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End Times Bible Prophecy Study

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We are glad you have come out to join us for what promises to be an exciting look into the Scriptures on the subject of Bible Prophecy. May the Holy Spirit cause you to see the truths and applications that will encourage you to begin or continue on your Christian journey. I would like to extend a special thank you to both Arnold Fruchtenbaum and Tim Lahaye, both of whose teaching on this subject has been most helpful.

James Moriello, Pastor at Firm Foundation, and teacher of this study

Outline of the study:

- 1) Introduction: What is Bible prophecy?
- 2) General rules of interpretation
- 3) God's timetable of human history (Dispensations)
- 4) Bible prophecies already fulfilled
- 5) The Prophecies of the Christ
- 6) Rapture of the Church
- 7) The Tribulation Period
- 8) The Second Coming
- 9) The Millennial Kingdom
- 10) Conclusion: What then shall we do?

1. Introduction: What is Bible Prophecy?

Prophecy in the Bible is expressed in two ways. The first is telling forth the Word of God (“Thus says the LORD”). The second is the telling forth of events that will happen in the future (“It will come to pass”). It is the second we will be focusing on in this study. Before we begin, it is important that we understand that prophecy is not continuing today as it did in Bible times. We have the completed Scriptures so there is no more divine revelations beyond that (Revelation 22:18-19; Jude 3). That’s how cults get started. God has spoken and He has had the last word. We also must not pretend to have all the answers. There are things which are yet to be revealed with greater clarity.

2. General rules of interpretation

When we seek to interpret and understand Bible Prophecy, we have to be consistent with and honest to the Scriptures. We will follow the four basic rules presented by Dr. David L. Cooper.

- 1) Scripture should be interpreted in its ordinary and literal sense unless the context or comparison with other Scriptures clearly indicates otherwise.
- 2) Many prophetic Scriptures have both a near and a far fulfillment. For example Zechariah 9:9-10 has both the First and Second Coming of Christ in view in the same passage.
- 3) Some prophetic passages record an event while others give more detail about the same event. A good example of this is the Olivet Discourse recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.
- 4) A verse cannot be pulled out of its context. Many false teachings have arisen due to failure to follow this principle. For example, some false teachers have identified the eagle in Scripture with the United States when there is no reason to do so. In fact, we do not find the United States in end time prophecy at all in Scripture.

3. God's timetable of human history (Dispensations)

The timeline of human history is best understood within the framework of dispensations. A dispensation is a period of time during which God works in specific ways in history. We present seven in our Statement of Faith, but Bible scholars have defined anywhere from six to fourteen. In times past, the law was revealed through Moses to God's covenant nation—namely Israel. Salvation came through faith in God by looking forward to the coming of the Savior (Job 19:25-27). In the current dispensation in which we live, salvation is obtained by believing upon the finished work of Jesus Christ and putting faith in Him (Hebrews 10:12; John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9). The believer today receives the gift of the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion (Ephesians 1:13). There are two dispensations yet future which we will be dealing with in this study. The first is the Tribulation period. While eternal life is still through believing in faith upon the work and promises of Jesus Christ, there are some features as to how that will work itself according to God's plan that are different with regard to the working of the Holy Spirit and the message of the 'gospel of the kingdom'. The second dispensation yet future will be that of the Millennial Kingdom, when Christ is physically present reigning on earth. We will elaborate on these when we arrive at them in the study.

4. Bible prophecies already fulfilled

We find assurance that what will come to pass in the future will surely happen in the fact that many things that the Bible said would happen came to pass exactly as they were written. In particular, this is true concerning Jesus Christ and His First Advent. Here are some examples:

- 1) He would be born of a virgin woman (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18).
- 2) He would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1).
- 3) He would be rejected by men (Isaiah 53:3; John 1:11).
- 4) He would suffer and be crucified (Psalm 22:1-21; Matthew 27:38-43).
- 5) He would rise from the dead (Psalm 16:10; Matthew 28:9).

5. The Prophecies of the Christ (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21)

Matthew 24-25 records what is known as the Olivet Discourse. It is so named because it took place as Jesus “**sat on the Mount of Olives**” (Matthew 24:3). We find parallel accounts in Mark 13 and Luke 21 as well. Most of this teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ is prophetic in nature. The primary purpose of prophecy in Scripture is to build up our faith in God. When we learn that all of His Counsel stands and will be fulfilled, we begin to trust God more and more as we live out our lives before Him. Jesus Himself said that “**heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will by no means pass away**” (Matthew 24:35). In this brief exposition we will examine Matthew 24:1-42. In doing so, we endeavor to seek the plainest sense of the passage in context and in harmony with the accounts of the same discourse recorded in the other Gospels. I strongly encourage the reader to follow along in the Bible as many passages will be referenced to in this exposition.

