
CHAPTER 3

MAINTAINING A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

THE NEED FOR BALANCE

A lot of harm has been done to God's word and the body of Christ by people who have been speculative about end-time events. On the other hand, some theologians, in the attempts to assist in interpretation, have interpreted the simplicity of God's revealed truth from their subjected prejudices. Many schools of thought have therefore arisen regarding the study of eschatology. But never forget this, that we are always putting pieces together!

There is yet another group which would not want to undertake any in-depth study of this subject because they do not want to bother themselves with hard thinking. Remember, whatever comes up in the Scriptures requires our attention. For this reason, the right and left brains have been made by God to assist balance in reasoning, more so with the help of the Holy Spirit, who inspires, illumines and reveals truth.

THE LAW OF DOUBLE OR MULTIPLE REFERENCES

Two or more similar events, which may be widely separated by the time of their fulfillment, could in prophetic writings be brought together into the scope of one prophecy. Often times the prophet would have a message for the people of his own day as well as for a future date. Sometimes, all such events could be in the distant future.

Also, seemingly concurrent events, but separated by long periods in fulfillment, can appear in one prophetic message. Again, two or more disjointed or differing events, which may be widely separated by the time of their fulfillment, could be brought together in prophetic

writings into the scope of one prophecy. It is also the principle of biblical interpretation that prophetic messages do recur for the purpose of adding details. This could result in the unschooled twisting and misinterpreting of Scripture or missing the import of the time gap for the fulfillment of such events.

We, therefore, want to illustrate these with some biblical examples. For clarity of purpose it will be good to classify these events. Four such classifications can be readily identified, namely: 1) **Two or more similar events**, 2) **Two or more seemingly concurrent events** 3) **Two or more disjointed events**, and 4) **Recurring references for adding detail**.

1. **Two or more similar events:** Examples; the Abomination of Desolation and the battle of Gog and Magog.

a. ***Abomination of Desolation:*** This has a number of Bible references. In the book of Daniel, some of the references to this event point to an earlier date than the main or final fulfillment during the revelation of the Anti-Christ.

Dan. 8:9-13 [The little horn here refers to Antiochus Epiphanes who caused this desolation of abomination in the 400 years Inter-Testament period] *"And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land. And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them. He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down. Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered. Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking, "How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled under foot?"*

Dan. 9:27 [It is the Anti-Christ who will cause this desolation of abomination in the middle of the Tribulation period] *"Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations*

shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate."

Dan. 11:29-35 [It is the same desolation by Antiochus Epiphanes who caused this desolation of abomination in the 400 years Inter-Testament period : "*At the appointed time he shall return and go toward the south; but it shall not be like the former or the latter.*" For ships from Cyprus shall come against him; therefore he shall be grieved, and return in rage against the holy covenant, and do damage. So he shall return and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant. "*And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation.*" Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits. "*And those of the people who understand shall instruct many; yet for many days they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering.*" Now when they fall, they shall be aided with a little help; but many shall join with them by intrigue. "*And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time.*"

Dan. 12:11[Here, it is the Anti-Christ who will cause this desolation of abomination in the middle of the Tribulation period]."*And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days*".

b. **Gog and Magog battle:** Ezekiel 38 and 39 talks about a Gog of the land of Magog battle. Another Gog and Magog battle is mentioned but as the last battle on earth in Rev. 20:4 -7. Though they seem to bear the similar name, their descriptions do indicate that they are entirely different in timing, mode of action and forces involved in the two battles. In the former, it is the prince of Rosh who is divinely pulled to attack Israel, while Satan engineers the later directly against Christ after his short release from the pit at the close of the Millennium.

2. Two or more seemingly concurrent events: Example; The Resurrection of the dead.

For instance, looking at the Scriptures that deal with resurrection, we observe two or more events carried in one prophecy. In John we read, "*Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves*

shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28, 29) KJV. Dan. 12:1-4 also refers, "At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. "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."

We discover that there is at least a time gap of 1000 years between the resurrection of (the righteous) those who have done good (referred to in the passage all share in the first resurrection before the millennium) and the resurrection of those that have done evil (comes after the millennium). We also know well now that even the resurrection of the just, shall be in phases at differing times for various category of saints – the Rapture for the Church saints and then later the Old Testament and also Tribulation saints.

