

FINDING THE END
OF THE WORLD

BY RON BRALEY

ISBN

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Many of my fellow human beings have also been instrumental in the creation and development of this wonderful product. It would've been difficult if not impossible to do without several key participants. I'd like to thank them personally. Most significantly, I'd like to acknowledge Christopher Sellers and the part he played in birthing this book. I'm convinced my family would never have realized the benefit of having me as the spiritual leader of our household had he not challenged my lack of biblical understanding and faith. This study guide certainly would have never materialized, and I would have remained lost! Christopher: Thank you! My prayer is that you'll always be blessed for changing my life and potentially the lives of whoever reads this text.

Next, my heart bursts with affection and gratitude for Joanne, my beautiful bride of 27 years. Her love, patience, support, and feedback have paved the way for God to do this work through me. Had it not been for her gentle nudges and encouragement, I'm sure I would've given up on this difficult undertaking long ago. What a blessing she has been! Joanne: I love you and am looking forward to whatever God has next for us!

I'd also like to thank my children, who've had to listen to what probably seemed like a million hours of my ramblings on this subject over the years. Most significantly, I'm very grateful to my daughter Tiffany, who did a wonderful job of tackling this project from the perspective of a devoted student. Her input and feedback have proven invaluable to fine-tuning this teaching tool. And spending time with her in working on this was fun!

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A very special thank you goes to my friend and pastor, Mr. Ron Almberg. There's absolutely no way this writing could have succeeded without him. I can't imagine the countless hours he spent editing this document and providing feedback and accountability. Ron: Thank you for your selfless contribution in helping me in this endeavor. I'm sure God will greatly reward your efforts!

Finally, I'd like to thank Rick Meyers, creator of E-Sword, for his wonderful donation-based study tool. I'm sure he's gone through great efforts to produce this powerful Scripture toolbox, building something that can turn seemingly impossible and time-consuming tasks into simple jobs that can be done in seconds. I suspect I'd still be working on Chapter Four if not for his wonderful gift to the world.

FOREWORD

Our world as we know it will end suddenly one day. But God's incredibly destructive wrath and a gathering of those faithful to Christ will come first. You and I will be in one of two groups if this happens in our lifetime: those gathered before the destruction begins, or the rest who'll suffer the wrath of God and eternal torment. No other options exist. Following a misguided church tradition and believing in false doctrine can cause a lack of faith based on a misunderstanding of the gospel, placing one in the latter group. Also, being ignorant of what God has already told us about the end of time by not exposing ourselves to gospel teaching about it can result in the same outcome.

The objective of this study is to help you avoid the destruction and torment mentioned above by accomplishing several goals:

- Guide you through as much Scripture as possible dealing with Christ's return so that you can make your own informed decision about what it teaches.
- Offer insight into existing end-times theories to examine where they may get it right or wrong.
- Teach you how to study Scripture so that you'll have a basic foundation for reading and studying it on your own.

Additional rewards I hope you'll gain from going through this study:

- Increased knowledge of Christ's return. This will reduce confusion and help keep you from being vulnerable to false doctrine.
- Motivation to become a spiritual leader in your home or community.
- Able to study God's Word more effectively.
- Stronger faith through learning the gospel.

While I don't intend to push a particular end-times view, the circumstances surrounding Christ's return – and certainly His actual coming – will become clearer and relatively easy to understand. Of course, whether this happens as advertised will depend on your approach to studying the topic and related Scripture. If you're like I was in my earlier spiritual journey, you may have already adopted your church's end-times doctrine (probably without question). In my experience, a pre-tribulation rapture position seems to be most prevalent – at least with evangelical churches in the United States. This is what I believed. Again, it's what my church doctrine reflected. My desire is to share with you my subsequent discoveries in the Scripture, and to provide you with the tools to do your own study and build your own faith.

Why am I so passionate about this topic? Until 1998, I was a statistic – one of 95% of Christians who don't read God's Word on a regular basis. Most of my biblical knowledge had come only from others. I was playing scriptural "Russian roulette," taking what some pastors and a few other well-meaning souls said as "gospel" in regards to end-times events. This was a great mistake and very dangerous. Why? What I learned later through my own study of Scripture was that much of what I believed concerning the end times resulted from misinterpretations, misunderstandings, personal or hidden agendas, or incomplete Scripture references taken out of context. But what did I know? I had no idea of what I *didn't* know, so I was very content.

There's danger in being scripturally illiterate. The Bible makes it very clear that our faith is strengthened from hearing the gospel, which is the good news of Jesus Christ's accomplishments in His first coming and the promise of His second coming. However, if what we know or believe is contrary to it, then our faith can be false or nonexistent. According to Scripture, we know there'll be a falling away from the faith and great deception of believers in the last days (cf. 1 Timothy 4:1, for instance). The lack of faith – or a faulty foundation built on false teaching – will open the door to allow this to happen. Conversely, I strongly believe that those who

study Scripture and history carefully, while asking for God’s Holy Spirit to give them wisdom, will have a strong faith and won’t easily be tricked or confused.

So there I was in 1998 – full of bliss and of little faith until I started studying God’s Word after being challenged by a friend. In this particular case, he revealed my misunderstandings about Christ’s return, which was based on partial verses such as “*Pray to be found worthy to escape,*” or “*Jesus will come back like a thief.*” Angered at first (no one likes being wrong!) I told him I’d prove the end-of-the-world theory I believed. After all, there had to be a good reason why so many people believed as I did.

After about 90 days of extensive Internet research, bugging pastors about why they believed what they believed, and sporadic Bible searches, I had to go back to my friend empty-handed and admit there was a problem and that I needed to become more knowledgeable. This humbling experience changed my life forever. I became the spiritual leader in my home and began daily devotions with my family. I also began building and strengthening my faith through regular study of God’s Word and was relentless in my pursuit of the truth regarding Christ’s return.

During this time, I found that no one could (or would) present a valid defense of their end-times belief based upon Scripture. Out of frustration, some people (including pastors) would say, “It doesn’t matter what you believe about the rapture anyway as long as you’re saved.” I accepted this at first. However, I understood it to be a false sentiment after learning more about the signs surrounding Christ’s return to earth and the subsequent gathering.

God’s Word teaches us there’ll be a falling away from the faith and a great deception of believers in the last days. We’re also taught that the “chosen of God” will undergo persecution and possibly death during a period of extreme trouble. If you’re having difficulty with these ideas, I encourage you to be patient and follow along in this study. I believe you’ll come to the same conclusion despite

what you think you may already know about “the falling away,” “the great deception,” “the time of extreme trouble,” “the rapture,” or “the chosen of God.” And even if you don’t, you’ll have the personal satisfaction of knowing you studied it for yourself and came to your own conclusions.

Passionate about teaching others to read and understand Scripture and learn the truth about many false church teachings (like several current end-times theories), I created a pamphlet, which turned into a larger document, which then turned into an Internet study, which . . . well, you get the idea. This project has grown considerably and been met with open arms by people just like me who for many years were ignorant of God’s Word and had little faith. Since 1998, I’ve devoted well over 3,000 hours to researching, reading about, writing, thinking about, discussing, and teaching this very important topic. It’s my pleasure to share the results with you.

Here’s a brief overview of what we’ll study together:

End-of-the-age prophecies: Preview of what the Bible has to say about the end of our world as we know it.

How to study Scripture: Important preparation for your study! Yes, there’s more to understanding God’s Word than just reading it.

History of the Jews: From the time of Abraham to the present. It also includes the end-of-the world visions of prophets like Daniel and Ezekiel.

End-times terminology: Common end-of-the-age terms and supporting Scripture.

The big picture: Beginning with a review of prophecy and a look at what Jesus, Peter, and Paul had to say about this subject. You’ll also do an in-depth study of the Revelation given to John by Jesus.

End-times theories: Insight into existing views related to Christ's return.

Please review the Study Plan in APPENDIX A if you're interested in establishing an individual structured plan or if you'll be leading a group study. You're welcome, and encouraged, to take all the time you need to go through the course comfortably – the plan and templates are only loose guidelines and certainly not binding. Head to the *Introduction* afterward for basic tips that will help you make the most of your end-of-the-world education.

My sincere wish is that your life (and that of others around you) will be forever changed in a positive way, just as mine was, after going through this study.

With heartfelt gratitude and best wishes,

Ron Braley
endoftheworld@FindingRevelation.com

INTRODUCTION

Before embarking on your new adventure, I'd like to talk about a couple of fundamental concepts related to this study and offer a few tips that will help you make the most of your time and make it more enjoyable.

First and foremost, there's nothing more important than the hope and expectation of Christ's return and the salvation that awaits those who are His. He will return as promised despite the fact that we don't always agree on the timing or sequence of events surrounding His second coming. If you don't know Christ or haven't yet accepted Him as the way to God, I encourage you to take what you'll learn in Chapter Seven of this guide to heart. Accepting the gift of Christ will change your life forever.

Second, since the title of this guide is *Finding the End of the World*, I guess we should define what *world*, or *age*, is and when it will end.

The Greek word for *age* or *world* is *aiōn* (ahee-ohn') and it represents an era. Most verses in our study related to *age* or *world* use that Greek word to depict the *current* era. We're in the last days as evidenced by the writings of Jesus and Paul, but the end of the current era/world/age won't occur until after the following events have passed: appearance of the Antichrist, three-and-a-half-year Great Tribulation, God's wrath, Christ's kingdom, and the great judgment. We'll certainly delve deeper into these things in the coming chapters. You may also want to preview the index of end-times terminology in Appendix B.