- 1) The disciples ask Jesus three questions in Matthew 24:3. They wish to know when the things spoken of in the previous verse will happen, what the sign of Jesus’ (Second) Coming will be, and what the sign of the end of the age will be. Jesus does not answer these questions in order, but He does answer all three over the course of His teaching.
- 2) Jesus begins with the church age. He speaks in Matthew 24:5 of false teachings and Messiahs appearing on the scene. Historically, this is exactly what happened and continues to happen to this day. Beware of counterfeit gospels that deny the Deity and Work of Jesus Christ. Do not even give them the time of day (Galatians 1:6-9). Jesus also speaks of localized warfare in verse 6 as characteristic of the church age.
- 3) Next, Jesus addresses the third question posed to Him in Matthew 24:3 which is in regard to the sign of the end of the age. In Matthew 24:7, Jesus prophesies worldwide wars and tragedies. Notice in verse 8,

- Jesus states that such are “**the beginning of sorrows**”. These things mean the end is coming, but do not necessarily mean the end is coming now or tomorrow. Beware of speculating about the time of the end (Matthew 24:36). If God in His Wisdom did not even tell the Son the exact timing when He was on earth, He isn’t going to be telling any self styled preacher today either.
- 4) Now turn to Luke 21:12-19. Here we have material not in Matthew that will help us get the big picture. Jesus says “**before all these things**”. Before all what things? In the context He is speaking of the sorrows and signs spoken of in Luke 21:11. Therefore, when we read through verse 19, we know Jesus is speaking of persecution in the church age in general, and particularly the Apostolic experiences.
 - 5) Let us stay in Luke a little while longer. Jesus answers the disciples’ first question which was when the events of Matthew 24:2 (and Luke 24:6) will occur. In Luke 21:20-24, He predicts the events that would occur just prior to and including the Roman siege and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 in detail. These events were recorded by Josephus in his writings and other historical sources. Such was the judgment against the nation of Israel alluded to in Matthew 23 which came as a result of Israel’s rejection of its Messiah.
 - 6) Now we return to Matthew’s account. In Matthew 24:9-14 we find the account of the first half of the seven-year Tribulation period prophesied of hundreds of years earlier in Daniel 9:27, amongst other places. “**Then**” in verse 9 means after the sorrows of verse 8 have had their fulfillment. There is the persecution of the saints by the worldwide apostate church (Matthew 24:9-14, Revelation 6:9-11, Revelation 17:1-6). We cannot know for certain the identity of the apostate church, so we should not speculate on that. There will be a rise of false prophets—also mentioned in Zechariah 13:2-6. There will be a rise of sin, or lawlessness, as a result of the rise of the man of sin and his influence as

well as the 'reduced activity' of God the Holy Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7). On the positive side if one can use that adjective, the first half of the Tribulation will also be characterized by the worldwide preaching of the Gospel. This evangelism will be accomplished primarily through the 144,000 Jews mentioned in Revelation 7:2-12. We know they are Jews and not Jehovah's Witnesses—as that cult claims—because they are identified by tribe. We also know that there is an innumerable multitude with God in heaven in His presence by Revelation 7:9.

- 7) Matthew 24:15-28 recounts the events of the Second Half of the Tribulation, also known as the Great Tribulation. This period is inaugurated by the setting up of the “**abomination of desolation**” in the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem temple (Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10, Revelation 13:11-15). This event will involve idol worship and essentially the Antichrist setting himself up as a god. The Jews alive at that time are advised to flee when they see this happen. Scripture seems to indicate that the place they are to flee to will be Bozrah, or Petra (Isaiah 34:1-7, 63:1-6, Micah 2:12-13, Habakkuk 3:3). There will be false messiahs and prophets arising at that time. Antichrist and his false prophet will hold sway over the earth in those days (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10, Revelation 13:11-15). Demonically inspired miracles will be performed as they were in the days of Pharaoh (Exodus 7:22, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). We should learn two things from this. First, we should be suspicious of those who claim to be prophets and miracle workers. Second, we should know the Word of God which is the standard by which we can test all things. The last point we will make here is that according to Matthew 24:25-27, the Second Coming will be visible to all people alive at the time. In this way it is different than both the First Advent of Christ and the Rapture (More on that later).
- 8) In Matthew 24:29-31, Jesus answers the disciples' second question posed in verse three as to the sign of His (Second) Coming and expounds

further upon their third question about the sign of the end of the age. God shuts the lights off and a worldwide blackout ensues. Then the Glory of God, or Shechinah Glory, is revealed. At that time God will gather His people together unto Himself.

