

Bible Study Series; Israel – God’s Super Sign of End Times

“Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days.” Dan. 10:14

Study 1. A Prelude to Prophecy

We will come to understand why God established Israel as the basis for the interpretation of Bible Prophecy. This will be evidenced in God’s Covenants with Israel and the progressive dispensations in God’s distinctive Programs with Israel and with the Church through the ages.

- Biblical Interpretation
- God’s Covenants with Israel
- Dispensations God’s Program for the Ages

Series on the Book of Daniel “The Impending Day of the Lord”

The Times of The Gentiles

The Revival of the Roman Empire

Daniel’s 69 weeks

The Church Age and Rapture before the 70th week

The Tribulation Israel’s 70th week

The Anti-Christ

The Rise of End Time Powers

Series Ezekiel “Revival, Return & Redemption”

The Dry Bones Revived Chapter 37

The Gog Magog Invasion Chapter 38

Mopping up after the Mayhem Chapter 39

Matthew 24,25

The Signs of the End of the Age, The Fulness of the Gentiles

Study of the Book of Revelation

Matthew 24:15 “spoken of by Daniel the prophet...whoso readeth, let him understand.” Jesus said the key to understanding end-time prophecy is to read and understand the prophecies of Daniel. Before we interpret Revelation, we need to understand those events prophesied in the Old Testament and interpret scripture by scripture.

Biblical Interpretation

Jesus established the foundation of Bible interpretation on the day of His resurrection on the road to Emmaus. “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). “The word here sometimes translated “interpreted” “expounded” - KJV, is the Greek word

diermeneuo...containing the root word from which our word hermeneutics is derived, meaning, then, the science of interpretation a science applied to the Word of God, which gives us understanding of revelation of God to men.”ⁱ

Referring to the same text about those two disciples, John C. Whitcomb Jr. of Grace Theological Seminary asked, “But can we ever know how Christ handled the Scriptures on the road to Emmaus? We can know because the scriptures give us numerous examples of His literal, grammatical-historical use of the Old Testament.”ⁱⁱ

Inspiration of Scripture

Jewish Awareness Ministries’ Statement of Faith concerning the Scriptures states “We believe the entire Bible, containing the 66 books from Genesis to Revelation, is the Word of God. We believe in verbal, plenary (written) inspiration of the Bible in its original documents. We believe that the Bible was written by holy men of God who spoke as they were moved/controlled by the Holy Spirit; therefore, it is inerrant and the supreme standard of authority by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions shall be tried. We believe that the Canon of Scripture is closed, and that any claims to

extra-biblical revelation are contrary to Scripture itself (Rev. 22:18,19). We are committed to the Bible as being our final authority in all matters of doctrine (faith) and practice.” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:19-21; 2 Peter 1:3; Psalm 119:7-11).

Methods of interpretation

In order to determine the normal, customary usages of biblical language, it is necessary to consider the accepted rules of grammar and rhetoric, as well as the factual historical and cultural data of biblical time periods. Therefore, the literal method of interpretation was also called the Grammatico-Historical method. Literal interpreters believe that scriptural revelation is given to be understood by man and that the Bible is “revelation, not a riddle.”

The birth of literal biblical exegesis and the formal exposition of God's word. “They expounded the law of Moses before the people from morning to mid-day” Nehemiah. 8:3

1. Literal or Figurative

Setting the literal over against the figurative is a serious misapprehension of the method. Everyone agrees that great literature properly uses both figurative and nonfigurative language. Literal interpretation properly accepts figurative language as normal and customary.

2. Literal or Spiritual

The false argument is that literal interpretation misses the spiritual element. Non-literal interpreters therefore like to call their method the “spiritual method” and the interpreter should penetrate behind the speech to the living spirit. They believe that the written records of scripture simply cannot contain all that is in the Spirit's mind, and that to interpret the words literally is to miss the true meaning of the Bible. Literal interpreters, of course, recognize the scripture contains spiritual truths. However, we do not get to know these spiritual truths through spiritualization. Spiritual truths are revealed as the written word of God. A literal interpretation of that which is written brings out these truths. Moreover, literal interpreters believe that the words of scripture are adequate in conveying all that God wants men to know. In Deuteronomy 29:29, Moses says “the secret things belong unto the Lord our God but **those things which are revealed** belong to us and to our children forever.” “To overstep and trespass the bounds of written revelation for that which is unrevealed and hidden in God is contrary to the teachings of scripture and mires the interpreter on uncertain ground.”ⁱⁱⁱ There are certain elements in the scriptures which appear as types and symbols. But these do not introduce a mystical element or a different sense into the interpretation of types and symbols.”