On the subject of the actual study, you may be asking yourself, "Which Bible translation should I use when reading the references?" I encourage the use of the King James Bible or NASB (New American Standard Bible) and discourage use of the NIV (New International Version) Bible. All Scripture quoted in this book came from the

NASB unless otherwise noted, and is presented in italicized text. Boldfacing in Scripture quotes was applied solely by me for the purpose of highlighting.

Use what you feel comfortable with, but please know there are differences between translations; the NIV, in my opinion, contains significant omissions and modifications that could negatively affect your study. Here's one source of many you can query if you're curious about NIV challenges: trinitarianbiblesociety.com/site/articles/NIV.asp. I tend to compare Scripture through multiple translations when researching important issues. You may wish to do the same. I can't imagine the agony translators must experience when trying to convert writings into equivalent meanings in other languages! Cross-examining English texts can give a person a better understanding of what the source is trying to communicate.

We'll take a literal approach to studying the Scriptures. We'll also consider Scripture references in context and take them at face value whenever possible, allowing the use of symbolism only where the interpretation is obvious. We'll also make sure we search and compare all Scripture and history (where known) to ensure we assign accurate meaning to those symbols.

I need to stress at this point that Jesus was very clear about the need to keep His Revelation to John intact, unchanged, and heeded by believers. I'm passionate about helping you do just that through this study. Toward that end, I've divided key areas into sections, or themes, and supported those themes through detail provided in section chapters.

- **PART ONE: Setting the Stage.** This section provides insight into why this topic is so important to learn – and learn correctly. It also includes a summary of what Scripture has to say about the sequence of the end of the world to help stimulate and keep your interest in this program.
- **PART TWO: Faith & Foundation - How to Study Effectively.**

Discover the true meaning of faith and how to obtain and keep it through effective study of the Word of God. Much of this section deals with study tools and proper methods of scriptural interpretation.

- **PART THREE: The Cast, Crew, & Props.** By far the longest and most intense theme, this portion of the program goes to great lengths to help you find out as much about end-of-the-world players as possible. You'll learn about the Antichrist, False Prophet, Harlot Babylon, those who will be beheaded for their faith, and much more through an exhaustive study of Scripture.
- **PART FOUR: Revelation & Insight.** This section offers something of a guided tour through apocalyptic literature written by Old Testament prophets like Daniel and Ezekiel, New Testament apostles such as Peter and Paul, and our Lord Jesus Christ. We'll cover the biblical books of Daniel and the Revelation in addition to highlighting what Jesus, Peter, Paul, and others had to say about the end of the world. You'll have seen many of these Scripture references by now. However, this particular theme will help you build a complete and accurate picture of what the end will look like through an unveiling of what each writer had to say on the subject. You'll be amazed at how the prophecies and apocalyptic writings corroborated and supported each other even though they were written tens or hundreds of years apart.
- **PART FIVE: Putting It All Together.** Compare and contrast different end-times viewpoints. By this time you should have gained considerable knowledge and insight into this subject and therefore should be able to look at what others think about this subject objectively. Finally, firm up what we've learned together by reviewing all previous sections.

Each part is broken down into chapters and subtopics. Chapters provide the background and support for section themes. I've bulleted

headings and topics to make it easier to follow the points and find Scripture references. Guidance with regard to chapter components:

RECOMMENDED READING: You'll find them at the beginning of some of the topics (within Chapter Twelve, for instance). Please read or review them before continuing with the study.

SUPPLEMENTAL READING: These are related to chapter topics and will provide a lot more background and proof texts than the narrative alone. Not every chapter will have SUPPLEMENTAL READING, but you'll find them at the end of the chapter for those that do.

✓ **Quick Reference:** I've often broken up topics into smaller units and put supporting Scripture into a Quick Reference that follows. You'll also find them at the beginning of topics in some cases. Please read them to enhance your study session.

CHECKUP QUESTIONS: These are meant to check your understanding of what was covered in the chapter and provoke additional thoughts and questions to elevate your learning to a higher level.

May you be blessed as you begin your study with PART ONE – Setting the Stage.

PART ONE

SETTING THE STAGE

CHAPTER ONE

WHY WORRY ABOUT THIS?

Being uninformed is never a good thing and can be dangerous – especially if it leads to ignorance of things related to Christ – past, present, or future. Getting some biblical things wrong or ignoring certain spiritual truths altogether can be deadly. Stiff penalties and great judgment can await those who allow themselves to be misled through false teaching. Will it matter that they’re just taking in what they’ve been taught (e.g. through church tradition)? No! Ignorance is no excuse. Those who aren’t confirming what they’re being told risk taking in false teaching, which could open the door to spiritual destruction.

For instance, in the Revelation given to the apostle John we’re told that those taking the mark or name of a dreadful worldwide ruler (you’ll learn later that this is the Antichrist) during his reign of terror will be blotted from the Book of Life and suffer God’s wrath. I’ve heard at least one person claim they’ll take that mark because God will understand the need for them to feed their families since those NOT taking this mark will have a tough time buying or selling goods during the Great Tribulation. Apparently this individual is ignorant of the warning against taking the mark and of the consequences mentioned in Scripture. Also, we’re told true believers during that terrible time won’t “*love their lives so much as to shrink from death*” (Revelation 12:11). Those who truly love Christ and follow Him will love Him more than earthly treasures or even their own lives.

Another unfortunate side-effect to scriptural ignorance is inability or difficulty in preaching the gospel to others. Christ admonished us to “*make disciples of all nations.*” Doing this will be hard if not impossible if we don’t know what we believe or why.

But why is learning what the Bible has to say about the end times important? The topic of the end of the world is discussed extensively

in Old and New Testament Scriptures. Most of the Old Testament prophets revealed end-times information. Jesus and several New Testament apostles did too (Appendix B contains most related Scripture references). Apparently, God feels it should be important to us! As such, the Bible contains plenty of clues and signs to teach us about the end-times sequence of events.

Jesus gave us signs to watch for in advance of His return. The apostle Paul reiterated a couple of those when he reminded Jew and Gentile Christians in Thessalonica that Christ wouldn't appear and gather believers to Himself until after a falling away from the faith and after the Antichrist enters the temple and exalts himself above God. Other signs that will precede Christ's return include an increase in false messiahs, violence, famines, and earthquakes.

You're probably saying to yourself, "Alright already! Answer the question: Why is this end-times stuff so important?" I hope that by reading the above scenarios, you've begun to understand that having the wrong answer to the right question or not knowing anything at all can be spiritually risky. In the case of the end of the world, it can be downright deadly. Not knowing what to expect with regard to the time of the end could cause:

1. Confusion, hatred of God, and falling away from the faith by those who erroneously believe they'll be removed from earth before the Great Tribulation (wrath of the Antichrist).
2. Suffering God's wrath. Again, accepting this "mark" of the Antichrist to save ourselves will result in a loss of salvation and the suffering of God's wrath, which will be poured out on the rest of the world after true believers have been gathered.
3. Inability to witness effectively before or during that time (how can we preach what we don't know?).

While doing research for this study guide, I've heard many lighthearted responses such as, "I'm a pan-tribber – it will all pan out in the end." Or, "It doesn't matter what you believe about the return of Christ as long as you're saved." Let's be clear: this

scriptural teaching matters and things WON'T just pan out in the end! As stated above, there'll be a falling away from the faith and deception in the end – most likely made possible by shaky faith built from false doctrine and a lack of knowledge of God's Word. It's important to note here that false doctrine and lack of knowledge, and the shaky faith that follows, will result in a misunderstanding of other doctrines of the faith as well, not just eschatology (study of end-times events).

Some have discouraged Christians from studying the writings of biblical prophets like Daniel and Ezekiel or the Revelation given by Jesus. Why? In my experience, it's because they believe Christians will already be in heaven before events portrayed within those prophecies or the Revelation begin. As a result, they're sure none of it will apply to them anyway. There's no biblical support for this point of view. What will proponents of that end-times position feel after believing they'll be whisked off the earth before the events foretold by Jesus unfold, but things don't work out that way? Perhaps betrayed or abandoned. Or they may believe there's no God since things didn't work out the way they thought they would and that no good God would let people suffer the way they will during the Great Tribulation. Again, this certainly opens the door to a possibility of falling away from faith in Christ and the hope we place in Him.

Confusion. Deception. Walking away from the faith. Spiritual and physical death. All of these are possible outcomes of not knowing God's Word – the end-of-the-world Scripture, in our case. Let's avoid destruction and confusion by digging in and becoming more knowledgeable of what God, His prophets, and His Son had to say about this extremely important topic.

In the next chapter, we'll whet your appetite by previewing the end-of-the-world picture you'll study in great detail later.