- 9) Next we turn to the parable of the fig tree recorded in Matthew 24:32-35. The fig tree does not represent Israel, as modern day date-setters often contend. The reference here is to trees in general. Jesus simply uses it as an everyday illustration, just as today we might use a pine tree or an oak tree if they happened to be in the area where we were. In the context of our passage, Jesus is referring in verse 34 to the generation that is alive at the time of these events; namely, the Tribulation generation—not any generation alive before that including our own.
- 10) Matthew 24:36-42 is best understood in the context of the Rapture of the church. Verse 36 speaks of God alone knowing the timing of future events. That holds true here and also holds true generally. The panorama of human history falls under the maxim that “**the secret things belong to the LORD our God**” (Deuteronomy 29:29). If we cannot set a Rapture date, it follows that neither can we set an end time date. The Rapture is the calling out of God’s church to meet Jesus in the air at an unknown point in history prior to the beginning of the Tribulation. Those believers alive at that time will be translated in the manner of Enoch and Elijah into bodies fit for heaven in an instant without experiencing natural death. We find this event described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. This event is distinct from the Second Coming by the fact that far from being obvious to all, everyone is going about his or her business and some people simply disappear (Matthew 24:36-42).
- 11) The Olivet Discourse teaches us many things. We should be watchful and ready to meet Jesus Christ today, and every day. We do

not know whether we will be a part of the Rapture (or for unbelievers, Tribulation) generation. Like all before us with the exception of only two men, we may die a natural death. We go to meet our Maker either way. What will he find you doing when your number is up? Will you be found a good and faithful servant? Are you ready?

6. Rapture of the church

We have already alluded to and defined the Rapture in our examination of the Olivet Discourse. Although the word does not appear in Scripture, it is descriptive of an event that the Bible gives good evidence for. When one examines Scriptures relating to the Second Coming of Christ, some problems arise with regard to seeming contradictions regarding its details. It is my opinion that the Doctrine of the Rapture best harmonizes those Scriptures while at the same time maintaining a literal view of Scripture. Here is the evidence in favor of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture:

- 1) The events recorded in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 are not visible to everybody on earth as the Second Coming of Christ clearly is. They are for believers only.
- 2) Comparing Matthew 24:29-31 and Matthew 24:36-42, it is (in my opinion), the best way to harmonize the juxtaposed teachings.
- 3) The church is absent from Revelation 4-18, which is the account of the Tribulation days. Scripture indicates in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 that the restrainer (the Holy Spirit) is absent on the earth in those days. These things would make perfect sense if the church was already in heaven.

7. The Tribulation

The term 'tribulation' comes from the words of our Lord recorded in Matthew 24:29. The duration of this Dispensation of history is given in Scripture to be seven years, and is divided into two halves known as the Tribulation and the Great Tribulation, respectively (Daniel 9:24-27, 12:11; Matthew 24:15). It begins not with the Rapture but with the signing of a covenant between Antichrist and the Nation of Israel (Isaiah 28:14-22; Daniel 9:27). God has three major revealed purposes for ordaining this period of history. First, it is to fulfill His desire that many come to Him through faith in Jesus Christ His Son (2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 7:1-17). Second, He desires to put an end to the prevailing wickedness that exists on the earth (Genesis 6:5; Isaiah 24:19-20; 2 Peter 3:7). Third, God wished to record these events for all saints in the New Testament economy in order that we might get a glimpse of God's amazing patience, mercy, and justice.

Prior to examining the events of the Tribulation as set forth in Revelation 6 through 18, we will introduce to you the cast on the stage of this period of history.

In Revelation 4 and 5, we find the Eternal Triune God in the throne room of heaven. He is the source of all blessing and is ever worthy of worship, honor, and glory for all times (Revelation 5:13-14). It is He under whose sovereignty all these things will take place.

