

The Intended Meaning of Apocalyptic Prophecy is Determined by Valid Rules

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Introduction

There's a thousand different interpretations on Bible prophecy floating around today. Why? Prophetic expositors arrive at different conclusions because there are as many different methods of interpretation as there are people. *Methods of interpretation* is a catch-all phrase that describes a controlling set of ideas or views residing in a person's head *before* he actually begins to interpret prophecy. Methods of interpretation include cherished religious views, spiritual presuppositions, scholastic assumptions, concepts about the role and authority of Scripture, the use of external authority and church traditions. For example, a Catholic scholar will interpret Bible prophecy so that his Catholic beliefs and his prophetic conclusions harmoniously align and a Baptist scholar will do the same thing. Ironically, the Catholic scholar and the Baptist scholar can study the same passages of Scripture and arrive at very different conclusions. How does this happen? The answer is quite simple. No one approaches the study of Bible prophecy without some kind of intellectual and/or religious baggage. This baggage is called "methods of interpretation," "rules of interpretation," or hermeneutics. Perhaps the following parable will illustrate how rules of interpretation affect us.

The Parable of the Math Teacher

Once upon a time, there was a math teacher who surrendered his life to the Lord. Later, he felt called to serve as a missionary in a foreign land. He sent out numerous resumes and eventually, he was invited to teach math in a parochial college in a city called Overspent.

During the first week of class, he discovered a puzzling situation. None of his college students could work a single math problem, yet they had an answer for every math problem that he assigned to them. He asked the students how they entered college without resolving a single a math problem. The students said their high school teachers did not require them to work through math problems because highly educated and spiritually guided math teachers long ago had worked out all of the answers and they needed only to memorize them.

The teacher was astonished.

The next day, the teacher put this equation on the board: $3x + 5 = 20$. He asked the students to solve for x . All of the students reported that x was equal to 24. When the teacher asked how they arrived at 24, they said they had always been taught that x equals 24, $y = 25$ and $z = 26$.

The teacher could not believe his ears. He demonstrated on the chalkboard how x is solved and he proved that $x = 5$ was true using the rules of substitution. The students were offended and

insulted because the math teacher showed no respect for their highly exalted high school teachers and their time-proven ways of solving math problems. The students told the teacher that if he had written $3e + 5 = 20$, their answer would have been 5 because $a = 1$, $b = 2$, $c = 3$, $d = 4$ and $e = 5$. The teacher responded by saying that the variable's name has no effect on the problem. Whether a variable is called "e" or "x", it doesn't matter because in math, the process of reaching the answer is as important as arriving at the answer! The students could not bear to hear this heresy and they rose up as one man and stormed out of class. The math teacher was stunned. He said aloud to himself, "How can I help them? They know nothing about working through a math problem. These students have no idea that math is controlled by four self-evident rules of addition, multiplication, subtraction and division. They think they have been properly informed, they are afraid to consider answers that are contrary to their elders. What shall I do for them?"

The next day the teacher plainly said to the students: "Please hear me out. You have been misled. Your approach for solving math problems is worthless. Memorizing answers is not to be confused with working through a problem to find the answer. If you will follow the four rules that govern basic math, you can test your answers in different ways. More importantly, others who know nothing about you can also test the validity of your answers. Math is not a matter of opinion, it is a matter of fact." Immediately, the students became hostile. He had condemned their beloved elders. He had insulted their high school and its traditions. They threw desks and chairs at the teacher so that he died.

When class was over, the students went away happy. They were relieved that the offending teacher was silent. After four years, the graduates of Overspent High School graduated from college and many of them went to work for the city. About two years later, the city entered a financial crisis and went bankrupt and no one could figure out why. Literally.

The moral of the story: Traditions can be more important than the facts. Tamper with a tradition and the result could be death. On the other hand, if we are ignorant of the truth, we will eventually perish and wonder why.

How Can the Bible Tell Us Things We Don't Want to Believe?