SUPPLEMENTAL READING (Either the KJV or NASB version of the Bible is recommended; read at least three verses before and after scriptural references to understand the context better):

1. Falling away from the faith in the last days:
 - a. Matthew 24:10
 - b. 2 Thessalonians 2:3
 - c. 1 Timothy 4:1
2. Being deceived:
 - a. Matthew 24:4, 5, 11, & 24
 - b. Mark 13:5 & 6
 - c. Luke 21:8
 - d. 2 Timothy 3:13 – 17
3. Consequences of false teaching:
 - a. Jeremiah 14:14 & 15
 - b. Jeremiah 23:32 – 34
 - c. Zechariah 10:2
 - d. Matthew 7:15-19
 - e. 2 Peter 2:1 – 10
 - f. Revelation 2:20 – 22
4. Warned to be watchful for Christ's return:
 - a. Matthew 24:37-51
 - b. Mark 13:32-37
 - c. Luke 12:35-46; 17:26 & 27; 21:28-36
 - d. 1 Thessalonians 5:2-23
 - e. 2 Timothy 4:1-4 and 3:1-3
 - f. 2 Peter 3:10-18
 - g. Revelation 3:3; 16:15
5. Consequences of taking the “mark of the beast”: Revelation 13:16; 14:9 & 11; 16:2; 19:20
6. Revelation – for the church: Revelation 1:1; 22:9 & 16

CHAPTER TWO

A GLIMPSE OF THE END

It would be really boring to make you wait until you've learned study tools, terminology, history, etc., before getting to the meat – the end-of-the-world Scripture. So, to build and keep your interest, we'll spend some time previewing what Scripture has to say about the times of the end. But please allow me to present a brief disclaimer first.

There are several end-times views and differences of opinion within each major view. All have some valid points. It's unlikely a reader will agree on every statement made in this guide or anywhere else for that matter. So let's agree to play nicely and remain open to instruction and correction from God's Word. Please read the entire text carefully along with all related Scripture, even if you hold to a view that isn't in alignment with this study.

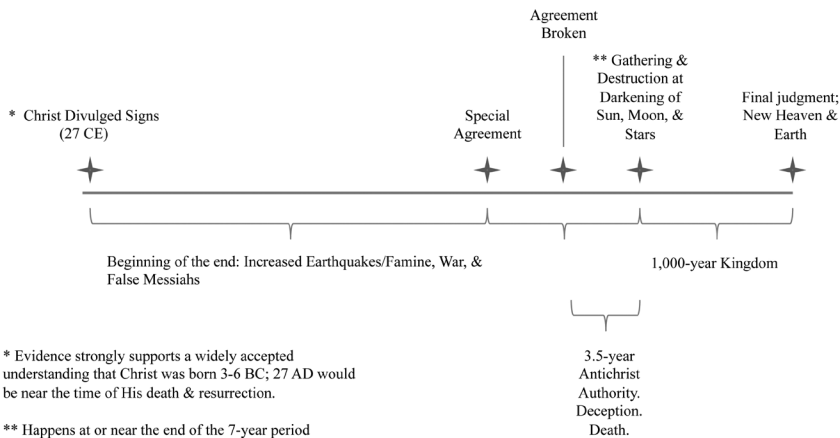
So what is the "end"? According to Jesus, it will be the conclusion of this current age with the great judgment preceding the creation of a new heaven and earth. According to the apostle Paul, we're already in the "last days" leading up to the very end. The following is a preview of the end times in a nutshell along with a brief description of each major section it comprises. I promise we'll cover these subjects in greater detail. Everything addressed will be based on Scripture and historical evidence.

- End (or last) days:
 - Began with Christ's ascension into heaven.
 - Includes signs such as increasing violence and earthquakes.
 - Will climax with a three-and-a-half-year time of great trouble, gathering of believers, wrath of God against the rest of the world (destruction), and reign of Christ on earth.

- End of the world (age): Conclusion of this age at the great judgment preceding the creation of a new heaven and earth.

The diagram and explanations below will shed more light on these landmark events.

2.1 Abbreviated Timeline



Beginning of the end: Christ forewarned that symptoms of the end such as false messiahs, wars, and earthquakes and famine will occur with greater intensity and frequency as the end draws near. As a result, He called them “birth pangs,” but they wouldn’t necessarily indicate the very end had arrived. According to the Old Testament prophet Daniel, a seven-year period (or a week of years) remains to usher in Christ’s kingdom, end sin, and bring everlasting righteousness. An “agreement” between Israel and others will start that seven-year period. Again, this will happen just before the end when there’ll be an increase in violence, earthquakes, and deception. We know nothing about how the first three and a half years of the seven-year timeframe will go, but the Bible has plenty to say about the last half as you’ll learn later.

✓ Quick reference:

- False messiahs: Matthew 24:5 & Revelation 6:2

- NOTE: Righteousness is suggested, but Christ's weapon is the sword, not bow. We'll discuss this further in Chapter Sixteen.
- War/violence: Matthew 24:6 & Revelation 6:4
- Famine/earthquake: Matthew 24:7 & Revelation 6:5-6
- Seven-year period: Daniel 9:27 (one week of years)

Change of heart: After the first three and a half years, the authority we call the Antichrist will break the agreement and begin a three-and-a-half-year reign of terror, or great tribulation, against God's chosen – Jew and Christian alike. Jesus quoted Daniel's prophecy about this when discussing the end of the world with His disciples. This period won't come as a surprise to those of us who are aware of the signs and warnings. Please note that the "time, times, and dividing of time" in Daniel 7:25 (listed below) represents 1 year + multiple (2) + half for a total of 3.5 years. This will be corroborated by other scriptural references and explained further in our study, but I've listed the reference here for your edification.

✓ **Quick reference:**

- Broken agreement: Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15
- Three-and-a-half-year authority: Daniel 7:25
- Great Tribulation: Matthew 24:9 & 21; Revelation 7:9-14

Signs of the times: According to Daniel, Jesus, and the apostle Paul, the timeframe to include the Antichrist's wrath, the gathering of believers, and God's wrath will be accompanied by signs. Here are a few you'll learn about:

- The Antichrist coming to authority in a particular way.
- A broken agreement with negative consequences to Israel and all true believers of Jesus.
- The creation of a "mark" needed to buy and sell.
- Great tribulation/persecution of God's chosen (up to three and a half years).
- Darkening of the sun, moon, and stars to usher in Christ's return and our gathering by His angels.

✓ **Quick reference:**

- The mark: Revelation 13:16-18; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4
- Darkening of the sun, moon, and stars: Matthew 24:29; Revelation 6:12-13

Gathering of the good: Jesus will appear with His angels and gather believers – those who’ve died and those still alive in Christ – at some point during the second half of this three-and-a-half-year period. His appearing and the gathering will be preceded by a complete darkening of the sun, moon, and stars. Please note there may be some disagreement as to whether this will happen just before the end or exactly at the end of this time period. Regardless, nothing in Scripture, history, or prophecy suggests the gathering – or *rapture* – will happen any sooner.

✓ **Quick reference:**

- Gathering of believers: Matthew 13:30 & 24:30-31; 2 Thessalonians 2:1; Revelation 14:15-16

Wrath of God: Those left on the earth will suffer incredible destruction as God’s angels deploy His wrath, which will be represented by 14 judgments or events. These will begin after a half-hour of silence in heaven once believers have been gathered. Christ will set up His kingdom in Jerusalem at the end of that time. Satan will be bound until Jesus’ 1,000-year reign on earth is nearly over.

✓ **Quick reference:**

- Warning/signs of God’s wrath: Revelation 6:15-17 & 14:18-20; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4; Matthew 13:39-43 & 49-50; Matthew 24:30
- Half-hour of silence before God’s wrath: Revelation 8:1
- Sequence of God’s wrath: Revelation 8:2-13; 9:1-21; 15:1-8; 16:1-21

1,000 years of peace: Christ and others, like those martyred for their faith during the time of the Great Tribulation, will reign for

1,000 years in Jerusalem. Toward the end of this reign, Satan, loosed for a short time, will war unsuccessfully against God.

✓ **Quick reference:**

- 1,000-year reign of Christ: Revelation 20:1-10

Final judgment: Following his final defeat, Satan will be destroyed and all who were not gathered before Christ's 1,000-year reign will be judged by their actions/works. This group includes all who had lived and died before Christ. Those not in God's Books of Life will be destroyed along with Satan by being thrown into the "lake of fire."

✓ **Quick reference:**

- Great judgment of God: Revelation 20:11-15

New heaven and earth: God will establish a final, everlasting kingdom after His great judgment. This is where the "*righteous will shine like the sun forever*" as indicated by Daniel and Jesus.

✓ **Quick reference:**

- New heaven and earth: Revelation 21:1-27 & 22:1-5
- Righteous shine like the sun forever: Matthew 13:43 & Daniel 12:2-3

Here's a review of what we've learned so far:

1. There'll be an increase in false messiahs, war, and earthquakes as the end times approach.
2. An evil authority we call the Antichrist will enter into an agreement with Israel, kicking off a seven-year period.
3. That Antichrist will break the agreement after three and a half years and begin a three-and-a-half-year reign of terror.
4. The time of this wicked authority will end with Christ's appearing, the gathering of believers, and the wrath of God against the rest of the world.
5. The 1,000-year reign of Christ will follow.
6. Destruction of Satan and final judgment will occur at the end

of Christ's reign.

7. God's new heaven and earth will begin afterward and will never end.

Okay! You've had a sneak preview of the end times and what we'll be studying. Now we really should get down to business and learn a few tools necessary for any biblical study. Let's proceed to PART TWO where we'll discuss faith and its connection to learning the gospel, and then explore good study tools you'll need for PARTS THREE – SIX of this Bible study guide.