The second player in the scene (pun intended) is the Antichrist. He will come as a conqueror, initially it seem by peaceful means (Revelation 6:1-2). Who is the Antichrist? This is a common question that is asked by Christians and Non-Christians alike. The short answer is that we do not know and will not know until he is "revealed" during and ultimately after the Tribulation (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 2:8). The Scripture passages that give us the most detail about the Antichrist are 2 Thessalonians 2:2-12 and Revelation Chapter 13. If you follow the Rapture view explained in the last

section in which the visible church will be taken up to meet Christ in the clouds, it would follow that “He Who restrains (unchecked sin)” —that is, the Holy Spirit—would have been ‘removed’ if the Antichrist were presently revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:7). Therefore, we cannot know who he is now or if he is alive now. That means the revelation of the identity of Antichrist is yet future. We can speculate all day long whether he is some religious or political figure alive today, but all we are doing is slandering people when we do that. How would you like it if some preacher identified you or your mother or your son as the Antichrist? The Antichrist will be a counterfeit Messiah. Genesis 3:15 speaks of Jesus the Messiah as “her seed” which implies the virgin birth since women don’t have seed—men do. The fact that Satan’s seed is mentioned in the same verse implies supernatural origin. Revelation 17:8 implies counterfeit resurrection—read it for yourself. The phrase “God of his fathers” and “by the help of a foreign god” implies Jewish ancestry (Daniel 11:36-39). The phrase “coming out of the sea” speaks of Gentile origin (Revelation 13:1). Most likely he will have both. Satan seeks to imitate God by setting up the unholy trinity in the middle of the Tribulation of himself as Antichrist, the beast, and the false prophet.

The third player of note on the scene during the Tribulation is religious Babylon described in Revelation 17. This is the one world religion which will be exerting its power over the souls of many to their detriment during this time. Presumably, it will have been a long time coming. The one thing we can say for sure is that this religion will encompass many who believe that man must work to get to God and not visa-versa—Christianity teaches that God has done all the work and man must merely accept His way on His terms; namely, belief in Jesus Christ God’s Divine Son. This one world religion will be an ally of Antichrist until the midpoint of the Tribulation, when he will declare himself to be God and the religion will become obsolete (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15). Much speculation has arisen through the centuries as to the identity of this one world religion,

and many have identified it as the Roman Catholic Church. It is extremely unlikely that it is in my opinion. This future apostate 'church' is much more likely to be of the liberal brand of 'church' that exists today where "everyone does what is right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). This would include those denominations, churches, and non-Christian religions where anything goes (deity of Jesus denied, sinful sex tolerated or advocated, authority of Scripture denied, emotional experiences inconsistent with Scripture given high regard).

The events of the first half of the Tribulation are recorded in Revelation 6-9. There are six seal judgments described in chapter six, followed by an account of a worldwide revival led by 144,000 Jewish evangelists in chapter seven, followed by six trumpet judgments in chapters eight and nine. Here is the breakdown in rough outline form.

Seal Judgments

- 1) 6:1-2 conqueror (Antichrist) comes
- 2) 6:3-4 global warfare
- 3) 6:5-6 famine
- 4) 6:7-8 death
- 5) 6:9-11 cry of the martyrs
- 6) 6:12-17 cosmic disturbances

Features of chapter seven

- 1) 144,000 Jewish evangelists, listed by ancestral tribe
- 2) Worldwide revival
- 3) Multitude of the saved in God's presence rejoicing over salvations

Trumpet Judgments

- 1) 8:7 vegetation struck
- 2) 8:8-9 seas struck
- 3) 8:10-11 waters (rivers and streams) struck
- 4) 8:12-13 heavens struck
- 5) 9:1-12 unlocking of the abyss, plague of locusts
- 6) 9:13-21 demonic horsemen

God is not in any way being malicious here in ordaining and allowing these things to happen. Rather, he is going through great pains to get the attention of those alive at the time that they might turn to Him and be saved. God works that way. If you are saved, think of what great lengths He went through to get your attention.

We now turn our attention to the events of the middle of the Tribulation, which are chronicled in Revelation 10-14. Here we will offer a brief overview in outline form.

- 1) Chapter 10: The mighty angel causes John to eat the scroll, in preparation of the continuance of the prophecy. This is reminiscent of the prophets of old doing likewise (Jeremiah 15:16; Ezekiel 3:1).
- 2) 11:1-14: God appoints two witnesses for the purpose of evangelism and warning of impending judgment at the beginning of the Tribulation. God gives the account of their ministry, death, and resurrection. Their resurrection happens three and a half days after their ministry commences at the midpoint of the Tribulation (verses 2 and 11).
- 3) 11:15-19: A seventh trumpet is blown, but this time it is to proclaim God's Kingdom and ultimate victory and not judgment.