Knowingly or unknowingly, every student of prophecy uses *some rules of interpretation*. The problem is that invalid rules will not produce valid conclusions. For example, some people believe the following is a valid rule: "A day in Bible prophecy *always* equals a year." If we accept this rule, then the 1,000 years of Revelation 20 would be translated as 365,242 literal years because a year has 365.242 days in it. (365.242 days x 1000 years = 365,242 years)

A valid rule cannot have an exception for if there is an exception, who on Earth has the authority to tell the rest of mankind when a rule should be applied or ignored? For reasons beyond the scope of this article, I find the day/year rule mentioned above to be invalid. Yes, there are places in Daniel and Revelation where God translates time according to the Jubilee Calendar. In such cases, a day is translated as a year (for example, the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 translate into 490 years), but there are other places in Daniel and Revelation where God measures time without

translation (for example, the 1000 years in Revelation 20 and the 1,335 days in Daniel 12 are literal time periods). How can we tell when God is translating time according to the Jubilee Calendar and when He is not? The answer is quite simple: A valid rule regarding the translation of time will tell us.

Eschatology today is largely “a nose of wax” which various expositors manipulate for political, religious or personal reasons. Millions of people have been misled into believing things that have no truth in them. In a nutshell, here’s the problem: If a prophetic idea can be made to *appear* reasonable, it can become believable. But, history says that reasonableness does not necessarily produce truth (even though truth is reasonable). For thousands of years observers of the Sun said that Earth stood still and the Sun orbited Earth. “The reasonableness of this position is plainly evident,” they said. Then one day in the 16th century, Copernicus came along and ruined their reasonable idea by putting a few interesting facts on the table and suddenly, two thousand years of “reasonable evidence” was used to prove that Earth traveled around the Sun.

Faulty Interpretations Unavoidable until the Time of the End

The book of Daniel contains 533 sentences. It was written about twenty-six centuries ago, but *unlike* the other 65 books in the Bible, the book of Daniel was sealed up “until the time of the end.” The angel, Gabriel, said to Daniel, “. . . **Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end.**” (Daniel 12:9) What does “closed up and sealed until the time of the end” mean? This means that God placed some information in the book of Daniel that remains “top secret” until the time of the end arrives. What is this top secret information that “pops out” of Daniel at the time of the end? Before I answer this question, consider the discovery of the Rosetta Stone.

The Rosetta Stone was accidentally unearthed in 1799 near Rosetta, Egypt, by some French soldiers. The stone bore a single message written in two forms of Egyptian script – demotic and hieroglyphic. When archeologists examined this second century B.C. stone, they were thrilled because this one rock unlocked a perplexing mystery. Prior to 1799, a large number of clay tablets bearing Egyptian hieroglyphics had been found, but they could not be read because no one could decipher the hieroglyphics. The Rosetta Stone changed this. The demotic inscriptions enabled Thomas Young (1773-1829) and J.F. Champollion (1790-1832) to decipher the hieroglyphics of ancient Egyptians and the rest is history.

In a similar way, God embedded four secrets in the book of Daniel. An angel told Daniel these secrets would remain entombed until “the time of the end.” (Daniel 12:4,9) When the time arrives for these secrets to be “unearthed,” the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation will become understandable – *just as they read* because God wants everyone to understand what He has to say to the final generation. The discovery of these four secrets shatters centuries of prophetic exposition because all interpretations of Daniel and Revelation prior to the time of the end are necessarily faulty and incomplete because Daniel is not unsealed until the time of the end. In other words, the book of Daniel was written for the generation that would live “at the time of the end.”