SUPPLEMENTAL READING (Either the KJV or NASB version of the Bible is recommended; read at least three verses before and after scriptural references to understand the context better; the following is just a sampling of the myriad of supporting Scripture we'll explore later):

1. Please read all the Quick Reference verses listed above if you haven't already done so
2. Daniel's preview of the end: Daniel chapter 7
3. Jesus' introduction to the end: Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43 & 49-50
4. Jesus' detailed vision of the end: Matthew 24:1-51
5. Paul's confirmation (in part): 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

CHECKUP

CHAPTERS ONE & TWO

The following questions are meant to check your understanding of what we've covered so far and provoke additional thoughts and questions to elevate your learning to a higher level. You don't *have* to answer *Private Challenge/Discussion* questions (or share the answers publicly if you do). They're just for your own consideration or group discussion.

Possible answers to all questions can be found in Appendix D.

1. Why is the end-of-the-world topic so important?

2. According to Christ, what will be some of the signs leading up to the seven-year period at the end?

3. How long, according to Daniel, will the entity we call the Antichrist be in authority and persecute God's chosen?

4. What sign will precede Christ's appearing in the clouds and our subsequent gathering?

5. Who or what will gather all true believers in Christ at His appearing?

6. *Private Challenge / Discussion:* What's your understanding regarding this Bible subject? What had you read, heard, or been taught regarding it before reading Chapters One and Two? What have you done to research, validate, or confirm that information?

PART TWO

FAITH & FOUNDATION
HOW TO STUDY EFFECTIVELY

CHAPTER THREE

FAITH – TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES

It's important to understand what faith is. Why? Jesus said, and Paul reiterated, that believers will fall away from it in the end. In part it comes from learning the truth from Scripture. The writer of the New Testament letter to Hebrew believers said it's the *assurance* of things hoped for (cf. Hebrews 11:1). You'll learn that faith is the belief in what we can't see. But that faith has to be based on truth – there must be a reason for believing in the things we can't see. Otherwise we could believe in anything that sounds good. After all, why shouldn't I believe fairies exist by believing hard enough? I could easily say I have faith in those things if I incorrectly believe that faith is a “feeling” that something is true, or I believe in a thing just because it sounds attractive.

Here's a good case-in-point: I was seated next to a young woman during a return trip from Vancouver, BC, in 1998. She had with her a kit containing a variety of wooden tuning forks and crystals. Her belief was that the articles could heal someone through frequency vibration. I asked her why she believed this, and her response was, “I don't know – I just do because it sounds right.” She became irritable when I pressed her for any kind of evidence or testimony that would help support her belief. We talked about God, and even after sharing personal testimonies and fulfilled prophecies, she remained unwilling to accept the concept of Him or of His Son as Savior. This was despite those things that offered assurance and lent credibility to what we discussed. I asked, “Why are you willing to believe in something that sounds good and has no support, and unwilling to believe in God and His Son despite the support and testimonies?” That pretty much ended the conversation.

Faith assured through knowing the gospel keeps us believing in the right things for the right reasons. Without faith built on truth, we may easily choose the wrong direction when faced with adversity.

You'll learn, as we continue through the course, that not knowing the right answer can prove deadly. In other words, being scripturally ignorant leaves us with little if any faith, which can be physically or spiritually dangerous. That topic is coming next in our study.

So how do Webster's dictionary and the Bible define faith? According to Webster, faith is firm belief in something for which there is no proof; complete trust; something that is believed especially with strong conviction. This is what normally comes to mind when people think of having faith in something (or someone) like God.

You'll find that the original Greek word used for faith in the context of our lesson is *pistis*. *Strong's Concordance* labels this as G4102 and defines it as: *persuasion, that is, credence; moral conviction (of religious truth, or the truthfulness of God or a religious teacher), especially reliance upon Christ for salvation; abstract constancy in such profession; by extension the system of religious (Gospel) truth itself: - assurance, belief, believe, faith, fidelity.*

Now, consider the following verse I referred to in the first paragraph of this section: "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" —Hebrews 11:1.

Does that mean we should just blindly believe in something we can't see? No! Where do the assurance and conviction the writer spoke of come from? They come from hearing the gospel, which is the good news of what God accomplished through Jesus Christ for humankind: "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the **word** of Christ.*" —Romans 10:17.

That "word" – and God's Word in general – provides testimony that lends credibility to what we believe by showing us the results of fulfilled prophecy and answered prayer. Without obtaining that assurance, there can be no real faith. Should God expect us to believe in something without any kind of testimony – eyewitness accounts, corroborating history, or confirmed miracles? We have to know what we believe and why; this comes from learning.

The SUPPLEMENTAL READING will expose you to additional Scripture references that strongly support the claim that faith is based on testimony and learning.

Besides being something we have (or believe we have), faith is also something with which we associate. For instance, I’m a part of the Christian faith – an association related to what I *believe*. I’m of the Christian faith, and my faith in Christ should be based on confidence gained from reading the Scriptures and related testimonies. It’s popular in some circles to believe that once you are saved, you’re saved forever. I wish it were that simple. We won’t debate the “once saved, always saved” (Calvinism) doctrine here, but you should know there’s a distinct risk in having little or no faith. The important basic truths from Scripture concerning our faith are:

- Faith is built on hearing the gospel and responding.
- A lack of faith from having no exposure to the gospel opens the door for deception.
- A lack of faith and subsequent deception allows wicked doctrine based on man’s wisdom to take root and keep some from *the* faith.
- Being scripturally ignorant can be deadly.

Being scripturally ignorant can definitely be deadly. We could suffer God’s wrath because of making bad choices due to not knowing His Word. This can even apply to those of us who believe we’re *saved*. Remember the churchgoer I mentioned in Chapter One – the one who stated he’d take the mark of the beast and that God would understand? Well, God won’t understand. Here’s what Jesus told John about this particular situation:

Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the

presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.” —Revelation 14:9-11.

This is confirmed during a description of the second half of God’s wrath (vial judgments):

So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. —Revelation 16:2.

As you can see, anyone taking the mark of the beast will suffer God’s wrath and be removed from the Lamb’s Book of Life. But how is it possible to get to such a state and perhaps fall from the Christian faith or suffer God’s wrath?

As stated before, there will be great deceit and a falling away from the faith in the last days. If faith comes from hearing the gospel, then the more we hear or learn, the stronger our faith and the less likely we’ll be to fall away from the fellowship of believers or be deceived. Conversely, less hearing means less faith and more possibility of deceit. Paul wrote to Timothy that some would fall away from the faith later. Consider this: “*But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons . . .*” —1 Timothy 4:1. Paul also told Timothy that “. . . *who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.*” —2 Timothy 2:18.

And Jesus said, “*At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.*” —Matthew 24:10-13.

In summary, faith is the assurance of what we can't see. We gain that assurance and therefore faith by learning the truth – God's Word. Build your faith by continually learning that truth. Otherwise you may not be adequately prepared when faced with difficult or potentially deadly choices. Increase your faith by reading God's Word daily and through regular fellowship with other likeminded believers to avoid being deceived. In the next section, we'll give you the tools to do that effectively.

SUPPLEMENTAL READING (Either the KJV or NASB version of the Bible is recommended; read at least three verses before and after scriptural references to understand the context better)

1. Mentoring for the purpose of (increasing) faith: Philippians 1:25
2. Faith grounded in hearing the gospel: Colossians 1:23
3. Faith *taught*; warning not to be spoiled by man's philosophy (strong faith will keep this from taking place): Colossians 2:7-8
4. Word of the Lord to keep us from going the way of wicked men without faith: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2
5. Faith and good doctrine are related: 1 Timothy 4:6-7
6. Learning the Scriptures to become wise unto salvation through faith (and all Scripture is inspired by God): 2 Timothy 3:14-16
7. Sound in faith to avoid fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth: Titus 1:13-14

CHAPTER FOUR

HOW TO STUDY...OR NOT!

We now know faith is based on our exposure to, and understanding of, God's Word. How we interpret it is vital to ensuring we "get it right." Remember that getting it wrong could have devastating consequences. Those who mislead others will be judged accordingly. Ignorance could lead to experiencing God's wrath, disappointment, deception, a falling away from the Christian faith, etc., as we learned in the previous chapter.

The goal of this portion of our study is to help you avoid the above consequences and introduce you to tools and concepts you can use to accurately understand Scripture. This section isn't a comprehensive study of hermeneutics (Bible interpretation). It only focuses on what I consider to be the most important concepts and principles. But it should encourage you to do your own Scripture studies and give you a good start in the right direction.

Before we begin, I'd like to give credit where it's due by letting you know how beneficial the Global University's Introduction to Hermeneutics course¹ was to preparing this instruction. Many of the technical points you'll read about in this chapter came directly from the course. I highly recommend it to anyone interested in learning more about how to study Scripture. You'll find more information about the reference material in Appendix C.

Rule number one of Bible interpretation: do everything possible to determine the writer's original intent. Rule number two of Bible interpretation: see rule number one. Figuring out what the text writer meant to say to the intended audience should be your primary focus. The next goal of Scripture interpretation should be to find out how the message applies to us today. A good understanding of grammatical principles and attention to format and message context will help ensure your success. Please take a moment to familiarize

yourself with the following terms before continuing to the next paragraph where we'll begin exploring proper grammar and sentence structure.

TERMS – SENTENCE STRUCTURE/GRAMMAR

Antecedent: The noun or pronoun to which a pronoun refers. Examples: referring to Jesus in a subsequent sentence as “He,” or several apostles as “they” to make the sentence shorter and simpler.