Opponents of the literal method

In early church history, there arose a group of interpreters known as allegorists. “They decreed that the hidden, deeper sense is the real one. Alexandrians and other church fathers practiced allegorizing to the hilt.”^{iv}

3. Brief history of allegorical interpretation

“A Rabbinic school developed which fanatically worshiped the bare letters of the law as potent as magic.”^v This led to the Kabbalah movement; using the numerical values assigned to Hebrew letters by the scribes to arrive at mystical interpretations from the letters, vowel points, etc.... of the words in the Hebrew Bible. This method also called *gematria* saw mystical relationships between words and concepts with the same numerical values assigned to them by the scribes. Rabbi Hillel, systematized seven hermeneutical rules of interpreting scripture. Although some of Hillel's rules were valid and sensible, most opened the floodgates to excessive allegorizing. The rival of Hillel was Rabbi Shammai, a formalist of the narrowest school. He interpreted every legal maximum with extremist-rigidity, while Hillel allowed modifying circumstances thus, Rabbi Hillel summarizes the entire law under the rule of love for one's neighbor. **Rabbi Akiva who claimed Shimone Bar Kochba Messiah, taught that a hidden meaning lies under every written peculiarity of the law. Therefore, the scriptures were forced to imply thousands of things which the original Bible writers certainly had never intended.**”^{vi} In the Egyptian city of Alexandria, Jewish religion and Greek philosophy were in daily and constant contact. Philo of Alexandria, a

philosophical Jew aimed to explore the mystical depths of significances allegedly concealed beneath the Old Testament scripture.

The allegorical method introduced by the Alexandrian Jews left deep and lasting scars on the study of scriptures. It lingered for more than 1500 years up to the time of the Reformation, and vestiges of it continue to the present. The observation of J. Dwight Pentecost is certainly apt: **“The allegorical method was not born out of the study of scriptures, but rather out of a desire to unite Greek philosophy and the word of God.”**^{vii} By the end of the 2nd century AD, the allegorizing of the early church fathers tended towards interpreting the Old Testament as a mysterious collection of isolated oracles all pointing to Christ. The early Church father, Justin Martyr, assumed that the Old Testament writers always spoke in mysteries, types, and oracles. Origen AD 185 – 254 embodied the allegorical method teaching that the Old and New Testaments contain unreasonable portions, and fables that did not take place. **Church father Augustine (AD 354-430) refined the approach of allegorical interpretation by limiting it to prophetic scriptures. This methodology is known as dualism, where non-prophetic scriptures are interpreted literally, while prophetic scriptures are interpreted allegorically. Unfortunately, Augustine's dualism was accepted into the Roman Catholic Church with little debate, and it was later adopted by Protestant reformers as well.** Augustine is best known among students of prophecy as the Father of Amillennialism. His view of the Millennium was incorporated into Roman Catholic theology. Augustine rejected the literal interpretation of the Millennium, viewing it as too materialistic and carnal. He taught that the Millennium should be understood spiritually, as fulfilled in the Christian Church. He rejected the millennial Kingdom as being earthly, but accepted the literality of the 1000 years of Revelation 20 and expected the second coming of Christ to appear around 650AD. This inconsistency is evidence that **the church fathers did not give reasonable exegesis to this subject of eschatology** (study of end times). John Calvin, in the preface to his commentary on the book of Romans, lays down the golden rule of interpretation: **“It is the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.”** **Unfortunately, however, the reformers refused to be involved in the issue of prophetic interpretation and so the whole of Protestantism went the way of Roman Catholic amillennialism and dualism by default.**^{viii} In the 18th century, John Augustus Ernesti taught the principle that **“the Bible must be rigidly explained according to its own language.... It must neither be bribed by an external authority of the church nor by our own feeling, nor by a sportive and allegorizing fancy.”** His classic work, Principles of the New Testament Interpretation, was used as the standard text by generations of students of hermeneutics. Charles C. Ryrie in his book The Basis of the Pre-millennial Faith wrote, **“the disagreement is in the interpretation of prophecy.”**^{ix}

