

BIBLE STUDY SERIES

INTERPRETATION AND INSPIRATION



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On occasion, I have inserted italics and brackets in Scripture quotations to enhance understanding, not to change the meaning.

May God bless you as you study this fascinating topic!

Larry Wilson

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Wake Up America Seminars, Inc.
P.O. Box 273
Bellbrook, OH 45305

Inspiration and Interpretation

Introduction

When the information presented in this booklet was first published in 1989, my views on prophecy were not widely known. Now that 30+ years have passed and the reaches of this ministry have grown exponentially, many of the same questions keep surfacing as people study to understand the message I share. This booklet was created to answer two of the most misunderstood aspects of prophecy: Inspiration and Rules of Interpretation.

The Bible contains immense treasure. Those who search for it must be patient and willing to explore many hours before discovering its beautiful threads of gold. Even then, it takes many threads to produce a handsome cloth.

My hope is that you will obtain helpful and meaningful information in this booklet. I recommend this booklet to all Christians for the same reason I recommend the Old Testament to all Christians. The better one understands the origin of ideas, the more likely he will appreciate the disputes or the improvements occurring since their origin.

Early Interest

I have had a special attraction for the Bible for many years and I continue to have a deep desire to know what the Bible contains. For 40+ years, I have studied and investigated the Bible, especially the books of Daniel and Revelation. If I were to summarize my findings in a sentence, it would be the contents of the Plan of Salvation can only be seen when one synthesizes all Scripture. I approach the Bible as a book containing many clues about God and His plan to save man. As I became acquainted with various clues, I began to see how they interconnect to reveal God's grace, love, power, justice, and mercy. The title "Plan of Salvation" is often referred to, but few people really understand that salvation's process was *planned* from the very beginning. For many years, I have been gathering all of the clues about the Plan of Salvation that I could find. I continue to study them so I can *see* salvation's process for myself, and I testify that my appreciation for God's plan is greater than ever.

My journey toward prophetic understanding can be divided into four phases: investigation, paradigm shift, discovery of a predictable design, and finally, dissemination of my findings. A paradigm shift is a total melt-down of previously held ideas and the reconstruction of new views.

From 1970 until 1976, I studied and examined my *inherited* position on prophecy. I use the word inherited to emphasize the idea that when one becomes part of a church, either through birth or rebirth, he does not understand *everything* the church teaches. He may understand enough to be a member, but it takes time and effort to examine everything any church teaches. Frankly, most people do not care enough about knowing *everything* to invest the time and effort that such research requires.

The paradigm shift began about 1976 when I became convinced my church was putting some round pegs in square holes in the interpretation of Bible prophecy. Some of the church's positions failed to maintain fidelity to Bible text, some conclusions lacked scriptural support, and some claims of prophetic fulfillment lacked historical confirmation. As I studied the origin of the church's prophetic framework, I discovered how it developed its conclusions; however, understanding the history of how these conclusions developed is no substitute for truth. As a church pioneer said, "One text is of more value than ten thousand words of explanation."

In 1976, I could not offer an explanation for all verses in Daniel or Revelation, so I could not say much about the church's positions that did not seem accurate. I did conduct seminars between 1977 and 1980 using Rev-

elation materials prepared by church leaders, but these materials only raised more questions in my mind than they answered. However, prophecy is a broad subject and fellowship with the “Body of Christ” does not require agreement on *every* verse in the Bible. Therefore, I saw no reason to quibble about my uncertainties, as I continued to search for understanding.

I began asking church leaders, teachers, and preachers about the properties of inspiration because I had reached a brick wall in my personal study. I could not resolve many passages in Daniel and Revelation with the views of my church; and by 1978, I began to realize there were problems with the church leaders’ teachings. Many pastors assured me that church leaders were fallible, but none of them could identify one instance of prophetic error. They assured me the church’s prophetic views completely agreed with the Bible. I found a certain irony in their claim that church leaders were fallible, but unable to cite a Bible reference proving their fallibility. It seemed a lot like the Catholic position on the infallibility of the pope. Protestants deny the claim the pope is infallible, but Catholics cannot provide a single instance when the pope has made a mistake when speaking *ex cathedra*.

Months passed and I could not resolve the issue of inspiration. I began to examine a church’s mindset about

church leaders. Typically, churches generally followed this logic: The Bible is the Word of God. Inspired individuals wrote the Bible. It contains a few discrepancies due to finite human beings, but in terms of the expressed will of God, the Bible is the infallible Word of God. Church leaders were inspired just like the writers of the Bible. Therefore, their writings are, at a minimum, on par with the Bible. Their writings are a modern-day infallible explanation of truth, revealing the expressed will of God.

