mother of whores and of every obscenity on earth.’ (Revised English Bible)

She had a title written on her forehead. This title has a hidden meaning. This is what was written: THE GREAT BABYLON MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND THE EVIL THINGS OF THE EARTH (Easy To Read Version)

On her forehead a title was written that was secret. This is what was written: THE GREAT BABYLON MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE EVIL THINGS OF THE EARTH (New Century Version)

On her forehead a ‘title [name] was written that was ‘secret [a mystery]. This is what was written: THE GREAT BABYLON MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES [whores] AND OF THE EVIL [abominable; detestable] THINGS OF THE EARTH (The Expanded Bible)

On her forehead was written a name, which is a mystery, “Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth.” (New American Bible, Revised Edition)

And on her forehead there was inscribed a name of mystery [with a secret symbolic meaning]: Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes (idolatresses) and of the filth and atrocities and abominations of the earth. (Amplified Bible, Classic Edition)

On her forehead was written a name that has a secret meaning: “Great Babylon, the mother of all prostitutes and perverts in the world” (Good News Translation)

And on her forehead a name was written, a mystery: “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES (false religions, heresies) AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” (Amplified Bible, Modern Edition)

On her forehead a mysterious name was written: I AM THE GREAT CITY OF BABYLON, THE MOTHER OF EVERY IMMORAL AND FILTHY THING ON EARTH (Contemporary English Version)

Therefore, as we have observed, most of the newer English translations do not see the word “mystery” as part of what was written on her forehead.

This punctuation is nothing new. Albert Barnes (1798-1870) wrote the following in his learned commentary on this passage:

Our translators [King James Version] have printed and pointed the word mystery as if it were part of the inscription. It would probably be better to regard it as referring to the inscription thus: “a name was written—a mysterious name, to wit, Babylon,” etc. Or “a name was written mysteriously” (Albert Barnes, Barnes Notes on Revelation 17:5)

WHAT EXACTLY DOES THE NAME SAY?

If “mystery” is not part of her name there still remains the question as to what the words on her forehead precisely say: “Babylon The Great” or “Babylon the Great Mother of Prostitutes and Abominations on the earth.”

Is it the shorter name or the longer one that will be on her forehead?

A number of commentators believe the name is simply “Babylon the Great” with the remaining words being a description of this woman, not her name. Buist Fanning explains:

Her primary name then is given as “Babylon the great” ... Additional phrases describe her as “the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth,” representing the widespread effect that her influence exerts. She is “the mother” in the sense that she produces others who engage in “prostitution” (i.e., misusing valuable or sacred things for personal gain; violating what is right and good for evil or self-centered purposes) as she herself does. So also she is the origin above all others of detestable, repulsive deeds — especially idolatrous acts ... None of these names are likely to be what she would call herself (much like Jezebel in 2:20), especially not the additional phrases. These constitute the Spirit’s characterization of her as given in John’s vision (Buist Fanning, *Revelation, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary On The New Testament*, 2020, p. 439).

DOES IT MATTER?

So does it matter whether we call this woman “Mystery Babylon the Great” or merely “Babylon the Great?”

Yes it does! Since the word “mystery” is not part of the name or title of the woman, there are basically two choices we have as how to understand the Greek term in this context.

OPTION 1 MYSTERY CAN MEAN A DIVINE SECRET REVEALED FOR THE FIRST TIME

The Greek word *musterion* is most-often used to denote a sacred secret that was formerly hidden but now has been revealed for the first time. In fact, this is the standard use of this Greek word in the New Testament. The Moody Bible Commentary concurs with this interpretation:

It is not “mysterious,” suggesting a symbolic interpretation, but rather is something that was not known previously (Daniel Green, *Moody Bible Commentary, Revelation*, Chicago, Moody Press).

Notice an example in Scripture of this use of the word “mystery:”

Listen, I will tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:51-53 NET).

Paul was revealing a “mystery,” a new truth, namely something never before known.

In the same way, John is revealing something new about this last days anti-God system. It is described in detail by an angel using a figure of a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast (Revelation 17:1-4).

In addition, the mystery, or sacred secret, that is related to the woman is further explained by the angelic interpreter in verses 8–18. It is the longest explanation of anything in the Book of Revelation.

OPTION 2 IT CAN REFER TO SOMETHING PERPLEXING

There is also a secondary use of the word “mystery” in Scripture. The word can refer to something perplexing or puzzling, something that needs further explaining to be understood. We find this secondary use of the word earlier in the Book of Revelation:

The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (Revelation 1:20 NET).

The meaning of the seven stars would not be known without this divine explanation.

Some Bible commentators contend that this secondary use of the word makes better sense in the context. Alan Johnson explains:

John’s use of *mysterion* [is] as a word denoting a divine mystery or allegory that is now revealed. Furthermore, his use of *pneumatikōs* (“figuratively,”) before the words “Sodom and Egypt” in 11:8, by which the reader is alerted to a special symbolic significance in what follows, likewise supports this. No doubt that ... the specific part of the title that is a divine mystery is that this prostitute is the mother of all the earth’s idolatrous prostitutes. She is the fountainhead, the reservoir, the womb that bears all the individual cases of historical resistance to God’s will on earth; she is the unholy antithesis to the woman who weds the Lamb (19:7–8) and to the new Jerusalem (21:2–3).

Therefore, she cannot be merely ancient Babylon, Rome, or Jerusalem, because these are only her children — she is the mother of them all (Alan Johnson, *Revelation*, Expositors Bible Commentary).

This secondary understanding of *mysterion* seems to be the best explanation in this context. Indeed, two verses down, the angel uses the word same Greek word, translated mystery, in this sense of something perplexing that needs to be explained:

Then the angel said to me, “Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast, with the seven heads and the ten horns, that carries her (Revelation 17:7 CSB).

In this instance, the angel promises to explain to John the meaning of the cryptic, or enigmatic, symbolism of both the woman as well as the beast.

All in all, these two options for the meaning of “mystery” in this context are basically saying the same thing, the woman called “Babylon the Great” needs further explanation as to her identity.

However, her exact identification continues to remain a matter of debate. Buist Fanning explains:

But the enigmatic name “Babylon the Great” still leaves room for debate regarding who or what John and his readers would understand this woman to be, and the further details given in chapters 17–18 provide more information to consider. The name “Babylon” has occurred without much description earlier in the book (14:8; 16:19) (Buist Fanning, *Revelation*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary On The New Testament, 2020, p. 439).

The precise identification of the woman “Babylon the Great” is a topic for another day.

SUMMING UP

In sum, we should learn a valuable lesson from this example when we aim to properly teach or understand a portion of Scripture. The first thing we must do is to make certain that our translation is correct.

Indeed, if we begin with a translation that is questionable, then our conclusions may be questionable also. This is why we should never use the symbolic term “Mystery Babylon the Great” or “Mystery Babylon.”

Instead we should understand what John has written as “a name of mystery, Babylon the Great.”

With this as our starting point, we should then examine carefully what the Scripture says about this woman Babylon the Great, so that we can better comprehend what the Bible is telling us about her.

MISTAKE 34

LAST DAYS BIBLE PROPHECY SHOULD BE STUDIED, BUT NOT ON ITS OWN: SEVEN LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

The study of last days Bible prophecy is important, very important. While this study is extremely valuable, what makes it all the more stronger and theologically sound is the fact that it does not stand on its own. Indeed, it is crucial that we view this particular subject in light of other biblical truths.

In other words, no Bible-believing Christian should limit their study of Scripture to the events of the last days and to them alone. It is a mistake to do so!

Accordingly, let's look at seven lessons that we need to learn about "where last days Bible prophecy fits in."

LESSON 1 GOD WANTS US TO KNOW THE FUTURE

This first lesson deals with the declarations of the Bible itself. Indeed, it is the Scripture itself which has made certain claims about the only God who exists and the evidence that He has provided to demonstrate His existence. This should be our starting point.

In my book, *God Wants Us To Know The Future*, I begin by listing six passages where the Lord makes it clear that He has given us Bible prophecy for a number of reasons. We will examine at three of these.

THE UNIQUE CLAIM OF THE BIBLE: GOD ALONE CORRECTLY PREDICTS THE FUTURE

Before we begin any examination of the vast subject of Bible prophecy, it is important that we understand that accurately predicting the future is something that the God of the Bible uniquely claims for Himself.

In fact, as we search the Scripture, we will find that God has specifically pointed to fulfilled prophecy to demonstrate that He exists, that He knows the future, and that He is in control of the future.

In light of this, we will cite three passages, make some observations about them, and then discuss what the God of Scripture has claimed about Himself through the predictions that He has made.

THE LORD CHALLENGES THE PAGAN GODS (ISAIAH 41:21-24)

In this context, the God of Israel is denouncing His people for worshipping idols—objects which their own hands have made! In these verses, the Lord directly addresses these non-existent idols:

"Present your argument," says the Lord. "Produce your evidence," says Jacob's king. "Let them produce evidence! Let them tell us what will happen! Tell us about your earlier predictive oracles, so we may examine them and see how they were fulfilled. Or decree for us some future events! Predict how future events will turn out, so we might know you are gods. Yes, do something good or bad, so we might be frightened and in awe. Look, you are nothing, and your accomplishments are nonexistent; the one who chooses to worship you is disgusting (Isaiah 41:21-24 NET Bible).

OBSERVATIONS ON THIS PASSAGE

1. The Lord is challenging these so-called "gods" to present arguments that they exist. He wants them to produce some evidence.

2. Specifically, He asks them to predict some specific future events so that we can know that they exist.
3. God also wants to see their past record—the Lord wants to know how and when their past predictions were fulfilled.
4. The Lord challenges them to do something! “Make us afraid, or in awe of you!”
5. He concludes by emphasizing that these gods are non-existent—those who worship them are fools.

THE CLAIMS OF GOD: LOOK AT HIS PAST RECORD OF FULFILLMENTS! (ISAIAH 46:9,10)

In contrast to these non-existent gods, the Lord makes the following claims about Himself:

Remember what I accomplished in antiquity! Truly I am God, I have no peer; I am God, and there is none like me, who announces the end from the beginning and reveals beforehand what has not yet occurred, who says, ‘My plan will be realized, I will accomplish what I desire’ (Isaiah 46:9,10 NET Bible).

OBSERVATIONS ON THIS PASSAGE

1. The Lord says that He is the only God who exists—He has no rival, no peer. How do we know this?
2. The people were told to remember what He had already accomplished in the past.
3. Namely, He has told them beforehand of certain things that will take place.
4. We should recall that the Book of Isaiah was written some 2,700 years ago. In other words, at that time the Lord had already made predictions that had come true!
5. The result: His plan will be realized—it will come to pass.

Continuing this thought (Isaiah 48:3-6):

I announced events beforehand, I issued the decrees and made the predictions; suddenly I acted and they came to pass. I did this because I know how stubborn you are. Your neck muscles are like iron and your forehead like bronze. I announced them to you beforehand; before they happened, I predicted them for you, so you could never say, ‘My image did these things, my idol, my cast image, decreed them. You have heard; now look at all the evidence! Will you not admit that what I say is true?’ (Isaiah 48:3-6 NET Bible).

OBSERVATIONS ON THIS PASSAGE

1. The Lord has announced events before they have taken place—He has made decrees, or predictions.
2. These predicted events have always come to pass!
3. Furthermore, He gave predictive prophecy because the people of Israel were stubborn.
4. Namely, they would give credit to their idols as “gods” instead of to Him.
5. Predictive prophecy from the God of the Bible, thus, was to demonstrate that all these idols and “gods” were false gods, and that there was only one God who exists, the Lord Himself.

6. The Punch Line: “You have heard, now consider all the evidence!” If you consider the evidence—God’s predictions and the fulfillment of them—you will have to admit that what He says is true: He is indeed the Lord.

We conclude that the Bible makes a number of claims about a God who exists and who has demonstrated His existence by predicting events that will take place in the future. These claims are either true or false. If true, there must be evidence to support them.

We will now begin to examine the evidence. This brings us to our next lesson.

LESSON 2 THE CLAIMS HAVE PROVEN TO BE TRUE: GOD HAS A PERFECT TRACK RECORD

In my book, *God’s Work In History: 50 Biblical Prophecies Made and Fulfilled*, I look extensively at some of the many predictions found in Scripture which have already had their fulfillment. I will illustrate this by giving merely a couple of examples. The first one will deal with predictions fulfilled by Jesus while the second example will be some predictions of Jesus that were fulfilled.

THE OLD TESTAMENT PREDICTIONS MADE ABOUT THE COMING MESSIAH

From the time humanity first sinned, the Lord had predicted that a Deliverer would be sent to bring the fallen human race back into a right relationship with Him. Centuries went by without the appearance of this promised Savior. The New Testament records that He did indeed finally appear in the person of Jesus of Nazareth!

PREDICTION: THE MESSIAH WILL BE BORN IN BETHLEHEM

In the Old Testament, a number of predictions were made about the Messiah. Among other reasons, this was done to make the message abundantly clear as to His identity.

One particular prediction would eliminate every city in the world but one in which the Messiah would be born. Indeed, anyone who would claim to be the Messiah had to be born in David’s city, Bethlehem. The prophet Micah wrote:

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times (Micah 5:2 NIV).

Therefore, every other city in the world is eliminated. The genuine Messiah can only be born in one city—the city of David, Bethlehem.

THE FULFILLMENT

The New Testament books of Matthew and Luke record the fulfillment of this prediction:

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them (Luke 2:1-7 NIV).

There are a couple of things that are fascinating about this passage.

THE DECREE OF CAESAR

To begin with, we have this decree given by the Roman Emperor, Caesar. The decree announced that people must go to the city of their lineage to register for the purpose of taxation. Joseph went to the hometown of his family, Bethlehem. Had it not been for the decree, the baby would have been born in their own hometown—Nazareth.

We also discover it was when Joseph and Mary reached Bethlehem that the baby Jesus was born.

THE TESTIMONY OF MATTHEW

Matthew also records that Bethlehem was the city in which Jesus was born:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him (Matthew 2:1-2 NIV).

To sum up the Old Testament predictions, not only would the Messiah appear, He would be born in a very special place—Bethlehem, the city of David. Indeed, the Lord had designated this one city to be the birthplace of the Savior.

We discover that Jesus was born in that predicted place. In other words, His birth testified that He had the proper credentials to be the Promised Messiah.

Of course, this is something that none of us have control over. Indeed, we cannot determine the precise geographical location of our birth.

Yet, because of a decree from a Roman Emperor, His mother Mary was brought to the city of Bethlehem to enroll with her husband, Joseph, for the purpose of registering for taxation. Jesus was then born in the little town of Bethlehem in Judea fulfilling the prediction of the prophet Micah.

The old hymn puts it perfectly as to what happened that day in Bethlehem.

For in thy dark streets shineth, the everlasting light. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

Indeed, all of our hopes and fears have been met in the Person of God the Son, Jesus Christ, who was born that day in the little town of Bethlehem.

PREDICTION: THE MESSIAH WILL BE A DESCENDANT OF KING DAVID

Not only would the Messiah be born in the city of King David, He would also be a male physical descendant of the king. Therefore, merely being born in Bethlehem was not enough. To claim to be the Messiah a physical link to David must be shown. Jesus fulfilled both of these predictions.

THE BACKGROUND

David was the first rightful King of Israel. The Lord made a number of promises to him. Among them was that his throne would be everlasting. In other words, his descendants would be the rightful rulers of the nation.

THE PREDICTION

David was told that one of His offspring would be the Promised Messiah:

When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever (2 Samuel 7:12-19 NIV).

It will be through the house, or family, of David, that the Messiah will come.

The family line of the kings of Judah, the descendants of David and Solomon, are listed in 1 Chronicles 3:10-16. The list begins with Solomon's son Rehoboam and goes all the way to the last king of Judah, Zedekiah. However, the Messiah had not yet come into the world. The fulfillment of the prediction would have to wait another six hundred years.

THE FULFILLMENT

In fact, the very first verse of the New Testament informs us that Jesus was a descendant of King David:

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1 NIV).

The promise was earlier made to Mary, the mother of Jesus:

So the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God! Listen: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:30-33 NIV).

Mary's child would be the promised descendant of King David. He would rule forever and ever according to the words of the angel Gabriel.

THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY OF THIS BEING CONTRIVED

Interestingly, this is another one of those predictions about the coming of the Promised Messiah that is humanly impossible for someone to purposely fulfill. Indeed, nobody can determine what family they are going to be born into. None of us have any say so in that matter.

Yet, as we saw in our previous prediction, Jesus the Messiah was born at the right geographical location—Bethlehem—and now we discover that He was also born into the right family line—the line of David.

Can you imagine something like this happening by mere chance? Of course not.

But this is not everything with respect to the predictions Jesus fulfilled at His birth. There is indeed something else.

PREDICTION: THE MESSIAH WILL ARRIVE BEFORE JERUSALEM AND THE TEMPLE ARE DESTROYED AGAIN

There is a third aspect to the coming of the Messiah that was supernaturally fulfilled. Not only would He be born in Bethlehem, and be a literal descendant of David, but the time of His coming was also predicted. In fact, according to the prophecy, the Messiah must arrive before certain events would take place in Jerusalem.

THE BACKGROUND

In giving the outline of the future of the nation of Israel, the same angel, Gabriel, who made the announcement of the coming birth of her son to Mary, had told the prophet Daniel a number of things about the future some five hundred years earlier. Among them was the timing of when the Messiah would appear.

THE PREDICTION

The prediction was that the Messiah would arrive before the destruction of Jerusalem, as well as the Temple:

After this period of sixty-two sets of seven, the Anointed One will be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing, and a ruler will arise whose armies will destroy the city and the Temple. The end will come with a flood, and war and its miseries are decreed from that time to the very end (Daniel 9:26 NLT).

Notice the specifics that are listed here. The Anointed One, the Messiah, will arrive on the scene. He would be put to death. Afterward, the city of Jerusalem and temple would be destroyed. This Temple would be the one that would be rebuilt after the captives in Babylon returned to Jerusalem. Thus, Daniel is not only predicting the construction of a Second Temple, he is also predicting its destruction, too!

THE FULFILLMENT

Jesus was born while the Second Temple was still standing; however, Christ predicted its destruction because the people had rejected Him as the Messiah:

Now as Jesus was going out of the temple courts and walking away, his disciples came to show him the temple buildings. And he said to them, “Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone will be left on another. All will be torn down (Matthew 24:1-3 NET).

Consequently, Jesus arrived on the scene of history before the Temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed a second time.

SUMMING UP THESE THREE PREDICTIONS

From the Hebrew Scriptures, we discover that the Messiah will be born in the little town of Bethlehem, He will be a male descendant of King David, and He will come upon the scene of history before the city of Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed for a second time.

In other words, anyone who would claim to be the fulfillment of these three Old Testament predictions must have been born at least two thousand years ago, seeing that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple occurred in A.D. 70.

Consequently, we must look to history to find a literal fulfillment of these predictions. We find that only one person has the proper credentials to claim to be the Promised Messiah—Jesus of Nazareth!

PREDICTIONS MADE BY JESUS THAT HAVE COME TRUE

We not only have examples of Jesus Himself fulfilling Bible prophecy by His coming to the earth, we also find that He made a number of predictions that have come true after His death, resurrection and ascension. We will give one example.

PREDICTION: THE FATE OF THE UNBELIEVING CITIES OF CAPERNAUM, BETHSAIDA, AND CHORAZIN

The greater the light that the Lord shines upon us, the greater responsibility we have to respond to the light. There were several cities in Jesus' ministry who should have responded to His mighty deeds in their presence, but they did not. Consequently, judgment was pronounced against them.

THE BACKGROUND

Jesus' ministry covered the area of the Galilee. In fact, the Lord made one of the cities, Capernaum, His headquarters:

Jesus climbed into a boat and went back across the lake to his own town (Matthew 9:1 NLT).

Yet the people in Capernaum, His own town, and the surrounding cities of the Galilee, though seeing so many of His miracles, did not embrace Him as their Messiah.

THE PREDICTION

The lack of belief caused the Lord to specifically pronounce judgment upon these particular cities:

Then Jesus began to criticize openly the cities in which he had done many of his miracles, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you! And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be thrown down to Hades! For if the miracles done among you had been done in Sodom, it would have continued to this day. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for the region of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you!" (Matthew 11:20-24 NET).

The predictions are clear. These three cities would receive the punishment from the Lord for rejecting Him. Strong words indeed from the Lord Jesus. Let's go down the list.

CHORAZIN

What do we find today? Ruins.

CAPERNAUM

More ruins.

BETHSAIDA

To this day, the exact location is unknown!

ANOTHER CITY ON THE SEA OF GALILEE: TIBERIAS

What makes these predictions even more amazing concerns another city in Jesus' day in the same geographical vicinity as these three. This city, Tiberias, located on the Sea of Galilee, is mentioned in the Gospel of John:

Several boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the Lord had blessed the bread and the people had eaten (John 6:23 NLT).

A thriving city in Jesus' day, but with no judgment spoken against it by the Lord Jesus.

In contrast to these other three cities, Tiberias has continued to exist throughout history and is still a thriving city today!

CONCLUSION

Think about the odds of this happening by chance! Four cities around the Sea of Galilee that are specifically mentioned in the New Testament. Three of them have judgment pronounced upon them by Jesus. The fourth does not.

The result? These three cities Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin do not exist to this day. They are either ruins or, in the case of Bethsaida, unknown as to its exact location.

On the other hand, Tiberias has continually existed since the time of Christ. This is not a coincidence. Indeed, it is another example of the supernatural fulfillment of the various predictions made by Jesus.

CONCLUSION TO LESSON 2

The claims of the God of the Bible have been shown to be true over and over again. Jesus Christ personally fulfilled a number of predictions about the coming Messiah which were made hundreds of years before His birth. In addition, He Himself has made numerous predictions that have also been literally fulfilled, both during His lifetime, as well as after His lifetime.

This is just a small sampling. When we examine the totality of the evidence we discover that the best explanation, the one that fits all of the facts, is that there is indeed a God who exists, who has told us ahead of time about certain things that will happen, and these things have all come true.

However, these are not the only miraculous fulfillments that we find. We now move on to predictions that are presently being fulfilled in our day and age.

LESSON 3 THE LORD ALSO HAS A PERFECT RECORD OF PREDICTING LAST DAYS EVENTS

Our next lesson has to do with events that will take place at the time of the end, when God's kingdom will come to earth in the presence of the King. These predictions come under the heading of last days Bible prophecy. We will discover the miraculous nature of these predictions which provide further evidence of the claims of the God of Scripture.

TWO ILLUSTRATIONS WILL DO

We will examine two aspects of last days predictions that found in the Book of Ezekiel. They have to do with a future invasion of Israel. All of this and much more is found in our book *The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion*. This book is a free download on our website educatingourworld.com under the heading of *Bible Prophecy*.