Why interpret prophecy literally? *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* tells of Alice going down a rabbit hole where she stumbled into a world of fantasy, make-believe, and enigma. When the Bible interpreter steps into the prophetic portions of the scripture, has he entered a world of make-believe, conundrums, and enigmas?

Fourfold reason for the literal interpretation of prophecy (by P. L. Tan)

1. Scriptural authority

In Luke 10:25-26 a lawyer asked Christ, “what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” In reply our Lord asks two questions: **“What is written in the law? How readiest thou?”** From Christ response, we may infer that the written word read at face value is adequate. In Matthew 24: 15 Jesus referred to Daniel the prophet and said, “whosoever **readeth let him understand.**” The concentrated interpreter is never commanded to plumb the unrevealed, hidden depths of God. He is simply required to comprehend and understand that which God has chosen to reveal. As Moses puts it so clearly, “the secret things belong unto the lord our God but **those things which are revealed** belong unto us and our children forever.” (Deut. 29: 29)

2. Historical fulfillments

The only way to know how God will fulfill prophecy in the future, observes Charles Feinberg, is to ascertain how he has done it in the past. Sir Robert Anderson of Scotland Yard, “making a scientific study of prophetic

fulfillments in scripture, reports: there is not a single prophecy, of which the fulfillment is recorded in scripture, that was not realized with absolute accuracy. And in every detail; And it is wholly unjustifiable to assume that a new system of fulfillment was inaugurated after the sacred canon was closed.”^x

A. Messianic prophecies

the virgin birth Isaiah 7:14; the betrayal of Christ for 30 pieces of silver Zachariah 11:12-13;
the crucifixion scene Psalm 22:16-18

B. Prophecies concerning ancient lands

destruction of Babylon Isaiah 13: 19-21, Jeremiah 51: 26, 43
the destruction of Tyre Ezekiel 26: 3-16

C. Restoration of the nation of Israel

Because of the obvious nature of this fulfillment, non-literal interpreters are divided on what to make out of the restored nation of Israel. Some interpreters concede the fulfillment, saying: if Israel's return ... is compared with prophecy, **we may say that this present-day return would seem to be a literal fulfillment of prophecy.**” - Martin Jacob Weingarten in The Future of the Kingdom in Prophecy and Fulfillment. **Other interpreters** such as John Wilmot, **refused to concede by explaining the phenomenon as a modern day name change: today a resettled people has assumed the title of Israel and applies it also to their country or state, but obviously the Israel first mentioned in this text is a specialized Israel the only entitlement to the name Israel is from spiritual relationship to Jesus Christ.**”^{xi}

3. Early Church precedent

There are at least 2 main early church beliefs which attest to the fact that the early Christians interpreted prophecy literally. These two beliefs are A. the imminent return of Christ and 2. the earthly reign of Christ. Philip Schaff in his History of the Christian Church wrote the most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age is the prominent Millenarianism, that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory then ruling on the earth with the risen Saints for 1000 years, before the general resurrection and judgment. ^{xii} Regarding the imminent return of Christ, **the early church believed that the coming of the Lord was imminent.** The doctrine of imminency means that **Christ may come at any moment** and that **no prophesied event stands between Christians and that hour. A common greeting of the early church was “Maranatha”** or the Lord is coming 1 Corinthians 16:22. Even the non-literal interpreter Murray admits that the early church definitely believed in the second coming of Jesus Christ, and seemed to cherish the convention that his coming was imminent.