I call this logic the “Insouciantarian Principle” [insouciant means a casual lack of concern or indifference] because many churches use this logic to either exalt the writings of their church leaders *above* the Bible or they trust their church leaders’ views of the Bible more than they trust their own. Luther was confronted with this very problem in his day. I italicized the word “above” because many churches unconsciously make their church leaders the final authority on truth. This practice actually reveals who is perceived to have the higher authority. If this practice were to continue for a few more centuries, would some church leader’s writings altogether shadow the importance and the authority of the Bible? No church leader’s writings are on par with the Bible, and my rejection of this Insouciantarian Principle significantly reduces the number of people willing to consider other prophetic interpretations.

Who Can Determine What the Bible Says?

It is a difficult situation. How can one discuss the meaning of a prophecy with people who insist that they cannot discuss the Bible without including church leaders' writings? Prophetic ideas that run contrary to earlier writings are usually quickly detected and rejected.

I suspect some churches are often considered religious cults; not because of doctrine, but because of the way they deal with the writings of their church leaders. A religious cult is a body of people having or appealing to external authority outside the Bible. Many people would rather defend the inerrancy of their church leaders than investigate the textual content of Daniel and Revelation. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that a profitable conversation is impossible between those who insist on interpreting Bible prophecy using the Bible alone and those who insist on interpreting Bible prophecy using a church leader's writings.

Today, many people find no distinction between the writings of their church leaders and the Bible. The line has become blurred. Many believe that their church leaders' writings are a modern-day version of the Word of God. They believe a church leader's writings and the Bible have equal authority and one is simply an extension of the other. If this view is true, then prophetic understand-

ing cannot develop any further. Most church founders are dead. Their understanding of prophecy was limited and it now remains unchangeable. Obviously, they did not know everything about prophecy since God did not reveal everything about prophecy to them. Truth is ever unfolding and Paul summarized the limitations of prophets when he said, **“For we know in part and we prophesy in part.”**¹ Could Jews of old have killed prophets of God because they revealed greater truths than what Moses wrote in an earlier generation?

I know my observations and conclusions do not set well with many denominations. I cannot help that. I expect detractors will wrest some of my writings from their context to make me look foolish. However, the compelling issue before all of us is not friendship or fellowship. Instead, the issue is God’s coming actions. What does the Bible predict that God is going to do and what is the next prophetic event? What should we be watching and waiting for?

Hopefully, this booklet will cause people to reconsider their prophetic positions. No historical church leader could know everything. The apostle Paul did not know everything and said so. How could they know everything when the book of Daniel was sealed until the end of time?² We must continuously test and retest the views of all prophets as God continues to reveal more

1 1 Corinthians 13:9

2 Daniel 12:4, 9

truth to us. If we are truly Protestant, we should press the Protestant banner higher. We should be foremost in saying the Bible and the Bible *alone* is the rule of faith.

There is a big difference between truth and that which is called truth. The assumption that inspired people are infallible is not limited to any church. Roman Catholics believe the pope is inspired. Therefore, they add papal infallibility and Church traditions to the authority of the Bible. Christian Scientists believe that Mary Baker Eddy was inspired. Therefore, they add her writings to the Bible. Mormons believe that Joseph Smith was inspired. So, the Book of Mormon stands on par with Scripture. Jehovah's Witnesses have gone one step further. Rather than add the writings of Charles Russell to the Bible, they rewrote the Bible according to Charles Russell. Islam has displaced the Bible with its own authority—the Koran. I bring up these points because the word “cult,” as defined earlier, actually includes a lot of people on this planet! Someday soon, I anticipate that the properties of inspiration will become a hotly debated subject among these religious bodies.

The Paradigm Shift

So, 1976 - 1982 was a period of confusion and reorganization for me. I went through a complete paradigm shift. What I once thought to be true became obsolete. My

understanding of the properties of inspiration changed during that time. My understanding of the writings by Peter, John, and Paul changed and opened an important door to a new understanding of the Bible. As a result, I became even more inquisitive about the Bible and I pressed on to understand the prophecies.

About 1980, two events occurred that were seen as threats within the church I attended; I now believe they were clouds with silver linings. First, the apotelesmatic view of prophecy was reviewed by many church leaders. In essence, a claim was made the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation can have multiple or partial fulfillments. Church leaders reviewed and rejected this claim on the basis that apocalyptic prophecy has one fulfillment. It also concluded that prophecy behaves in a consistent way. Therefore, all interpretations must conform to valid rules of interpretation.

The second shock wave was a demonstration that considerable portions of historical church writings considered to be inspired were plagiarized. Using computers to scan and compare text, researchers discovered large sections of the writings were, in many cases, copied word for word from the writings of other religious authors. This revelation caused an uproar among those who believed a religious leader's writings were to be considered as equal to the Bible.