3. Two or more disjointed events: Example; The outpouring of the Spirit and the Tribulation.

We read from Joel 2:28-31 and Acts 2:17-21 that Pentecost was not meant to be a static occurrence; there is to be the continuous outpouring of the Spirit until the events beginning of the Tribulation. These scriptures do not tell us when the former event ends but gives us the courage to receive the outpouring of the Spirit any time in the Church age.

4. Recurring references for adding details: Applicable to many eschatological events.

Apart from catching the real meaning from first mention in scripture, it is normal in prophecy to discover details in later recurrences. Typical examples are, the Rapture (1Cor.15:50-55; 1Thess.4:13-18) and the battle of Armageddon (Zech. 14:1f; Rev. 16:12-16; 19:11-21). This is the more reason why we should study to show ourselves approved unto God.

HOW TO APPLY THE LAW

There is a simple rule of prophecy to assist us in the application of the law. It states: *If a prophecy has not been totally fulfilled in the past, then there will be a future complete fulfillment.* Of course, there could be a partial fulfillment or even more than one until a final complete fulfillment. It all depends on the eternal design and plan of God. Now we do know that the advent of Jesus into the world had been planned to be in two phases - His First and the Second Advents.

All prophecies concerning the first advent were fulfilled but those that jointly conveyed the two advents in one prophecy have received only partial fulfillment. For example Isaiah 9:6-7 declares "*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this* (NKJ).

We know that Jesus has been born. He lived bodily on earth but not as king; was crucified, died and buried. He arose from the dead, ascended into heaven and would, therefore, return to the earth. So, it is in His second advent that Jesus will sit upon the 'throne of His father David' in the millennium to rule from Jerusalem. We come across many such partially fulfilled prophecies in the Bible.

Applying the law to the:

1. **Two or more similar events:** E.g.; Abomination of desolation. Normally, further references may be made to them even after the fulfillment of an initial occurrence. This is the case with the abomination of desolation; where Jesus Himself made further reference (Matt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14; Luke 21:20) after the historic occurrence at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes during the 400 years inter Testament period.
2. **Two or more seemingly concurrent events:** Example; Resurrections.

The teaching of the New Testament will help divide the word of truth. It is Paul who teaches on the rapture of the Church. There is no reference to the Church in the Old Testament. Even Jesus Himself did not teach specially about the rapture of the New Testament believers. His audience was still predominantly Jewish, so He referred more to Jerusalem and the great Tribulation. It was Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, who plainly showed that the rapture of the Church saints will come before Anti-Christ is allowed to operate *during the day of the Lord* (2Thess. 2:1-8).

So, obviously the rapture would precede the resurrection of the Tribulation and Old Testament saints at the end of times (Dan. 12:2, 3; Rev. 20:4, 5). In Revelation, we also discover that what are classified under the first resurrection and the second are separated by at least a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-5, 11-15).

3. Two or more disjointed events: Example; The outpouring of the Spirit and the Tribulation (Acts 2: 17-21).

From Peter's responses, we notice that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was to be a continuing occurrence until the Tribulation begins. The implication is that the Church Age must be marked out clearly by the constant *fallen upon or the receiving* of the Spirit right until her Rapture (Acts 2: 1-4; 17-19; 38, 39; 3:19-23; 8:14-17; 11:44-46).

4. Recurring references for adding details: Applicable to many eschatological events

The Rapture, for example, has separate references in 1Cor. 15:50-55; 1Thess. 4:13-18. Also the battle of Armageddon has separate references in Zech. 14:1f; Rev. 16:12-16; 19:11-21. It is when such pieces are put together that the full meaning of the event is grasped. It does not mean, however, that events that have single mention in scripture need be marginalized.

WHAT TO DO WITH SYMBOLS AND TYPOLOGIES

1. Maintain simplicity.

Bible teachers have classified the study of the Bible using different approaches, all in an attempt to make it become clearer and understandable. In one subject we take a quick look at each book in the Bible; in one we learn what the Bible teaches about doctrines; in another we learn all we can about the practical life of Christ. We now have translations into local languages from the original languages and other lexicon ready for us, making it easy for many to learn from the scriptures. Expositors now abound. Yet, many still approach the Bible from complex interpretative approach.