Detractors of pre-tribulationism (Rapture) argue that the early Christians could not possibly have expected to the Lord to come at any moment for the Bible. The key passage usually cited is John 21:18-19 where Jesus tells Peter about his death. Critics argue that as long as Peter was still alive, the early believers would surely not have expected the Lord's imminent return. In reply, it must be pointed out that this text in the Gospel of John was written some 20 years after Peter's death. There were no grounds therefore for the early believers' use of this text to deny the Lord's imminent return. The early Christians expected their Lord to come during their lifetime, the lifetime of John 21:20-23. In Acts 12: 15- 16 the early believers including Peter himself expected that he would die that very night under the hands of Herod who had just killed James. Peter could have died suddenly without most people knowing it. The early church therefore was not waiting for the death of Peter but for the imminent return of our Lord. **The early church's doctrine of the coming of Christ must therefore have been pre-millennial, if eminent, then pre-tribulational.**^{xiii} Another illustration of pre-tribulationism may be found in Irenaeus' Book Against Heresies. Describing the sinfulness of the present age, the church father Irenaeus comments: “Therefore, when in the end the church shall be suddenly caught up from this evil age, it is said, there shall be tribulations such as was not since the beginning; Neither shall be.” The doctrines of the pre-tribulation rapture like many Bible doctrines come from the thorough exegesis of scripture, not by polling the fathers. In summary, we note that **the early church was pre-millennial and pre-Tribulational in her doctrine because she interpreted prophecy literally. Moreover, the early church expected the imminent return of the Lord, and this is the product of the literal interpretation of prophecy.**

4. Logical necessity When Alexandrian church fathers left the sure footing of the literal interpretation of scripture in favor of the allegorical method, a runaway situation resulted. Taking flight from the little literal word, every father became virtually an authority to himself, and the sky was the limit. Among non-literal and prophetic interpreters, there existed a state of virtual interpretive chaos. It is rare, for instance, to see a well-ordered and definitive work by an amillennial interpreter setting forth positively and consistently his prophetic

interpretations. On the contrary, Amillennial writings usually concentrate on attacking and ridiculing the premillennial position. This approach is probably one of necessity, for Amillennialists seldom agree with each other in specific interpretations of prophecy except to be against the earthly millennium. **Whether it is the interpretation of prophecy or non-prophecy, once literality is sacrificed, it is like starting down an incline.** Momentum speedily gathers as one succumbs to the temptation to spiritualize one passage after another. All objectivity is lost as one method of interpretation appears disappears and reappears under the whims of the interpreter. Practical consideration demands that the literal method of interpretation be used for all scripture.

Principles of prophetic interpretation by P.L. Tan

The most important reason for the revelation of prophecy is to authenticate and glorify the God of Israel as the only true God. Secondly, it is a test to prove whether the prophet is true and is sent by God or is false and motivated by his own devices, or even worse an agent of Satan to deceive. Deut. 18:18-20; Jer. 23:21

1. Follow customary usage of language.
2. Commit no historical - cultural blunder.
3. Make Christ central in all interpretations. (rather than the church)
4. Be conscious of context.
5. Interpret by the analogy of faith.
6. Recognize the progress of revelation .
7. Grant one interpretation to each passage.
8. Choose the simplest alternative.

Tan adds – “View all prophecy primarily in the context of Israel to whom it was granted, secondly, only to the Church when the context specifically determines it and thirdly to the Gentiles only in relation to Israel. The substitution of the Church for Israel comes from the failure to see Israel as the medium and object of God’s plan through the ages and is an abandonment of the principle of literal interpretation for the allegorical method of interpretation.”

The resurgence of Reformed/Covenant Theology (replacement of Israel with the Church/ relabeled renewal theology)

According to reform.org “Three basic eschatological views are held by those calling themselves “Reformed.” These are: postmillennialism, amillennialism, and historic premillennialism. **Absent from the list is dispensational premillennialism because it is a view that (a) is incompatible with the doctrines of grace (b) compromises God’s aseity, and (c) compromises God’s sovereignty.** Also incompatible with the doctrines of grace are views that require two resurrections in light of a supposed secret rapture. Below are included some critiques of different aspects of dispensationalist teaching” (by Reformed Theologians).^{xiv}