Neither of these events influenced my study. After a short investigation, I rejected the presupposition of multiple fulfillments of prophecy on the grounds that they reduce the intended meaning of prophecy to putty. In plain English, this means that prophecy in the hands of a skillful manipulator can mean one thing at this time and something else at another time. I also found the second discovery to be consistent with my newly acquired understanding of inspiration, so I was not disappointed to learn of the extensive copying.

My view of inspiration is that God shines a *spotlight* on some aspect of a subject and the inspired person *sees* that component of truth. Then, after the vision is finished, the seer attempts to explain in his own words what he has seen. In some cases, he may need to study the subject more on his own to understand what he saw and how it fits into the body of existing truth. In fact, Paul went to the desert for three years after receiving visions so that he could understand them.¹ I know that after the discovery of plagiarism was circulated in my church, many people either denounced their church leaders or defended their inerrancy by saying, “Well, the inspired writer was shown what to copy and what not to copy.” As far as I was concerned, both responses were inappropriate.

¹ Galatians 1:16-18

The response of both groups stems from an improper understanding of inspiration. A person should not condemn an inspired person because he recites or duplicates the words of others. Peter quoted from Joel on the Day of Pentecost. Did Paul quote from the Old Testament or another source in 1 Corinthians 14:34? Second, the claim that God showed someone what to copy and what not to copy has no evidence to support such a claim. Further, many people gathered and compiled materials for books, borrowing liberally from other authors, 100+ years ago. It was common practice in those days. Subsequently, they saw nothing wrong or misleading with copying excellent passages from the studies of others.

Back to the Story

Even though my enthusiasm for Bible study was renewed after gaining some insight on the properties of inspiration, I felt like I was going in a circle. From 1982 to 1987, I faithfully studied the prophecies. I was convinced that each verse was important and made an important contribution toward the big picture of God's plan. Finally, it dawned on me one day that I was approaching the subject of prophecy from the wrong direction. Instead of trying to synthesize or determine the meaning of every detail, I felt I should *first* look for a *predictable* design within the prophecies. Maybe God assembled the prophecies in a particular way and the

key to understanding the prophecies was linked to identifying the way God put them together.

I have long believed prophecy cannot be of private interpretation, nor can the interpretation of prophecy be the exclusive property of well-studied scholars. I also believe that God had the prophecies written in an obscure manner so they would remain obscure until He wanted people to know what they mean. However, when the time came for understanding, I reasoned that their contents must be plainly obvious for all who “have ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” After all, why would God keep the meaning of prophecy from common people? There are billions of us. I was also convinced that God would not grant one person the understanding of truth about prophecy so that all other people must come to that person to hear the truth. Truth is self-evident. It needs no defense or excuse and stands on its own feet. Whether a billion people agree or disagree with it, truth is not affected—it remains true. Perhaps best of all, those who want to understand truth can see it, regardless of the messenger’s ability to explain it!

So, I concluded that there must be a common denominator to prophecy. Prophecy must conform to a set of rules so any person, regardless of religious background, language, or physical location on this planet, can understand it. After all, the Second Coming is not a week-

end event sponsored by a local church. I began searching for predictable order; a specific design within the prophecies and to my amazement, I found one! The books of Daniel and Revelation consistently behave in a clearly defined way! I found a comprehensive, predictable design respecting the order and content of *all* texts in Revelation; even better, each verse contributes to an elegant, grand design.

However, detecting a design and resolving all the design offers are two different things. By 1987, the design was unfolding. Large prophetic pieces were fitting into predictable places, not according to my view of history, but according to God's design of prophecy. History was right there, confirming the design. I felt the joy of a person assembling a large picture puzzle when the last flat-sided piece of the perimeter has just been snapped into place. Even though I knew many unknown pieces remained, I sensed the framework was coming together.

By 1988, I identified three rules of interpretation I could express in three short paragraphs. As it turns out, these rules have proven to be more precious than fine gold because they explain the elegant and profound design of prophecy in just a few words. Even more, I have seen people from all faiths take these rules and arrive at essentially the same conclusions as I have. This is an important test to me because the fulfillment of proph-

ecy affects every human being on Earth. Therefore, the meaning of prophecy cannot be parochial. One does not have to be a Catholic or Baptist to understand prophecy. The content of prophecy belongs to all people because it affects all people. So, here are the first three rules that I have confirmed:

1. Each apocalyptic prophecy has a beginning point and an ending point in time and events within each prophecy occur in the order they are given.
2. A prophecy or prophetic element within a prophecy is not fulfilled until all specifications of the prophecy are met. This includes the order of events within the prophecy.
3. Apocalyptic language can be literal, symbolic, or analogous. To reach the intended meaning of a passage, the student must consider (a) the context, (b) the use of parallel language in the Bible, and (c) a relevant text that defines the symbol if an element is thought to be symbolic.