EXAMPLE 1 WHAT THE WORLD WILL LOOK LIKE AT THE TIME OF THE EZEKIEL INVASION

**THERE ARE AT LEAST ELEVEN ASSUMPTIONS PRIOR TO THE INVASION,
AS TO WHAT THIS PART OF THE WORLD WILL LOOK LIKE**

Before the invasion will take place, there are, at least, eleven predicted things that are assumed to be true about the nation of Israel as well as the condition of the land at that time. They are as follows:

ASSUMPTION 1 THE NATION OF ISRAEL WILL EXIST IN THE LAST DAYS

This first prediction is obvious. In fact, it is their country that will be invaded by this coalition of nations led by a person called Gog. Before the invasion, we read the following in Ezekiel 37:

Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are all the house of Israel. Look, they are saying, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope has perished; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy, and tell them, ‘This is what the sovereign Lord says: Look, I am about to open your graves and will raise you from your graves, my people. I will bring you to the land of Israel (Ezekiel 37:11-12 NET)

After describing the results of the invasion the Lord says:

I will display my majesty among the nations. All the nations will witness the judgment I have executed, and the power I have exhibited among them. Then the house of Israel will know that I am the Lord their God, from that day forward (Ezekiel 39:21-22 NET).

Specifically, the nation of Israel will exist in the last days. This is the first assumption.

**ASSUMPTION 2 GOG, WITH HIS ARMIES WILL COME TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL:
A LAND THAT HAD BEEN RAVAGED BY WARS**

Scripture says:

After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come to a land restored from the ravages of war (Ezekiel 38:8 NET)

ASSUMPTION 3 THE PROMISED LAND WILL HAVE BEEN IN RUINS FOR A LONG TIME

Ezekiel 38:8 predicts that this land had been devastated for a long period of time:

... with many peoples gathered on the mountains of Israel that had long been in ruins (Ezekiel 38:8 NET).

ASSUMPTION 4 THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, HOWEVER, WILL BE NUMEROUS

... with many peoples gathered on the mountains of Israel (Ezekiel 38:8 NET).

Earlier, in Ezekiel 37, we are told the people would be “like a great army.”

So I spoke the message as he commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army (Ezekiel 37:10 NLT).

ASSUMPTION 5 THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN SCATTERED

... its people have returned from many lands to the mountains of Israel (Ezekiel 38:8 NLT).

**ASSUMPTION 6 YET, THE PEOPLE WILL HAVE RETURNED TO THEIR ANCIENT HOMELAND
(IN THE LAST DAYS)**

We are specifically told that these events will take place in the “last days,” in the “distant future:”

A long time from now you will be called into action. In the distant future you will swoop down on the land of Israel ... after its people have returned from many lands to the mountains of Israel. At that time in the distant future, I will bring you against my land as everyone watches, and my holiness will be displayed by what happens to you, Gog (Ezekiel 38:8, 16 NLT).

We should note that Ezekiel had earlier recorded the Lord predicting this return:

I will bring them out from among the peoples and gather them from foreign countries; I will bring them to their own land. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams and all the inhabited places of the land (Ezekiel 34:13 NET).

In the 19th century, William Kelly explained the prediction in this manner:

The prophecy then supposes the return of the people as a whole to their land, not of a remnant only, as after the Babylonish captivity. But there is more. It supposes a condition of unsuspected quiet such as differs from any period of Israel’s history in the past (William Kelly, *Notes on Ezekiel*, London, Blackheath, 1876, p. 197).

ASSUMPTION 7 THEY WILL COME BACK AFTER BEING AWAY FOR A LONG TIME

The land had long been in ruins . . . without the people of Israel (Ezekiel 38:8 NET)

**ASSUMPTION 8 THE DEVASTATED LAND WOULD BE RESTORED, ISRAEL WOULD
THEN CREATE GREAT WEALTH**

Though they would return to a desolate land, once back in the land they will create great wealth. In fact, it is this great wealth that will cause this personage named Gog, along with his allies, to invade the land. The Lord said to him:

A long time from now you will be called into action. In the distant future you will swoop down on the land of Israel, which will be enjoying peace after recovering from war ... This is what the Sovereign Lord says: At that time evil thoughts will come to your mind, and you will devise a wicked scheme. . . You will say, ‘Israel is an unprotected land filled with unwalled villages! I will march against her and destroy these people who live in such confidence! I will go to those formerly desolate cities that are now filled with people who have returned from exile in many nations. I will capture vast amounts of plunder, for the people are rich with livestock and other possessions now (Ezekiel 38:8-12 NLT).

When he invades, the land will have been restored from the ravages of war, the cities will be populated and the ruins rebuilt. Gog will then invade to take a spoil, to plunder.

**ASSUMPTION 9 WHEN THE PEOPLE RETURN, THEY WILL FORM A STATE
(SOME POLITICAL ENTITY)**

Gog and his allies will attack a nation, not just a mob of people.

ASSUMPTION 10 THEIR BORDERS WILL INCLUDE THE MOUNTAINS OF ISRAEL

...with many peoples gathered on the mountains of Israel (Ezekiel 38:8 NET)

ASSUMPTION 11 THEY WILL COME BACK IN UNBELIEF IN JESUS AS THEIR MESSIAH

How do we know this to be true? Scripture tells us that it is only when the Lord destroys these invading armies do the people begin to recognize that the Lord is working on their behalf.

I will display my glory among the nations, and all the nations will see the judgment I have executed and the hand I have laid on them. From that day forward the house of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God (Ezekiel 39:21-22 Christian Standard Bible)

This assumes that they were in a state of unbelief until that time.

SUMMING UP

According to the Prophet Ezekiel, there are at least eleven predictions, or assumptions, as to what the world will be like in the “last days” when this invasion takes place.

- Prediction 1 The nation of Israel will exist in the last days.
- Prediction 2 Gog, with his armies will come to the land of Israel, a land that will have been ravaged by wars.
- Prediction 3 The Promised Land had long been in ruins.
- Prediction 4 The people of Israel, however, are numerous.
- Prediction 5 The people of Israel will have been scattered.
- Prediction 6 Yet the people will have returned to their ancient homeland (in the last days).
- Prediction 7 They will return after being away for a long time.
- Prediction 8 The land would be restored though they initially returned to a desolate land. Once back in the land they will create great wealth.
- Prediction 9 When they return, they will form a state (some political entity).
- Prediction 10 Their borders will include the mountains of Israel.
- Prediction 11 They will come back in unbelief in Jesus as their Messiah.

Let us now look at these eleven predictions (assumptions), made about 2,600 years ago, which must be fulfilled before the invasion can occur.

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE ELEVEN THINGS WHICH MUST BE IN PLACE

Did you notice, every single one of them has now been fulfilled! Let’s go down the list.

FULFILLMENT 1 THE NATION OF ISRAEL DOES INDEED EXIST IN THE LAST DAYS

They do indeed exist. In fact, at the beginning of 2022, the population of Jews worldwide was about 14.6 million

FULFILLMENT 2 THE LAND TO WHICH THEY RETURNED HAD BEEN DECIMATED BY WAR

FULFILLMENT 3 THE LAND HAD LONG BEEN IN RUINS

We will look at fulfillments two and three together.

The Promised Land did not look anything like a “land of milk and honey” when the Jews returned to it. In fact, when he visited the Holy Land in the nineteenth century, American writer Mark Twain described it this way:

A desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds... a silent mournful expanse.... a desolation.... we never saw a human being on the whole route.... hardly a tree or shrub anywhere. Even the olive tree and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country” (Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, 1867).

Looking back to 1867, we find that the Holy Land was a place that was desolate at that time. Indeed, no humans, no vegetation. These descriptions of the Holy Land were a literal fulfillment of the predictions of the Lord. Fortunately, the desolation was not to last forever.

FULFILLMENT 4 THEY HAVE COME BACK IN LARGE NUMBERS

Scripture predicted, like a large army. We find that the people have indeed returned to their ancient homeland, in the millions. There were about seven million Jews living in the Promised Land at the beginning of 2022.

FULFILLMENT 5 THE PEOPLE FROM THE NATION ISRAEL HAD INDEED BEEN SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

This was not speaking of the Babylonian captivity since the people, at that time, were captives in the empire of Babylon.

This prediction has been literally fulfilled. There is scarcely a nation that does not have, or has not had, descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In an appendix of our book, *25 Signs We Are Near The End*, we give about dozen predictions of past commentators living anywhere from one hundred to four hundred years ago. Each of them noted this scattering of the people, yet they all predicted their future return to their ancient homeland.

For example, F.J. Horsefield wrote the following in 1920:

The history of all the great empires of the Old Testament times bear witness to the fact that the truth of prophecy has, in all ages, been fully vindicated, however, improbable the fulfillment may have seemed whilst the present condition of the Jewish race bears absolutely irrefutable testimony to the same effect. . . It has been frequently pointed out that the present condition of the Jews, is, in itself, a proof of the fulfillment of prophecy. Our Lord foretold it when He said, “They shall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all the nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). And in this emphatic statement Christ was only confirming a multitude of Old Testament prophecies which speak of the desolation of the land of Israel; of the people being scattered amongst the heathen; and of the becoming “an astonishment, a proverb, and a by-word amongst all nations whither the Lord should lead them (Deuteronomy 28:37). Yet they were preserved as a separate people, and after the

conclusion of the times of the Gentiles, to be brought back to their own land. . . . For the moment we simply notice that after 2,000 years of dispersion the Jews are as distinct as when they were first scattered from Jerusalem. Other races blend and mingle with each other, and in time lose their separate identity, but for twenty centuries that little nation of Israel, scattered all over the world, has been kept separate and distinct from every other nation and race, waiting for the time when they shall be restored in Palestine (F.J. Horsefield, *The Return of the King*, Fifth Edition, Good Books Corporation, Harrisburg, Pa., 1920, pp. 20, 27-28).

Notice the last sentence, “waiting for the time when they shall be restored to Palestine.” They have indeed been restored!

FULFILLMENT 6 THEY DID RETURN TO THEIR ANCIENT HOMELAND

As we have emphasized, this would have been a rather amazing prediction when first made. Indeed, the nation had been removed from their homeland to Babylon. Humanly speaking there was no guarantee that they would ever be able to return to their own land—let alone re-form their nation in their homeland.

Yet all this has happened, not once, but twice in their history!

In fact, in our book *25 Signs We Are Near The End*, under sign number three, we list some eleven specific predictions found in Scripture about their promised return!

FULFILLMENT 7 THE PEOPLE HAD BEEN AWAY FROM THEIR HOMELAND FOR A LONG TIME

Indeed, it was almost 1,900 years from the time that Jerusalem and the Second Temple were destroyed, and the people were scattered throughout the world, until they returned to their homeland.

Again, this is not the Babylonian Captivity. Ezekiel 38:8 is clear about this. All of this takes place in the “distant future.”

FULFILLMENT 8 YET, ONCE BACK IN THE LAND THEY HAVE CREATED GREAT WEALTH

When one looks at the land of Israel at the beginning of the twentieth century, and then compares it to what we see today, it is truly like “night and day.” The desert has been built up and waste areas have been beautified. Modern Israel is indeed a wealthy country.

Interestingly, writing in 1840, Hugh McNeile predicted this based upon the Scripture:

The present condition of the land of Palestine is well known to be one of extreme barrenness and desolation; whereas it was a land of flocks and herds, a land flowing with milk and honey, the glory of all lands. In this way we recognize the literal fulfillment of that clause of the prophecy which predicts desolation; and from the next clause of the prophecy, we confidently anticipate a literal renovation of beauty and fertility, accompanied by a multiplication of beasts upon it, as well as men, for the consumption of its produce. In the present condition of the Jewish people, divided and dispersed, we recognize the literal fulfillment of those claims of prophecy which imply division and predict dispersion; and from similar clauses, similarly interpreted, we confidently anticipate a similar literal fulfillment of the promised restoration and reunion (Hugh McNeile, *Popular Lectures on the Prophecies relative to the Jewish nation*, London, J. Hatchard and Son, 1840, pp. 156,157).

His reasoning was simple. At his time, there was a literal fulfillment with respect to the desolation of the land. Based upon Scripture, he predicted a literal fulfillment of the predictions concerning the renovation of the land. While he did not live to see it, the predictions have literally come true.

FULFILLMENT 9 THE MODERN STATE OF ISRAEL HAS INDEED FORMED

Not only have the people returned to their ancient homeland, but the modern state of Israel was formed on May 14, 1948.

FULFILLMENT 10 THEIR BORDERS NOW INCLUDE THE MOUNTAINS OF ISRAEL

This was not true in 1948 when the modern state of Israel was reborn. It was only in 1967, as a result of the Six-Day War, that this geographical area became under their control.

We have noticed that the Lord has emphasized over and over again that Gog's army would come down to the mountains of Israel to "take a spoil" and then find themselves defeated on these mountains. Interestingly, the mountains of Israel have only recently come into the hands of the Israelis.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum explains:

They extend the length of the center of the country at the southern point of the Valley of Jezreel at the town of Jenin in Galilee (biblical Ein Ganim), and continuing south until they peter out at a town north of Beersheba in the Negev. These mountains contain the famous biblical cities of Dothan, Shechem, Samaria, Shiloh, Bethel, Ai, Ramah, Bethlehem, Hebron, Debir, and most importantly, Jerusalem, which seems to be the goal of the invading army. Here is another example where the Six Day War has set the stage for the fulfillment of prophecy. Up to the Six Day War in 1967 all of the mountains of Israel, except for a small corridor of West Jerusalem, were entirely in the hands of the Jordanian Arabs. Only since 1967 have the mountains of Israel been in Israel, thus setting the stage for the fulfillment of this prophecy (Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, p. 114).

FULFILLMENT 11 THEY ARE STILL IN UNBELIEF IN JESUS

The nation today has certainly not accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Indeed, many Israeli Jews are secular, having no form of religion whatsoever.

In fact, according to Ezekiel 39, it will not be until the Lord supernaturally intervenes on their behalf, and destroys the invading armies, that the people will realize that the God of Israel has been fighting for them. Scripture says:

In this way, I will demonstrate my glory to the nations. Everyone will see the punishment I have inflicted on them and the power of my fist when I strike. And from that time on the people of Israel will know that I am the Lord their God (Ezekiel 39:21 NLT).

In sum, each of these eleven things, that must be in place before the invasion can occur, are now in place!

EXAMPLE 2 THE PLAYERS INVOLVED IN THE EZEKIEL 38,39 INVASION

We have a second example of the supernatural predictions of Scripture beginning to be fulfilled in our present age. Let's go back to the 1970's and compare what was going on in the world with what the Bible says about the coalition that will exist at the time of the end.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

In the last days, there will be a coalition of nations that will invade Israel. The explanation is found in Ezekiel 38-39. We have specific geographical references as to where these invading forces will come from. Rosh is modern day Russia. It will be a Russian who is the leader of the coalition. His title as we mentioned is Gog.

Gomer and Beth Togarmah are found in modern day Turkey, Persia is modern day Iran. Egypt is conspicuously not mentioned as being part of the invading force.

So from Scripture we would conclude that there would be a coalition of nations, not including Egypt who would invade Israel at the time of the end. Since these are specific predictions in Scripture, Bible believers assume that this is where these nations will end up.

However, in the 1970's there was a problem!

Egypt had been involved in every war with Israel, in 1948, 1967, 1973. In fact, Egypt was the driving force in each of the three wars with Israel.

Iran was Israel's best friend in the Middle East. Their re-supplying of Israel was crucial to the nations survival in the 1973 Yom Kippur War

Turkey, a member of NATO, was Muslim in name only. It was the place where Israelis would take their vacations. They were a friend of Israel.

Furthermore, Scripture predicts a Russian/Iranian military confederation? Never in the history of the world has that taken place. In other words, the people from these two geographical areas have never fought together. Never...

EVERYTHING WAS SEEMINGLY WRONG!

The point is that our prophecy charts were completely opposite of what was happening in the world at that time. The bad guys at the time of the end, Iran, and Turkey, were the good guys. Egypt, who will NOT be involved in this invasion, was the main nation that continually attacked Israel.

But we did not give up the faith. We knew that sooner or later this would change.

In 1979, Egypt, in the Camp David Accords, made peace with Israel. Jordan followed in 1994. They have had peaceful relations since then, no more wars.

However, Muhammad Morsi and the fake election caused the Muslim Brotherhood to be elected to lead Egypt. They are directly connected to Iran.

At that time, Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, California and I were doing the program World News Briefing on Hischannel.com. We stated that Morsi's government would not last. Egypt will NOT be in bed with Iran and the radical Muslims. Yet, this was threatened by this new government.

However, Morsi was soon overthrown by a military coup led by General Al-Sisi. Then the Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed and designated a terrorist organization in Egypt in December 2013. Egypt remains at peace with Israel.

IRAN

In the mid-1970's Pastor Chuck Smith was on Israel's northern border with officers from the Israeli Defense Force. As they looked at both Syria and Lebanon from their vantage point, he told them that these two countries should not be their worry. Instead they should worry about Iran. They laughed at him when he said that since Iran was Israel's best friend in the Middle East. Chuck told them to remember what he said.

In 1979, the Shah of Iran was overthrown, and the Islamic Republic of Iran was established. Since then, Iran's state sponsored terrorism has spread throughout the world. Included also was the consistent drumbeat of "death to Israel." Global domination through worldwide Jihad has been their goal ever since.

At that time, Chuck started receiving phone calls from these same Israeli officers asking, "What's going to happen next?"

HOW COULD WE KNOW?

So how could Chuck and I know that the Morsi government would not last in Egypt? How could he confidently tell these Israeli leaders that Iran would be their major problem in the future?

The answer: We are not prophets, or sons of prophets. Remember what Daniel wrote:

I heard, but I did not understand. So I said, "Sir, what will happen after these things?" He said, "Go, Daniel. For these matters are closed and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made clean, and refined, but the wicked will go on being wicked. None of the wicked will understand, though the wise will understand (Daniel 12: 8-10 NET).

We are promised that those living in the last days can understand what is taking place as well as what will take place. That's why we could make these claims!

Iran remains a clear enemy while Russia is seen as Israel's friend. Turkey has also turned to the dark side.

Conclusion: Not only are the eleven things in place for the Ezekiel 38, 39 invasion to take place but the countries that were Israel's allies in the 1970's, Iran, and Turkey, have now turned against them. Egypt, who was their main enemy from 1948-1973 has remained in a peaceful relationship with Israel since 1979.

The situation in the 70's has been completely reversed. The Bible proven right again!

Our takeaway from this is simple: God's Word will always turn out to be true, sooner or later!

CONCLUSION TO LESSON 3

These two illustrations, to which many more could be added, make it all the more clear that we are dealing with an all-knowing God, the God of the Bible. Indeed, only He could make such precise predictions that have come true. For further information see our books *25 Signs We Are Near The End* and *The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion*. Again, they are available for free download at educatingourworld.com under the heading of *Bible Prophecy*.

SUMMARY OF LESSONS 1-3

The Bible speaks of a God who exists and who has told us about certain specific events that will take place in the future. These are the claims of Scripture

These predicted events have not only come true in the past, they also continue to come true in the present. The Bible, therefore, is indeed a supernatural revelation of the one true God who exists.

SO WHAT ELSE SHOULD WE EXPECT FROM GOD?

Based upon these above facts, there are three assumptions that we should make about the Bible itself.

First, we would expect that the text of the Bible has been transmitted to us accurately, nothing has been changed, added or lost.

Second, based upon the reliable text of the biblical books that have been handed down to us, there will be modern-day Bible translations which will accurately reflect God's message to the world.

Third, since the God of the Bible is a God of truth, we would expect that Scripture will be found to be historically accurate in all that it records.

Let's now make some observations about these three assumptions.

LESSON 4 THE TEXT HAS BEEN TRANSMITTED TO US IN A RELIABLE MANNER

The evidence also shows that the written text of Scripture has been passed down to us in a trustworthy manner. We are documenting this in great detail in our forthcoming book *The Message Of The Bible Has Not Been Changed: A Look At New Testament Textual Criticism*.

When we examine the handwritten manuscripts of the Bible, we find that the message is consistent, it has not been changed. Furthermore, there is no guesswork needed to establish the text.

Since we do possess so many manuscripts, we can be assured the original text has been preserved. Consequently, we never have to revert to guessing to determine what the text originally said. The great scholar Samuel Tregelles wrote:

We possess so many mss. [manuscripts] and we are aided by so many versions, that we are never left to the need to conjecture as the means of removing errata (Samuel Tregelles, Greek New Testament, Prolegomena).

Modern day textual scholar Michael Holmes concurs:

The sheer volume of the information available to the New Testament textual critic makes it practically certain that the original text has been preserved somewhere among the surviving witnesses (Michael Holmes, *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation*, Editors David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, Zondervan, 1991, p. 106).

Furthermore, the well-known textual authority, Sir Frederic Kenyon, emphasized that the totality of the evidence showed that nothing was lost of the original text of the New Testament:

The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities (Sir Frederic Kenyon, *Our Bible and Ancient Manuscripts*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941, p. 55).

This is precisely what we would expect from a God who has supernaturally given us specific predictions about the future that have been fulfilled.

The conclusion is that we never have to resort to what scholars call a conjectural emendation, a fancy term for a good guess, to establish the original text. Textual scholar Peter Gurry states:

It is worth mentioning how rarely editors of the Greek New Testament have to guess or conjecture what the original text is—in other words, how rarely editors have concluded that *all* of our manuscripts are wrong and the original text is simply not to be found in any of them. Such conjecture is fairly common

practice among editors of classical works ... Yet when we consider the mainstay scholarly edition of the Greek New Testament, the NA (Nestle/Aland), we see a decreasing use of conjecture over time. In the thirteenth edition published in 1927, editor Erwin Nestle (son of Eberhard Nestle) introduced eighteen conjectures in the apparatus that he thought must be considered original. Contrast that to the NA²⁸ released in 2012 where we find only two conjectures the editors think are original (one at Acts 16:12 and one at 2 Peter 3:10). Other editors such as those of the Tyndale House edition, reject all conjectures on principle.... Still, even the eighteen conjectures in Nestle's thirteen edition bear witness to the remarkable reliability of the New Testament text. The original reading is usually, if not always, there somewhere in our witnesses: the challenge where such exists, is in settling convincingly on where exactly it is (Peter J. Gurry, *Myths about Variants*, in *Myths and Mistakes*, pp. 197,198).

In sum, as we expected, the words originally written by the biblical authors have been transmitted to us in an accurate manner. This is the first step.

LESSON 5 THE MESSAGE OF SCRIPTURE IS CLEAR

This leads us to our next lesson. We also discover that the text that has been transmitted has a consistently clear message. This is crucial. Indeed, it would be of no help whatsoever if an accurately transmitted message makes no sense when translated. But such is not the case. The statement of Stephen Neil more than fifty years ago remains true to this day:

The very worst Greek manuscript now in existence...contains enough of the gospel in unadulterated form to lead the reader into the way of salvation (Stephen Neil, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961*, The Firth Lectures, 1964, Oxford University Press, pp. 63-64).

The message of Scripture comes through loud and clear. There is one God who exists and He has revealed Himself to humanity in the pages of Scripture.

LESSON 6 THE BIBLE HAS PROVEN TO BE HISTORICALLY ACCURATE

While the text of Scripture has been transmitted to us in a trustworthy manner, and the message comes through loud and clear, all of this is not enough. In fact, one could accurately transmit the ravings of a lunatic! In other words, this clear message of Scripture, accurately transmitted, must match up with known reality, it must be historically accurate.