- 4) 12:1-6: Here we have a picture of a woman giving birth and a dragon seeking to destroy the child. The woman is Israel, the child is Jesus, the dragon is Satan, and the stars are fallen angels. We know that the woman is Israel and not Mary for two reasons. First, she has a garland of twelve stars on her head which represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Second, she flees into the wilderness to be protected during the time of the Great Tribulation as recorded in verse six. Israel is on earth at that time and Mary is not.
- 5) 12:7-12: This is the account of Satan being evicted from heaven in ages past and his activities since then.
- 6) 12:13-17: Israel will be especially persecuted by Satan in the Tribulation.
- 7) 13:1-15: This is the account of Satan indwelling Antichrist, who is bodily resurrected in an imitation miracle (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). We find the record of the unholy trinity rising up to intensify the war against the saints of god.
- 8) 13:16-18: This is the account of the mark of the beast. Satan consolidates his power by controlling commerce. He causes any who wish to buy and sell legally to take his mark, a symbol of ownership. His number is said to be 666. Many fanciful interpretations of this have arisen, but we cannot say for sure what it indicates. It will be known to the believers alive at that time. Suffice it to say that in the Bible, the number 6 is a reference to man as opposed to 7 which is the divine number. The point is that man will be exalted over God in some extraordinarily tangible way at this time.
- 9) 14:1-5: Here we have a scene in heaven of Jesus with 144,000 Christians. These are not the same people we met in Revelation 7. They are already redeemed and in heaven and not on earth.

- 10) 14:6-20: Here we have the proclamation of the angels of the salvation of God, warnings against worshipping the beast (Satan), and warnings of judgment to those who persist in such apostasy.

We now turn our attention to the events of the Great Tribulation as recorded in Revelation 15, 16, and 18. These events take place during the period of three and a half years from the mid-point of the Tribulation up until immediately prior to the Second Coming of Christ. The Second Coming of Christ will be the topic of our next point in this study. Chapters 15 and 16 record the final judgments, known as the bowl judgments, of which there are seven. Again, God seeks to get the attention of sinful men and women that they might call out to Him for salvation in faith.

Bowl Judgments

- 1) 16:2 Loathsome sores
- 2) 16:3 Sea turned to blood
- 3) 16:4-7 waters (rivers and streams turned to blood)
- 4) 16:8-9 men scorched by heat
- 5) 16:10-11 darkness and pain
- 6) 16:12-16 Euphrates River dried up
- 7) 16:17-21 massive earthquake and great hail

Chapter 18 recounts the fall of the political and economic kingdom of Antichrist. The people of the world mourn greatly because they have put their trust in earthly things and not heavenly ones. The stage is now set for the Battle of Armageddon and the Second Coming of Christ.

8. The Second Coming

The Bible clearly teaches in both the Old Testament and the New Testament that Jesus Christ will return to the earth someday. Many Bible passages are very clear about this fact. We read in Revelation:

“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on Him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war” (Revelation 19:11)

This is an obvious reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. Read the following passages for yourself and you will get a good idea of the Scriptural teaching on the subject: Isaiah 63:1-6; Zechariah 14:4-11; Matthew 24:27-31; Matthew 26:63-64; Revelation 19:11-20:10.

When Jesus Christ comes, He will come with His saints to make war with the ungodly at what we know as the Battle of Armageddon. It is called so because the biggest bloodbath in history will take place at the Valley of Megiddo (Revelation 14:17-20, 19:11-21). Jesus Christ will make short work of His enemies at that time and, after seventy-five days, establish His physical Kingdom on earth, the Millennial Kingdom (Daniel 12:11-12).

9. The Millennial Kingdom

The fact that Jesus Christ will one day reign on earth for a literal thousand year period is clearly stated in Scripture. The term “thousand years” is repeated six times in the account of the Millennial Kingdom recorded in Revelation Chapter 20. It will be a time of unprecedented peace—a kingdom that mankind has longed for but could never create because of sinful proclivities. The lion, the wolf, and the lamb will indeed keep company together in His Kingdom (Isaiah 65:24-25). Satan will be bound, to be given one more shot at the end of the thousand years to draw those born in that time period away from the true God.

10. Conclusion: What then shall we do?

All of these things that we have looked at over the course of our study of end time Bible prophecy point to one Person, Jesus Christ. God desires that every man and woman come to Him, although some will still refuse (2 Peter 3:9; Romans 1:18-32). Which camp are you in? If you are sitting on the proverbial fence, you are yet in your sins and will be looking at an eternity apart from God if you were to die today. If you have already made your decision to follow Jesus Christ, then you have a place in heaven with God. These things should encourage you and strengthen your faith that God has done and will do what He has promised. In the meantime, the Bible calls the Christian to live for Him (Romans 12:1-2). What will He find you doing in your last moment on earth? Make each day count, because you know not which day He is coming to bring you home to be with Him forever. May the God of all grace be with you. Amen and Amen.