Many people incorrectly assume I just made up these rules and often accuse me of making up the rules so I can present something new or sensational. I do not wish to cause or bring trouble to anyone. The truth is most people have not earnestly examined the prophecies and

become acquainted with the contents of each verse in Daniel and Revelation. It is easier to place confidence in the traditions of a church and the supposed infallibility of its leaders than to faithfully search the Scriptures. Therefore, when a new or *foreign* view rises that is contrary to longstanding tradition, it is only natural that many would rather reject a new view rather than give it due consideration.

Church leaders also have two responsibilities that naturally militate against new views. First, church leaders believe they are the *defenders* of the faith delivered to them. A leader cannot be a “teacher of Israel,” operating in the defensive mode, while being a student in the research mode. So, most church leaders see new ideas about truth as a threat to the stability and mission of their church. Second, church leaders have many projects and programs to administer and any diversion of time and energy for “wild goose” chases is regarded as an impediment.

I understand these responsibilities. These issues are not unique to any church. All churches have this mindset because religion itself seriously limits the expansion and development of new ideas. Somehow, people think of religion as something that does not (or should not) change. How ironic. Especially when considering that God is ever making revelations for people to understand.

Rules are Necessary

A rule is an expression of something that is observed to be constant. For example, the behavior of gravity is called the “law” of gravity because gravity behaves in a constant manner. If one weighs 150 pounds in Washington D.C., he will also weigh 150 pounds in Los Angeles because gravity on Earth is constant.

I must emphasize the point that we cannot *make up* the rules of design; rather, man may only *discover* God’s design through observation. For example, Sir Isaac Newton did not *make up* the law of gravity. However, after years of study, Newton *observed* gravity behaves in a constant manner and he formulated a rule expressing the constant operation of gravity. Newton’s *rule* is an expression of what Newton *observed*. Gravity does not behave according to Newton; rather, gravity behaves in a constant manner and Newton wrote down an expression that has been validated to be true in all cases. Newton’s expression about gravity is called a rule (or law). The same is also true about electricity. Ohm’s law came into existence through observation. If the physicist, Georg Ohm, (yes, it is spelled Georg) had not noticed the constant behavior of electricity during the last century, someone else would have eventually discovered and expressed the constant relationship that exists between voltage, amperage, and resistance.

Again, man does not make up the rules; rather, it is only his privilege to observe God's grand design (whether in natural science or prophetic science) and express the behavior of things in writing. Consider this point. If a person is not studying gravity, electricity, or prophecy, it is unlikely he or she would understand the importance or the operation of the rules.

Someone who does not carefully investigate the prophecies may conclude that any view of prophecy, other than church orthodoxy, is wrong. Consider how many conflicting interpretations on Revelation already exist. I believe God followed a clear design when He gave apocalyptic prophecies to Daniel and John. It is our privilege to identify and express the consistent operation of the prophecies into rules of interpretation. Once the rules of design are known, they can be tested and the unknown elements of prophecy can be solved with the same accuracy that we solve for the unknown in algebra. In fact, I believe God sealed the book of Daniel until the end of time because His apocalyptic design could only be detected *at the time of the end*.

The book of Daniel deals with many historical events. Today's student of Daniel can "observe" the grand design of Daniel by considering the past 2,500 years. By comparing fulfilled prophecies of Daniel with historical events, we can confirm apocalyptic prophecy behaves

in a well-defined, consistent manner. Unless a person studies the Bible, he or she cannot see the design nor have confidence in *any* rules. Therefore, confidence is limited to a belief structure, prophet, or religious system. Many Christians do not search the Scriptures and in the near future, this ignorance will result in a terrible surprise. Many expectations about the future are simply wrong. For example, some people claim the seven trumpets of Revelation are historical events. It *really* matters if they are in the future or in the past, especially if you understand what the trumpets are and how they will soon affect each person on Earth!

Prophecy Not That Important?

Having a false view of prophecy may not seem harmful right now; after all, each week comes and goes with its usual round of cares. However, false knowledge becomes harmful when reality comes knocking. Here's an example: Many sincere Christians anticipate a pre-tribulation rapture. They believe they will escape the terrible events that are coming. So, believing in a pre-tribulation rapture today seems harmless enough; in fact, I wish the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture were true! However, suppose there is no rapture and the Great Tribulation begins. Millions of Christians anticipating the pre-tribulation rapture will discover their prophetic hopes are not realized. They will feel deceived and expe-

rience great disappointment. They will blame God, their churches, and their preachers. Many will abandon their faith in God when unanticipated events occur. History reveals a disappointment can short circuit one's faith in God and His Word. Therefore, the study of prophecy is a two-edged sword. To ignore it is to remain in darkness. To believe in it is to risk disappointment if events do not transpire as expected. Which option should faith seek?