And this is precisely what we discover. In our book, *Ancient Mysteries of the Bible Solved*, we look at the evidence for the historical accuracy of Scripture through a number of modern discoveries of archaeology. The verdict becomes clear when we see the same pattern over and over again. The people, places, events that are recorded in Scripture continue to match up with known reality. Simply put, we are dealing with facts, not legends!

However, there is something else. Not only do we show that the Bible, in this case the Old Testament, is historically accurate, we also find convincing evidence for the existence of three different biblical prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel. This evidence confirms that they lived at the time that the Bible says that they did.

If so, then our only conclusion is that there is a God in heaven who exists and who has told us the future. Why do we say this? We state this because each of these prophets predicted things to take place during their lifetime as well as things which would take place after their lifetime. These predictions have all come to pass! How could this occur on a natural level? Simply put, it could not.

Therefore, the historical accuracy of the Bible gives further testimony that God exists and that He has revealed Himself to humanity in a clear manner. Consequently, He holds humanity responsible for acting upon His revelation of Himself, specifically in believing in the person of Jesus Christ.

LESSON 7 WE CAN HAVE CONFIDENCE IN OUR PERSONAL FUTURE

Given the above facts we now have one last lesson. This has to do with our own future. The God of the Bible has also revealed to us what that will be. We have documented all of this in our five-book series on the afterlife. They are: *Living In the Light Of Eternity*, *What Happens One Second After We Die*, *Resurrection and Judgment*, *Heaven*, and finally *Hell*. They can be found on our website educatingourworld.com under the heading of *The Afterlife*.

From His revelation we know how we should live in the light of eternity, as well as what will happen immediately after death, the future promises of resurrection and judgment, which in the case of the believer means rewards, not punishment, and the final destinations, heaven and hell.

In other words, all of our main questions about the afterlife have been answered for us in Scripture!

SUMMARIZING OUR SEVEN LESSONS:

We can summarize our seven lessons as follows:

First, the God of the Bible has made certain claims about Himself. Among them is that He is the only God who exists, that He knows everything that will happen in the future, and that He has predicted certain events that have not yet taken place. These are His specific claims! We document this in our book *God Wants Us To Know The Future*.

Second, from Scripture, we discover that His claims are true. Time after time the Bible records where the Lord has predicted far off events, events that have now been literally fulfilled. Only an all-knowing God would be able to do this. This is documented in our book *God Wants Us To Know The Future*.

Third, not only do we find that He has accurately predicted events that have taken place in the past, He has also told us a number of specifics about what would happen in the last days.

Amazingly, we discover that these predictions have also been literally fulfilled. When we couple this with our previous lesson, we find that the Lord does indeed know all things. We document this evidence in our books *25 Signs We Are Near The End* and *The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion*.

Fourth, building upon our last two lessons, we would then naturally assume that the Bible, His Word, would have been transmitted to us in an accurate manner. In other words, nothing would be added or lost to the text of the various writings. This is precisely what we find. This will be fully documented in our forthcoming book *The Message Of The Bible Has Not Been Changed: An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*.

Fifth, we would also expect that this accurately transmitted message would be understandable to the masses. Again, this is exactly what we find. The message that Jesus Christ comes through loud and clear! This includes His sinless life, His death on the cross for our sins, and His resurrection from the dead. This will be documented more fully in the updated version of our book *Bible Translations*.

Sixth, not only would we expect that the message be accurately transmitted and understandable, we would also expect to be trustworthy in all that it records. The historical events it records would match up with known reality. Again, this is precisely what we find.

However, there is another aspect to this that is important for us to appreciate. There is evidence that three of the Old Testament characters, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, did indeed exist at the time in history that the Bible records. If so, then there is no other conclusion that can be made than accepting the fact that an all-knowing God does indeed exist.

Why? Because each of these men predicted events that took place later in their lifetimes as well as after their lifetimes. There is no way, humanly speaking, that they could know these things. Hence, the historical accuracy of these particular biblical characters provides overwhelming evidence for the existence of the God of the Bible. We fully document this in our book *Ancient Mysteries of the Bible Solved*.

Finally, our seventh lesson has to do with our own personal future. The Bible records how to live a life that is pleasing to God, what will happen the moment we die, the promise of a future resurrection of our bodies, a time of reward for believers, and our eternal home with Him in heaven. It also records the destiny of those who have rejected His truth. These truths are documented in our five book series on the afterlife: *Living in the Light of Eternity*, *What Happens One Second After We Die?*, *Resurrection and Judgment*, *Heaven*, and finally *Hell*.

Given these seven lessons, we can conclude that there is indeed a God who exists, One who has given to us specific evidence to believe in Him. This includes last days Bible prophecy which continues His track record of listing future things ahead of time. As these predictions continue to come true, it provides convincing evidence that we are not believing a fairy tale.

Finally, we can also conclude that we can read the Bible, His written Word, with complete confidence. We can trust the promises found within the pages. This includes those promises about our personal future.

All in all, the Lord has provided everything that we need to live a life that is pleasing to Him. Indeed, the Scripture makes this promise to us:

By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence (2 Peter 1:3 NLT).

MISTAKE 35

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN MAIDENS DOES NOT SUPPORT A PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE

One of the parables of Jesus, that of the ten maidens in Matthew 25, has caused considerable controversy, since it had been cited as evidence for certain claims about the end times. This includes the idea that the Galilean wedding, in all its details, somehow provides a vivid picture of the pre-tribulation rapture of the church.

Supposedly, the parable gives further evidence from the Bible that Christians will not experience the final seven-year period of God's wrath that will come upon the earth, known as "the seventieth week of Daniel" or "the time of Jacob's trouble."

The author, in fact, has written two books where he sets out the evidence that the pre-tribulation rapture is the best way of interpreting what will take place in the future *The Rapture*, and *The Pre-Trib. Rapture Defended*. However, he does not believe that the parable of the ten maidens has anything to do with this subject. Therefore, we will examine the claims in some detail and demonstrate why these claims do not fit the biblical or historical evidence.

WHY I'M ANSWERING THIS QUESTION

At the outset, there also needs to be some sort of explanation as to why I'm looking at this question in such detail. We'll provide a bit of background that should help.

In 2020 I was doing an hour long daily program on Hischannel called "Breaking News." The idea was to look at the daily headlines and explain what they meant with respect to "last days" Bible prophecy. Eventually we added a half hour segment on Wednesday's and Friday's during which I would answer Bible questions that people sent in.

On one particular Wednesday I was handed a question that I had never heard about before. The person asked what I thought of the idea that the parable of the ten maidens reflected the Galilean wedding customs at Jesus' time, and that aspects of these customs provided solid biblical support for a pre-tribulation rapture.

I was incredulous. At the outset, I replied that this idea does not seem possible since the context of Matthew 24-25, and in particular the parable of the ten maidens, is about the Second Coming of Christ, not the rapture.

Furthermore, the whole idea of the parable can be summed up in two words, "Be prepared." It warns us not to be like the five foolish maidens who were not ready to meet the bridegroom when he arrived. In other words, prepare now to meet the Lord before it is too late.

After answering this question I went on to the next one, all the while assuming that the matter was closed.

Well, the next day I received another email from a viewer. The tone was unfortunate. The upshot was that I was ignorant of new evidence that had come to light making it obvious that the wedding was indeed a clear portrait of a pre-tribulation rapture. According to this viewer, indisputable evidence had been provided through a new movie titled "Before the Wrath."

I had not heard of the movie so I went online and found favorable reviews. There were two lengthy ones that I read which basically said the same thing: that the movie laid out a powerful case for the pre-tribulation rapture once the customs of the Galilean weddings in Jesus' day were understood.

In response, I took the entire 30 minutes of the last half of the Friday program to thoroughly go through the entire context of Matthew 21-25 and demonstrated that we are dealing with judgment of the Lord upon those who had rejected Jesus. It culminated in Matthew 25:31-46 where the Lord judges people during His return, dividing between the sheep and the goats.

Furthermore, I added that as far as I was aware, we did not possess sufficient information about first-century weddings to make any firm conclusions about what the customs were at the time. I had not heard of any earth-shattering discoveries that supposedly filled the gap of our ignorance.

Anyway, I thought that this simple explanation was adequate. However, to some it was not! It seemed that I was trying to destroy a great argument for the pre-tribulation rapture when all I was doing was stating the obvious facts.

I eventually did get to see the movie. The arguments put forward were totally unconvincing to me. Additionally, should these arguments be proven true with anthropological evidence, they would not replace or nullify the context of this parable in Matthew's gospel.

However, I had already said my piece so I decided not to comment further.

Again, there were a number of people who would not let it go and I still continue to be asked this question. Therefore, I will explain in detail, hopefully once and for all, why this idea doesn't work.

CHECKING OUT THE EVIDENCE

We will start with citing three passages of Scripture that seem appropriate for putting this question into perspective.

First, we are commanded in Scripture to test all things and hold on to those things that are good:

Examine all things; hold fast to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21 NET).

This commandment addresses how to respond when someone is claiming to speak for the Lord. Paul issued this advice to the Thessalonians to assist them with sorting out the true from the false. In other words, we are to weigh and evaluate the evidence whenever an assertion is made.

Next, the Book of Proverbs gives us this wise warning:

The first to state his case seems right, until his opponent begins to cross-examine him (Proverbs 18:17 NET).

The New Living Translation puts it this way:

The first to speak in court sounds right—until the cross-examination begins (Proverbs 18:17 NLT).

Obviously, the point being made is that wisdom calls for us to hear both sides of any argument. This is very important. We must be careful not to jump to conclusions when we hear only one side of any presentation of a new claim.

Finally, Paul wrote to the Galatians:

So then, have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? (Galatians 4:16 NET)

If someone comes along and refutes something that we have previously believed we should not denounce them. In other words, we should not “shoot the messenger.”

With these things in mind, let us take a look at this issue of the parable of the ten maidens and then discover precisely what we can, and cannot, conclude from the evidence.

THE CONTEXT OF MATTHEW 25

Before we look specifically at this particular parable, it is vital that we understand the context in which it was given.

The Lord Jesus made a statement in front of His disciples that caused them confusion. After arriving in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday in His “triumphal entry” and acknowledging that He was indeed the promised Messiah, Christ pronounced judgment upon the city, as well as the temple.

His disciples were perplexed. Jesus acknowledged that He was the promised Messiah, the Christ. According to Isaiah 2:1-4, when the Messiah arrives, He will rule and reign from the temple in Jerusalem when He sets up His kingdom. Now, they are told that it will be destroyed. What are they to make of this?

After they left the temple area and went up to the Mount of Olives, four of His disciples came to Him privately to ask Him about what He meant.

As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, his disciples came to him privately and said, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3-4 NET).

These questions led Jesus to give the last of His major discourses: the Olivet Discourse. It is recorded in Matthew 24:4-25:46.

THE WIDER CONTEXT

Before we summarize His answer, and in particular look at the parable of the ten maidens, it is important that we go back a few chapters to put His words into a wider context.

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

We start with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Upon coming near the city, Jesus wept over it for its people’s rejection of Him as the Messiah:

But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep. “How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes. Before long your enemies will build ramparts against your walls and encircle you and close in on you from every side. They will crush you into the ground, and your children with you. Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, because you did not recognize it when God visited you” (Luke 19:41-44 NLT).

This first episode begins a pattern of Jesus pronouncing judgment upon the populace for their unbelief. We must not miss the fact that he wept over the city for their lack of faith in Him.

JESUS DROVE OUT THE MONEYCHANGERS

Once Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He drove the moneychangers out from the temple courts and then spent the night outside of Jerusalem:

But when the chief priests and the experts in the law saw the wonderful things he did and heard the children crying out in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they became indignant and said to him, “Do you hear what they are saying?” Jesus said to them, “Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of children and nursing infants you have prepared praise for yourself?’” And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and spent the night there (Matthew 21:15-17 NLT).

HIS AUTHORITY WAS QUESTIONED

Upon returning to Jerusalem the next day, the Lord was approached by the religious leaders in the temple courts who questioned His authority. After silencing them, Jesus then directed two parables toward these hypocrites, the parable of the two sons and the parable of the tenants. He ended with His pronouncement of judgment upon religious leadership as well as the unbelieving nation:

I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce the proper fruit. Anyone who stumbles over that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on.” When the leading priests and Pharisees heard this parable, they realized he was telling the story against them—they were the wicked farmers. They wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowds, who considered Jesus to be a prophet (Matthew 22:43-46 NLT).

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST

He then proceeded to give the parable of the wedding feast. This also ended with the pronouncement of judgment:

But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who wasn’t wearing the proper clothes for a wedding. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?’ But the man had no reply. Then the king said to his aides, ‘Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Matthew 22:11-13 NLT).

THE DENUNCIATION OF THE RELIGIOUS RULERS

In Matthew 23 we find the harshest words of condemnation in the entire Bible. It was given by the Lord Jesus and directed to the religious rulers. Not only did Jesus denounce the religious leaders, He did it with intense emotion. We will give a few examples:

What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! (Matthew 23:13 NLT)

This construction in the Greek is known as a “vocative of emotional address.” Simply put, Jesus is denouncing these hypocrites in the strongest of terms with language that shows intense emotion.

We have another example of Jesus’ emotion toward these false teachers:

Blind guides! What sorrow awaits you! (Matthew 23:15 NLT)

Again, the construction in Greek emphasizes His emotional response to these religious authorities leading the people astray. This emotion continued throughout all the “woes” which the Lord pronounced upon them.

JUDGMENT WAS THEN PRONOUNCED UPON THE CITY AND THE TEMPLE

It was then that the Lord Jesus pronounced judgment upon Jerusalem and the temple. Again we should not miss the emotion in His voice:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God's messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me. And now, look, your house is abandoned and desolate. For I tell you this, you will never see me again until you say, 'Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD!' (Matthew 23:37-39 NLT).

Again, syntax and grammar are important. Jesus repeated the word Jerusalem in a way that speakers often use to express strong emotion.

Therefore, from the time of His triumphal entry, through His denunciation of the religious leaders, it is marked by strong emotion from Jesus.

So, to sum up, Jesus revealed Himself as the Messiah at His triumphal entry, and was then rejected. His following actions, and the parables which He gave, all pronounced the coming judgment.

The crescendo was the condemnation of the religious rulers and then the emotional pronouncement of judgment upon the city and the temple.

These events set the stage for His final discourse in which He explained what would take place in the future.

THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Hence, in answer to the questions to His disciples that concerned the coming judgments against the city and the temple, as well as His return to the earth in triumph, Jesus gave a number of illustrations designed to urge the people to be prepared, to be ready for His return.

ANSWERING THE DISCIPLES QUESTIONS

Jesus first listed a number of signs that would characterize the time of the end (Matthew 24:4-14). He then gave a specific sign that would start the final three-and-one-half-year period popularly known as the great tribulation.

THE ABOMINATION THAT CAUSES DESOLATION

Jesus made this proclamation:

So when you see the abomination of desolation—spoken about by Daniel the prophet—standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains (Matthew 24:15-16 NET).

He later added this:

For there will be greater anguish than at any time since the world began. And it will never be so great again. In fact, unless that time of calamity is shortened, not a single person will survive. But it will be shortened for the sake of God's chosen ones (Matthew 24:21-22 NLT)

This event would signal the end is getting near.

After explaining a number of things surrounding His return Jesus urged the disciples to keep watch:

So you, too, must keep watch! For you don't know what day your Lord is coming. Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would keep watch and not permit his house to be broken into. You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected (Matthew 24:42-44 NLT).

Christ will return at a time when the people least expect it.

THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT OF MATTHEW 25

Jesus then gave the illustration of two servants, a sensible one and a foolish one. The foolish one would be judged for his unbelief that the Lord may come sooner rather than later:

But what if the servant is evil and thinks, ‘My master won’t be back for a while,’ and he begins beating the other servants, partying, and getting drunk? The master will return unannounced and unexpected, and he will cut the servant to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:48-51 NLT).

In this instance, the master returned earlier than this foolish man had expected.

Next came the parable of the ten maidens, where, as we will see, the master returned later than expected.

The first thing that should strike us is that the parable of the ten maidens is sandwiched between two other parables which *both* speak of Jesus’ Second Coming to the earth. The first parable was that of the faithful and wise slave who was ready for the coming of his master and the evil slave who believed that the master was delaying his coming. Jesus concluded the parable as follows:

The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not foresee, and will cut him in two, and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:50 NET).

The second was the parable of the talents. Before going on a journey the master entrusted money to three of his servants. When he returned he found that two servants were faithful but one was not. The Lord had the following to say about the third servant who was unfaithful:

Then he ordered, ‘Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver. To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Matthew 25:28-30 NLT).

Again, we notice that the parable ends with the useless servant being judged by the Lord, thrown into outer darkness.

Finally, the Lord Jesus then compared His return to the earth to a shepherd dividing the sheep, the righteous, from the goats, the unrighteous:

But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left ... And they [the unrighteous] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life” (Matthew 25:31-33, 46 NLT).

Jesus’ prediction of a return in judgment concludes these chapters, which began with His triumphal entry and His weeping over the city because of the rejection of His people of Him as the promised Messiah.

Now let’s look where the parable of the ten maidens fits into the overall teaching of these chapters. In doing so, we will discover what we should conclude, as well as what we cannot conclude, from the text as it stands.

Matthew 25:1

At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten maidens who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

At that time

Notice the parable begins with the words “at that time.” What time is this? In context, it is the time of Jesus’ return to the earth in judgment as He had just explained in the previous parable, the parable of the wise and foolish servant. Greek scholar Charles L. Quarles explains:

The Greek word ... probably means “at that time” and probably refers to the time of the master’s coming mentioned at the climax of the preceding parable ... It highlights a distinction between the present manifestation of the kingdom (in which it is not too late to enter) and the consummation of the kingdom (at which time it will be too late to enter). (Charles Quarles, Matthew, *Exegetical Guide To the Greek New Testament*, Nashville, B&H Publishing Group, 2017, p. 296).

Bible commentator Thomas Constable wrote:

The introductory “then” ties this parable to the subject of the preceding instruction, namely, the Second Coming of the Son of Man. The beginning of “the kingdom of heaven” is in view. It will be similar to what the following story describes (Thomas Constable, Constable’s Online Expository Notes, Matthew, 2014).

In his comprehensive book on the parables of Jesus, Klyne R. Snodgrass agrees:

This is the only parable to begin with (then)... likely it refers to the coming of the future kingdom which was alluded to in 24:50-51 (Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent, A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, Second Edition, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2018, p. 509).

Snodgrass also noted a number of themes in the parable of the ten maidens that are found elsewhere in the context:

Several themes are given prominence in this section: the fivefold repetition of no one knows the day or the hour (24:36,42,44,50; 25:13), (“watch” ... 24:42-43; 25:13—note the similarity of 24:42 and 25:13), wise 24:45; 25:2,4,8,9), prepared...24:44; 25:10, and delay 24:48; 25:5 (Snodgrass, p. 508).

Most commentators on Matthew concur that this parable is dealing with the same subject matter, the return of the Lord and the need to be ready. Merrill Unger, former professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, writes:

“Then” ... as a temporal particle, establishes the time context of this illustration as at the end of the Tribulation and at the advent of the Messiah to judge (24:36-51) His own people, Israel. Hence, it has no reference to the rapture (Merrill Unger, Unger’s Commentary On The Gospels, Copyright © 2014 by The Merrill F Unger Trust LLC, Published by AMG Publishers 6815 Shallowford Rd. Chattanooga, Tennessee 374216).

Therefore, the time frame that we are looking at is the Second Coming of Christ. This is crucial to understand. Indeed, the entire parable must be interpreted in light of this.

Consequently, from the very first word in the Greek text, it appears that we are NOT looking at an event that will take place some seven years prior to His return, the rapture of the church.

the Kingdom of Heaven will be like

This refers to the future time where God's kingdom will rule over the earth. The parable of the ten maidens will compare the kingdom of heaven to this illustration that Jesus will now give.

Merrill Unger writes how this parable speaks of the very moment the Lord will return to set up that kingdom:

This kingdom, completely suspended during the hiatus between Daniel's sixty-ninth and Seventieth Week ... is here in view. Moreover, it is surveyed at the precise moment the Messiah returns to judge the living for the purpose of entrance or non-entrance into the kingdom (Unger's Commentary On The Gospels).

ten maidens (virgins, handmaidens, young women, girls)

The parable is about the antics of ten maidens, not aspects of the maidens identities. While some English translations use the word "virgins" to render the Greek here, the idea of their virginity is not what is being stressed. This is a story about what happened to these young girls.

The Contemporary English Version translates it as "ten girls." Simply put, we are dealing with the experiences of ten young women.

Interestingly, the Greek word *parthenos*, translated as "virgin," can refer to either males or females. In fact, in the Book of Revelation, it is used of males:

These are the ones who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins (Revelation 14:4 NET).

From this context in Matthew, it seems clear that females are in view. Specifically this would refer to girls in their early teens. All ten of the maidens looked the same from the outside: they were all young girls, they all carried lamps, and engaged in similar activity.

The Tyndale New Testament Commentary makes an important point as to the identity of the ten young girls:

The details of the story are not all clear, as contemporary wedding customs are not fully known. The maidens may be attendants of the bride, or servants in the bridegroom's home, or perhaps friends and neighbours. The term 'bridesmaids' ... is not necessarily to be read in a modern cultural context! (R.T. France, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, Matthew, Inter-varsity Press, Nottingham England, website www.ivpbooks.com © R. T. France 1985).

We also have the suggestion that the maidens were female friends of the groom:

These were probably female friends and relatives of the bridegroom, who went out to welcome him and his new companion to their home. These are the virgins mentioned in this parable (Albert Barnes, *The Gospel According To Matthew*, Barnes Notes, Philadelphia, 1832).

In sum, these young girls could be bridesmaids, friends and neighbors of the bride and groom, relatives of the groom or servants in the home of the groom. We are simply not told.

The parable centers upon them, not the bride who is absent in Jesus' story.

who took their lamps (torches)

We now arrive at our next dilemma. What exactly did these ten maidens take with them? Commentators are divided as to whether it refers to lamps or torches. Craig Keener writes:

Weddings were held toward evening and torches were used as part of the celebration, which focused on a procession leading the bride to the groom's house. It is unlikely that "lamps" refers to the small Herodian oil lamps, which could be carried in the hand; all the evidence points instead here to real torches, which were also used in Greek and Roman wedding ceremonies. For many people, these torches may have been sticks wrapped with oil-soaked rags (Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*, Second Edition, 2014).

On the other hand, there are those who argue that it was lamps that were used.

and went out to meet the bridegroom

At this point we understand that this parable has a wedding ceremony in view. These ten young girls were to venture out and meet the bridegroom.

In the Old Testament the Lord's relationship with Israel is likened to a groom with His bride. In this instance, the bridegroom is seemingly referring to Jesus Himself. In fact, Jesus had earlier compared Himself to a groom:

Then John's disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples don't fast?" Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot mourn while the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days are coming when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast (Matthew 9:14-15 NET).

The NET Bible has a note that explains the identity of the wedding guests:

"sons of the wedding hall," an idiom referring to wedding guests, or more specifically friends of the bridegroom present at the wedding celebration (NET Bible, note on Matthew 9:15).

These guests could have been either male or female. The Greek word used, translated as "sons" in the NET Bible, is not limited to males.

While the ten maidens took their lamps, we are not told the purpose of them having these lamp or torches. Were they used to light the way for the arriving groom or bride—who may or may not have been with him—or for the crowd that gathered?