Three Levels of Information

As the reader might expect, God buried His secrets in the book of Daniel very well. However, when God wants something known, ordinary men and women can discover the things that He has hidden. Through the ages we find this discovery mechanism at work: *On or about the time of fulfillment, elements of prophecy are properly understood.* For example, when it came time to understand the timing of Christ's birth, the wise men from the East figured it out. (Matthew 2:2)

The apostle Paul also noticed this phenomenon. Consider his words: **"Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."** (Ephesians 3:2-6)

What did God hide in the book of Daniel? The answer to this question requires a little explanation. The book of Daniel offers three levels of information. They are:

1. Dramatic stories of faith
2. Visions revealing God's plans
3. Apocalyptic architecture

The highest (or most evident) level of information in the book of Daniel consists of dramatic stories of faith in God. These stories were recorded for the benefit all generations. However, Earth's final generation will benefit most from these stories because the fiery trials in the first chapters of Daniel are mini-parallels of coming events. For example, in Daniel 3 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced the mandatory worship of a golden *image which the king of Babylon constructed*. In Revelation 13:15, the inhabitants of the world will face the mandatory worship of an *image which the king of modern Babylon will set up*. These stories and their outcomes were put in the book of Daniel for the encouragement of all people, especially those who will live at the time of the end.

A second (and more difficult) level of information found in the book of Daniel concerns the meaning of visions. God gave King Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel visions about the future and we can be sure that everything God said has either come to pass or will come to pass. The good news that comes from these visions is the knowledge that God has a definite plan and time-table for this planet. Because God's people have understood (more or less) these visions for hundreds of years, we cannot say that the visions themselves were sealed up until "the time of the end." Something else was sealed up in the book of Daniel was sealed up, something that uniquely applies to those people who will *live at the end* of the world. What is it?

The Book Unsealed

The third (and deepest) level of information embedded within Daniel is *the architecture of apocalyptic prophecy*. There are five prophecies in Daniel and here's the secret: Each prophecy conforms to a consistent structure. In other words, all five prophecies behave in precisely the same way. After making this discovery, the intended meaning of Daniel becomes crystal clear! But wait! There's a huge bonus that goes with this discovery. God used the same architecture in the book of Revelation that He used in Daniel! In other words, once we understand how the prophecies in Daniel consistently behave, we know how the prophecies in Revelation will behave. Daniel and Revelation share the same unusual architecture!

Once a consistent behavior is observed, that behavior can be defined or quantified into a rule that is never broken. These rules function much like the combination code for a safe. When valid rules of interpretation are applied to the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation, a marvelous result occurs. The prophecies will create a huge matrix and every prophetic will fit in this matrix without conflict. Even more, the prophecies will make perfect sense *just as they read!* Layers of interpretation and prophetic expositors are not needed nor warranted. The Bible will interpret itself!

When the four rules in Daniel are applied to each prophecy in Daniel and Revelation, a comprehensive story will unfold that is completely harmonious with everything the Bible has to say about the ways of God. Furthermore, all of the details in Daniel and Revelation are in perfect harmony and synchrony with each other. To visualize the matrix which the four rules produce, think of a tall wedding cake having seventeen layers! The larger pieces of the cake are at the bottom of the stack and the smaller pieces are on top. The "toothpicks" that hold the seventeen layers together are prophetic events that unite and align the seventeen layers in Daniel and Revelation into one grand story. The toothpicks are important because two or more prophecies can describe the same prophetic event! Because the same event is described in two different ways – within two different cake layers – a precise alignment of all prophetic events is possible. (The wedding cake in this illustration has seventeen layers because there are seventeen prophecies (five in Daniel and twelve in Revelation)).

Private Interpretation

Any interpretation of prophecy that does not conform to a published set of valid rules is called a "private interpretation." The word "private" in this context does not mean obscure. Millions of people believe and endorse various interpretations that are "private" in nature. Consider this: A private interpretation is an interpretation which does not have an external means for validation. In other words, a private interpretation cannot be tested and validated by an impartial jury who have to test the conclusions set forth by a given set of rules. In other words, a private interpretation requires a private interpreter. A private interpreter is a person or persons who use something other than valid rules to make their interpretation *appear* reasonable and valid. For most people, their interpreter is within their church. Therefore, Baptist and Catholic laymen cannot agree on the meaning of prophecy because their authorities cannot agree. This diversity emphasizes man's need to understand the architecture in Daniel. *There is one architecture in Daniel and Revelation, there are four valid rules which produce one prophetic truth.* Looking

for truth is a joyful experience for those who love truth. Caution: Even when we have valid rules of interpretation, reaching the intended meaning is not “a cake walk”, but eventually, the intended meaning will appear! (It is one thing to know the laws of algebra, but it is another thing to correctly apply them in every case.)