Generally people think that end-time prophecies are difficult to understand because they employ queer symbols. Well, I believe it's because we have lost the simplicity, originally intended in learning doctrine. We should bear in mind always that the entire Bible is meant to be understood by God's people as simple practical instruction for living. Only those who do not have ears cannot hear from the Holy Spirit. Thus, every aspect of the Bible is meant to be interpreted and understood by all in the kingdom of God, even the unschooled (Matt. 13:11, 52; 2Tim. 3:16, 17).

2. Learn a little about the various dispensations.

Background knowledge to any prophetic message will help discern the spiritual import. We may have to answer questions like: To whom was the message written, why and in what dispensation? Then what plan was God following, that is in what dispensation is the expected fulfillment time? If these are clearly discerned, we will be able to understand the symbols, typologies and terminologies used.

This way, even seeming contradicting statements in the Bible, become clearly discernible to us as we take time to think and study and pray over them. For example, in Exodus 19:12, God said He would come down upon Mount Sinai, but if any man except Moses touched the mount, that man must be killed! That looks like God wants us to stay far from Him! Yet, in James 4:8 we read, "Draw near to God and he will draw nigh to you". What causes the difference?

In the former verse, the people of Israel trusted in their own righteousness. That generality belonged to the dispensation of law. Then the cross of Christ came. Jesus opened the way to God (John 14:6). By trusting in His righteousness alone, we can enter God's presence. Paul says, this is in effect the dispensation of the grace of God to us (Eph. 3:2).

This does not mean that Christians can live presumptuously and inadvertently because of grace. It is not the people during the flood only who are considered to have suffered judgment of a kind. The Jews have also suffered domination from other earthly kingdoms due to their rebellion against the God, the God of Abraham.

The Church must, thus, not trifle with the grace of God. No sir! God remains holy; and will always judge sin. The only big difference in this dispensation is that Christ shed His blood to remove the condemnation of all who believe in His Name. So that we can now count on the efficacy of the blood of Jesus to reconcile and keep us close to God, unlike under Judaism where the blood of animal could not remove but only cover sins (2Cor. 5:19-21; Heb. 9:11-14; 10:3-14).

We know that the world will not acknowledge our lifestyle and us because it never received the Lord Jesus. However, Christians of every generation must always make the eternal positive impact that a peculiar people have lived on the planet earth, through His Name. Sooner very soon, we shall be like Him, when we are gathered unto Him (1John 3:1-3). The heaven-bound believer is destined to be in His presence, in life or in death! *"I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death"* (Phil. 1:20(NIV)).

3. Distinguish between People Groups in various Time Zones

In addition to dispensations, it will always help us is to remember that there are three categories of persons God deals with throughout the Bible. They are the Jew, the Gentile, and all peoples of the Church of God, for we read; *"Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God"* (1 Cor. 10:32KJV). On God's redemptive plan, the Jew was His elect. Abraham the Gentile comes into covenant with

God; and his progeny, the Jews become God's peculiar nation. Israel as a nation rejected the Son of the Living God, in other that the Gentiles could be grafted into God's salvation plan. This has led to the election of believers in Christ - both Jews and Gentiles, who become the Church, also called the Bride of Christ.

Certainly, God could not deal the same way with all peoples, for His dealings are based on covenant relationships. We must know to which category of people a Scripture was initially directed before we can fully understand its meaning. Some men have read of the great blessings promised to Jerusalem, and the House of Jacob, and the people of Israel, and they have said, "Ah, that belongs to the church!" They think God has cast off the Jewish people forever, or erroneously assume the Church to be equivalent to Israel. This has brought much confusion, for the Bible has many, many promises to the Jewish people that are yet to be fulfilled. Paul tells us plainly in Romans 11 that God has not cast off His people Israel forever. We do know that God only grafted in the Church, to extend salvation to Gentiles also through Christ (Rom. 11:19-29; Gal. 3:13-18, 29; Tit. 2:11-14).