Conjunction: A word that connects or otherwise establishes a relationship between two or more words, phrases, or clauses. Examples include *but*, *and*, *nor*, *neither*, and *because*.

Connecting adverb: A word that serves roughly the same function as a conjunction. Examples include *therefore* and *nevertheless*. Paul used “therefore” regularly to continue from one idea to another related idea; *therefore* means “for that reason.”

TERMS – FORMAT

Allegory: A short story or teaching that contains few details but many points of comparison.

Apocalyptic writing: Specific revelations addressed to future generations that usually include symbols and specific outcomes. The Revelation given to John by Christ is a great example of this type of “unveiling.”

Figurative language: Describes language that uses symbols. Figures of speech use words for more than their literal meanings. Figurative language can enhance meaning by making comparisons and connections that draw on one idea or image to explain another.

Literal: Plain, direct common speech that doesn't use symbols. Approach Scripture interpretation from this angle whenever possible! Literal language is direct and factual – straight to the point.

Parable: A brief, succinct story that illustrates a moral lesson by comparing at least two subjects or concepts.

Prophecies: Oracles concerning the future given directly by God to man.

Types: A foreshadow of things to come. These can be many Old Testament events, ideas, objects, and people as patterns or symbols of something future. The New Testament often fulfilled what the Old Testament “types” pointed to.

TERMS – INTERPRETIVE CONCEPTS AND TOOLS

Allegorize: Searching for hidden meaning in Scripture. This generally results in a departure from the writer’s original intent.

Concordance: Alphabetical listing of words with scriptural references of where the words can be found in the Bible. Some are “exhaustive” and some are “condensed.”

Dictionaries: Help us to understand words better, but be careful – the definitions are based on opinion and man’s wisdom. Also, context determines which of several possible meanings applies in a particular text or Scripture.

Eisegesis: Inserting meaning INTO one’s interpretation of the Word of God. Searching for, or focusing on, pieces of Scripture to support a personal belief by imposing one’s views or beliefs upon scriptural interpretation.

Exegesis: Taking meaning OUT of the Word of God. Gleaning what God intended to communicate through the author’s language, literary structure, culture, and history.

Law of context: The true meaning of any verse or even a single word is the meaning it has in its literary context.

Study Bible: A Bible that provides introductions to books, maps,

articles, explanations, etc. Be aware that study Bibles are often produced by authors or denominations that have a particular theological viewpoint or method of interpreting Scripture.

Translation comparison: Using multiple Bible translations for biblical harmony.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE & GRAMMAR

Understanding basic concepts related to sentence structure and grammar is vital to Bible interpretation. You've most likely attended several English courses by now, so I won't bore you by discussing the basics. However, we'll need to focus on the following, which are directly related to understanding a writer's original intent: antecedents, pronouns, conjunctions, similes, and metaphors. Let's start by discussing antecedents and pronouns, mostly in the context of end-times writings.

Antecedents and pronouns: An antecedent is the noun(s) or pronoun(s) to which a pronoun refers. Their use makes sentences simpler and shorter. For instance, we can select from pronouns like *they* to represent a variety of people or *those* to refer to a multitude of things you wouldn't want to list individually. We must be able to associate antecedents with their pronouns to ensure we're focused on the right people, places, or things. Why is this important? Relating a pronoun to its noun will help you keep focused on the correct players in scriptural context. One good example we'll revisit later:

*... and the people of the **prince** who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. . . . And **he** will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week **he** will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering ... —Daniel 9:26-27.*

In this example, it would be possible to miss the association between those who eventually destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 CE (Common Era) and the end-times Antichrist without

recognizing the antecedent of “*prince*” and related pronoun of “*he*.” Unfortunately, some disregard this association to support a view that Jesus is the *prince* who has already made a spiritual agreement and ended the need for sacrifice. Even if you miss the association between the prince and coming Antichrist, the context of the verse within the chapter and Jesus’ later acknowledgment of this prophecy (cf. Matthew 24:15) support that association: “*When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place . . .*”

You’ll find it’s important to compare Scripture with Scripture to discover relationships like this. Let’s look at other examples of antecedents and pronouns.

Example 1:

*Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our **Lord Jesus Christ** and our gathering together to **Him** . . .*
 . —2 Thessalonians 2:1. Here, Jesus Christ is the antecedent referred to later in the sentence as “Him.”

Example 2:

For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief. . . —1 Thessalonians 5:2-4.

- “*yourselves*” represents those Paul was talking to. In context, you’ll see they are the “*brethren*” also described as those “*not in darkness*.”
- “*they*” are the opposite of those Paul was talking to. You can glean from this that he’s referring to people who aren’t exhibiting the same pattern of behavior as the brethren (believers).
- “*that day*” is tied to the “*day of the Lord*” in the beginning

of the verses.

Example 3: The phrase “*these things*” below refers to the heavens, the elements, and the earth and all it contains. You’ve probably suspected by this time that the Day of the Lord will include the destruction of the wicked – those who aren’t holy as Peter goes on to describe.

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, **what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness** . . . —2 Peter 3:10-11.*

Conjunctions and connecting adverbs: These components join or show the relationship between two or more words, phrases, or clauses. Original Scripture writers didn’t use verses, chapters, or books to divide their writings. So this portion of our instruction is very important to understanding the relationship and flow between major points. You may find that many concepts and primary message points span multiple chapters because of where early translators placed the divisions. This won’t be a problem as long as you look for complete ideas when interpreting the Bible. Being able to spot words or phrases that connect verses and chapters to complete the writer’s message will make this easier to do.

Conjunctions include *but*, *because*, *either*, and connecting adverbs like *therefore* and *furthermore*. Consider the following examples:

*You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, **but** that is not yet the end.* —Matthew 24:6. There’ll be an increase in war as the end approaches, although the increase in itself won’t indicate the end.

. . . *that you not be quickly shaken from your composure **or** be disturbed **either** by a spirit or a message **or** a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.* —2 Thessalonians 2:2. Paul is telling believers of his time not to erroneously believe that the Day of Christ (appearing and gathering) had happened.

*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. **Therefore** rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them.* —Revelation 12:11-12 (KJV). Because they'll overcome the Antichrist through faith in the end, believers should rejoice.

*To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. **Furthermore** then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.* —1 Thessalonians 3:13-4:1 (KJV). We must remain pure until the end when Christ returns with His angels by behaving and pleasing God as the apostle taught us through his admonishment to the church at Thessalonica.

Simile and metaphor: Simile makes a comparison between two things by using the word *like*: “*The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed . . .*” —Matthew 13:31. A metaphor, just like simile, is a comparison between two things, but instead of words such as *like*, you'll find direct comparisons by using *is* or *am*. Examples of metaphors used by Jesus to make a point: “*I **am** the Light of the world . . .*” —John 8:12 or “*You **are** the salt of the earth . . .*” —Matthew 5:13.

I encourage you to refresh your understanding of English grammar and mechanics as necessary to make your biblical studies more accurate and enjoyable. You might also wish to take a course in Bible interpretation (hermeneutics) like the Global University course I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Now that we've covered details and mechanics related to sentence structure, let's discuss

different literary formats used in the Bible. Knowing of these formats and tips for understanding them will further enhance your study.

FORMAT

Parable: A parable is a brief, succinct story that illustrates a moral lesson – usually by comparing multiple subjects or concepts. Because of the multiple comparisons, which use words such as *like*, a parable therefore uses simile. Key points to remember when interpreting parables:

- Examine the setting (time, reason for the parable, and application)
- Look for an explanation at the end of the parable
- Analyze the parable by identifying:
 - the characters
 - points of comparison
 - the main and any lesser lessons
- Avoid assigning hidden meaning to meaningless details

Jesus' parable of the Wheat and Tares and built-in explanation can help illustrate these points:

The parable: *Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will*

say to the reapers, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.”
— Matthew 13:24-30.

The explanation: *Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.” And He said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*
—Matthew 13:36-43.

Analysis of the Wheat and Tares parable:

- Examine the setting (time, reason for the parable, and application): In Matthew 13, Jesus was speaking to a multitude in the form of several parables. The theme of this parable appears to be sowing and reaping for the kingdom of heaven, the relationship between *hearing* and *understanding* the gospel, and letting it take root to resist evil. The farming theme is significant because Jesus was speaking to a farming community. He was conveying His message in terms they would most likely relate to.
- Look for an explanation at the end of the parable: In this case, Matthew 13:36-43 explains the meaning of the parable. This explanation helps us to understand and analyze it.
- Analyze the parable by identifying:

- The characters:
 - Christ
 - The world
 - Believers/the righteous
 - Unbelievers
 - Satan (the devil)
 - Reapers
- Points of comparison
 - Christ and the sower
 - Field and the world
 - Good seed and believers/the righteous
 - Bad seed and tares (weeds)/unbelievers
 - Enemy sowing weeds and Satan
 - Angels and reapers
 - Harvest and end of the world
- The main and any lesser lessons: Most importantly, this parable warns that there will be a gathering of the righteous and destruction of the wicked at the end.
- Avoid assigning hidden meaning to meaningless details: While it may be tempting to assign hidden meaning to parts of a parable – especially if we see some personal significance – we need to avoid this practice, which is called *allegorizing*. For instance, someone could allegorize that “. . . *he went his way . . .*” in Matthew 13:25 referred to Satan’s hold over planet earth as its *prince*, or that the servants mentioned in verse 28 were really indicative of anyone who evangelizes or serves in the body of Christ. If we don’t take Scripture at face value wherever possible, we’ll run the risk of missing or masking the writer’s message. You’ll find that most symbols or comparisons (like this parable) are explained for us within Scripture.