1987 and Onward

I began to publicly present my discoveries to small groups in 1986. The following year, I began writing the first edition of my book, *Warning! Revelation is about to be fulfilled*. The task of writing was even more difficult than studying prophecy. I failed English, both in high school and college, but writing is a valuable exercise. Good writing forces a clear and logical progression of thought.

Toward the end of 1988, I felt the Lord's call to resign from the church of which I had been employed for seventeen years. I had served the denomination as a pastor, a college staff administrator, and a hospital department head. However, living by faith is a test of fellowship with Jesus. Jesus says His sheep hear His voice and the call of the Lord was very present within me. I was reluctant to resign for obvious financial reasons; after all,

financial security is important. However, spreading the gospel of Jesus is even more important.

In 1989, my faithful wife and I set out, not knowing how the call would develop. She was willing to work fulltime so I could conduct seminars and continue writing. I knew God had called us to tell others about the prophecies, so we had to try it. If the Lord did not bless our efforts after two years, I promised Shirley that I would get a job and then we could investigate where we went wrong.

When establishing a ministry, I made a covenant with the Lord concerning money. I told the Lord that I would go forward as long as He provided the financial means to do so. I would not ask for, nor solicit, money to finance the ministry. I reasoned if God wanted *this* message to go forward, He would meet the expenses as they came. By following this design, Wake Up America Seminars could be as big or as little as God wanted. And, for decades, Wake Up America Seminars has met *every* financial obligation, since day one, without delay! We have seen God do things that are as miraculous as the parting of the Red Sea. It is a wonderful life learning how to rest on the everlasting arms of Jesus.

Even after having the ministry underway, one prophetic element still eluded me. I accepted that a day can represent a year in prophecy on the basis that history

confirms its operation. However, I also understood, as a result of the three rules previously stated, that some near-future prophetic time periods had to be reckoned in literal time. However, I did not know what principle governed the reckoning of prophetic time periods. How could some time periods use a day/year principle and others be literal time periods?

As I was looking through one of my many translations of the Bible one night, I happened to turn to Leviticus 25. This chapter discusses the origin of sabbatical and Jubilee years. Chapter 26 discusses the fact that if Israel did not observe the sabbatical years, God would remove them from the land so that the land could receive its sabbath of rest. This interested me because 2 Chronicles 36:21 says that the land enjoyed its Sabbath rests during Israel's 70 years of Babylonian captivity. I wondered if the 70 years in Babylon was a "payment" or atonement for the violation of 70 Sabbath years. To my amazement, I discovered that there are exactly 70 sabbatical years in the 430 years of Israel's and Judah's apostasy.¹ This explains why the Babylonian captivity lasted for 70 years! In other words, the 70 years of captivity was not an arbitrary jail term placed upon Israel. God removed Israel from the land so *the* land would have the Sabbath rests that Judah and Israel had failed to give it during their 430 years of apostasy!

¹ Ezekiel 4:5-6

This data opened a new door. My understanding of the Jubilee Calendar unfolded and grew into a subject of great interest and importance. The more I examined God's method of reckoning time, the clearer I understood the purpose behind the Jubilee Calendar. This resulted in the fourth prophetic rule of interpretation.

4. The presence or absence of the Jubilee Calendar determines how God measures time. If a prophetic time period occurs during the operation of the Jubilee Calendar, time is translated as a day for a year; otherwise, this translation is not permitted.

I do not have space enough to explain all this rule has to offer, but I have found it to answer many questions involved with prophetic issues of time and timing.

Today and Beyond

Thus far, I have observed these four rules of apocalyptic prophecy. Although they are stated in my own words, keep in mind prophecy does not behave according to Larry Wilson. Rather, prophecy behaves according to God, its designer. I have tested these rules quite closely and believe they are true. There may be more rules to come. However, if there are more, they cannot lessen the requirements of the four rules any more than a new discovery about gravity can lessen the general truths

discovered by Newton. If any one of the four rules can be proven to be untrue, then it ceases to be a rule – period.

I now find a distinct difference between prophetic truth (looking backward) and prophetic faith (looking forward). Prophetic truth is confirmed by history. We can easily compare the fulfillments of prophecy with history. On the other hand, prophetic faith looks to the future and our prophetic faith is only as secure as the rules we follow. The meaning of apocalyptic prophecy is not subject to, or dependent upon, any man's opinion. In fact, differing opinions only cancel each other. This is why it seems prophecy means nothing today. Thankfully, to those who understand God's design of prophecy, the meaning is both clear and sure.

Multiple or Partial Fulfillments

A few comments need to be made about the idea that prophecies can be repeatedly fulfilled, applied, or partially fulfilled. Some expositors claim this concept is demonstrated in Matthew 24, when Jesus merged the end of Jerusalem with the end of the world into *one* prophecy. This dual application of prophecy is claimed to mean that prophecy can have more than one fulfillment. However, a close examination of Matthew 24 does not confirm the claim.