The Value and Importance of Rules

Most Christians have not heard about nor considered the necessity of having valid rules of interpretation. I often hear from people who claim they have studied Bible prophecy for many years and they are usually offended at my response to some conclusion they are anxious to defend. My standard comment is this: “Just send me your rules, not your conclusions. I am well acquainted with all of the prophetic pieces in Daniel and Revelation. I will do a simple test using your rules to see what the result may be.” This doesn’t go over too well because most Christians do not use valid methods (rules) of interpretation. Even popular TV prophetic expositors do not realize that they are merely supporting a private interpretation when they promote what was given to them. Here’s the point again: A private interpretation requires a private interpreter. Without the private interpreter sitting in the driver’s seat, no one else could reach the same conclusion.

Scientists achieve advances in the study of genetics by working at the cellular level. After years of studying various cells within the human body, scientists have been able to determine how certain cells operate. In more and more cases, they have been able to predict the behavior of cells under controlled circumstances because they now know something about the behaviors of amino acids and proteins. Research scientists are constantly looking for “consistent behaviors” within their studies and once the behavior of a specific amino acid or protein on a particular cell is understood, drugs are compounded to produce the desired results. Pharmaceutical companies spend billions of dollars on this type of painstaking research because they know that once a constant behavior is detected and controlled, a cure can be produced.

Consistent Behavior

In a similar way, the four rules in Daniel have been distilled through a careful study and analysis of Daniel’s prophecies. The visions within Daniel behave in a predictable way and this behavior allows us to decipher things about the meaning of prophecy that we could not otherwise know. For example, here is a consistent behavior that occurs throughout the books of Daniel and Revelation. *Each prophecy has a beginning point and an ending point in time, and the events in each prophecy occur in the order in which they are given.* This rule may sound very simple, but it has profound ramifications.

Consider the results of violating this *self-evident* rule. If the events given within each prophecy of Daniel do not occur in their given order, *how can* the order of events be authoritatively determined? This question brings up an even greater question. Does the Bible speak for itself or must it have an external interpreter? After many years of study on this question, I conclude the Bible stands alone. It speaks for itself and the Bible is its own interpreter. The constant and predictable architecture within Daniel’s prophecies is the basis for Rule One. Putting this rule in

my words, the rule is: *Each apocalyptic prophecy has a beginning point and an ending point in time and the events within each prophecy must occur in the order they are given.* Keep in mind, I did not invent this rule. Rather, I am expressing a self-evident behavior that recurs without exception throughout the book of Daniel (as well as Revelation).

The Four Rules

I hope you will print this article and refer to it from time to time because the following four rules will be often discussed in this chat group. The four rules embedded within the book of Daniel and sealed up until the time of the end are:

1. Each apocalyptic prophecy has a beginning and ending point in time and the events within each prophecy must occur in the order they are given.
2. A fulfilment of apocalyptic prophecy occurs when all of the specifications within that prophecy are met. This includes the order of events outlined in the prophecy.
3. Apocalyptic language can be literal, symbolic or analogous. To reach the intended meaning of a prophecy, the student must consider: (a) the context, (b) the use of parallel language in the Bible, and (c) relevant statements in the Bible that define that symbol if an element is thought to be symbolic.
4. God measures apocalyptic time in two ways: (a) a day for a year, and (b) as literal time. The presence or absence of the Jubilee calender determines how God measures time.