Furthermore, were the young girls there to escort the groom somewhere, perhaps to his home, his parents' home, or to the home of the bride? Again, there is no information given and commentators differ on the answer.

Matthew 25:2

Five of the maidens were foolish, and five were wise.

Five of the maidens were foolish (dimwitted) and five were wise

Though these ten maidens outwardly looked similar, there was a difference between them: five were wise and five were foolish.

We are first introduced to five who were dimwitted. We should note that they are mentioned first as they will furnish the illustration that Jesus was making about not being prepared.

The parable will now explain why five of them were foolish. Basically, they were not ready for what was about to take place.

This is a further statement of the “theme” of the story. The word translated “wise” or “prudent” stems from 24:45 in the previous parable, “the faithful and wise slave.” This parable continues the wisdom theme, namely discerning followers of Christ understand the situation and will do what is right in preparation for His coming.

Matthew 25:3

When the foolish ones took their lamps, they did not take extra olive oil with them.

When the foolish ones took their lamps (torches) they did not take extra [olive] oil with them

The wise and foolish maidens are similar to the faithful and evil servants that the Lord spoke of in the previous parable. The five foolish maidens expected the groom to arrive in a short period of time, but the wise were prepared for a possible delay.

The New English Translation adds the word “extra” before olive oil.

The word “extra” is not in the Greek text but is implied. The point is that the five foolish virgins had only the oil in their lamps, but took along no extra supply from which to replenish them. This is clear from v. 8, where the lamps of the foolish virgins are going out because they are running out of oil (NET Bible, note on Matthew 25:3)

Some translations omit the word “olive” before oil.

but they didn’t take any extra oil (God’s Word Translation) but no extra oil (The Contemporary English Version).

Their foolishness seemingly consisted of not being prepared for any possible delay in the arrival of the groom.

Greek scholar A.T. Robertson listed one possible scenario about their lack of oil:

[They took] probably none at all, not realizing their lack of oil till they lit the torches on the arrival of the bridegroom and his party (A.T. Robertson’s, *Word Pictures In The New Testament, Matthew*).

If so, then they brought either lamps or torches that could not be lit at all!

Matthew 25:4

But the wise ones took flasks of olive oil with their lamps (NET)

But the wise ones took flasks of olive oil with their lamps

On the other hand, the wise ones were prepared. They took along oil, or perhaps extra oil, in case of a delay. This is the only stated difference between these two groups.

Matthew 25:5

When the bridegroom was delayed a long time, they all became drowsy and fell asleep

When the bridegroom was delayed a long time

In the previous parable, the master came sooner than expected. In this instance, the groom was delayed for a considerable amount of time for some unspoken reason.

The lengthy delay is the key to understanding this parable.

In a real sense, it is the bridegroom's delay that distinguishes the wise from the foolish virgins. Any interpretation that ignores this central element in the story is bound to go astray (D.A. Carson, *Expositors Bible Commentary, Revised Edition*, Matthew).

they all became drowsy and fell asleep

The long delay caused all ten of them to fall asleep. The fact that they all fell asleep was not the problem.

Again, we have lack of specific details in this parable. We are not told as to their exact location as to where they fell asleep, what they were doing there, or how long they slept.

When we compare 24:48 with 25:5 we find that the lesson is the same as that of the evil slave in the previous parable. In both instances, some delay occurred. However, the two reactions to the delay were completely opposite.

In the first instance, the evil slave overestimated the delay of the return of his master. Therefore, the slave received an unpleasant surprise by the seemingly early arrival of his master.

In this instance, the foolish maidens unwisely underestimated the delay in the arrival the groom and hence were not prepared for it.

Excursus: Should We Interpret This Parable In Light Of John 14?

There have been those who have attempted to identify the words of Jesus in the upper room on the night of His betrayal with this particular parable. He said to His disciples:

Do not let your hearts be distressed. You believe in God; believe also in me. There are many dwelling places in my Father's house. Otherwise, I would have told you, because I am going away to make ready a place for you. And if I go and make ready a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that where I am you may be too (John 14:1-3 NET).

It is alleged that the Lord was specifically alluding to the well-known customs of a Galilean wedding. It is claimed that the custom of the day had the groom leaving the bride to go to the house of his father and take up to a year to build a room onto the house for the newly married couple.

Accordingly, when Jesus said gave this illustration to His disciples they would have immediately thought of the current wedding customs. Like a betrothed groom, the Lord will go away to build a house for His bride at the house of His Father.

This is supposedly further evidence that the Lord is providing some sort of future timeline with the wedding illustration of Matthew 25.

However, there are a number of things that do not fit this claim.

First, the illustration Jesus gave was not meant to be understood literally! The Lord is symbolically letting His disciples know that when He does return there will be a place prepared for them in the presence of God the Father. We should not assume that these are literal houses in the unseen realm!

Second, there is nothing in the context, before or after, that suggests the analogy of a wedding is being brought up. Nothing!

Third, Jesus said His Father's house *already* had many rooms. This is not the same idea as a groom constructing an add on to the existing structure of his father's house.

Fourth the groom did not always build a room onto the house of his father. Indeed, he may have built a separate facility for his new bride.

Fifth, Jesus spoke of going away to do this. The bride and groom, though they were already considered husband and wife and did not live together, would have had no need for the groom to "go away" if they were previously living in proximity.

Sixth, unlike Jesus' ascension into heaven (after which His disciples would no longer see Him), there is no indication whatsoever that the groom in the first century spent the entire year building his new house without ever seeing his bride.

Seventh, even though Jesus had likened Himself to a groom, the illustration that believers in Christ are compared to a bride is not found in His teaching! It was the Apostle Paul who first gave this illustration in his letter to the Ephesians (5:32).

Hence, we should not equate Jesus' words in the upper room with His previously mentioned parable of the ten maidens. There is no connection between them whatsoever.

Matthew 25:6

But at midnight there was a shout, "Look, the bridegroom is here! Come out to meet him."

But at midnight

In other words, the delay was much longer than expected. Midnight may mean in the midst of the night, not necessarily 12 a.m.

there was a shout

We are not told who shouted to wake them up, whether it came from one of the maidens in the group who woke up or from someone else heralding the coming of the groom.

Look, the bridegroom is here! Come out to meet him.

Wherever their location, the maidens awakened by the shout. They were told to come out and meet the late-arriving groom. However, we are not told exactly *why* they were to meet him or where they were going.

Matthew 25:7

Then all the maidens woke up and trimmed their lamps.

Then all the maidens woke up

The shout woke all of them up.

and trimmed their lamps.

They then prepared their lamps or torches for the arrival of the groom to their unspoken location.

Matthew 25:8

The foolish ones said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.”

The foolish ones said to the wise

The foolish maidens will now make a demand of those who were wise.

Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.

They requested some of their oil as they noticed that their lamps were going out.

What we are not told was if the lamps had been burning the entire time while they were asleep. We only know that their lamps were starting to go out. Again, we are never told as to why their lamps or torches must be lit, or the specific reason they were needed.

Respected Bible commentator R.C.H. Lenski makes some interesting observations about the foolish maidens lack of preparedness:

It was necessary for the great purpose of the parable to set out first of all and apart from the following action this basic fact: some foolish—others wise. For this is really what decides all that follows, and this is the heart of the warning for us. We are also shown without delay the plain evidence for the senselessness of the one group and for the sensibleness of the other. The foolish took their lamps along but took no oil! Can you imagine anything more foolish? Of course, no Jewish maidens would do such a thing as that; but this is a parable. Jesus has to picture such maidens in order to make us see how silly we are when, in our preparation for meeting the heavenly Bridegroom, we do exactly this silly thing in a spiritual way. Lamps, perhaps with a few drops of oil left in them from a former burning—and no oil! (R.C.H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament, Matthew*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, Minnesota).

Lenski makes a couple of important points. First, this is merely a parable, Jesus is not attempting to explain a realistic situation. Second, it is possible that the five foolish maidens had no oil whatsoever in their lamps.

Matthew 25:9

No, they replied. There won't be enough for you and for us. Go instead to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.

No, they replied.

The wise ones would not give their foolish counterparts any of their oil. This was not because they were selfish.

There won't be enough for you and for us.

The stated reason was that there would not be enough for any of them if they shared what they had held in reserve.

Go instead to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.

They suggested the dimwitted maidens find someone from whom they could buy oil. Whether this was even possible has been disputed by commentators. Indeed, many argue that there would not have been shops open all night in a small village.

Matthew 25:10

But while they had gone to buy it, the bridegroom arrived, and those who were ready went inside with him to the wedding banquet. Then the door was shut.

But while they had gone to buy it, the bridegroom arrived

Unfortunately for the unprepared maidens, the groom arrived before they returned with extra oil.

and those who were ready went inside with him to the wedding banquet.

Those who were prepared were able to enter the wedding banquet.

Then the door was shut.

Sadly, for the foolish maidens the door was shut. The shut door indicated that the wedding feast had now commenced.

EXCURSUS: HOW LONG DID THE CELEBRATION LAST?

Interestingly, some have argued that the seven-day wedding feast, celebration, represented the seven-year "Time of Jacob's Trouble," or the "Seventieth week of Daniel."

However, we are not told precisely how long this feast would last.

In fact, the apocryphal Book of Tobit, written between the testaments, mentions a wedding feast that lasted fourteen days, not seven:

Now when the fourteen days of the wedding celebration had ended that Raguel had sworn to observe for his daughter (Tobit 10:7 NRSV).

This is another reason as to why we must be careful about claiming things about any ancient customs that we know so little about.

Matthew 25:11

Later, the other maidens came too, saying, "Lord, lord! Let us in!"

Later, the other maidens came too

The other maidens eventually arrived. We are not told if they had acquired oil for their lamps or torches or if they were lit. The only point mentioned is that they arrived too late.

saying, “Lord, lord! Let us in!”

They requested the keeper of the door to let them in. The repetition of Lord, lord revealed their concern, they were locked out and wanted to join the ceremony.

The identity of the doorkeeper is uncertain. If this event took place at the house of the father of the bride then her father would have been the one who answered. If it was at the house of father of the groom, then either he, or the groom would be the one answering.

Matthew 25:12

But he replied, “I tell you the truth, I do not know you!”

But he replied, I tell you the truth

The words, “I tell you the truth” indicates that the one who had control over the door was about to make a solemn statement.

I do not know you!

His statement is similar to an earlier one made by Jesus in the context of responding to false prophets:

On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws’ (Matthew 7:22-23 NLT).

Here is where the parable would not fit with what we know of weddings in the first century Ancient Near East.

As many commentators have mentioned, these two things would never have happened. The people in charge of the feast would not keep these young girls from entering the week-long celebration merely because they had been late to the ceremony, and they would never say to them, “I do not know you.” Indeed, in a small village the identity of these young girls would be known to whoever was the keeper of the door.

The Zondervan Study Bible makes the following comment:

By the time the unprepared girls return with their extra oil, the procession has already arrived at the groom’s home and gone inside. At a real wedding, the late arrivals would have been publicly shamed but probably let in. But this is a parable, teaching spiritual lessons. Jesus insists that once he has returned it will be too late to repent (*NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Notes on Matthew*).

Kenneth Bailey makes another important point based upon Middle Eastern customs:

As is often the case, the reader of the parable is left hanging. Does the bridegroom relent and let them in or not? The listener/reader is not told... We do not know what they receive when the conversation is over. In the Middle East the word no is never an answer, rather it is a pause in the negotiations (Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, Inter-Varsity Press, 2008, p. 273).

It is here where we are given the lesson to be learned, be prepared. There will come a time when it is too late to enter the kingdom of God. The parable ends with the following exhortation from Jesus.

Matthew 25:13

Therefore stay alert, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Therefore stay alert

The parable ends with a command to stay alert.

because you do not know the day or the hour.

The parable of the wise and foolish maidens establishes for the last time in the Olivet Discourse that the time of the return of the Lord Jesus is unknowable (see 24:3, 36, 39, 42-44, 50; 25:13).

It could be sooner than expected, as in the previous parable, or later than expected, as in this parable. The Lord is returning but nobody knows the exact moment that this will occur. Hence we should always be ready for His appearance.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE PARABLE OF THE TEN MAIDENS

After looking at this parable in some detail, we can make a number of observations as to what we have discovered.

To begin with, there are a number of factors that rule out this parable as having anything to do with the timeline of “last days” events including the rapture of the church. They are as follows:

**OBSERVATION 1 IN THE PARABLE, THERE ARE MANY
DETAILS OF THE WEDDING CEREMONY LEFT UNSTATED**

As we have indicated, this parable does not contain many precise details of a first century wedding ceremony. Indeed, there are so many things that are unstated, so many questions unanswered, that it does not seem possible to construct a last days outline, as it were from its contents. We can give the following examples.

Who were the young girls? Were they bridesmaids, friends of the family, relatives of the groom, or merely a group of neighbors? Were they officially supposed to be in the wedding party or were they merely wanting to be a part of it? One commentator put it this way:

In this kingdom parable the story revolves around ten unmarried women “virgins” ... likely in their early teens who wait for a bridegroom who is delayed (25:5) (Jeannine K. Brown, *Teach The Text Commentary Series, Matthew*, Baker Books, 2015).

They are ten young women who are unmarried. That is all that we really know about them.

Where were these young girls when they fell asleep? Were they at someone’s home? If so, whose?

In addition, we do not know if actual lamps were going out or if there were lighted torches where the flames were flickering. Why were these lamps or torches even necessary?

There is another issue unstated: where was the groom coming from? Was it from the house of the bride? Was it from out of town? Was it from his own house?

Who does the groom represent? Is it God or is it Jesus? It could be either.

None of these questions are explained in the parable. This is in contrast to the parables of the sower as the wheat and the weeds in Matthew 13. In these narrative parables, the Lord gives us an explanation of the various participants along with a timeline. We find nothing of the sort here.

The fact that so many questions remain unanswered is a problem for those who want to make more of this parable than a mere illustration of the importance of being ready.

Indeed, since there are so many things we do not know about the situation we may rightly question whether we can use it to understand some sort of timeline about the future.

**OBSERVATION 2 WE DO NOT HAVE DETAILED KNOWLEDGE
OF FIRST CENTURY WEDDINGS**

For anyone attempting to argue for some type of correspondence between first century weddings in the Galilee and the timeline of the rapture of the church, another problem is our lack of knowledge with respect to these weddings. There are many things that we do not know about the customs at the time of Jesus with respect to weddings. This is admitted by all who comment on this parable. We will provide merely a few examples.

Though not much is known about first-century Jewish wedding customs, it may be that these young, unmarried women leave the groom's home to welcome and accompany the couple back to the groom's household (Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:395).

Notice the admission that “not much is known about first-century Jewish wedding customs.” This citation is from the three volume commentary series of Davies and Allison, one of the standard works on Matthew.

The point they make is that we do not have a lot of information about first-century wedding practices.

Writing specifically on the subject of the background of the New Testament, well-known scholar Craig Kenner acknowledges:

Because not all the details of ancient Palestinian weddings are known, it is not clear whether the parable envisions the lamps as burning while the bridesmaids slept (to avoid the delay of having to rekindle them) or as being lit only after the first announcement of the bridegroom's coming (as many scholars think) (Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*, Second Edition, 2014).

Note Keener, like Davies and Allison, also admits that “not all the details of ancient Palestinian weddings are known.” Indeed, as he states, it is unclear whether or not the lamps would burn while the bridesmaids slept. We simply do not have enough information to make a determination.

In the most comprehensive work on the subject of Jesus' parables, Klyne R. Snodgrass makes the following comment about the parable of the ten virgins:

To the frustration of all interpreters of this parable, information about wedding customs in the ancient world is relatively sparse, and practices may have differed from place to place (Snodgrass, p. 510).

Little information about the customs, as well as differing practices is what is found in the available literature. In other words, we have, at best, limited knowledge of the situation.

We have just cited three standard works: a three-book series on Matthew one on the subject of New Testament background, and the most comprehensive book on Jesus' parables. We also cited a few major commentaries on Matthew. They all admit the same thing: we do not know the exact customs that were practiced at the time.

Our lack of knowledge alone ought to stop anyone from trying to find some hidden truth from Jesus in this parable about a timeline of last days events.

**OBSERVATION 3 THERE HAVE BEEN NO RECENT EARTH-SHATTERING
DISCOVERIES ABOUT GALILEAN WEDDINGS**

The claim that something new has been discovered with respect to the uniqueness of first-century Galilean wedding customs has yet to be proven.

Where is the convincing evidence that the weddings were so different in the Galilee to the point that they mirrored the last days scenario in Scripture? Indeed, there is nothing from firsthand sources that herald such a unique finding in recent times.

To the contrary, well respected commentators admit that so many details of these weddings are not understood. If so, then how could anyone construct a timeline of last days events from something that is not completely understood?

OBSERVATION 4 THE PRIMARY SOURCES CONFLICT

There is something else that must be appreciated, the sources that we have conflict!

The primary sources above show some variety (Snodgrass, p. 512)

Since this is the case, which ones are we to believe? None of them has the authority of Scripture.

In sum, due to the conflicting nature of these sources, we cannot be certain as to the exact customs at the time of Jesus. Therefore, it is not possible to construct some predicted timeline of end time events.

**OBSERVATION 5 THERE ARE DETAILS WE DO KNOW ABOUT FIRST-CENTURY
WEDDINGS THAT DO NOT FIT THE RAPTURE SCENARIO**

There is a further problem. Indeed, there are some things that we do know about traditional weddings in the ancient Middle East that are problematic to coordinate with last days events.

Kenneth E. Bailey was a master biblical scholar who lived in the Middle East for 60 years. He is known for his unique understanding of Middle Eastern culture.

According to Bailey, in traditional village life in the Middle East, weddings occurred “during the seven months of the hot and cloudless summer” (Bailey, p. 271).

Does this mean if the return of the Lord follows the customs of the Galilean weddings, that He cannot return during those five months where weddings were not taking place at the time of Christ? So, is His return limited to a seven month window?

There is something else to consider. John 2 tells us that the wedding in Cana of Galilee took place on “the third day.” As scholar Craig Keener points out:

The “third day does not refer to the third day of the week, because virgins were married on the fourth day (Wednesday) and widows on the fifth (Thursday).” (Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*).

Does this indicate that if the Galilean weddings were a clear blueprint for the coming of the Lord that we should look for two comings of Christ? One for the virgins and one for the widows?

Should we also assume that He will follow the pattern of weddings on only two days of the week? Does this mean Christ can only return on a Wednesday or Thursday?

Kenneth Bailey also noted:

When the bride was ready, she would be placed on the back of a riding animal, and the groom, with his friends, would form a disorganized, exuberant parade (Bailey, p. 271).

How does this work with the catching up of believers at the time of the rapture of the church? Are we to ride horses when we meet the Lord in the air?

In sum, we not only discover that our knowledge of weddings at the time of Christ is limited; what we do know, moreover, conflicts with the scenario that some people are promoting.

Yet these are not the only problems of trying to claim that they are a “divine pattern” for understanding the end times.

OBSERVATION 6 THE WEDDINGS CEREMONIES WERE SIMILAR AT THE TIME OF CHRIST

However, that which do know, with the sparse information available to us, does fit the general background of the times.

Bailey also wrote the following comments on the work of Davies and Allison for this parable, Matthew 25:1-13, as well as a similar one found in Luke 12:35-38, “the parable of the serving master:”

W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison present a detailed discussion of the various options regarding the history of the composition of this parable...I note the above list of comparisons to make the point that both of these parables have similar traditional Middle Eastern culture behind them (Bailey, p. 271).

We learn that the parable of the wise and foolish young women has a setting that was similar to the Middle Eastern culture at that time. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia concurs:

A general survey of ancient marriage laws and customs shows that those of the Hebrews are not a peculiar creation apart from those of other peoples. A remarkable affinity to those of other branches of the Semitic races especially, may be noted, and striking parallels are found in the Code of Hammurabi, with regard, e.g., to betrothal, dowry, adultery and divorce (ISBE E-text version Copyright 2002, HeavenWord, Inc. All rights reserved.)

In other words, there was seemingly nothing that sets the wedding illustration by Jesus, given in Matthew 25:1-13, apart as a unique practice, or something special.

So why look at the particular customs in the Galilee to form a “last days” timeline.

OBSERVATION 7 THERE IS NO COMMANDMENT IN SCRIPTURE AS TO HOW A WEDDING CEREMONY IS TO BE CARRIED OUT

While the Lord did institute marriage at the very beginning of creation, (Genesis 2:24) there is nothing prescribed in the entire Bible about how a wedding ceremony is to be conducted.

This illustrates the difference between what is merely described by the Lord as opposed to that which is prescribed, or commanded, by Him. In other words, we have to make the distinction between what the Scriptures are commanding us to do from passages that merely describe events or customs that were practiced. These marriage customs had no divine approval.

In fact, wedding ceremonies and their traditions in the Ancient Near East developed over time. As we mentioned in our previous observation, they go back to at least the time of Hammurabi which was before the time of Moses.

Are we to assume that these traditions, particularly the ones developed in the Galilee, were somehow divinely inspired to reveal a “last days” scenario?

OBSERVATION 8 THIS PARABLE IS UNIQUE TO MATTHEW: IT IS FOUND NOWHERE ELSE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There is another important point that needs to be made. We only find the parable of the ten maidens in Matthew. Neither Mark’s gospel, which is attributed to Peter’s perspective, nor Luke or John mention it.

John does record a wedding that was attended by Jesus in Cana of Galilee but he says nothing about this parable. We do not find the parable referred to in the other writings of Peter (1,2 Peter) or the writings of John (1,2,3 John, Revelation) or any other New Testament writer for that matter. None of the recorded speeches in the Book of Acts refer to it.

If the parable was such a clear picture of the unique Galilean wedding, which supposedly portrayed a pre-tribulation rapture, we would likely expect at least something to be mentioned, or at the very least hinted at, in the New Testament. However, there is nothing!

This being the case, we seem to have three basic choices.

First, the possibility that this parable was highlighting a pre-tribulation rapture did not dawn upon these New Testament writers or any of Jesus’ disciples for that matter. In other words, they did not see the connection. Why would those intimately familiar with Jesus’ be unaware of such an important connection?

Second, they did understand the significance of this parable for “last days” Bible prophecy and they did speak about it, but there was nothing recorded in Scripture of what they said. Why would they choose to do this when they touch on the last days in other instances?

Third, the most likely scenario, they did not see any special connection to the rapture of the church because there was none. This is why the parable and its meaning is recorded nowhere else.

OBSERVATION 9 JESUS HAD NO INTENTION OF GIVING A REALISTIC PORTRAYAL OF A FIRST CENTURY WEDDING

There is another matter of the utmost importance that must be addressed, perhaps the most important issue of all. We must ask ourselves in what sense was Jesus trying to realistically portray a first century wedding in this illustration?

Indeed, there have been a number of commentators who have pointed out that Jesus is not necessarily using the precise customs of the day in this parable. In fact, the nature of a parable does not force one to assume that we are dealing with actual realities.

In a highly recommended book on the parables of Jesus, author Arland J. Hultgren explained:

A parable is a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between God's kingdom, actions, or expectations and something in this world, real or imagined.