Allegory: An allegory is a short story or teaching containing few details but many points of comparison. It’s a message full of metaphors to make a point. One very good example is Paul’s allegory comparing bodily and spiritual armor.

*Therefore, take up the full **armor** of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, **HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH**, and **HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**, and having shod **YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE**; in addition to all, taking up the **shield of faith** with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take **THE HELMET OF SALVATION**, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. . . . —Ephesians 6:13-17.*

Allegories can be good teaching tools as long as the storyteller makes clear that their comparisons of Scripture to elements in their allegory are just metaphors and not direct interpretations of hidden meaning from Scripture. Not doing so can mislead the reader into believing they're reading proper translations. This results in *allegorizing* – a practice that is generally bad because the reader is reading into the Scripture what they imagine (eisegesis). Doing that is poor hermeneutics and doesn't bring out the original message. We'll discuss this very poor method of biblical interpretation in the next section.

Types: These are typically prophecies of future events and include people, events, actions, objects, and ceremonies. In Scripture, the Old Testament types are referred to as *shadows* (or foreshadows) of things to come. Understanding what a type is will help you during the interpretation of prophetic Scripture by making it easier to recognize relationships between Old Testament prophecies and future fulfillment. Examples include: the Passover lamb as an Old Testament type fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament; the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle fulfilled by God's presence in heaven; Jewish feasts and festivals fulfilled by Christ's life, death, resurrection, and future appearing. Let's consider these in more detail.

The Passover lamb was a type of the sacrifice Christ would ultimately become for everyone: "*He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led*

to slaughter; And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.” —Isaiah 53:7 and also “*Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For **Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.***” —1 Corinthians 5:7.

The tabernacle in the Old Testament was a type of the tabernacle in heaven: “*For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own.*” —Hebrews 9:24-25 and also “*Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh . . .*” —Hebrews 10:19-20.

Jewish feasts and festivals are types of the future events filled, or to be fulfilled, by Christ: *Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day -- things which are a mere **shadow** of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.* —Colossians 2:16-17.

Be careful to limit comparison of the type and fulfillment to the points the Bible makes. In other words, don’t read anything more into the text. Otherwise, when it comes to end-times scriptural warnings, you’ll most likely miss the writer’s point or the events to watch for if the type hasn’t already been fulfilled. As with allegorizing, this is dangerous! Doing so leads people to see a “type” in everything and attempt to find a New Testament parallel for everything in the Old Testament. Or they find an end-times meaning where it isn’t intended. Be very careful to limit types to only those the Bible uses!

Prophetic: Old Testament prophecies were oracles given to man by God. They sometimes reflected a clear idea of the prediction with an easy-to-understand fulfillment. For instance, Christ’s birth, ministry, and crucifixion fulfilled over 100 direct Old Testament

prophecies. The following are but two:

Jesus born in Bethlehem: *“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.”* —Micah 5:2.

Isaiah’s prophecy about His being born of a virgin: *“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”* —Isaiah 7:14.

Additionally, oracles often presented choices for the Jews – sort of an if/then scenario like those passed on by the prophet Jeremiah:

*As a well keeps its waters fresh, So she keeps fresh her wickedness. Violence and destruction are heard in her; Sickness and wounds are ever before Me. **Be warned, O Jerusalem, Or I shall be alienated from you, And make you a desolation, A land not inhabited.*** —Jeremiah 6:7-8.

Or by the prophet Isaiah:

*Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together;” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool. **If you consent and obey, You will eat the best of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You will be devoured by the sword.**” Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.* — Isaiah 1:17-20.

We’ve introduced two types of prophetic fulfillments so far – direct or specific fulfillment (e.g. non-negotiable details about Christ), and not-so-direct (e.g. oracles where the Jews could change future consequences of their actions by turning back to God as their first love).

A third type of prophetic fulfillment, also non-specific, is a “telescopic” fulfillment. You’ll see this type often in Old Testament prophecies that contain both near-term and far-term or end-times apocalyptic events. We call them near-far oracles fulfilled in stages over a long period of time.

Prophets like Isaiah and Joel predicted the imminent captivity and destruction of the Jews as consequences of their adulterous behavior, but in the same writing they often gave a glimpse of redemption in the last days. The purpose was to give Israel hope by letting them know that despite the imminent judgment of the day, God will keep His promise to Abraham and David and abide with them in the end. Jesus also gave near-far apocalyptic glimpses to His disciples on the Mount of Olives when answering their questions about when the temple would be destroyed, the signs of the end, and of His return. Let’s take a look at Joel 2:25-32 to give you a better understanding of their construction:

Part One – imminent prophecy of the restoration of Israel (verses 25-27): *“Then I will make up to you for the years That the swarming locust has eaten, The creeping locust, the stripping locust and the gnawing locust, My great army which I sent among you. You will have plenty to eat and be satisfied And praise the name of the LORD your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you; Then My people will never be put to shame. Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel, And that I am the LORD your God, And there is no other; And My people will never be put to shame.”* —Joel 2:25-27.

Part Two (already happened in the first century AD):

- Last-days prophecy of the pouring out of God’s Spirit on all people (verses 28-29): *“It will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”* —Joel 2:28-29.

- Confirmation of fulfillment by Luke on the day of Pentecost: *“but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS, ’ God says, ‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; Act 2:18 EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy.”* —Acts 2:16-18.

Part Three (will happen near the end of time):

- Darkening of the sun, moon, and stars in the last days just before the end (verses 31- 32): *“I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood Before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.”* —Joel 2:31-32.
 - Reiteration of this “far” prophecy by Jesus: *But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.”* — Matthew 24:29-30

Paying attention to historical context and parallel lines of text in the prophecies themselves is important to interpreting these messages effectively. For instance, it’s good to know that the kingdom of Israel was divided in the time of Joel and that Joel’s prophecy was directed at Judah – one of the kingdom halves.

The following are Old Testament books that are primarily **prophetic**:

- By major prophets:
Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel Daniel
- By minor prophets:
Hosea Joel Amos
Obadiah Jonah Micah
Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah
Haggai Zechariah Malachi

Historical: The purpose of this type of writing is to describe events or behaviors as they occurred. Many books of the Old Testament fall into this category. Here's a listing of Old Testament books that are primarily **historical**:

Joshua	Judges	Ruth
1 & 2 Samuel	1 & 2 Kings	1 & 2 Chronicles
Ezra	Nehemiah	Esther
1, 2, 3, & 4 Maccabees*		

*(very important historical documentation found in the biblical Intertestamental Apocrypha)

Historical accounts, which often document fulfillment of prophecy, can be important to lending credibility to the prophecies themselves and often reveal the end of the story. For instance, fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies related to the first type of Antichrist as seen in chapter 8 of his writings were fulfilled as reported by Judah Maccabeus – a Jewish priest. His historical accounts are contained within the biblical Apocrypha.

In this case, Daniel foretold of an evil character of Greek descent that would persecute the Jews and greatly defile the temple. He went on to prophesy that the individual would be defeated and the temple cleansed and rededicated. Daniel was referring to Antiochus Epiphanes, defeated by Judah Maccabeus and his army over 300

years later during a revolt beginning in 167 BCE (Before the Common Era). The temple was cleansed and rededicated afterward as Daniel had prophesied. The miraculous way this happened brought about the annual Jewish celebration of Hanukkah.

Other prophecies and fulfillment, which include conquest by the Assyrians and captivity by the Babylonians, can be seen in most of the Old Testament historical and prophetic books. Other historical documentation invaluable to interpretation includes the writings of historians like Flavius Josephus and early church fathers such as Polycarp and Irenaeus.

We've introduced parables, allegories, types/shadows, prophecy, and historical writing as different literary formats from which you'll extract meaning as you interpret the Bible. Let's look at one last format you'll see often as we continue our study: apocalyptic literature.

Apocalyptic literature: Revealing – or unveiling – future events (from the perspective of the writer). While prophetic writings were usually addressed to the current population, apocalyptic prophecy was addressed to future generations. Examples of Old Testament unveiling of the end of our world can be found in Isaiah 24-27, Daniel 7-12, Ezekiel 1, 8-10, and Zechariah 9-14. Apocalyptic revelation in the New Testament came primarily from Jesus. For the most part, it is contained in His Mount of Olives responses to His disciples (Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21) and in the book of Revelation.

Prophecies conveyed in apocalyptic literature were often presented in the form of dreams or visions. The word-painted pictures often contained symbols, which made the prophecy easier to convey and perhaps remember. As you'll discover, they're almost always explained immediately in Scripture or gleaned from the context or by comparing Scripture references. Good examples can be found in Daniel's visions and throughout the Revelation:

- Daniel 7:3
 - Symbol: *And **four great beasts** were coming up from the sea, different from one another.*
 - Explanation: Four kingdoms that would come to power from the Babylonian kingdom until the end: Babylonian, Mede/Persian, Greek, and Roman (cf. Daniel 2:38-40 & 8:20-21)

- Daniel 7:4
 - Symbols: *The first was **like a lion and had the wings of an eagle**. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it.*
 - Explanation: This represented the Babylonian kingdom led by Nebuchadnezzar (also represented by the statue's gold head in Daniel 2:37-38).