Concerning the Kingdom prophecies in the Old Testament

Covenant theologians confirmed that the church, being the successor of Israel, has appropriated all these prophecies. The church is the new form of the Kingdom. No other fulfillment in the future, earthly Kingdom is to be expected. As theologian Archibald A. Hodge says, the Kingdom of Christ has already come. The Old Testament prophecies, therefore, any which predict this Kingdom, **must refer to the present dispensation of grace and not to a future reign of Christ on earth in person among men in the flesh.** In Outlines of Theology Concerning the Nation of Israel, covenant theologians maintain that Israel is now cast aside because she crucified the Messiah and is now **no more special to God than any other nation on earth.** John Willmott in his book Inspired Principles of Prophetic Interpretation, states: “**Jews, racially, naturally, outwardly, are not now in God’s esteem, the seed or children of Abraham, any more than Ishmael and Esau; the Israel nation, service to God, and the world ceased with the coming of Christ.**”

Paul Lee Tan summarizes. **“Covenant theologians hand the Old Testament promises over to the church, and leave the threats and curses often found in the same Old Testament text behind for Israel. The church is said to be enjoying the blessings recorded in the prophecy, while the Jews collect all its curses.** For the unbelieving Jews there are prophecies ...to be literally fulfilled. These promises are of wrath and of judgment, of being scattered among the nations of the world. Nothing but wrath and destruction awaits the race unless they turn to Christ.

No wonder George H. Peters clamors for honesty in this regard: **“The curse is pronounced, or all carefully heaped upon them the Jews severally and shown their case to be sadly realized, while the blessings promised to the identically same nation and city ie... Israel and Jerusalem are taken from them and carefully bestowed upon the gentile churches. Is this honest to the record?”** he asked.”^{xv} While the church age is in progress, Israel is not cast aside but only temporarily set aside in the sense of having a Kingdom: God's promises to Israel are held in abeyance and not canceled.

Acts 7:38 is one of the verses that Covenant Theologians use to prove that Israel is synonymous with and pre dating the Acts 2 Church. **“This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness** with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and *with* our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us.” First of all, when Jesus said “I will build my church was spoken in future tense. No “church” preceded Him. In Acts 11:15 Peter referred to the church “at the beginning” meaning at Pentecost in Acts 2. “Church” in Acts 7:38 is from the Greek word *ekklesia*. It is used in Acts 19:32 of an “assembly of Greeks in the theater in Ephesus who were chanting “Great is Dianna goddess of the Ephesians.” They were certainly not the church. Acts 7:38 is simply referring to the assembly of the Jews in the wilderness.

Notice that even after the church begins at Pentecost, the Apostle Paul still sees the nation Israel as an entity distinct from the Christian church **“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God” (1 Corinthians 10: 32). During the Church Age or Dispensation of Grace there still exists these three distinct categories.** Paul prays for the Jews, Romans 10:1, because they are still unbelievers, although they have the covenants and the promises Romans 10: 4-5. The Apostle Peter continues to address Israel's distinct national people even after the church has begun Acts 3:12; 4:8. Therefore, it is right to maintain that the promises of God to Israel and the Old Testament have not been appropriated by the church, but that Israel will be restored to fulfill the promises made to her.”

Therefore, this series on Prophecy, **Israel – God’s Super Sign of End Times** is based on the 4 unconditional Covenants of Israel which we will cover in Study #2. Then we will study the framework of interpretation through the progressive revelation of scripture through the ages or Dispensations. We will interpret literally without spiritualizing or allegorizing, while strictly following God’s interpretation of the symbols throughout the remainder of the canon of scripture. Where scripture remains silent on the symbols it is wise that we remain silent as to the mysteries that belong only to God.

ⁱ Protestant Biblical Interpretation, Bernard Ramm, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1970, p xiii

ⁱⁱ The Interpretation of Prophecy, Paul Lee Tan, Assurance Publishers, Winona Lake, Indiana, 1976, P 19,20

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., pp33,34.

^{iv} Ibid page 38

^v Ibid page 40

^{vi} Ibid page 43,44

^{vii} Ibid page 47, 48

^{viii} Ibid page 50-54

^{ix} Ibid page 58

^x Ibid page 62

^{xi} Ibid page 66

^{xii} Ibid page 67

^{xiii} Ibid page 70, 71

^{xiv} <https://reformed.org/eschatology/>

^{xv} Ibid page 250-251