Matthew 24 contains information about the end of Jerusalem *and* the end of the world, but the two sets of information do not describe the *same* event. Everything predicted about the end of Jerusalem has been fulfilled – period. And, everything predicted about the end of the world in Matthew 24 will be fulfilled – period. No one denies that parallels exist, but the specifications about the end of Jerusalem and the end of the world are separate and distinct.

The unstated purpose behind the concept of dual fulfillments is this: Some churches are seeking a way to maintain the *inerrancy* of their church leaders and they also want a more thorough explanation of prophetic text. After all, large segments of Daniel and Revelation are never mentioned. After examining this matter, here are my observations:

1. A fulfillment is a full-fill-ment. God knows every detail about the future and He has predicted the details in advance. All events predicted to occur will occur just as God said. A prophecy does not reach full-fulfillment until all that God has said about the event occurs. For example, Revelation's third trumpet cannot be full-filled until everything described in trumpet three occurs. Furthermore, the third trumpet has to occur *after* the second trumpet. If the trumpets do not occur in their order, how can one know which

trumpet is next or, even worse, when any trumpet occurred?

2. Suppose that trumpet two is a great asteroid impact upon a sea, how can a partial fulfillment of trumpet two occur? How can trumpet two occur multiple times unless trumpet one occurs multiple times? Maybe the question should be asked, how many times do the seven trumpets sound *in their order*?
3. Suppose the fifth trumpet is the physical appearing of Satan. The Bible predicts that the devil will torment those not having the seal of God for five months. When does the five-month time period occur? Can it occur more than once? Can it occur partially?

The premise behind dual fulfillments, multiple applications, or a partial fulfillment of prophecy is faulty from the start. For example, when considering the second trumpet, dual fulfillments, multiple applications, or a partial fulfillment are just *multiples of interpretation* because there is no historical evidence to show that the event has occurred. In other words, trumpet two cannot be different events at two different times. Whatever trumpet two represents can only be satisfied by the fulfillment of the specifications given in trumpet two. Additionally, trumpet two must occur *before* trumpet three and *after* trumpet one. So, the use of dual, partial, or

multiple fulfillments to defend the infallibility or limited knowledge of a church leader does not accomplish the desired end. The fact remains that they simply do not know everything. God has not yet shown any writer or church leader everything there is to know about end time events. Therefore, some prophetic conclusions can be proven wrong because knowledge about the future is partial. However, this does not lessen their work as being inspired by God. All writers of the Bible gave the best they had. This is one of the limitations of being finite. Yet, God gently works within our limitations to reveal truths greater than the highest human thought can reach. For this reason, later generations have the privilege of knowing more about God than previous generations.

Prophets Can Make Mistakes

Prophets are individuals to whom God speaks through a process known as inspiration. Prophets usually receive information from God in a dream or a vision. After the dream or vision is concluded, God allows the prophet to reveal what he saw or heard in his own words. This type of inspiration is called plenary inspiration. The plenary concept of inspiration stands in contrast to verbal inspiration. Verbal inspiration is the process where God speaks to a person and the person either writes or says exactly what God told him or her to say. Thus, those

believing in verbal inspiration take the words of prophets to be inerrant and the infallible Word of God. These two views on inspiration help determine how a person interprets prophetic writings.

A Parable

The following parable explains inspiration as I have come to understand it. Suppose you, an ordinary person, are blindfolded and taken by the hand onto the stage of a totally dark auditorium filled with hundreds of silent people. The blindfold is then removed, but you cannot see or hear anything because of the darkness and the silence. Your guide shines a narrow beam of light to your left and you see three people in the light. Then, he shines the spotlight toward the back of the auditorium and you see two people. Finally, he shines the spotlight toward the right of the auditorium and you see one person. Your blindfold is then replaced and as you exit the room, your guide says you should tell others everything you experienced and saw. When you begin to tell others of your experience, you become known as a prophet because you speak about the information God revealed.

The meaning of the parable is that God chooses common people to become His servants. In Paul's case, the vision experience was so lifelike that he could not tell whether he remained in the body or was taken out of

the body.¹ On the other hand, John concluded he was taken out of the body during his vision on Patmos.² God reveals wonderful things to common people and He shines a spotlight on some aspect of truth. Then, the vision ends, and the same common person begins to tell what he saw and heard. Even more, the prophet integrates the revealed information with what he already knows about God's truth (he conceptually connects what he saw with what he knows).