There are two types of parables:

1. Narrative parables: the comparisons made include narration; these parables typically have a "once upon a time" quality about them and the particularity of stories set in the past.
2. Similitudes: the comparisons are made without stories but by means of the words "is like" or "is as if;" analogies are made between their subjects and general and timeless observations (Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2002, p. 3).

Notice that the narrative parables do not have to be historically precise. They are merely given as illustrations of spiritual truths in a setting that is either real or imagined.

In his comprehensive book on the parables of Jesus, Klyne R. Snodgrass agrees:

Parables are not always realistic and do not need to be....Parables are not direct pictures of reality and do not claim to portray life as it should be. They only partially map the realities they seek to reveal (Snodgrass pp. 510,517).

In fact, we find a number of statements in Jesus' parable of the ten maidens illustrate a deeper truth without necessarily attempting to be historically precise.

For example, it has been suggested that the idea of these young girls' attempting to buy oil in the middle of the night in a small village is not realistic.

Furthermore, many have pointed out that in a first-century wedding the person in charge of the door of the house would not have shut out the foolish girls merely because they showed up a bit late. Neither would he have denied knowing them. Both of these actions would have been unrealistic.

These kinds of non-realistic illustrations are normal in parables. Note the following observations of commentators:

Jesus is not telling a story about something that actually happened; he is warning people of the dreadful fate of those who know that they should be watching for the coming of the Son of man but who do not do this (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According To Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, Eerdmans 1992).

Thus far all of the parable has seemed reasonably realistic, except perhaps for the unpreparedness of the foolish bridesmaids. But, as always in parables, the real point is at the spiritual level, as now becomes clear. An ordinary groom would let the girls enter, but this lord refuses admittance and denies even knowing them v. 12 (Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, B and H Publishing Group, 1992).

With these words of pronouncement, the parable shifts from metaphor to meaning, since a bridegroom would know the identity of the bride's attendants (Teach the Text)

Jesus himself indicates that the features of certain parables have detailed correspondences with reality (13:18-23, 37-43, 49-50), but in the case of the present parable, Jesus supplied only a generalizing conclusion (25:13) (David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Cornerstone Bible Commentary, 2005).

Consequently, many commentators suggest that the point of the story is to relay an important message, not to give an accurate account of first century weddings. This lack of historical precision would have been understood by His audience.

If so, then we may again ask why we should attempt to find precise details in the story. It becomes all the more impractical to do this when it appears that Jesus had no intention of doing so.

We will give one final illustration that shows the difficulty of establishing some type of consistent understanding of the background of this parable. Klyne Snodgrass explains:

How should the wedding circumstances be understood? To whose house (or to what place) is the bridegroom coming? Because of the paucity of good evidence, this is one of the more difficult decisions. Implicit is the question of determining the *realism* of the wedding. For some, the description does not fit what is known of Palestinian weddings... explanations usually assume the bride is to be escorted to the home of the groom (or his parents), where the wedding takes place, but even that is not certain. Several options have been suggested:

The virgins are at the bride's house and the wedding will take place there, which is less common but possible.

The virgins at the bride's house, and the groom arrives there to find his bride and take her back to his house in a celebratory procession.

The virgins have left the bride's house and have stopped somewhere on the way to await the groom, for which I know of no evidence. This view seems to be a misunderstanding of 25:1, which should be seen as a title for the whole parable, not evidence that the virgins went out twice.

The virgins and the bride are already at the groom's house awaiting his arrival which is not the usual pattern.

The virgins are at the groom's house and await his return with his bride...it is hard to speak of realism when there is insufficient information about first-century Palestinian weddings, and it will not do to point to Arabic or Indian weddings of later times...no doubt practices varied in different locales and in different circumstances (Snodgrass, pp. 512-513).

Having said this, we again cite Snodgrass:

The parable is not unrealistic. It is sufficiently within the bounds of what is known that, even if it presents unusual circumstances, it works, and its warning to be ready is clear (Snodgrass, p. 513)

This is a fitting conclusion! While there are parts of this parable that do seem to be unrealistic, the basic thrust of it works to bring across the main point of Jesus: we must be ready for His return!

OBSERVATION 10 THE OTHER WEDDING PARABLE IN THIS CONTEXT IS NOT REALISTIC

One more observation needs to be made before we shift gears a bit. In this context, Matthew 21-25, there is another parable about a wedding given by Jesus. It is found in Matthew 22:1-13. It concerns a king inviting people to a wedding banquet for his son. The people refused to come and judgment was pronounced upon the nation.

Specifically, the parable concluded with a man who came to the wedding banquet but did not show up in a clean wedding garment. This would have insulted the king and it resulted in the pronouncement of the following punishment:

Then the king said to his attendants, 'Tie him up hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!' (Matthew 22:13 NET).

However, the judgment that was pronounced was unrealistic. The image of “outermost darkness” with “weeping and grinding teeth” is used often in Matthew’s gospel for eternal punishment.

Accordingly, it is the Lord and Him alone that can do this, not some earthly king. This fact tells us a couple of things.

First, like the narrative parable of the ten maidens, it does not have to be completely realistic to get its message across. The illustration in the parable points to a heavenly king, the Lord Himself, who alone can send someone into everlasting punishment.

Second, the wedding to which the king invited the people could not have occurred in the nation of Israel; Israel had no king at that time! In fact, they had not had a king since the time of the Babylonian captivity, some six hundred years previously!

Therefore, this wedding illustration which precedes the ten maidens parable, had nothing to do with the situation on the ground at that time in history.

If so, then why would anyone assume that the next parable about a wedding, the ten maidens, which was given two days later, would be any different?

The simple explanation is that neither parable was uniquely confined to the customs of the day, and neither was meant to be realistic in all of its details.

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON THE CLAIM OF A PARALLEL BETWEEN ANCIENT CUSTOMS OF THAT TIME AND THE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE

There are also a number of other observations that we can make from the text itself that seem to rule out the subject of the pre-tribulation rapture of the church being embedded in the story. They are as follows:

OBSERVATION 11 THE COMPARISON IN THIS PARABLE IS TO JESUS’ SECOND COMING

There is also a timing factor in the comparison between the parable and what the Lord has revealed about the future.

As we earlier emphasized, the Greek adverb at the beginning of verse one, translated “at that time,” makes it clear that the setting is the Second Coming of Christ—not the pre-tribulation rapture of the church.

OBSERVATION 12 THE PLACEMENT OF THE PARABLE IS BETWEEN TWO OTHERS THAT DEAL WITH JESUS’ RETURN

As we also mentioned, the parable previous to the ten maidens warned against assuming that the master would not come immediately in judgment. It centered on those who were not expecting Him to come for a long time. Hence, they lived their lives in sin.

The parable of the talents, that follows that of the ten maidens, is also a warning against not being ready when the Lord returns. It emphasizes the need for people to fulfill their responsibilities while waiting for the coming of the Lord. Therefore, it is problematic to argue that Jesus changes the subject in the parable of the ten maidens, to deal with the catching up of the living believers to meet Him in the air does not fit the context.

**OBSERVATION 13 COMMENTATORS ON MATTHEW AGREE IT IS ABOUT THE
RETURN OF THE LORD TO THE EARTH**

Historically, those who have commented upon Matthew view this parable as speaking about the Second Coming of the Lord to earth. It is not seen as a picture of the rapture of the church.

To be fair, there are some who argue that the Day of the Lord is in view, not merely the Second Coming of Christ. If so, that would include the rapture of the church. This is a minority view, but it is not impossible.

Having said this, passages on the rapture emphasize the joyous reunion of believers with the Lord while passages on the Second Coming, such as this one, basically emphasize that He is returning to judge sin.

In other words, these passages *warn* the hearers and the readers. The thrust is to “be ready” for His coming, not to give some hidden message about a timeline of events.

Again, this is especially true when we have so few details in the parable about the precise situation to which the Lord is referring.

**OBSERVATION 14 THE PARABLE CONCURS WITH THE CONSISTENT THEME
OF JUDGMENT IN THESE CHAPTERS**

From the moment Jesus came into Jerusalem in His triumphal entry, until the final illustration of Him returning to earth and dividing the people as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats, there is one constant theme in everything recorded: judgment.

In fact, every episode recorded from Matthew 21 through Matthew 25 sets the stage for Jesus’ dying for the sins of the world because He was rejected by the people of His day. This rejection would lead to their judgment. They should have known who He was, but they did not. They were willfully blind. Hence, the predicted judgment.

Therefore, we find nothing joyous in these chapters, which we should expect if they referred to the believers being caught up to meet Him in the air, the rapture. This is not the subject matter of these chapters.

**OBSERVATION 15 THE EMOTION OF JESUS’ WORDS IN THIS OVERALL
CONTEXT MUST BE APPRECIATED**

In addition, from the time of the triumphal entry to the denunciation of the religious leaders and the prediction of the destruction of the city and the temple in Matthew 23, we find a number of emotive statements from Jesus. This is consistent with the theme of judgment that characterizes each of these chapters.

Consequently, to attempt to place the rapture of the church in the midst of these predicted punishments seems out of place. Indeed, there is nothing obvious in the context that the Lord is changing the topic.

**OBSERVATION 16 THE ANALOGY OF THE PARABLE TO THE RAPTURE
OF THE CHURCH DOES NOT WORK**

Even if we had sufficient knowledge of the customs at the time of Christ a problem arises for those who contend that this is an illustration of the rapture—that is, the Lord coming for His bride: there is no mention of a bride in the parable. Furthermore, the bride analogy for believers is not even stated in the four gospels! This was something developed later by Paul.

As we mentioned earlier, there is no explanation in the parable as to who the various participants represent: neither the groom nor the ten maidens. Various answers to this question have been given by Bible commentators. This merely proves that it is not substantiated to claim that the groom, or the maidens, are representative of such and such.

OBSERVATION 17 IF THE BRIDE REPRESENTS THE CHURCH THEN WHO ARE THE MAIDENS?

If this is a picture of the Lord coming for His bride, then who are the maidens? Whom do they represent? If the bride is an example of those who have believed in Him then who is this other group?

A much simpler way to interpret the parable is that the details were not meant to single out certain groups, whether at the time of Jesus or at the time of the end.

In other words, it is a straightforward illustration about the need to get ready for the coming of the Lord. Perhaps, nothing else should be read into it. The Tyndale New Testament Commentary says:

But to look for specific identifications of the oil (faith? good works?), or the bridesmaids, beyond being representatives of those who are ready or not, seems to be going beyond what the context requires (Tyndale New Testament Commentary)

OBSERVATION 18 THE RAPTURE TEACHING WAS FIRST REVEALED TO PAUL

When we read the words of the Apostle Paul, it appears that the doctrine of the rapture of the church was first revealed to him. He wrote:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51 NIV).

According to Paul, the doctrine of the rapture is a “mystery.” This does not mean something that is difficult to comprehend. Instead the word has the idea of a “sacred secret.” There was no divine revelation of this truth to the people of God before Paul unveiled it. He had written about it previously to the Thessalonians and now he is further explaining it to the Corinthians.

Consequently, since these truths were given to Paul to reveal, we should not look for the rapture doctrine in the Old Testament or, for that matter, even in the teachings of Jesus. While Jesus spoke of coming again for His own, He did not elaborate on the details. This responsibility was given to the Apostle Paul.

This being the case, we ask the question: should we look for some hidden message in a parable about a wedding for a timing of an event that had not been revealed yet?

OBSERVATION 19 THE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS JESUS WAS ASKED DEALT WITH GOD’S COMING KINGDOM TO THE EARTH

As we attempt to understand Matthew 24 and 25, we must remember that they are Jesus’ answers to questions about His coming back to earth to set up His kingdom:

As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, his disciples came to him privately and said, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3 NET).

They were asking for signs of the end of this present age. There was no thought whatsoever in the minds of the disciples that certain believers would be taken out of the world before His return in order to escape His wrath. The entire idea was foreign to them and also to the context of these two chapters.

Consequently, it is misguided to look for some hidden teaching on this subject by Jesus in a parable about His coming judgment, the one theme that is consistent throughout these chapters.

**OBSERVATION 20 GOD'S WORD IS CLEAR: WE ARE NOT TO LOOK
FOR HIDDEN MEANINGS IN THE TEXT**

This is the most important point that we can make. Scripture was written for us to understand who God is, what He is like, who we are, and what He requires from us.

In doing so, the Lord gave us a message that was clear. In fact, the Bible tells us not to look for any hidden meanings in the text and not to go beyond that which is written. Paul wrote:

Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying: "Nothing beyond what is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6 CSB).

In the Scriptures, God has revealed everything that is necessary for us to know about Him and His plan for time and eternity. Jude wrote:

But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people (Jude 3 NLT).

The faith has been "once and for all delivered." God has told us everything that needs to be said. Therefore, we derive our information from the Bible and from it alone. We do not go elsewhere to discover what will happen in the future.

Second, we are to read the Bible at face-value. In other words we do not have to read between the lines to find hidden messages. Paul wrote:

Our letters have been straightforward, and there is nothing written between the lines and nothing you can't understand (2 Corinthians 1:13 NLT).

The Amplified Bible puts it this way:

For we write you nothing other than what you read and understand [there is no double meaning in what we say]. And I hope you will [accurately] understand [divine things] until the end (2 Corinthians 1:13 Amplified Bible).

To sum up, we go to the Bible alone for our information about the future and in doing so we read the Scriptures in a straightforward manner. There are no hidden messages or any double meanings in the text.

CONCLUSION

After a close look at the parable of the ten maidens and the overall context in which it is recorded there is no reason whatsoever to suppose that it deals with any other subject other than Jesus' return to earth in judgment! To insert the doctrine of the rapture of the church through Galilean wedding customs is foreign to the context.

In sum, the claim that this particular parable somehow illustrates a last days timeline has no supporting evidence whatsoever. Hence, it should not be used to illustrate the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture.

MISTAKE 36

DO NOT AUTHORITATIVELY CITE THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGES OF SCRIPTURE IF YOU DON'T KNOW THEM

This is a very common mistake among those teaching the Bible, or those passing along what others have taught about what the Scripture says. While it is certainly not limited to people who teach last days Bible prophecy, it is often done by those schooling us about the end times.

Indeed, too often a Bible teacher wishes to make a point by saying something like “this is what the Hebrew or Greek word really means.” And then they explain a meaning that is somewhat different than what people read in their Bibles. It gives the idea that they have some special insight that few, if any others, have.

Most of the time this comes from well-meaning Christians who don't know any better. Indeed, they heard someone say something to this effect and they merely repeat what they have heard. However, they are not actually able to read or study the Scripture in the original. Hence, they do not have the ability to know if the claims are true or false.

I must confess that I was guilty of this as a young Christian. Before I had studied the biblical languages I often pontificated on the meaning of Hebrew or Greek words to others. This was always the result of listening to what somebody else said, or reading about it somewhere. Ignorantly, I merely parroted what others said.

Looking back, I believe that I was *always* wrong about what I so clearly enumerated to people. So I certainly understand believers making this well-meaning mistake!

THE LESSON: ALWAYS BE CAREFUL ABOUT AUTHORITATIVELY REPEATING WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

As we mentioned, this is certainly not limited to the teaching of last days Bible prophecy but, as we will see, it does happen way too often. The problem is that there are many people using Greek or Hebrew in the pulpit, on the internet, etc., who don't actually know enough of the language to support the use that they are making of it.

Here is a good rule of thumb: if you hear someone say something like “what the Greek really means here” ... the chances are good that you are about to be misinformed. Indeed, nobody that knows Hebrew or Greek would ever speak that way.

Instead, one would say something like this: “this text may have the meaning of...” or “it's possible in this context to translate the Greek word as such and such” something like that. Anyone who has studied these languages would always qualify what they say about how a word or passage should be rendered.

When someone says that a certain Bible translation is incorrect, it is almost always that the person making the claim that is mistaken. Here are a few examples:

THE GREEK WORD *GENEA* DOES NOT MEAN RACE IN MATTHEW 24

Often in interpreting Jesus' parable of the fig tree in Matthew 24:32-34, we hear, or read, of someone saying the Greek word *genea* means “race” in this context. In other words, Jesus is predicting that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will exist to the very end. In essence, He would be saying:

Truly, I say to you, this race will not pass away until all these things take place (Matthew 24:34)

However, this does not work. In a standard work on the subject of Greek and Hebrew words, we read the following comparison between two Greek words *genos* and *genea*.

The noun γένος (*genos*) sports several meanings or applications in the NT. The sense “family” is clear in Acts 7:13 ...The usage of γενεά, (*genea*), in contrast, is relatively narrow, having usually a temporal component...

A few scholars have argued that here ... *genea* means “race, nation,” and that therefore Jesus is predicting the preservation of the nation of Israel until the end times. ... it [the usage] is rare; more important, it is unattested elsewhere in the NT and in comparable lit. (such as the LXX [the Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint] and the ApF [Apostolic Fathers]; recall that γένος [*genos*] is used for that sense. In addition, nothing in the context prepares the reader for a comment (and an emphatic comment at that) about whether or not the Jewish people will maintain their identity until the end (*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2nd edition, Moises Silva, Revision Editor).

Therefore, if Jesus had wanted to say the Hebrew race would never pass away, He would have used *genos*. The use of *genea* rules that possibility out. Therefore, it has a temporal meaning in the context.

As we have already indicated, during the New Testament era a biblical generation was assumed to be about forty years in length (Mistakes 16-18). We also showed that the fig tree is never used in the Bible as representing the nation of Israel (Appendix 1).

THE GREEK WORD PHARMAKEIA IS NOT ABOUT DRUG ABUSE IN THE LAST DAYS

The Greek word *pharmakeia* is used three times in the New Testament, once in Galatians, and twice in Revelation, as an example of the sins for which the people did not repent:

Now the deeds of the flesh are clear: ... witchcraft (Galatians 5:19,20 TLV).

And they did not repent and turn away from their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their stealing (Revelation 9:21 TLV).

And the light of a lamp shall never shine in you again! And the voice of the bridegroom and bride shall never be heard in you again! For your businessmen were the tycoons of the world, for all the nations were deceived by your sorcery! (Revelation 18:23 TLV).

Our English word “pharmacy” is derived from this Greek word. Therefore, it has been common to see this as a condemnation of drug abuse in the last days. However, the primary meaning of the word is sorcery or magic, though drugs were sometimes involved in the casting of spells:

pharmakeia sorcery, magic

Gal 5:20, in a catalog of vices; Rev 18:23, in reference to “Babylon’s” sorcery, through which “all nations were deceived” (*Eerdmans Exegetical Dictionary Of The New Testament*).

the use of magic, often involving drugs and the casting of spells upon people - to practice magic, to cast spells upon, to engage in sorcery, magic (*Louw and Nida Greek-English Lexicon*).

In sum, the emphasis should not be on the use of drugs but rather the occultic practice of sorcery.

ARROWS OR MISSILES

One final example. In the Ezekiel 38,39 invasion we are told that the Lord will strike the bow from the left hand of the invaders and make their arrows drop from their right hand:

40 Common Mistakes About Last Days Bible Prophecy Cleared Up

I will turn you around, drive you along, and lead you up from the extreme north. I will bring you upon the mountains of Israel. Then I will strike your bow from your left hand and make your arrows drop from your right hand (Ezekiel 39:2,3 TLV).

Rather than arrows, there are some who have used the words “missiles” instead. The idea, of course, is that any modern war would not consist of bows and arrows but rather of missiles.

While it is possible that it could be a reference to something like this in modern warfare, we should not change the translation or attempt to update the Hebrew and Greek words with a meaning that, of course, they have never had.

These are a few of the many examples of people attempting to make the Bible say something that it does not. We must be careful to be faithful to the meaning of the original text when translating God’s Word.

In sum, if you have not studied the original languages in which the Scriptures were written, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, then do NOT pretend that you have.

MISTAKE 37

DON'T CONFUSE THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH WITH THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

One common mistake that people often make is confusing the rapture of the church with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It is clear from Scripture that they are different events. Paul wrote:

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come (2 Thessalonians 2:1 ESV).

The “coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” and “our being gathered together to him” are two different events. We will briefly explain the differences.

WHAT IS THE RAPTURE?

One of the major prophetic events that the Bible speaks of is known as the “rapture of the church.” It is also referred to as the “translation of the church.” What is the rapture? What does the Bible tell us about this coming event?

The doctrine of the rapture of the church can be simply stated as follows. At some future time, the *genuine* believers in Jesus Christ (not merely people who have a church membership or affiliation) will be caught up to meet Him in the air when He descends from heaven.

Those Christians who are alive will be instantaneously changed from their mortal bodies into immortal bodies, from corruptible bodies to incorruptible bodies. Immediately before this happens, the believers who have died “in Christ” will be raised from the graves into their new bodies where they too will be with the Lord. This is the “blessed hope” of the true believers in Jesus.

UNDERSTANDING THE TERMS RAPTURE, TRANSLATION, AND SECOND COMING

It is important that we understand the different terms used for the coming of the Lord; rapture, translation, and Second Coming. The terms rapture and translation are used for the coming of Jesus Christ *for* His church. In this coming, Jesus meets the believers *in the air*. The term Second Coming is consistently used as a reference to Jesus’ coming back *to the earth* with the believers to establish His kingdom.

While the words rapture and translation refer to the same event they are not identical. The rapture refers to the doctrine that the believers in Christ are “caught up” from the earth to meet the Lord in the air. The term translation emphasizes that those who are snatched up are immediately transformed. The physical bodies of those who are raptured are instantly changed from natural, corruptible, mortal bodies to spiritual, incorruptible, immortal bodies. For simplicity sake, we will use the two terms, rapture and translation, interchangeably.

WHERE DO WE GET THE TERM RAPTURE?

The English term rapture is derived from the Latin Vulgate translation of the New Testament. The Latin verb *rapere* is a translation of the Greek word *harpadzō* which has the meaning of being “caught up.” It is the word used in one of main passages describing this event, 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The believers are “caught up” to be with the Lord (Greek *harpadzō*, Latin *rapere*). Hence, the English word “rapture” comes to us by way of the Greek and the Latin.

We should note that while *raper* is a verb meaning “to catch away” this catching away of believers has been turned into a noun, “the rapture.” Thus, “the rapture” has become the popular way to portray this predicted catching away of believers.

We can make the following general observations about the doctrine of the rapture of the church.

1. THE BELIEVERS WILL BE CAUGHT UP

The Scripture speaks of this great catching away of the true believers in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth and stated it in this manner:

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:50-52 NIV).

When Paul speaks of “sleep” in this context he is referring to physical death. Not everyone will die! Millions of believers in Jesus Christ will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. This change will involve receiving a new body which is immortal and incorruptible. Those who have died in Christ will be raised with their new incorruptible bodies.

Paul told the church at Thessalonica something similar. He wrote to them of a time when the Lord Jesus would personally return for the believers and snatch them away to meet Him in the air. He put it this way:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 NIV).

This passage emphasizes that the dead in Christ will rise first and then the living believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

2. JESUS SPOKE OF COMING FOR HIS OWN

Another passage which speaks of this event comes from the words of the Lord Jesus Himself. On the night of His betrayal, Christ told His disciples that He would come back for them:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:1-3 NIV).

These verses speak of Jesus “coming again” to take the believers to Himself, the rapture.