- Daniel 7:5
 - Symbol: *And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a **bear**. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, 'Arise, devour much meat!'*
 - Explanation: This represented the coming Mede/Persian Empire. Persia was the stronger of the two collaborating entities, and the three ribs most likely represented the three Persian rulers between Cyrus II and Xerxes (cf. Daniel 2:39 & 8:20).

- Daniel 7:6
 - Symbols: *After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a **leopard**, which had on its back **four wings of a bird**; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it.*
 - Explanation: This represented the Greek kingdom, led by Alexander the Great, that would defeat the Persians. It was split into four divisions upon

Alexander's death (cf. Daniel 2:39 & 8:21).

We'll discuss how to interpret this type of writing in our next section: *Interpretive Concepts & Tools*.

INTERPRETIVE CONCEPTS & TOOLS

There's no point interpreting Scripture unless you plan to do it correctly. As we've already discussed, polluting ourselves with false messages through poor interpretation is bad enough, but feeding the corrupted information to others is much worse. Remember, there'll be consequences for those who mislead others. So we need principles to guide us to ensure we discover biblical meaning correctly and don't mislead anyone. These principles have been around for hundreds of years and address the difficulties we face during interpretation of Scripture. These difficulties include:

- **Time:** Biblical writings can be thousands of years old. Time introduces a variety of changes and challenges to include differences in philosophy, ways of life, and language. Using Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, and examining the writings of others who lived near or at the same time, would be helpful here.
- **History and Culture:** Translating Scripture can be tough if we try to do it without considering the historical era or culture the author and audiences lived in at the time of the writing. Most of the prophetic texts were generated during troublesome times such as the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian conquests, occupations, and captivities. Apocalyptic literature in the New Testament was created throughout the Roman occupation, which enveloped the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The timeframe also included the destruction of Jerusalem and dispersion of the Jews as foretold by Jesus.
- **Language:** Because Scripture may have been written in Hebrew, Aramaic (Babylonian), or Greek, and then translated, you'll want the ability to go back to the original words or

phrases to truly understand them. A good concordance or Bible dictionary can help.

Early Jewish rabbis like Hillel offered reminders and rules of interpretation that help address the challenges listed above. Six of them are as follows:

1. Understand the word in its sentence and the sentence in context.
2. Compare Scripture on similar topics (compare all references to a topic in Scripture; try to identify complete thoughts rather than segments; comparing multiple parallel passages can give a balanced view and show “both sides of the coin”).
3. Prefer a clear passage to a difficult one (look for clear, explicit text to clarify or support difficult parallel writing).
4. Pay attention to grammar, spelling, and figures of speech.
5. Determine whether to apply the text to areas in life not mentioned directly by Scripture.
6. God has revealed Himself through the tongues of men.

Let’s focus on a few golden rules of interpretation that include some of the points made above before going through a list of interpretive activities to do (or not). Remember the primary goal of interpretation is to extract the writer’s message. So, although a verse may have multiple applications, **it can have only one meaning**. Here are some tips to help you understand the writer’s intent:

- Be prepared to study through guidance by God’s Spirit, having a teachable spirit and a good attitude, etc.
- Take Scripture literally whenever possible and accept the simplest meaning first.
- Consider the author.
- Understand the recipient(s).
- Analyze the context.
- Consider historical/cultural background first.
- Compare translations.
- Consider apocalyptic symbols.
- Use study tools and aids whenever possible.

~ DO ~

Be prepared. Several qualities adopted in advance of our studies are essential to accurate interpretation. For instance, we must be *born again spiritually* to effectively study Scripture. Why? Christ said the Holy Spirit would guide us and give us wisdom. The Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to believers is absent in anyone who isn't a *born again* believer. So while an unbeliever may understand sentence structure and context and therefore glean the writer's intent in many cases, they may not be able to accurately interpret much of what the Bible has to tell us or receive the complete meaning in all cases. Pray regularly for guidance by God's Spirit before beginning your studies.

We also must be teachable. Unfortunately, being closed-minded and practicing eisegesis (reading *into* Scripture what we imagine) is commonplace. In Chapter Seventeen of this study, we'll compare and contrast different end-times theories. It will become very clear that some give in to a temptation to pick and choose pieces of Scripture to support a particular theory instead of considering all Scripture and then forming a belief or doctrine. Believers who are unteachable risk blocking guidance from the Holy Spirit, thereby missing the point of the writer in the same way an unbeliever would.

✓ **Quick reference:**

- He that has ears let him hear (cf. Mark 4:9)
- Be swift to hear (cf. James 1:19)
- Jesus' promise to heal those who'll hear with their ears and see with their eyes (cf. Matthew 13:15)

Take Scripture literally whenever possible. Taking text literally, unless there's good reason to believe it's meant to be figurative, will reduce the risk of finding unintentional hidden meaning. John used figurative language often. Old Testament prophets did as well to describe their visions. So you'll see symbols and figurative language, but their use is the exception and usually defined. Here are some steps you can take to decide whether the text should be taken literally or figuratively:

1. Take the text literally if it makes sense as is. The simplest meaning in context is most often *the* meaning.
2. If the text doesn't make sense as is, look for explanations within the context or in other books as necessary.
3. Look for symbols or hidden meanings (in context first) if all else fails.

Consider the author. It will be much easier to determine the writer's message if you know something about the individual. Five questions you should answer about the author:

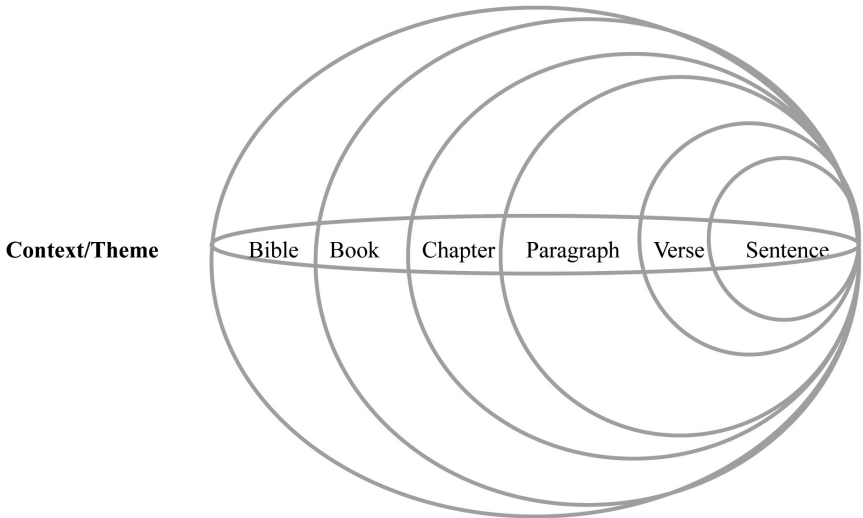
1. Who was he?
2. When did he write the book?
3. What setting was he in?
4. What relationship did he have with those to whom he wrote?
5. What was his purpose?

Get to know the recipient(s). Improve your chances of figuring out the writer's intent by understanding who he was writing *to*. Four questions you should answer about the recipients:

1. Who were they?
2. What was their city or town like?
3. What was their social status?
4. What were their shared history, religious experiences, and myths and legends?

Analyze the context. Words make up sentences and sentences make up paragraphs. Biblical chapters are composed of paragraphs and all work together to convey a message or *theme*. A theme may span multiple chapters. So look at the chapter before and after the one you're interpreting. Never try to interpret a verse alone – consider it within the paragraph (smallest circle of context for a sentence or verse). Interpret a passage by its context in a larger theme of the book (may encompass many chapters).

4.1 Analyzing Context



Not considering Scripture in context opens the door to incomplete or false interpretation. And, as we've discussed, this introduces the risk of false teaching, which carries negative consequences. A couple of very good, but unfortunate, examples of taking text out of context:

- In Revelation 4:1, John is summoned in the spirit to heaven so he can watch and record the end-times events Jesus is about to show him: “. . . *and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things . . .”* Some take this sentence out of context and isolate it to support a claim that it represents the coming rapture/gathering, and that since John “went up hither” before the events were displayed, this is symbolic of a pre-tribulation rapture.
- One popular means of supporting an imminent, any-moment pre-tribulation rapture theory is to claim that Jesus will “*come back like a thief.*” This is based on partial Scripture such as 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Peter 3:10. However, you’ll find

that when taken in context, the Scripture is a warning to the unsaved about the coming Day of the Lord destruction.

✓ **Quick reference:**

- John’s invitation to heaven for a vision of the end (cf. Revelation 4:1-11).
- Day of the Lord destruction as a “thief in the night” for those in darkness (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:2-6).
- Day of the Lord destruction as a “thief in the night” for the unsaved; looking forward to the new heaven and earth that follows (cf. 2 Peter 3:13).

Consider historical/cultural background. As with time, historical eras bring about adjustments in culture and language. Also, it can be difficult to understand the context of a particular piece of literature and therefore accurately extract the message if the historical setting isn’t known. Using historical and archaeological books along with the Old Testament to interpret the New Testament can help you overcome this hurdle.

