

# HOW TO STUDY BIBLE PROPHECY

TIM LAHAYE

*Prophecy is God's roadmap to show us where history is going. The Bible's predictions claim literal and specific fulfillments that verify that such prophecies are indeed from God. The key to interpreting Bible prophecy is in discerning what is literal and what is symbolic. Therefore, the best way to avoid confusion in the study of prophetic scripture is to follow these simple directions:*

INTERPRET PROPHECY LITERALLY WHEREVER POSSIBLE. God meant what He said and said what He meant when He inspired "holy men of God [who] spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21) to write the Bible. Consequently we can take the Bible literally most of the time. Where God intends for us to interpret symbolically, He makes it obvious. One of the reasons the book of Revelation is difficult for some people to understand is that they try to spiritualize the symbols used in the book. However, since many Old Testament prophecies have already been literally fulfilled,

such as God turning water to blood (Ex. 4:9; 7:17-21), it should not be difficult to imagine that future prophetic events can and will be literally fulfilled at the appropriate time. Only when symbols or figures of speech make absolutely no literal sense, should anything but a literal interpretation be sought.

*PROPHECIES CONCERNING ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH SHOULD NOT BE TRANSPOSED. The promises of God to Israel to be fulfilled "in the latter days," particularly those concerning Israel's punishment during the Tribulation have absolutely nothing to do with the Church. The Bible gives specific promises for the Church that she will be raptured into heaven before the Tribulation (John 14:2-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).*

FOR SYMBOLIC PASSAGES, COMPARE SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE. The Bible is not contradictory. Even though written by numerous, divinely inspired men over a period of 1600 years, it is supernaturally consistent in its use of terms. For example, the word "beast" is used 37 times in Revelation and many other times in scripture. Daniel explains that the word is symbolic of either a

king or kingdom (see Dan. 7-8). By examining the contexts in Revelation and Daniel, you will find that "beast" has the same meaning in both books. Many other symbols used in Revelation are also taken directly from the Old Testament. These include "the tree of life" (Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14), "the Book of Life" (Rev. 3:5ff.), and Babylon (Rev. 14:8ff. ).

Some symbols in Revelation are drawn from other New Testament passages. These include terms such as "the Word of God" (1:2, 9ff), "Son of man" (1:13; 14:14), "marriage supper" (19:9), "the bride" (21:9; 22:17), "first resurrection" (20:5-6), and "second death" (2:11; 20:6; 14; 21:8). Other symbols in Revelation are explained and identified in their context. For example "the Alpha and Omega" represents Jesus Christ (1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13); the "seven lamp stands" (1:13, 20) are the seven churches; the "dragon" is Satan (12:13ff); and the "man child" is Jesus (12:5, 13).

Though some prophetic passages should be interpreted symbolically, it is important to remember that symbols in the Bible depict real people, things, and events. For example, the "seven lamp stands" in Revelation 1 represent real churches that actually existed when the prophecy was given.

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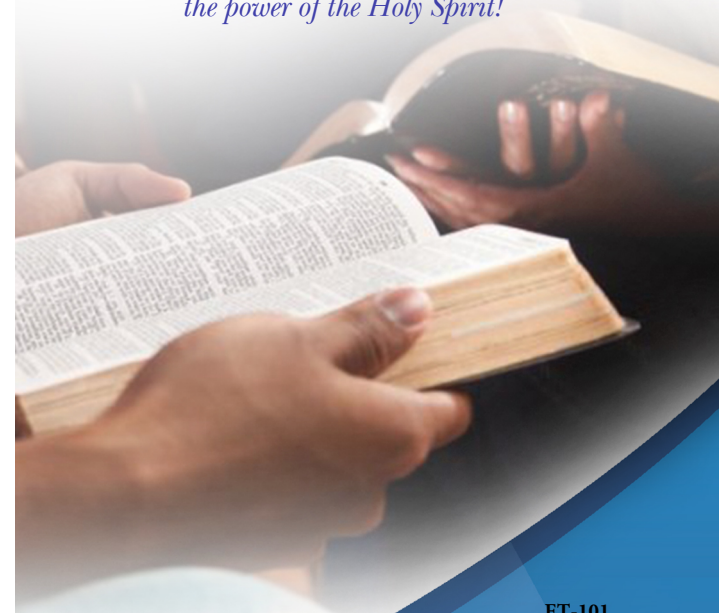
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