3. IT IS THE BLESSED HOPE OF BELIEVERS

When the Apostle Paul wrote to Titus, he spoke of this event as the “blessed hope” of the church:

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (Titus 2:11-14 NIV)

While believers are presently fighting a spiritual battle in this world we are waiting for that “blessed hope;” the time Jesus Christ comes back for all of us.

In the same manner Paul wrote to the Philippians of this hope. He stated it in this manner:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20-21 NIV).

This is the hope of the believer. Our frail sinful bodies will be transformed by Jesus at the time of the rapture.

4. ENOCH AND ELIJAH ILLUSTRATE THE RAPTURE

The rapture of the church, the “catching away” of living believers who will not experience death, is not without a biblical precedent. Indeed, there are two Old Testament examples of people who did not suffer physical death: Enoch and Elijah. We read the following about Enoch:

Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away (Genesis 5:24 NIV).

God “took” Enoch to Himself. This faithful man of God did not have to experience physical death. The New Testament uses Enoch as an example of the rapture of the church. We read in Hebrews:

By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: “He could not be found, because God had taken him away.” For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God (Hebrews 11:5 NIV).

The general rule is that every human being will die. The Bible makes this clear:

Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment (Hebrews 9:27 NIV).

Enoch was an exception. He was “caught up” to meet the Lord. Like Enoch, the prophet Elijah did not experience death:

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11 NIV).

Elijah, while he was still alive, was taken up in a whirlwind to meet the Lord.

As Enoch and Elijah did not suffer physical death, at some unknown time in the future, there will be millions of Christians who will have the same experience.

5. JESUS’ ASCENSION INTO HEAVEN IS SOMETIMES USED AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE RAPTURE

Another event which is compared to the rapture of the church is the ascension of Jesus into heaven:

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has

been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:9-11).

This is sometimes used as another illustration of what will occur to believers at the rapture of the church. However, there are differences. For one thing, Jesus’ ascension took place *after* His death. Yet the catching up of living believers upon the earth will occur *before* they have died. Also, Jesus’ ascension was in full view of His disciples while the gathering up of believers will seemingly not be seen by those remaining upon the earth. The Christians will simply disappear with nothing “left behind.”

This briefly sums up the doctrine of the rapture of the church; the catching up of living believers into the presence of the Lord as well as the dead in Christ being simultaneously raised to meet Him. At that time both the dead and the living will be clothed with incorruptible immortal bodies. What a wonderful event this will be! Indeed, it is the “blessed hope” of the Christian.

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST

While the rapture of the church involves only believers, the Second Coming is the return of the Lord Jesus to the earth. When He comes back, every eye will see Him:

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen (Revelation 1:7 ESV).

The Bible records His return as follows:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, “Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.” And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh (Revelation 19:11-21 ESV).

He is indeed coming again!

In sum, Scripture has predicted two great events for those living upon the earth: the rapture of the church, and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Let us not confuse the two. In the words of the Apostle John ...

Even so, come, Lord Jesus (Revelation 22:20 KJV).

MISTAKE 38

UNDERSTAND BIBLICAL IDIOMS AND FIGURES OF SPEECH BEFORE YOU CITE THEM AUTHORITATIVELY AS EVIDENCE OF PREDICTIONS ABOUT THE LAST DAYS

This is a common mistake that we should be careful not to make: citing certain idiomatic expressions in Scripture, or certain figures of speech as proof of what we should expect the world to look like in the last days. Unfortunately, this is often done without an appreciation of what the Scripture actually is saying.

We will give some illustrations:

THE EARTH DWELLERS

The phrase “earth dwellers” in the Book of Revelation has been mistakenly claimed to prohibit humans from colonizing another planet before the return of Christ. In other words, the judgment of Christ is specifically for those who inhabit the earth. This we are told, precludes humans from living at any location outside of the earth. Since colonization of places apart from the earth is now being planned, it is argued that this is another reason why Christ must come soon.

However, this is a misunderstanding of the meaning of the term. After looking at all of the instances of “earth dwellers” in the Book of Revelation, Thomas Ice makes this conclusion:

The term “earth dwellers” refers to persistent unbelievers during the Tribulation who will not place their faith in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, no matter how clearly God’s plan of salvation is presented. In fact the more the earth dwellers resist, the greater the hardship they will endure as the wrath of God will be poured out on them in ever-increasing degrees. Rather than looking to God, who dwells in heaven, their focus will be on the Beast (the Antichrist), who will arise from the sea on planet earth. Many will turn away from the truth and not only follow a lie but will even delight in it. Such a display demonstrates that people left to their own fallen nature will never respond to God’s message of grace, regardless of the circumstances. The gospel message only impacts an individual in tandem with God’s grace. “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come’ ” (Rev. 22:17).

Today many people are trusting Christ as their Savior. Yet also evident is worldwide antagonism toward Christianity, making it easy to envision how quickly conditions will degenerate into the scenario outlined in the Bible’s prophetic literature. Thus it is important to note that unbelief can be obstinate and persistent and on the other hand to note how great and marvelous is God’s grace as He still offers salvation to everyone (Thomas D. Ice, *The Meaning of “Earth Dwellers” In Revelation*, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 166:633, 2009, p. 365).

Therefore, the term is referring to persistent unbelievers, it has nothing to do with specifying the geographical location of these unbelievers at the time of the end, namely people who happen to live on the earth. In other words, it does not disallow non-Christians residing on a space station, flying towards a destination other than the earth, or setting up a colony somewhere.

Hence, nobody has the right to claim that Christ **MUST** come back before any of the above occurs. The Bible certainly does *not* say that!

THE FABLE OF JOTHAM

Another example of drawing incorrect inferences from Scripture comes from the fable of Jotham, the son of the judge Gideon. When he was told that his brother Abimelech had killed all of his other brothers, and that the elders of Shechem had made this murderer king, he gave them this fable:

When it was told to Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim and cried aloud and said to them, “Listen to me, you leaders of Shechem, that God may listen to you. The trees once went out to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us.’ But the olive tree said to them, ‘Shall I leave my abundance, by which gods and men are honored, and go hold sway over the trees?’ And the trees said to the fig tree, ‘You come and reign over us.’ But the fig tree said to them, ‘Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit and go hold sway over the trees?’ And the trees said to the vine, ‘You come and reign over us.’ But the vine said to them, ‘Shall I leave my wine that cheers God and men and go hold sway over the trees?’ Then all the trees said to the bramble, ‘You come and reign over us.’ And the bramble said to the trees, ‘If in good faith you are anointing me king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade, but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.’

“Now therefore, if you acted in good faith and integrity when you made Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house and have done to him as his deeds deserved—for my father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian, and you have risen up against my father's house this day and have killed his sons, seventy men on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his female servant, king over the leaders of Shechem, because he is your relative—if you then have acted in good faith and integrity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the leaders of Shechem and from Beth-millo and devour Abimelech.” And Jotham ran away and fled and went to Beer and lived there, because of Abimelech his brother (Judges 9:7-21 ESV).

The Moody Bible Commentary explains the words of Jotham in this manner:

The lecture of Jotham to the elders of Shechem is the finest biblical example of a fable, a short prose or poetic morality lesson in which animals or plants behave like people. The stylized account of the trees searching for a king among the plants, only to settle on the bramble, is classic satire in fable form. The bramble, a noxious bush, represents Abimelech in the fable. The other trees, that would have been more qualified, were simply not willing to serve such a miserable constituency. So the story is a backhanded swipe at Shechem itself (John McMath, *Moody Bible Commentary*, Judges).

To sum up, Jotham's fable is about trees searching for a king. The trees try to find a suitable tree that will rule over them. They offer the kingship to the olive tree, the fig tree, the vine, then finally to the bramble. The first three decline but the bramble accepts.

IS THIS WHAT JESUS WAS THINKING ABOUT?

Since people and nations are described as trees in this fable, it has caused some to relate it to Jesus' reference to the fig tree, and all the trees, in Luke's gospel:

And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees (Luke 21:29 ESV).

Supposedly, since we have a biblical precedent of comparing nations to trees, it is claimed that this is precisely what Jesus was doing. In other words, the fig tree represents Israel and the other trees are representative of the various nations.

RESPONSE

This equation of the trees with the various nations in Jesus' parable does not work for a number of reasons.

First, as we have indicated in Mistakes 16-18, as well as in Appendix 1, the fig tree is NEVER used in Scripture to refer to the nation of Israel.

Second, each instance of the fig tree in the New Testament refers to an actual tree. It is never used as symbolic for anything.

Third, Jesus gave a parable, namely a story that deals with reality. Indeed, it was well-known that when fig trees start showing their leaves then summer is soon arriving. Jotham, on the other hand, gave a fable, a story that does not have anything to do with reality. Indeed, trees do not talk to olive trees, vines, fig trees, or brambles!

Fourth, the trees in the fable do not refer to nations. Rather it is Jotham's sarcastic illustration of the stupidity of the people of Shechem to make a man ruler over them, a man who had just murdered all his brothers! As we continue to read the account in Judges, we find that his illustration is well-taken.

Consequently, we should conclude that when Jesus used the illustration of the fig tree and all the trees, He was giving an illustration from nature, not from talking trees who represented people seeking another tree to rule over them.

These two examples point out the folly of not understanding figures of speech in Scripture, or the different types of literature we find in the Bible.

We again emphasize that it is a mistake to interpret the Bible without appreciating the literary forms in which it is written as well as the meaning of idiomatic expressions.

MISTAKE 39

A WORD OR EXPRESSION MAY MEAN ONE THING IN A CERTAIN PASSAGE BUT SOMETHING DIFFERENT IN ANOTHER

Another common mistake that is often made is the assumption that once we come across a word in the Bible, it always has the same meaning in every context. In other words, once the meaning of the word is determined the first time it is used, we should always assume that it has the same meaning in every other context. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

We can make the following observations:

WORDS IN THE BIBLE CAN HAVE MORE THAN ONE MEANING

Like English, most Hebrew and Greek words have more than one meaning, it all depends upon the context.

We can illustrate this with an example from English. If I say the word, “trunk” what am I talking about? Well, unless I’m pointing at an elephant, the back part of a car, or a large tree, you really have no idea what I’m talking about. Words need to be understood along with other words in a sentence. Examples of this can be multiplied with words like “duck” “bank” and “run.”

Almost every Greek word used in the New Testament has a number of possible meanings. Again, it all depends upon the context.

However, sometimes even a sentence needs a larger context. For example, if I say, “he sold a lot of stock,” what am I talking about? Is it wall street, a farmer, or a man in charge of a hardware store? It could be any of the three. Again, what we need a context to understand precisely what is being said.

WORDS CAN CHANGE THEIR MEANING THROUGH TIME

There is something else that we must appreciate, namely, words can have their meaning changed through time. We have many examples of this in English, when we compare the language of the King James Version of 1611 to modern English. Indeed, there are hundreds of words that are found in the King James Version, which are still in use today in modern English, but now mean something entirely different than they did in 1611! We will list a few examples:

A TARGET OF BRASS

Goliath had a “target of brass” between his shoulders:

And *he had* greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders (1 Samuel 17:6 KJV)

The word translated “target” mean “javelin” and “brass” means “bronze.” Brass was not known in those days.

THE MEAN MEN, THE MEAN MAN

The Authorized Version speaks of the “mean” men and the “mean” man:

Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean *men* (Proverbs 22:29 KJV).

And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not (Isaiah 2:9 KJV).

This word does not refer to cruel or evil men but rather to “common men.”

CHERISHED

We have this description of a woman who “cherished” King David in his old age:

Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat. And the damsel *was* very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not (First Kings 1:2,4 KJV).

Cherish in 1611 meant “to keep warm.”

GREAT AND TERRIBLE

We read the following description of God in Nehemiah:

... the great and terrible God (Nehemiah 1:5 KJV).

In 1611, the word “terrible” meant something that was “full of awe.” In other words, “full of astonishment” or “wonderment.” Today, of course, the word has the idea of something that is bad, or something full of terror. Consequently, it means just the opposite today.

For many more examples of this, see our book *Bible Translations*.

ALWAYS CHECK OUT REPUTABLE TRANSLATIONS

This is why it is crucial that we compare what someone may claim about the meaning of a certain word or phrase with the way it is translated in reputable translations. We always urge people to read the biblical text in a number of translations. The various ones we use in this book are good examples of translations that should be consulted.

EXAMPLE OF THE SAME WORD MEANING SOMETHING DIFFERENT IN TWO CONTEXTS (THE LITTLE HORN)

This term “little horn” is an excellent illustration of the same word with two different meanings in back to back chapters.

A LITTLE HORN IN DANIEL 7

In the Book of Daniel, chapter 7, we encounter this description of “a little horn.”

While I was considering the horns, suddenly another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. And suddenly in this horn there were eyes like the eyes of a human and a mouth that was speaking arrogantly (Daniel 7:8 CSB).

The identity of this little horn is not some Roman or Greek king from the past, but rather he is the final world ruler who comes on the scene a few years before the return of Christ.

The Bible calls this individual by a number of names. He is “the prince who is to come” (Daniel 9:26), the king who “will do as he pleases” (Daniel 11:36), “the man of lawlessness,” “the son of destruction,” (2 Thessalonians 2:3), “the beast,” (Revelation.13:1-10).

He is most widely known with the title “Antichrist” (1 John 2:18). We call him the Final Antichrist because he is the last of many.

THE LITTLE HORN IN DANIEL 8

In the next chapter of Daniel we again read of a person known as the “little horn.”

Four conspicuous horns came up in its place, pointing toward the four winds of heaven. From one of them a little horn emerged and grew extensively toward the south and the east and toward the beautiful land (Daniel 8:9 CSB).

In Daniel 7:8, this little horn will emerge out of one of the four kingdoms of the divided the Greek Empire after the death of Alexander the Great. He was Antiochus IV Epiphanes who ruled over the Seleucid dynasty from 175–163 B.C.

Therefore, in this instance the term “little horn” is not describing the Final Antichrist but rather an historical figure.

This should teach us a valuable lesson! Like we have just observed, the same words can describe two different individuals.

Again, it is crucial that we always consider the context before making a determination of what a particular description means. This is especially true when we realize that each of these passages are prophetic.

AN EXAMPLE OF A WORD CHANGING ITS MEANING THROUGHOUT HISTORY: THE HEBREW WORD FOR GENERATION (*DOR*)

The meaning of the Hebrew word *dor* translated “generation” seemed to have changed from the time of Abraham until the time of the Exodus when it was then used for approximately forty years. Old Testament scholar Victor Hamilton writes:

Gen 15:16 suggests that in an earlier time a generation was roughly equivalent to a century. Only when the iniquity of the Amorites had reached its full measure (i.e., four generations from Abraham) would Abraham’s descendants possess the land promised to him. Such a postponement highlights Joshua’s invasion of Canaan four “generations” later as an act of justice rather than of aggression.

2. Subsequently דֹר (*dor*) was interpreted as a period of approximately forty years. Thus the whole book of Numbers is structured around the deeds and eventual death of the first generation that came out of Egypt (Num 1:1–25:18) and the prospects for the survival of the second generation (Num 26:1ff.) (Victor P. Hamilton, NIDOTTE).

As we have noted, at the time of Jesus, a generation was approximately forty years (see Mistakes 16,17 and 18). Since our concern is what the word meant at the time of Jesus, a past meaning of the term would not be relevant.

In sum, the three things that are always necessary to understand any passage in the Bible are context, context, context!

MISTAKE 40

ABOVE ALL, REMEMBER THAT OUR MESSAGE TO THE WORLD IS THE FIRST COMING OF JESUS CHRIST, NOT THE SECOND COMING

One common mistake that is continually being made is the substituting the message of the First Coming of Christ with that of His Second Coming. This is something that we should never do!

Indeed, the message that Christians are to take to the world is not the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to the earth but rather His First Coming to our world! We cannot emphasize this enough.

A MOST IMPORTANT LESSON TO LEARN: REMEMBER OUR MESSAGE!

While we are living at the time of the end, and we see the signs that are pointing to the coming of the Lord, we should always remember that our message is the same one which Jesus told us to bring to a lost world.

THE GREAT COMMISSION: MAKE DISCIPLES OF JESUS BY PREACHING THE GOSPEL

Our marching orders were given to Jesus' disciples, which includes those of us who believe in Him:

Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20 CSB).

This is the same commandment that we must follow today, namely make disciples of all nations by preaching the good news about Jesus' First Coming into the world.

THE GOSPEL DEFINED

The Apostle Paul defined the gospel message for us in his letter to the Corinthians:

Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel I preached to you, which you received, on which you have taken your stand and by which you are being saved, if you hold to the message I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers and sisters at one time; most of them are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one born at the wrong time, he also appeared to me (1 Corinthians 15:1-8 CSB).

From this passage we can define the gospel, or good news, as follows:

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

Jesus was buried.

The Lord Jesus was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

Jesus Christ appeared to a number of people after He had been raised from the dead.

This remains our message... lest we forget.

In that same letter, Paul wrote elsewhere about the necessity of preaching the message of Christ:

The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. As the Scriptures say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent." So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense (1 Corinthians 1:18-23 NLT).

The gospel of Jesus Christ, His death on the cross for our sins, His resurrection from the dead, and His offer of forgiveness of sins, remains our message to this lost and dying world. We should never stray from proclaiming these truths first and foremost.

JESUS SAID WE ARE TO BE ENGAGED WITH PEOPLE WHILE WE WAIT FOR HIS RETURN

In His parable of the three servants, Jesus emphasized what to do in the time that we are waiting for His return. The King James Version put it this way:

Occupy till I come (Luke 19:13 KJV).

The English Standard Version, along with most other modern translations, brings out a further meaning of the text. It renders it as follows:

Engage in business until I come (Luke 19:13 ESV).

Therefore, as we are living our lives pleasing to the Lord, we should always be busy in our work for Him. Our message should always centered around the Person of Jesus and what He has already accomplished for us at His First Coming. As John wrote in the Book of Revelation:

The testimony about Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Revelation 19:10 NET).

SO HOW DO WE DO THIS?

If we want to remain focused on our prime directive, to make disciples of all nations by preaching the good news about Jesus, then there are a number of biblical lessons to be learned on how we should live in light of His Coming. We can list them as follows:

LESSON 1: WE ARE TO BE WATCHFUL AND READY FOR HIS COMING

Once we begin to understand the times in which we are living, we are to be watchful for the things that are to come. Being watchful means to be ready—to be alert. Jesus said:

Therefore stay alert, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have been alert and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him (Matthew 24:42-44 NET).

This is another lesson that needs to be emphasized, especially in our day and age. We are to pay attention to the signs that we see with respect to the coming of the Lord.

Again, no believer should be ignorant about these things.

LESSON 2: WE ARE TO WAIT PATIENTLY FOR HIS COMING

This logically brings us to our next point. While we are to be watchful, and always alert, we are also to be patient.

Undoubtedly, this is particularly problematic in light of the conditions of the world in which we live. James wrote about the need for such patience in light of the present circumstances:

Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near (James 5:7-8 NLT).

We should indeed "take courage."

In fact, when we look at the events around us, we sometimes feel like the martyrs that cry out in the Book of Revelation:

They shouted to the Lord and said, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?" (Revelation 6:10 NLT).

How long indeed!

The lesson to learn is to be patient. God's program is right on schedule.

**LESSON 3: WE SHOULD RESIST DOUBTING AND DISILLUSIONMENT
AS WE WAIT FOR HIS RETURN**

One particular lesson that we must learn is not to doubt that the Lord is truly returning. Jesus warned about this problem:

But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk (Luke 12:45 NIV).

Unhappily, too many people in our day have been caught up in doubt and disillusionment about the return of Christ.

However, we must recognize that this is not something new. Indeed, Peter wrote about the doubters and scoffers in his day:

Dear friends, this is already the second letter I have written you, in which I am trying to stir up your pure mind by way of reminder: I want you to recall both the predictions foretold by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles. Above all, understand this: In the last days blatant scoffers will come, being propelled by their own evil urges and saying, "Where is his promised return? For ever since our ancestors died, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:1-4 NET).

The scoffers ridiculed believers in the first century for trusting in the promises given in the Word of God about the return of the Lord.

This is all the truer today. Especially when so-called “Bible experts” make predictions about the precise time of the coming of the Lord, and, of course, their predictions turn out to be untrue.

Since the predictions of these date-setters always turn out to be wrong, this causes some people to make a tragic mistake—they reject all biblical prophecy.

Unhappily, some people have gone so far as to list an exact date when Christ will return. They claim to have calculated the precise moment that He will come back to the earth. These claims have led many people astray, as well as disillusioned others.

And, of course, the scoffers are there to continually remind us of these mistaken predictions by “Bible experts.”

The lesson to be learned is that we should not allow false claims by certain “biblical authorities” to cause us to be disillusioned about the return of the Lord Jesus. Neither should we be bothered by the continual reminders from scoffers that the Lord has not yet returned as He promised some two thousand years ago.

Indeed, the Lord is coming back to our world and He is returning on His schedule. May this particular lesson sink deep into our hearts!

LESSON 4: WE ARE TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER AS THE TIME DRAWS NEAR

Believers should be encouraging one another as the time of the Lord’s coming approaches. In fact, the Bible commands us to do just that:

And let us take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works, not abandoning our own meetings, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and even more so because you see the day drawing near (Hebrews 10:24-25 NET).

This is another timely truth. Discouragement can easily set in as we look at the world around us and observe the many spiritual battles that we are facing. In fact, as we get closer to the time the Lord will return, the battle will be more difficult than ever.

Consequently, each one of us should learn the lesson to be an encourager to one another.

LESSON 5: WE ARE NOT TO BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD SYSTEM IN THESE LAST DAYS

If we are to stand out as a witness to this world, especially in these difficult times, then we should not be conformed to this ungodly world system in which we live. Paul wrote:

Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God - what is good and well-pleasing and perfect (Romans 12:1-2 NET).

Indeed, in our present environment, the temptation to compromise and to be conformed to this evil world system, is like never before. We must resist this temptation. We have been made for a purpose, namely, to glorify the Lord in all that we do. The Lord has said:

For I will honor those who honor me (1 Samuel 2:30 NET).

WE HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO

In fact, the answer of Simon Peter to the question of Jesus is appropriate here. We are told that many people walked away from Jesus when He taught some difficult things. The Lord then asked His disciples if they were going to leave also. Peter gave this answer:

Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God (John 6:68,69 NLT).

Where indeed? This evil world system has nothing for those who believe in Jesus Christ, lest we forget.

LESSON 6: WE ARE TO WORK FOR THE LORD AS WE WAIT FOR HIS COMING

The time of waiting is a time of working. In other words, we should not sit idly by as the time of the Lord approaches. Jesus made this clear:

We must perform the deeds of the one who sent me as long as it is daytime. Night is coming when no one can work (John 9:4 NET).

We must work before the night comes. Paul wrote about this to the Thessalonians:

So then we must not sleep as the rest, but must stay alert and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But since we are of the day, we must stay sober by putting on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet our hope for salvation. For God did not destine us for wrath but for gaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that whether we are alert or asleep we will come to life together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, just as you are in fact doing (1 Thessalonians 5:6-11 NET).

Every believer needs to be busy in the work of the Lord.

WE ARE TO BE FAITHFUL TO OUR CALLING

Consequently, as we are living in the light of the coming of the Lord, each of us has a calling, a responsibility, that we are to live up to. Paul wrote:

Now what is sought in stewards is that one be found faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2 NET).