Understanding the culture of the people you’re reading about in Scripture can help you determine the rationale for certain actions or identify common figures of speech. For instance, Jesus used a figure of speech also referred to by Job hundreds of years previously (compare Matthew 24:28 to Job 39:27-30 below). If we didn’t know this, we might be tempted (as some have been) to allegorize Christ’s reference and believe it’s symbolic of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. This allows them to then say this is proof that Christ returned at that time (common in a post-millennial end-times theory we’ll discuss later). They believe the eagle in the saying is symbolic of the eagle attached to the top of poles carried by Roman soldiers, and that the carcass is symbolic of the dead bodies left behind in the city by Roman soldiers during the destruction. Let’s compare/contrast the references by Job and Christ:

- Matthew 24:28 (KJV): *For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.*

- Job 39:27-30 (KJV): “Doth the *eagle* mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high? She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place. From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off. Her young ones also suck up blood: **and where the slain are, there is she.**”

What’s the point of the above saying in context? Basically, “When you see *this*, you’ll then see *that*.” There’s no mystery here – Jesus was giving signs to watch for and was just making a point. He makes the same point later in the paragraph by comparing springtime and a budding fig tree (cf. Matthew 24:32-33).

Answer these questions to help discover the historical/cultural background of a specific passage:

1. How does the specific passage relate to the author’s purpose?
2. Are there any specific historical details to explain?
3. Are there any specific cultural details to explain? Examples:
 - a. Social roles, values, or customs
 - b. Economic concerns
 - c. Political matters
 - d. Religious beliefs or practices

Compare translations. This can be very important to interpreting difficult or critical passages. Take advantage of the strength of different translations and recognize weaknesses. For instance, the King James Bible is scripturally strict and very accurate, but it’s difficult to read. This can lead to misinterpretation despite the accuracy of the text. On the other hand, modern translations such as the NIV are easier to read but not as scripturally accurate. I’ve found the NASB to be very accurate and easy to read. But I’ll often compare particular verses from multiple translations while also looking back at the original Hebrew or Greek root to help me understand the writer’s intent. You can do this easily and quickly through the use of computer tools like e-Sword (www.e-sword.net). This is one of the best I’ve seen. It’s

free of charge, although donations are encouraged and accepted.

Consider apocalyptic symbols. Remember to take Scripture literally unless it becomes obvious it's figurative in nature because of the use of symbols. But follow these guidelines if you need to interpret symbols in apocalyptic literature:

1. Look for meaning in the context. Many if not most symbols are explained within the paragraph, chapter, or book.
2. Look for meaning in the history or culture of the writer as discussed previously.
3. Look for meaning in previous apocalyptic literature by comparing Scripture to Scripture. For instance, compare the beast in Daniel's vision (chapter 7) to the abomination/beast mentioned by Jesus and Paul. Another example: symbols used in Revelation to represent churches, multitudes, kingdoms, etc., are explained in previous books as you'll discover later in our study.

Use study tools and aids whenever possible. Attempting to interpret Scripture without keeping it within context or considering the historical/cultural background would be foolish. Likewise, not utilizing tools to help with accurate interpretation is equally silly and risky. We have the means to easily and quickly compare Scripture to parallel Bible references and other supporting text. We can also discover the root or original meaning of a particular word, find all references to a word or phrase, or consider the interpretations of early church fathers that knew Christ's disciples (or at least associated with others who did). Using these resources improves our chances of accurately interpreting Scripture. Here's a list of possible tools and resources you should have at your disposal:

- Study Bible: In addition to containing Scripture, these will also host a variety of other resources such as maps, commentaries, a concordance, and charts. They're written by humans and are therefore fallible. So use them wisely. You'll find many examples in hard copy and in electronic format. A

free, downloadable study Bible is available at e-Sword.net. Modules offering multiple translations, commentaries, and dictionaries can also be downloaded from this site.

- Concordance: A good concordance will contain an alphabetical listing of words used to create translations such as the King James Bible. Use it to find the root of a word or its origin whether Hebrew or Greek. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* is very popular and comes embedded into some study Bibles. Two possible sources of electronic Bible concordances are www.abibleconcordance.com and e-Sword.net Bible modules.
- Commentaries: These can help with the study of Scripture by providing subjective explanations and interpretation of biblical text. While commentaries can be helpful, you must remember they contain the opinions and wisdom of men and particular theological stances that will interpret Scripture a particular way. To use a commentary wisely, you should know the theological tradition of the author or series. That way, one can read them with eyes wide open. Access commentaries online at www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries.
- Bible dictionaries: These define terms and names and are also based on man's wisdom and theological points of view. You can find one online at www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries or download a Bible dictionary as an e-Sword module (e-Sword.net).
- Electronic tools: Portable, electronic Bibles can make referring to Scripture easier when you're away from the family computer. The Internet offers great search and reference capabilities. You'll find many online Bibles and Bible study portals. E-Sword.net, www.biblestudytools.com, and www.biblegateway.com are but several choices out of many.

~ DON'T ~

Allegorizing Scripture by assigning hidden meaning where it doesn't exist and taking Scripture out of context hide the true meaning and writer's intent. We're intelligent creatures and often see complex relationships within our realm of understanding. So the temptation to find multiple meanings will exist. Just be careful not to claim the manipulated Scripture as "gospel."

As we've discussed, allegorizing Scripture changes its meaning. When this takes place, literal writing can suddenly become figurative in the reader's mind. Various end-times theorists do this because a literal interpretation doesn't fit the doctrine they subscribe to. In my research, I've found this to be most pervasive in the pre-tribulation rapture theory I used to believe in many years ago. Let's look at a couple of examples to drive this point home.

***Allegory:** The budding of the fig tree as mentioned by Jesus in Luke 21:29-30 is symbolic of Israel becoming a nation.*

***Literal meaning:** Just as with the eagle and carcass example we covered earlier, Jesus is simply reminding the disciples that "when you see this, you'll then see that." He's giving the signs that will precede His coming and then goes on to discuss His subsequent appearing. It's true that the Jews needed to come back to their homeland before the end as foretold by Old Testament prophets, but this saying has nothing to do with that event.*

***Allegory:** The letters from John to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 represent church ages.*

***Literal meaning:** God admonished seven real, historical churches – all in Asia Minor and within John's realm of influence. Sinful behavior has looked the same throughout the centuries, so God's warnings and reassurances echoed in the letters can benefit us today too. However, it would be dangerous to read anything more into it – especially if doing so leads to the creation of a church doctrine about various dispensations from God and symbolic church ages.*

This practice is nothing new. Augustine and others like Clement of Alexandria, Clement of Rome, Maximus the Confessor, and Origen did this throughout the early church period. Origen taught that each biblical text had three levels of meaning: body, soul, and spirit. And Augustine is famous for his allegorical interpretations. One good example is the allegory that he turned the Good Samaritan parable into. The following is the original parable and allegorical components he created from the parable.²

The parable: *Jesus replied and said, “A **man** was going down from Jerusalem to **Jericho**, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away **leaving him half dead**. And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring **oil** and wine on them; and he put him on his own **beast**, and brought him to an **inn** and took care of him.”* — Luke 10:30-34.

Some of Augustine’s allegories:

- “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho” represents Adam.
- “Jericho” means the moon and signifies Adam’s mortality.
- “Leaving him half dead” means that as a man Adam lives, but he died spiritually; therefore he is half dead.
- “Oil” represents comfort of good hope.
- “Beast” means the flesh of Christ’s incarnation.
- “Inn” signifies the church.

Other practices that can hide the true meaning of Scripture: taking it out of its context or focusing on just bits and pieces while disregarding the context altogether. Doing either makes it harder to take Scripture literally, which can lead to misinterpreting the biblical text. We’ve already discussed the example regarding a “thief in the night,” but here’s another:

Statement taken out of context: Some people assert that “Jesus can return at any moment since the Bible says no one knows when Christ will return.” This is based on Matthew 24:36: “*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.*”

Literal meaning in context: This is probably the worst case I’ve seen with regard to taking last-day Scripture out of context. Read Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, and 2 Thessalonians 2 among others and you’ll quickly understand in the whole biblical context that a sequence of events and signs will precede Christ’s return. So while it’s true we won’t know the exact time of His appearing, we’ll know the season by being watchful as Christ admonished us to do.

In summary, take Scripture literally whenever possible. Also, keep it within the context of the verse, then the passage, then the book, and then the whole of Scripture. Compare Scripture with Scripture (parallel lines within a theme or similar Scripture in multiple books). Use study tools, most of which you can find free of charge (or by donation) to increase your chances of producing accurate and timely interpretations.

Now that we know how to (and how *not* to) study Scripture, let’s apply what we’ve learned beginning with the next section: PART THREE - The Cast, Crew, & Props. But first, please answer the Checkup questions for Chapters Three and Four on the following page to check your understanding of what we’ve just covered.

CHECKUP

CHAPTERS THREE & FOUR

The following questions are meant to check your understanding of what we've covered so far and provoke additional thoughts and questions to elevate your learning to a higher level. You don't have to answer Private Challenge/Discussion questions (or share the answers publicly if you do). They're just for your own consideration or group discussion.

Possible answers to all questions can be found in Appendix D.

1. Why is it important to understand what an antecedent is and to be able to identify them?
2. How should you first approach Scripture interpretation – literally or figuratively? Why?
3. A _____ is the smallest circle of context for a sentence or verse.
4. What resource(s) should you consult to discover the root or meaning of certain words in Scripture?
5. Why is allegorizing Scripture so dangerous?

6. *Private Challenge / Discussion:* What are some possible biblical allegories you've heard? Would you take the time to validate them through Scripture research and comparison?