Unfortunately, each prophet's view of truth is limited. In the parable, the prophet only saw six people, but remember, the auditorium was full of people. A hundred years pass and God does the same thing again, except this time, he shines the spotlight in places not seen before. Thus, more truth is revealed. Centuries go by, and God continues this process revealing more to subsequent prophets.

God reserved the correct understanding of apocalyptic prophecy until the end of time because apocalyptic prophecy reveals the truth about the order of events that He *planned* for salvation. The sequence, order, or timing of all prophetic events is subject to apocalyptic prophecy. This means the timing and order of events revealed in apocalyptic prophecy must be considered when reading the visions of all Bible writers. In other words, God

1 2 Corinthians 12:2

2 Revelation 4:2

shined a spotlight on various elements within His Plan of Salvation to individual prophets through the ages. Their comments about the vision reflect what they saw. However, at the end of time, God will turn on all of the lights in the room and the final generation will see the whole structure in complete form. The order and timing of all events will then make sense. The darkness is gone and the truth is visible. For this reason, I compare the unsealing of the book of Daniel to turning on all the lights. The rules that explain the meaning of Revelation were hidden in Daniel until the end, which has arrived.

Thus, the truth about the contents of the room continues to unfold at God's discretion. The 144,000 will be taken into the room and God will reveal the **WHOLE TRUTH** about the contents of the room. The 144,000 will understand and powerfully proclaim the **WHOLE TRUTH**.

Five Points about God's Truth

This crude parable teaches five important elements about God, His truth, inspiration, and man.

1. Man cannot see more truth than God wants seen at any given time.
2. Each prophet receives a partial view of God's truth. So, the testimony of any one prophet is incomplete until the 144,000 appear.

3. Truth is additive. A person must take into account all that has been written about truth to understand what has been revealed and what has not been revealed.
4. The final generation on Earth hears the whole truth as it relates to the fulfillment of the Plan of Salvation because God will reveal all the contents of truth to His servants, the 144,000. They will powerfully declare the everlasting gospel message to the world.
5. New light is not inconsistent with previous light. However, more light may oppose ideas that were thought to be right.

This last point needs some explanation. For example, the first prophet only saw six people in the room. Yet, many people believed his testimony and formed a church called, The Church of Six People. However, later on, another prophet testified he saw twelve people in the room. Some students of the prophets combine the two reports and conclude that there must have been eighteen people in the room. They form a church called, The Church of Eighteen People. At the same time, other students of the prophets conclude that there were twelve people in the room because they believed the second prophet saw the same six people revealed

to the first prophet plus six new people. This last group forms a church called, The Church of Twelve People. So, there is diversity over the understanding of what the prophets saw because the information from both prophets is incomplete and is therefore subject to ambiguity. Unfortunately, each church is certain that they have the truth on the contents in the room.

Ultimately, when the 144,000 see the entire room illuminated, they will report that 1,000 people were in the room! Their report will anger those churches who insist that their inerrant prophet said there were fewer people. However, a few people in each church, those who understood from the beginning that each prophet's report was incomplete, will rejoice to learn that the room is full of people. Those who understand the ultimate total will be thrown out of their churches for believing such foolishness.

A proper understanding of inspiration is most important to the study of the Bible. The contents of truth, revealed by later light, is always consistent with the contents seen by previous light if one is willing to sort through the details and find the harmony. This is the point where so many people get confused: A person must work diligently to distinguish between what is light and what is called light.

Inconsistencies Not a Stumbling Stone

The plenary concept of inspiration helps to explain many inconsistencies found in the Bible. For example, in Matthew 8:28, Jesus met two men possessed by demons when they sailed across the lake to the region of the Gadarenes. Jesus commanded the demons to come out of the two men and enter a large herd of pigs; whereupon the pigs ran into the sea and drowned themselves. However, a textual point about this incident rises. Two other gospel writers say that there was only one man and not two!¹ In reality it makes little difference whether there were two men or one man in the story. This tiny point demonstrates Bible writers had the freedom to write what they thought. Any student of the four gospels knows there are discrepancies between the gospels, but this is not a problem if one correctly understands the properties of inspiration. Instead, the discrepancies make Bible study interesting. What a delight to solve a mystery and find the truth!

Bible writers demonstrate a large latitude in writing. Some express their own opinions and clearly say so.² In other texts, Bible writers express their opinions and they do not say it is their opinion! So, how can a Bible student distinguish between truth and that which is

¹ See Mark 5:2 and Luke 8:27.

² 1 Corinthians 7:12

called truth? Before addressing this question, one more comment is needed.

Any discussion on the subject of inspiration is likely to generate a dispute for two reasons. First, some fear if every word written by prophets is not inspired, then non-inspired people cannot distinguish between that which was revealed and that which was not. They claim that if the concept of plenary inspiration is true, then no one can completely separate truth from error. If this were the case, how could God expect us to separate truth from error when truth is ever advancing? At any given time, we only have partial truth.