The New Living Translation puts it this way:

Now, a person who is put in charge as a manager must be faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2 NLT).

No matter the circumstances, we are to “stay the course.” We are not to forget the calling that we each have. In other words, as we look for His coming, we are to fulfill the calling that the Lord has given to us.

The lesson is clear: the time of waiting is a time of working!

LESSON 7: WE ARE TO LIVE WITH ETERNAL VALUES IN VIEW

Since we are living in the light of eternity, we must live with eternal values in view. Paul wrote about this to the Philippians:

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us (Philippians 3:12-14 NET).

Like a runner with their eyes upon the finish line, we are to be constantly moving toward that goal as we press on toward eternity. Each day that we live is one day closer to His Coming.

We all need to live in the light of eternity with the values of eternity constantly on our mind. This is another important lesson to learn.

LESSON 8: WE ARE TO BE CONSTANTLY LOOKING FOR HIS APPEARING!

Interestingly, in the final section of the last letter that the Apostle Paul wrote before his impending death, he emphasized to Timothy about the necessity for believers to be looking for the return of the Lord:

For I am already being poured out as an offering, and the time for me to depart is at hand. I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith! Finally the crown of righteousness is reserved for me. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will award it to me in that day—and not to me only, but also to all who have set their affection on his appearing (2 Timothy 4:6-8 NET).

When someone writes a letter, knowing that they are soon to die, it would be fair to call it a “dying declaration.”

Hence, they will obviously emphasize the things they believe are the most important since this is the last thing that they will ever write. Therefore, it is telling that Paul wrote this at the end of his last letter.

His point: the coming of the Lord should be something that is constantly on our mind. In fact, Paul says that we are to “love” His appearing—to “set our affection” on His coming back to the earth.

Therefore, each of us needs to ask ourselves these questions: Have I set my affection on the coming of Christ? Is this something that is forefront in my mind?

According to Scripture, it should be.

SUMMING UP

We do live in very exciting times. As we have mentioned previously, we should not limit our study of Scripture to merely issues of last days Bible prophecy (Mistake 34). Indeed, the entire Bible should be studied.

If we do so, then we will always have at the forefront of our minds the message that we are to proclaim, namely the First Coming of Jesus Christ to a lost world who desperately needs to hear this life-changing message.

APPENDIX 1

FIGS AND FIG TREES IN THE BIBLE

The following are all of the instances where the words “fig” and “fig tree” are found in the Bible. It will become clear that the fig tree is NEVER is used as a symbol of the nation of Israel.

ADAM AND EVE IN EDEN SEWED FIG LEAVES TOGETHER (GENESIS 3:7)

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves (Genesis 3:7 NRSV UE).

Interestingly, we find fig trees in Eden.

THE PROMISED LAND WILL PRODUCE FIGS (DEUTERONOMY 8:7-8)

As Israel was about to enter the Promised Land, they received the following promises:

For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams, springs, and deep water sources, flowing in both valleys and hills; a land of wheat, barley, vines, figs, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey (Deuteronomy 8:7-8 CSB).

Among the blessings of the land will be figs.

JOTHAM’S FABLE (JUDGES 9)

Jotham, the youngest son of the Judge Gideon, said the following to the elders of Shechem:

The trees once went out to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us.’ But the olive tree said to them, ‘Shall I leave my abundance, by which gods and men are honored, and go hold sway over the trees?’ And the trees said to the fig tree, ‘You come and reign over us.’ But the fig tree said to them, ‘Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit and go hold sway over the trees?’ And the trees said to the vine, ‘You come and reign over us.’ ... (Judges 9:7-12 ESV).

It is clear that the fig tree, in this context, is not equated with the nation of Israel.

ISRAEL’S PROSPERITY UNDER SOLOMON (1 KINGS 4:25)

Throughout Solomon’s reign, Judah and Israel lived in safety from Dan to Beer-sheba, each person under his own vine and his own fig tree (1 Kings 4:25 CSB).

The fig tree, along with the vine, are examples of safety and prosperity in the land of Israel under the rule of Solomon.

ABIGAIL LOADING FIG CAKES (1 SAMUEL 25:18)

Abigail hurried, taking two hundred loaves of bread, two clay jars of wine, five butchered sheep, a bushel of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys (1 Samuel 25:18 CSB).

Fig cakes are mentioned here with other foods taken by Abigail.

DAVID'S MEN GIVE AN EGYPTIAN FIGS TO EAT (1 SAMUEL 30:11-12)

David's men found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David. They gave him some bread to eat and water to drink. Then they gave him some pressed figs and two clusters of raisins. After he ate he revived, for he hadn't eaten food or drunk water for three days and three nights (1 Samuel 30:11-12 CSB).

This is an illustration of the kindness of David's men.

THE KING OF ASSYRIA PROMISED PROSPERITY TO ISRAEL (2 KINGS 18:31-32)

Don't listen to Hezekiah, for this is what the king of Assyria says: 'Make peace with me and surrender to me. Then each of you may eat from his own vine and his own fig tree, and each may drink water from his own cistern until I come and take you away to a land like your own land — a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey — so that you may live and not die. But don't listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you, saying, "The LORD will rescue us" (2 Kings 18:31-32 CSB).

This promise of the prosperity of the fig tree is from the lying words of the king of Assyria.

THE RECOVERY OF HEZEKIAH (2 KINGS 20:7) (ISAIAH 38:21-22)

The Bible records that a lump of pressed figs were used in the healing of King Hezekiah:

Then Isaiah said, "Bring a lump of pressed figs." So they brought it and applied it to his infected skin, and he recovered (2 Kings 20:7 CSB).

Now Isaiah had said, "Let them take a lump of pressed figs and apply it to his infected skin, so that he may recover." And Hezekiah had asked, "What is the sign that I will go up to the LORD's temple? (Isaiah 38:21-22 CSB).

FIG CAKES BRING JOY IN ISRAEL (1 CHRONICLES 12:40)

In addition, their neighbors from as far away as Issachar, Zebulun, and Naphtali came and brought food on donkeys, camels, mules, and oxen — abundant provisions of flour, fig cakes, raisins, wine and oil, herds, and flocks. Indeed, there was joy in Israel (1 Chronicles 12:40 CSB).

On this occasion, fig cakes were part of the provisions that would bring joy to Israel.

A PROVERB ABOUT A FIG TREE (PROVERBS 27:18)

Whoever tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and whoever looks after his master will be honored (Proverbs 27:18 CSB).

This is a simple truism, the one who tends the fig tree eats its fruit.

THE RESPONSE OF THE LOVER (SONG OF SOLOMON 2:10-13)

In response my lover said to me: "Get yourself up, my darling, my pretty one, and come, come! For behold, the winter has past, the rain is over, it has gone. Blossoms appear in the land, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land. The fig tree ripens its early figs. The blossoming vines give off their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling, my pretty one, and come, come!" (Song of Solomon 2:10-13 TLV).

This is another illustration of the fig tree as a symbol of prosperity.

THE WOE PRONOUNCED UPON SAMARIA (ISAIAH 28:1-4)

It sits at the head of a fertile valley, but its glorious beauty will fade like a flower. Whoever sees it will snatch it up, as an early fig is quickly picked and eaten (Isaiah 28:4 NLT).

In this illustration, Samaria will be eaten like an early fig. There is no mention of a fig tree.

THE NATIONS THAT THE LORD JUDGES ARE COMPARED TO FRUIT ON A WITHERING FIG TREE (ISAIAH 34:1-4)

Draw near, O nations, to hear; O peoples, give heed! Let the earth hear and all that fills it, the world and all that comes from it. For the LORD is enraged against all the nations and furious against all their hordes; he has doomed them, has given them over for slaughter. Their slain shall be cast out, and the stench of their corpses shall rise; the mountains shall flow with their blood. All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall wither like a leaf withering on a vine or fruit withering on a fig tree (Isaiah 34:1-4 NRSV UE).

The judgment of the Lord against the nations is compared to fruit withering on a fig tree. Notice the comparison of the fig tree is to the heathen nations, not Israel.

THE LORD PREDICTS THE DESTRUCTION OF THE LAND (JEREMIAH 5:17)

They [the Babylonians] will consume your harvest and your food. They will consume your sons and your daughters. They will consume your flocks and your herds. They will consume your vines and your fig trees. With the sword they will destroy your fortified cities in which you trust (Jeremiah 5:17 CSB).

Everything in the land of Judah, including the fig trees, will be totally consumed by the invading Babylonians.

THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH ARE COMPARED TO GOOD AND BAD FIGS (JEREMIAH 24)

After King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had deported Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, the officials of Judah, and the craftsmen and metalsmiths from Jerusalem and had brought them to Babylon, the LORD showed me two baskets of figs placed in front of the temple of the LORD. One basket contained very good figs, like early figs, but the other basket contained very bad figs, so bad they were inedible. The LORD said to me, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" I said, "Figs! The good figs are very good, but the bad figs are extremely bad, so bad they are inedible" (Jeremiah 24:1-3 CSB).

In this context, the people of the southern kingdom of Judah are compared to good and bad figs. The exiles in Babylon are compared to good figs, while King Zedekiah, and his officials who had remained in Jerusalem, are compared to bad figs. Nothing whatsoever is said about the fig tree.

THE LORD WILL JUDGE THE NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL (HOSEA 2:12)

I will devastate her vines and fig trees. She thinks that these are her wages that her lovers have given her. I will turn them into a thicket, and the wild animals will eat them (Hosea 2:12 CSB).

Vines and fig trees, symbols of prosperity, will be devastated by the Lord when He brings judgment upon the rebellious people.

THE COMPARISON OF ISRAEL TO FIGS BEFORE THEY REBELLED IN THE WILDERNESS (HOSEA 9:10)

I discovered Israel like grapes in the wilderness. I saw your ancestors like the first fruit of the fig tree in its first season. But they went to Baal-peor, consecrated themselves to shame, and became abhorrent, like the thing they loved (Hosea 9:10 CSB).

The Lord compares the behavior of the people who exited the Promised Land with their later rebellion. He uses the illustration of the taste of grapes and as well as the taste of the first fruit from a fig tree before they committed shameful behavior.

Notice He is comparing them to the wonderful taste of grapes and figs, NOT to the fig tree itself. Fig trees and vines do not grow in the wilderness, they must be planted.

THE LORD PROMISES THE RESTORATION OF THE LAND (JOEL 2:21)

Don't be afraid, land; rejoice and be glad, for the LORD has done astonishing things. Don't be afraid, wild animals, for the wilderness pastures have turned green, the trees bear their fruit, and the fig tree and grapevine yield their riches (Joel 2:21-22 CSB).

Again the fig trees, as well as the vines, are speaking of the future prosperity of the land, not the land itself.

THE LORD PROMISES PROSPERITY (MICAH 4:4)

He will settle disputes among many peoples and provide arbitration for strong nations that are far away. They will beat their swords into plows and their spears into pruning knives. Nation will not take up the sword against nation, and they will never again train for war. But each person will sit under his grapevine and under his fig tree with no one to frighten him. For the mouth of the LORD of Armies has spoken (Micah 4:4 CSB).

The fig tree is again used to indicate prosperity and safety.

NO EARLY FIGS ARE FOUND AFTER THE HARVEST (MICAH 7:1)

How sad for me! For I am like one who —when the summer fruit has been gathered after the gleaning of the grape harvest — finds no grape cluster to eat, no early fig, which I crave (Micah 7:1 CSB).

This is another example of the taste of figs used to indicate prosperity. In this case it is the lack of prosperity.

THE PROMISED LAND IS BARREN (HABAKKUK 3:16-18)

I heard, and I trembled within; my lips quivered at the sound. Rottenness entered my bones; I trembled where I stood. Now I must quietly wait for the day of distress to come against the people invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though the flocks disappear from the pen and there are no herds in the stalls, yet I will celebrate in the LORD (Habakkuk 3:16-18 CSB).

A day of reckoning is coming where there will be no fruit on the vines and no budding of the fig trees. In this instance it warns of the distress the land will suffer.

THE PROMISE OF FUTURE BLESSING (HAGGAI 2:18,19)

From this day on, think carefully; from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid; think carefully. Is there still seed left in the granary? The vine, the fig, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yet produced. But from this day on I will bless you" (Haggai 2:18-19 CSB).

While the land was barren, there will come a time of prosperity where the vine, fig tree, etc. will produce. Again, there is no equivalence of the fig tree itself with the nation of Israel.

THE PROMISE OF PROSPERITY (ZECHARIAH 3:10)

On that day, each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree." This is the declaration of the LORD of Armies (Zechariah 3:10 CSB).

Again we find the vine and the fig tree as illustrations of prosperity.

CONCLUSION ON THE OLD TESTAMENT USE OF THE WORDS FIG AND FIG TREE

After examining each passage of the Old Testament in context, we find there is nothing whatsoever that equates the fig tree with the nation of Israel. The references to the fig tree speak of the prosperity and safety, or lack thereof, of the people living in the land. The fig tree is never used as a symbol of the nation itself.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

As was true with the Old Testament, we do not find the fig tree representing the nation of Israel in the New Testament.

JESUS CURSES THE FIG TREE (MATTHEW 21:18-22) (MARK 11:12-14; 20-25)

In the morning, when he returned to the city, he was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it, they were amazed, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" Jesus answered them, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' it will be done. Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive (Matthew 21:18-22 NRSV UE).

The next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. Seeing from a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if He would find any fruit on it. When He came up to it, He found nothing except leaves, because it wasn't the season for figs. And He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening. ... As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses (Mark 11:12-14; 20-25 ESV).

Both Matthew and Mark record the episode of Jesus cursing the fig tree that had no fruit. We should make note of the fact that when the disciples, specifically Peter, questioned the Lord about it, He said nothing about

it being symbolic of Israel. Instead, when confronted with the cursed fig tree, He brought up the subject of faith and prayer.

If there was ever an opportunity to explain to His disciples that the fig tree was to be equated with the nation of Israel, this was it. But He did not.

More likely, the curse against this fig tree symbolized the Temple. We should not miss the fact that Mark has this account sandwiched between two episodes of Jesus going to the Temple. It was the Temple in Jerusalem that would be cursed since it had become a den of robbers, thieves, instead of the house of prayer it was meant to be. Shortly after the cursing of the fig tree, the Lord would predict the Temple's destruction:

See, your house is left to you, desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. Then he asked them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down" (Matthew 23:37-38; 24:1-2 NRSV UE).

Furthermore, Jesus said that the cursed fig tree would never bear fruit again. This could NOT refer to the nation of Israel. Indeed, as we just read, Jesus said He would come again to them once they received Him as their Messiah. We also read of this prediction in Zechariah:

Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died (Zechariah 12:10 NLT).

This will occur at the time when they would see Him again, at His Second Coming.

JESUS GIVES THE PARABLE OF A BARREN FIG TREE (LUKE 13:6-7)

And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down (Luke 13:6-7 ESV).

There is nothing in this context that equates the fig tree with Israel. In fact, the fig tree is planted in the midst of a vineyard, which the Lord Himself used as a symbol for the nation of Israel!

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting... (Isaiah 5:7 ESV).

It is a vineyard that is equated with Israel, never a fig tree!

Therefore, since a distinction is made between the fig tree that is planted in the vineyard, and the vineyard itself, we certainly should not equate the two.

Again, the only illustration in the Bible of Israel from something planted is the vineyard, not the fig tree!

THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE (MATTHEW 24:32-34) (MARK 13:28-31) (LUKE 21:29-33)

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Matthew 24:32-34 ESV)

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Mark 13:28-31 ESV)

And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Luke 21:29-33 ESV).

Each of the first three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke record the parable of the fig tree. None of them equate the fig tree with the nation of Israel. Neither should we assume that Jesus’ disciples would have immediately connected the two.

JESUS SEE NATHANIEL UNDER THE FIG TREE (JOHN 1:48-50)

Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” (John 1:48-50 ESV).

On this occasion, the fig tree was where Nathaniel was sitting under when his brother Philip called him to meet Jesus. It is not used symbolically for Israel.

JAMES MAKES A WELL-KNOWN COMPARISON (JAMES 3:12)

Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water (James 3:12 ESV)

James is asking a rhetorical question to which the answer is a clear, “No!”

THE STARS OF HEAVEN DROP LIKE UNRIPE FIGS (REVELATION 6:13)

The stars of heaven fell to the earth as a fig tree drops its unripe figs when shaken by a high wind (Revelation 6:13 CSB).

In the future, the stars that will fall from the sky are compared to unripe figs.

CONCLUSION ON THE NEW TESTAMENT’S USE OF THE FIG TREE

As we mentioned in Mistakes 16-18, all sixteen uses of term fig tree in the New Testament are literal. In other words, it is always referring to an actual fig tree. This has become apparent as we examined each of the references.

Again, as with the Old Testament, we never find the fig tree equated with the nation of Israel.

In sum, after looking at the totality of Scripture, and examining every reference to figs and the fig tree, we find there is no basis whatsoever of seeing it as a symbolic reference to the nation of Israel.

40 Common Mistakes About Last Days Bible Prophecy Cleared Up

Therefore, when we seek to discover the meaning of the parable of the fig tree, found in Matthew, Mark and Luke, one thing that we can conclude is that the fig tree was given as an illustration from nature.

Indeed, it was not meant to be equated with the nation of Israel or the return of the people to their ancient homeland in the last days.

The disciples of Jesus would never have understood it in that manner and neither should we.

APPENDIX 2

A LOOK AT THE VARIOUS WAYS THE PHRASE “THIS GENERATION” IN THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE HAS BEEN INTERPRETED

To many people, the interpretation of the phrase “this generation” in Jesus parable of the fig tree is obvious. Christ is telling His disciples that the generation that sees the budding of the fig tree will see His return to the earth. This has caused many people to attempt to calculate the length of a biblical generation so as to put a time frame for the return of the Lord.

However, it is not that simple. Indeed, there are other possible ways to understand Jesus’ words that godly commentators have suggested. We certainly need to be aware of them.

Before we look at these options, let us summarize what we have learned thus far.

First, there is no evidence whatsoever that the “fig tree” was ever a symbol of the nation of Israel (Appendix 1). Furthermore, if the phrase “this generation” is assumed to indicate a time frame, we have seen that at Jesus’ era it referred to a period of approximately forty years (Mistakes 16,17, 18 and Mistake 39).

With these things in mind, let us look at our options.

WAS JESUS REFERRING TO THE FALL OF JERUSALEM, THE TIME OF THE END, OR BOTH?

One of the difficult issues concerns the precise subject matter of the Olivet Discourse found in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13 and in Luke 21. Was Jesus answering questions about the soon destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple, or was He only speaking of the time of His Second Coming? Or was He referring to both? There are Bible scholars who argue for each of these three possibilities.

This is where the importance of understanding the phrase “this generation” comes into view. What specifically was Christ referring to when He used this particular phrase?

Generally speaking the answers fall into one of five options.

Option 1: They are the Jesus’ contemporaries. Option 2: He is referring to the Jewish people. Option 3: It is the sinful people of Israel who rejected Him. Option 4: The last generation of people before He returns. Option 5: Both options one and four, or perhaps options three and four.

OPTION 1 JESUS’ OWN GENERATION WILL SEE THESE PREDICTIONS FULFILLED

A popular view is that Jesus was speaking of His contemporaries when He stated, “this generation will not pass away.” In other words, the generation that was alive when He made these statements would see all of the things fulfilled that He predicted.

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

One line of evidence to support this is recorded in Luke’s gospel. We find that Jesus specifically predicts the destruction of Jerusalem:

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. Alas for

women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:20-24 ESV).

Jerusalem did fall and the Temple was destroyed in a generation, some forty years, after Jesus' prediction. Therefore, it is claimed the prediction "this generation shall not pass away" in Luke 21:32 was fulfilled in A.D. 70.

RESPONSE

While Jesus' prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple was indeed fulfilled, it is problematic to say that everything He predicted in the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24-25 took place at that time. It did not. In fact, most of what He prophesied would happen has not yet occurred.

Warren Wiersbe sums up the problem:

To what "generation" does Luke 21:32 apply? Some who doubt that Jesus will literally return say that this statement applies to the generation of the apostles, so that "the coming of the Lord" was either the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) or the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. But none of the signs Jesus mentioned took place before or during those events. Nor did they climax with the deliverance of Israel and the establishing of the kingdom (Warren Wiersbe *BE Series, Luke*).

Thomas Constable explains Luke 21:20-24:

Jesus now returned to the subject of when the temple would suffer destruction (v. 7). The similar passages in Matthew and Mark are sufficiently different to alert the reader to the fact that they deal with a different incident from what Luke described (Matt. 24:15-22; Mark 13:14-20). ..

The sign that Jerusalem's destruction was imminent would be the presence of besieging "armies" (cf. v. 7). This happened when Titus encircled the city with troops and put it under siege beginning in A.D. 68.

.... God's "vengeance" on the city would descend shortly, in fulfillment of prophecy (Thomas Constable, Luke, *Constable's Expository Notes*, 2014)

The point he makes is that these passages teach two different incidents, and we should not confuse the two.

The *Believers Bible Commentary* agrees in its discussion of these verses:

Jesus then returned to the disciples' original question about when the temple would be destroyed. In these five verses He noted that Gentile domination included the destruction of Jerusalem which would come about when the city was surrounded by armies. Gentile domination would continue until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (v. 24). The times of the Gentiles' domination over Jerusalem actually began when the Babylonians took the city and the nation into Captivity in 586 B.C. Jerusalem will again fall under Gentile domination in the Tribulation (Zech. 14:1-2) just before the Messiah returns to restore Jerusalem. It is that restoration of which Jesus spoke next (Luke 21:25-28). (*The Believers Bible Commentary* William MacDonald, Edited by Arthur Farstad Luke, Nashville, Thomas Nelson).

To sum up, Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem to those who were His contemporaries. This prediction was fulfilled forty years after He gave it.

However, other predictions that He has made have yet to be fulfilled. It will not do to say they were somehow fulfilled symbolically at either Pentecost or at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Therefore, the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple's destruction did not fulfill His claim that "this generation will not pass until all these things be fulfilled." All of the predicted events were NOT fulfilled in A.D. 70. They still await their fulfillment.

OPTION 2 THE JEWISH PEOPLE WILL NOT CEASE TO EXIST

A popular view is that "this generation" refers to the Jewish people. Therefore, the Greek word translated "generation" has the idea of "race." In other words, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would continue to exist until the time of the end.

RESPONSE

We have already noted the problem with this view when we looked at the two Greek words *genea* and *genos*. Nowhere does the Greek word *genea*, generation, refer to the entire Jewish race (see Mistake 36). Therefore it does not seem remotely possible that the Lord had this in mind.

OPTION 3 THE SINFUL PEOPLE OF ISRAEL WHO REJECTED JESUS

In Matthew's gospel, *before* Jesus gave the parable of the fig tree, He used the phrase "this generation" a number of times in describing the sinful people of Israel who had rejected Him as the Christ, the Messiah. We can list them as follows:

"To what should I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to one another, 'We played the flute for you, yet you did not dance; we wailed in mourning, yet you did not weep.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him, a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is vindicated by her deeds" (Matthew 11:16-19 NET).