We can never understand how God is working out His plan if we do not know whom He is talking to. When Jesus spoke to His disciples for example on peace, He intimated that His type of peace, the real peace of God to be that which the world could not give because it would not have it. He says in John 14:27, "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*". It means that the unbeliever cannot be promised with enjoying this kind of peace.

4. Compare Scripture with Scripture.

When we take time to compare scripture with scripture we are able to link up the pieces that make up the whole. It has been stated that we all see and know in part; besides God would not reveal everything to only one prophet - that person would cease to be human. So the authors of the Bible gave us what the inspiration of God led them to write down. As we compare scripture and come to reality with the background we would better understand any symbols.

5. **Do not over spiritualize.**

Do not try to find a deep hidden meaning in every word or verse. A good rule is to take each verse to mean exactly what it says when this is possible. If it seems very strange, compare it with other parts of the Bible as stated above. For instance, Jesus once said, "*If thy hand offends thee, cut it off!*" (Matt. 5:30 KJV) That is a strange command. We had better compare it with some other Scriptures. In 1Thess. 4: 11, we read, "*And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.*" Paul wanted the Christians to have hands to work with.

In another of the teachings of Jesus, He says in Matthew 15:19: "*Out of the heart precede murders, thefts.*" Perhaps my hand has stolen, but I must ask God to deliver me from the covetousness in my heart. Why? I had better be poor and needy all my life and be saved at last, than to set my heart upon the things my hands can get for me and go to hell. This does not also project being rich as a sin, it rather '*the love of money which is the root of all evil.*' (1Tim. 6:10)

Literal fulfillment of prophecy indicates the need for literal interpretation. You will soon discover that this is the case even with the book of Revelation. Thank God that we live in times when pieces are coming together to make every thing beautiful! On the other hand, we sincerely need to hold that as the events of the end are fulfilled, we will better understand. It therefore means that until then no man will have answers to all eschatological events; for some "*words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end*" (Dan. 12:9). The counsel is to allow the Holy Spirit to employ scripture in explaining occurrences as Peter did in quoting from Joel on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16f).

HOW TO STAY ON SAFE GROUNDS

1. **Avoid speculative date setting.**

All who attempted to set dates have ended up falling into error. How would you want to dabble in matters God has deliberately set beyond our reach? According to the scriptures, no man would know the exact day and hour (Matt. 24:36, 42-44; 25:13; Mk. 13:32). All that is required of us is to discern the times, so as to redeem it. Nothing more, nothing less! (Eccl. 8: 5; Luke 12:54-56; Eph. 5:14-17).

2. Hold on to an imminent Second Coming.

Maintain a position of holding on to the imminent return of Jesus Christ and be ready at all times and at any time (Rom. 13:11-13; 1Cor. 1:7; 16:22; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 10:24, 25; James 5:8; 1Jn. 2:18; Rev. 22:17, 20).

3. Heed Bible Warnings.

Take seriously the warnings of the Bible to help refrain from an attitude of careless living, false hopes, or callousness (Matt. 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-27; 1Thess. 5:1-12; 2Pet. 3:3-6).

4. Learn from Jesus' Parables.

There are countless parables that Jesus used to teach deep spiritual lessons about His coming (Matt. 25:1-51; Luke 19:11-27). Jesus was concerned about His disciples being taught truths about the kingdom of God but warned against speculative wishful thinking (Acts 1:1-8 vs. 6, 7).

5. Get focused with the unadulterated foursquare gospel.

The dominant theme of the disciples for preaching remained the four-square gospel - Jesus Christ the Savior, Healer, Baptizer into the Spirit's power and the soon coming King. Through this, they emphasized the need for a sanctified life and a kingdom business mindedness of the serving Spirit-filled believer. They never relented nor substituted anything else for the preaching of Jesus Christ. They knew that the Church would continue to be the only agent of the kingdom of God until her Rapture and that this gospel is the only way to gain entry into the *kingdom at all times* (John 3:1-7; Acts 1: 1-3, 6-8; 2:38, 39; 3:19; 5:42; 28:28-31; 1Cor. 15:1-5; Gal. 1:6-9).