In this instance, the Lord said that "this generation" found fault with both Him and John the Baptist. In other words, no matter what John preached about the coming kingdom, or what miraculous signs Jesus performed, it would not convince them that He was the Christ. In doing this they rejected both the forerunner of the Messiah as well as the Messiah Himself.

On another occasion the religious leaders came to Jesus asking Him for a sign:

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here (Matthew 12:38-42 NKJV).

In this episode, the Lord called them "An evil and adulterous generation" for seeking after a "sign." They had already witnessed Him heal the sick, open the eyes of the blind, and raise the dead back to life. Yet they still did not believe and requested a further "sign." Jesus gave them this sign, namely His resurrection from the dead.

Following up on this, the Lord then compared the fate of the present generation to a person possessed with demons:

“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation” (Matthew 12:43-45 ESV).

We should not miss the statement that the “last state” of the demon possessed person would be worse than the former state. He then directly applied it to “this evil generation” who did indeed suffer a worse fate after rejecting Him as their Messiah.

Again, the Lord was asked for a sign and once again He gave them the sign of Jonah:

A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” And He left them and departed (Matthew 16:4 NKJV).

We should note that He referred to them as a “wicked and adulterous generation.”

Finally, Matthew records Jesus calling His unbelieving contemporaries a “faithless and twisted” generation:

And Jesus answered, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me” (Matthew 17:17 ESV).

To sum up, in these instances recorded by Matthew, Jesus described “this generation” as an “evil and adulterous generation” an “evil generation” a “wicked and adulterous generation” and “a faithless and twisted generation.”

The Baylor *Handbook of the Greek Text* sums up how this phrase is used in Matthew’s gospel by looking at its usage in Matthew 11:16:

“This generation” (ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆ) [*Hay genea bowtay*] is granted a recurring role in Matthew’s narrative. In this context, it comprises Jesus’ and John’s contemporaries who stand on the receiving end of their missions and nevertheless reject them both (cf. 11:17-19). Here the phrase denotes one part of Israel (those who reject John, Jesus, and the dawning kingdom they announce) at one point in time—and not the nation in its entirety or throughout history (Wesley G. Olmstead, *A Handbook of The Greek Text, Matthew 1-14*, Matthew 11:16).

IT HAS THE SAME MEANING IN LUKE’S GOSPEL

We also find the same meaning of “this generation” in Luke’s gospel. Lutheran scholar Arthur A. Just Jr. writes:

This generation (ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆ) occurs nine times in Luke, always denoting an unbelieving portion of humanity. They rejected John the Baptist, as well as Jesus for not dancing to their tune (7:31). They are the evil generation that seeks a sign but will be condemned because they did not repent at the signs provided them by Jesus (11:29-32 four occurrences). On them will be avenged the blood of all the slain prophets (11:50-51). The Son of Man will be rejected by “this generation” (17:25), which invites comparison to those who perished in the flood and or in the destruction of Sodom (cf. 17:26-29). Luke 21:32 is the final occurrence of the phrase in the gospel. It occurs in Acts where it has the same meaning: Peter urged the Pentecost crowds “Be saved from this perverted generation (Acts 2:40). (Arthur A. Just Jr, Luke 9:51-24:53, *Concordia Commentary*, St. Louis, Missouri, 1997, p. 804 note 24).

The Cornerstone Bible also argues for this interpretation by also citing the same phrase “this generation” in Luke’s gospel:

Elsewhere in Luke, this expression is used to describe sinful humanity, unresponsive to God and oblivious to the possibility of immediately encountering him ... ‘This generation,’ which ignored the coming of the kingdom in Jesus’ ministry, continues in its rejection of the gospel message until the very end. Thus, ‘this generation’ of 21:32 stands in continuity and solidarity with ‘this generation’ of Jesus’ day” (*Cornerstone Bible Commentary*).

Bible scholar C.A. Coates agrees:

“This generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled”. The word is often used in Scripture in a moral sense--not a generation in the sense of thirty or forty years. That character of generation which was present when the Lord was speaking will not pass away till all that the Lord said is fulfilled. The same generation is present now, for Peter says, “Be saved from this perverse generation”. It is still a perverse generation and people have to be saved from it.

Paul in Philippians 2 speaks of being blameless and harmless, “children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation”. The world continues a “present evil world”. Some say the world is getting better, others say that it is getting worse, but they are both wrong. Scripture does say that evil men and seducers will wax worse and worse, but that is in the sphere of profession. The world is the same as it always was; it is made up of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; and it always will be that (C.A. Coates, *C.A. Coates Commentary And Articles Luke 21:1-22:1*).

Finally, Arthur A. Just Jr, whom we quoted above, makes this observation:

How is one to understand these words two thousand years later while still waiting for the parousia [the return of the Lord]? This commentary has advocated the view that “this generation” is the continuing line of all unbelievers. They are the group that rejected the prophets who came speaking the words of God. Their spiritual heirs will reject the Gospel proclaimed by the apostles and pastors down to the present day. Those who reject will be present at the time of the end (Arthur A. Just Jr, Luke 9:51-24:53, *Concordia Commentary*, St. Louis, Missouri, 1997, p. 804).

This particular view of understanding the words “this generation” in the parable of the fig tree, in the same way as the previous five instances in Matthew, and nine instances in Luke, has a lot going for it. Indeed, the strength of this contention is that it is harmonious with the way the phrase is consistently used in the gospels.

If this is the correct understanding of what Jesus meant by “this generation,” then there is no need to attempt to calculate the number of years in a generation to determine when Jesus would return a second time. Indeed, the phrase would have nothing to do with this idea.

OPTION 4 THE LAST GENERATION BEFORE HE RETURNS

This view is widely held. We will cite a few examples of solid Bible commentators holding this view:

The parable of the fig tree essentially warned the disciples that once the events Jesus has just described begin to unfold they will continue unabated to the conclusion—the second coming—He has just described. The note about this generation (21:32a) is best taken to refer to the generation that is alive when these events begin to unfold (not to the generation to whom Jesus was speaking; Jesus’ point is, “When the signs come, they will proceed quickly; they will not drag on for generations. It will happen within a generation” (Michael G. Vanlaningham, *The Moody Bible Commentary*, Matthew, Chicago, Moody Press).

Respected Bible commentator Thomas Constable wrote:

This parable illustrates the truth that the kingdom's appearing will follow the signs that Jesus just identified (vv. 10-11, 25-26). It will follow as certainly as "summer" follows the budding of "trees" in the spring. Jesus here connected the beginning of "the kingdom" with His return to the earth (v. 27) (Thomas Constable, *Luke, Expository Notes*, 2014

The Bible Knowledge Commentary concurs:

The clause, this generation (*genea*) will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened, has caused much controversy. Some think Jesus was telling His disciples that their generation would see the destruction of the temple. That interpretation stems primarily from verses 5-7 in which the discussion pertained to the temple's destruction. However, because of verse 31 (in which Jesus spoke of the coming of the kingdom of God), and because of Matthew 24:34, it seems preferable to say His words refer to the generation living at the time of the cosmological events that will just precede His second coming. That generation will actually see the founding of the kingdom of God — something every generation of Jewish citizens has longed for throughout the nation's history (John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Luke 21:29-33).

This view also has much biblical support.

OPTION 5 BOTH JESUS' OWN GENERATION AS WELL AS THE LAST GENERATION

Some hold the view that the best answer is a combination of option one and option four. Luke is obviously recording Jesus' predictions about the fall of Jerusalem which did indeed take place within a generation of His prophesying about it. However, this certainly does not exhaust everything that Jesus predicted. The unfulfilled predictions will take place immediately before He returns again.

The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary holds this view:

The parable of the fig tree (21:29–33) is easy to comprehend. Just as the appearance of leaves on a tree shows that summer is near, so too the signs previously described indicate that the coming of the Son of Man is near. The assertion that "this generation will certainly not pass away" (21:32) is difficult. It could refer to (1) the generation in which Jesus was living, (2) the Jewish race, (3) the human race, or (4) the end-time generation. It probably refers both to (1) and (4), for Jesus's generation experienced the razing of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem's destruction becomes a type of the end. In typical Jewish fashion Jesus combines in this discourse information about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. (*The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*).

It is an excellent way of looking at this question.

However, some feel that our options 3 and 4 are the best. In other words, the phrase is certainly directed to the last generation before His return, there is no doubt about this. However, it is also predicting that like the hostile people in Jesus' generation, especially Jewish, these type of individuals will continue to exist until the time of the end.

The Believers Bible Commentary explains it in this manner:

Some feel He referred to the generation living at the time He spoke these words, and that all things were fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem. But this cannot be so because Christ did not return in a cloud with power and great glory. Others believe that "this generation" refers to the people living when these signs begin to take place, and that those who live to see the beginning of the signs would live to see the return of Christ. All the events predicted would happen within one generation. This is a possible explanation. Another possibility is that "this generation" refers to the Jewish people in their attitude of hostility to Christ.

40 Common Mistakes About Last Days Bible Prophecy Cleared Up

The Lord was saying that the Jewish race would survive, scattered yet indestructible, and that its attitude toward Him would not change through the centuries. Perhaps both numbers 2 and 3 are correct (*Believers Bible Commentary*, William MacDonald, Edited by Arthur Farstad Luke, Nashville, Thomas Nelson)

In sum, either of these combination options will work, perhaps even a combination of our options 1,3 and 4.

Whatever the case may be, as we again emphasize, the parable of the fig tree is not specifically referencing the Jews returning to their ancient homeland in the last days, and forming a modern state, which starts the countdown of a limited number of years before the Lord Jesus must return.

40 Common Mistakes About Last Days Bible Prophecy Cleared Up

APPENDIX 3

THE USE OF “ALL THE TREES” IN THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE IN LUKE 21:29 HAS NO SYMBOLIC MEANING

We mentioned earlier that Luke records that Jesus used the phrase “all the trees” or “all the other trees” when He gave the parable of the fig tree:

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the other trees (Luke 21:29 NET).

We asked the question: if the fig tree supposedly represents Israel, then what does “all the other trees” mean?

Our conclusion was that this parable was a simple illustration from nature, namely one that His disciples were certainly aware of. Simply put, as you see the fig tree, as well as the other trees, put forth their leaves, then you know that summer is near. In the same manner, when you see all of these signs come to pass, then you know that the Kingdom of God is near at hand.

We Are Going To Go Into More Detail

It is necessary for us to go into a little more detail in explaining this verse. To the point, while there are well-meaning people who try to make both the fig tree and all the trees symbolic, the evidence is clear that what we have in this context is a proverbial saying by Jesus. In other words, there is no reason for us to look for some symbolic meaning for these trees. We will make three observations.

First, we will examine how Jesus uses the word parable as recorded by Luke. Second, we will note how the context demands that we understand this parable is an illustration from nature. Third, Jesus’ illustrations always dealt with the real world, never with fables. Therefore, we should not look to such passages as Judges 9 where there is a fable about talking trees to claim that trees are representative of nations.

OBSERVATION 1: JESUS’ USE OF THE WORD PARABLE IN LUKE IS OFTEN AS A PROVERBIAL SAYING

When one examines the use of the word parable in Luke’s gospel, they will find that it is often used as a proverbial saying. In other words, there is no symbolic meaning to the words, it is merely a straightforward well-known saying. For example, we read the following:

Jesus said to them, “No doubt you will quote to me the proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ and say, ‘What we have heard that you did in Capernaum, do here in your hometown too.’” (Luke 4:23 NET).

First we should note that the NET Bible translates the Greek word parable in this context as “proverb.”

The *Exegetical Guide To The Greek New Testament*, which examines every word and phrase in the Greek text and explains their meaning in context, had this to say about the use of parable in Luke 4:23:

In this context παραβολήν [parable] refers to a proverbial saying (Alan J. Thompson, *Exegetical Guide To The Greek New Testament*, Luke, BH Academic Press, Nashville, 2016, p. 75).

We find another example of Jesus using the word parable to refer to a proverbial saying in Luke 5:35:

He also told them a parable: “No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old garment. If he does, he will have torn the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old (Luke 5:35 NET).

We read the following comment in the *Exegetical Guide*:

As with 4:23, παραβολήν [parable] in this context refers to a proverbial saying (BDAG 759c). (Thompson, *Exegetical Guide*, p. 95).

They reference BDAG. This is the standard Greek lexicon, or dictionary, for the New Testament. It stands for Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich, the compilers of the lexicon.

There is a further illustration found in Luke 6:39:

He also told them a parable: “Someone who is blind cannot lead another who is blind, can he? (Luke 6:39 NET).

Again, the *Exegetical Guide* recognizes that this is another use of the word parable referring to a proverbial saying:

Παραβολήν in this context refers to a proverbial saying ... BDAG 759c; cf. 4:23; 5:36 (Thompson, *Exegetical Guide*, p. 109).

When we come to the parable of fig tree in Luke 21:29, we read the following comment from the *Exegetical Guide*:

For this use of παραβολή (parable) see 4:23; 5:36; 6:39 (cf. 8:4). (Thompson, *Exegetical Guide*, p. 335).

In other words, we have another proverbial saying by Jesus in the parable of the fig tree and all the trees.

Therefore, in each of these four specific instances in Luke, we have the word parable referring to a well-known saying, namely a proverb. Recognizing this, we should not look for some symbolic meaning of the terms fig tree or all the trees in Luke 21:29.

**OBSERVATION 2: LOOKING CLOSELY AT THE CONTEXT UNDERSCORES
IT IS A SIGN FROM NATURE**

As we look carefully at each word, or phrase, in this verse, we will find further reasons for not attaching any symbolic meanings to the words fig tree and all the trees. We can summarize the meaning of them as follows:

Look

This word is a command in Greek! His disciples are to pay close attention to something.

at the fig tree and all the other trees

Namely, look at how a fig tree, and other trees, normally operate in nature.

when (as soon as)

The word translated “when” indicates this is referring to something that is temporal. In other words, “as soon as.” This is the beginning of the proverbial saying.

they sprout leaves

In another comprehensive work on the Greek text of the gospel of Luke, this particular Greek word προβάλλωσιν (pro ball oh sin), translated as “they sprout leaves,” is explained as follows:

Here, “to begin vegetative growth, with special emphasis upon the sprouting of leaves” (LN 23.195). (Martin M. Cully, Mikeal C. Parsons, Joshua J. Stigall, *Luke, A Handbook To The Greek Text*, Baylor University Press, 2010, p. 656).

In other words, as soon as you see the leaves sprouting

you see for yourselves

At that time, they can observe this natural event that consistently occurs each spring.

know

This is another command for them to pay close attention. From this normal occurrence, they should recognize the following.

that summer is now near.

Namely, summer is about to arrive. This is something that each of them would all be familiar with. Hence, it was a proverbial saying.

In the same manner

This adverb here in Greek οὕτως (who toes) makes an important connection. It is indicating the following: as they see the leaves sprouting, which is a natural occurrence, there will be a comparison they can make to what He had previously revealed about the signs of the end.

when you see all these things come to pass

As the sprouting of the leaves of the fig tree indicates summer is near, in the same manner, when people see all these things, namely the signs He has just talked about...

know

There is something that they should then know, something they should understand.

that the Kingdom of God is near

Namely, when they see all the signs that He has just predicted, it is like the fig tree and all the trees act in the spring, an indication that God’s kingdom is near.

In sum, this proverbial statement only works if we understand the fig tree and all the trees as an illustration of something that happens in nature. The disciples must literally understand what happens in the spring to the fig trees and the rest of the trees to understand that how that indicates His kingdom is near. Hence, there is nothing in this illustration of Jesus that the words fig tree and all the trees are meant to symbolize something else.

OBSERVATION 3 WE SHOULD UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A FABLE AND A PARABLE: JESUS NEVER TOLD FABLES

Finally, we must also respond to the claim that Scripture does give us an example of a symbolic use of trees, it is found in Judges 9 in the fable of Jotham. This passage has been maintained to indicate that Jesus’ use of trees in this parable of the fig tree and all the tree may have been a symbolic reference to Israel and other nations. In response, a number of things should be mentioned.

Jesus Never Told Fables

The parables which Jesus gave, as recorded in the four gospels, were illustrations from real life, namely a sower sowing seed, a king holding a wedding feast for his son, a bride and groom about to meet up for their wedding, etc. In other words, there is nothing in any of His illustrations that remotely deals with such things as talking trees as in the fable recorded in Judges 9.

Since Jesus never resorted to telling fables we should not attempt cross reference one of His illustrations with a fable that someone else has given in an entirely different context. This is especially true when we examine the context of Jesus' words, as we have just done in our observations one and two.

There is nothing remotely in His words to suggest that the Twelve would immediately think of the fable of Jotham when Jesus gave the lesson from the fig tree and all the trees. Furthermore, a fable is NOT a parable. They are two different types of literary expression.

Summary

When we examine Jesus' parable of the fig tree, as recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it is found to simply be a well-known fact of nature that He used to illustrate as a sign of His coming. In other words, as you know what happens to the fig tree, and the other trees when you see begin to see foliage on them, in the same manner when those who are alive see all the signs that He has just given, they will also recognize that the end is near, namely, the Kingdom of God is about to arrive.

To attempt to make the fig tree represent Israel, and the other trees represent something like other nations, is completely foreign to the context. In addition, the use of the word parable in Luke and the use of the fig tree and other trees in Scripture do not provide the slightest justification of interpreting the passage symbolically rather than a simple illustration from nature.

We could also mention that the "talking trees" in Jotham's fable were not symbolic of nations, but rather of the misguided evil rulers of one of the areas in Israel, Shechem. Therefore, it is incorrect to say that trees in Scripture represent nations. They do not.

Coupled with our two previous appendices, that the fig tree is never used in Scripture to represent Israel and the phrase "this generation" has a number of possible meanings, it should be clear that this parable given by Jesus should NEVER be used to attempt to calculate the time of His return.

Thomas R. Schreiner in the *Illustrated Bible Commentary* has summed it up well:

The parable of the fig tree (21:29–33) is easy to comprehend. Just as the appearance of leaves on a tree shows that summer is near, so too the signs previously described indicate that the coming of the Son of Man is near (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Illustrated Bible Commentary* on Luke 21:29–33).

APPENDIX 4

MAKE CERTAIN YOU UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHAT THE BIBLE RECORDS AND WHAT THE BIBLE STATES AS TRUE

There is a huge mistake that people often make, not only in their everyday study of Scripture, but also in their attempt to understand last days Bible prophecy.

Simply put, they believe that they can pick up the Bible, find a verse or passage that says something that they believe is profound, believe it is true, then quote it to others as God's truth. However, it is not quite that simple.

NOT EVERY STATEMENT IN THE BIBLE IS TRUE

When we read the Bible, should we regard every statement as true? Can we confidently read any portion of Scripture and act upon any statement or promise that we find? Can we believe any statement that we find in the Bible that seems to give us an understanding of what we should expect in the future?

The answer is no. A distinction needs to be made between the accuracy of the statements that are made in the Bible, and their truthfulness. A number of observations need to be made.

THE TRUTH OF EVERY STATEMENT OF SCRIPTURE IS NOT GUARANTEED

Divine inspiration guarantees the accuracy of every statement in Scripture, but not the truth of it. We can give a number of examples to illustrate this.

1. THE DEVIL ALWAYS LIES

To begin with, we are told that every time Satan, or the devil, spoke, he lied. Jesus said the following to the religious leaders of His day:

You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44 NRSV).

The only truth in the statements of Satan is that he actually said them – nothing more. Therefore, his claims and false promises should always be read and understood in context.

2. THE SERPENT LIED WHEN MAKING PROMISES TO EVE

As Jesus had said, we find the devil lying from the very beginning. In the Garden of Eden, the serpent promised Eve that she and Adam would be like divine beings, or God, if they ate of the forbidden fruit:

The serpent said to the woman, "Surely you will not die, for God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will open and you will be like divine beings who know good and evil" (Genesis 3:4,5 NET).

The New International Version translates these verses in this manner:

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4,5 NIV).

The statement of the serpent is recorded accurately, but the statement is not true. Adam and Eve would not, and they certainly did not, become divine beings or God, or even become like divine beings or like God, by eating the forbidden fruit.

Other examples can be found in Scripture where people made statements that are against the clear teaching of the Lord and His Word. These statements were actually made by people, and the Bible accurately records them.

However, the statements do not reflect biblical teaching. They are only true in the sense of that Scripture tells us what they said, nothing more.

3. THERE WERE INCORRECT STATEMENTS IN THE BOOK OF JOB

We find that a large section of the Book of Job contains statements that are recorded accurately but are not true—the people actually made these misguided statements.

After Job and his three friends had been discussing Job's problems, God made the following comments:

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: "Who is this who darkens counsel with words without knowledge? Get ready for a difficult task like a man; I will question you and you will inform me. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you possess understanding! (Job 38:1-4 NET).

The Lord called what they were saying, "Words without knowledge."

The New Living Translation translates the Lord's comments in this manner:

Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind: "Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words?" (Job 38:1,2 NLT).

Therefore, we must always be careful when we read and quote from this portion of the Book of Job. According to the Lord, the previous discussion of Job and his friends was ignorant and uninformed.

The unspiritual words of Job's friends, as recorded in the Book of Job, do not have the same usefulness to lost humanity as does the gospel of Jesus Christ.

However, both are exactly what God intended to include in His Word and each has its place and its divine purpose.

4. THERE ARE HUMAN MISSTATEMENTS IN THE BIBLE

In addition, there are also human misstatements in Scripture. In the gospel of John, we find the religious leaders said the following to Nicodemus about the origin of Jesus:

You aren't from Galilee too, are you? Investigate carefully and you will see that no prophet comes from Galilee! (John 7:52 NET).

If this is the proper understanding of what the religious leaders said (and there is some controversy as to what exactly they did say), then this statement of the religious leaders was not true. They said that no prophet comes from Galilee.

However, the prophet Jonah was from the region of Galilee.

**CONCLUSION: EACH STATEMENT IN SCRIPTURE MUST BE READ
IN CONTEXT TO DETERMINE ITS TRUTH**

Therefore, it is the utmost importance that each passage of Scripture needs to be read in context to determine whether or not it is saying something that is true. While all the statements and events are accurately recorded, they may not always be teaching God's truth. Hence, there is the need to read and study the Bible in context.

ALL SCRIPTURE IS PROFITABLE

There is one final point which we need to make. While not every statement of Scripture may be true, all of it is profitable; we can learn lessons even from those who are lying. Paul wrote:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17 NIV).

Therefore, there are lessons for us in all of Scripture; even those portions which record lies.

SUMMARY

We can summarize what we have just said as follows.

Although every statement and event recorded in Scripture actually happened, not every statement recorded is a true statement. Each statement of the Bible needs to be read in context.

We need to know who is speaking to see whether the statement, though recorded accurately, is in harmony with the truth of God. The Bible records misguided statements as well as lies.

While there may not be Christian doctrine in every statement of Scripture, all things recorded in the Bible can be read with profit.

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Don is a best-selling and award-winning author having authored, or co-authored, over eighty books. This includes the best-selling *Answers to Tough Questions*, with Josh McDowell, as well as the award-winning book *Family Handbook of Christian Knowledge: The Bible*. His various writings have been translated into over thirty different languages and have sold over a million copies.

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Currently there are 64 books on the site in PDF form, totaling about 13,000 pages of material while answering over 1,900 questions. All of his books can be downloaded for free on his website www.educatingourworld.com.