Be warned: Plenary inspiration militates against those who enjoy thinking that they have intellectually surrounded and therefore understand the WHOLE TRUTH. Some people see everything in black and white terms. Be careful because the plenary process undermines the proof-text or soundbite approach to truth.

Second, the subject of inspiration often brings a dispute because very few people honestly try to reconcile all that has been written on any given topic by inspired people. For instance, I have observed people talking about some specific Bible topic and one will turn to his texts and offer them as evidence supporting his position. Then, the other person will dismiss those texts and

offer his texts as proof supporting his position. How can texts from the same book in the Bible militate against each other? Perhaps the better question should be, how can one person ignore some texts and emphasize others when all texts have equal authority? The next time you have a discussion on a Bible topic, make sure you have considered the contribution of all relevant texts.

The Primary Question

The question is how does a person know when prophets are expressing their opinion and/or determine when they are expressing a direct revelation from God? The answer to this question is by the harmony that comes from the sum of all the parts.

For example, consider this text: **“In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.”**¹ I understand how people can read this text and conclude, on the authority of Jude alone, that the Sodomites and the Gomorrahites are burning in an eternal (endless) fire right now. If this were the only text in the Bible commenting on punishment and eternal fire, I would agree that Jude’s comment about God’s punishment could be used to support an eternally burning fire.

¹ Jude 1:7

However, if people are thorough about studying the Bible, they realize there are some 40 authors all having the same experience called inspiration. So, to reach a correct conclusion, why not examine all that has been written about God's punishment and eternal fire? Notice this text: **"They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them."**¹ Revelation does not conflict with Jude because if you place them side by side, John writes that fire comes down from heaven at the end of the 1,000 years and *devours* the wicked.

Because of this, I believe Jude's comment meant that God rained fire down upon Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed them. This event serves as an example of what He is going to do again. Those who receive the punishment of the final fire will be devoured and the results are eternal. The proof of truth has to be found in the harmony of the sum of its parts. Sometimes, the harmony is difficult to find, but the contents of truth always align.

Moral Law and Inspiration

Religion always distorts the truth about God. Because we human beings are damaged by sin, it becomes inevitable that all religious structures become corrupt. God

¹ Revelation 20:9

is far more generous with the diversity of man than religion allows. Religion by its nature, takes a set of beliefs and creates its exclusive God. Then people use this view of God to elevate *their* religion above all others and in the process, only separate themselves from each other. Some people claim there is only one God and many different religions that serve Him. This statement is true from one perspective, but false in another. Yes, there is only one God, but each religion has created its own God. For example, the God of the Baptist commands different things than the God of the Catholic. The God of the Moslem commands different things than the God of the Jew.

When it comes to right and wrong, there are various commands from God that apply at various times. For example, at one time God commanded Noah to get on the ark, but in our day, this is not possible. At one time God commanded the Jews to offer a lamb on the Altar of Burnt Offering, but in our time this is not necessary. However, there are universal, timeless commands from God for all of humanity. These commands are called moral (basic) laws. One command is to love the Lord with all your heart, mind and soul and your neighbor as yourself. To prevent degenerate man from distorting the meaning of love, God defined the *results* of love so that human beings can test themselves to see if they are in compliance with His law of love. He wrote the test

on two enduring tablets of stone called the Ten Commandments. A life of love produces actions that are in harmony with God's law.

If righteous principles are applied to a person's life, a noble and generous character comes forth. God made sure the Ten Commandments are not difficult to understand. They define moral truth in a profound way and in an elegant form. Those willing to express these ten principles *through love*, glorify God.

I have written on the subject of inspiration because it is connected to the principles of right and wrong. When I write that prophets can make mistakes, the subject of moral law is one of the first to be raised, because many people think that moral law came through the prophets. However, consider this point: Moral law *was not* revealed through inspiration. God Himself came to Earth and spoke the words from Mt. Sinai.¹ There can be no quibbling over the content of moral law. God Himself has spoken and no human being, inspired or non-inspired, can change it. Prophets are not God; they are *observers* of God. Prophets cannot alter what God has determined to be truth and herein lies a problem.

When Jesus walked on the earth, He was Truth Incarnate. He came to reveal more about God's character and God's will. Unfortunately, the Jews would not receive

¹ Exodus 20:1

Christ as the Promised One and they did not believe His testimony. Jesus said, **“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.”**¹ Jesus also told the Jews, **“If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.”**²

The first text above is self-explanatory, but the second text reveals a truism about human beings, religion, and prophets. The Jews had exalted Moses to the place of God and they worshiped Moses. Of course, the Jews would have denied this statement and said such a claim was blasphemous, but consider their actions. God, in the human form of Jesus, stood right before them, but they rejected Him and the truth He presented. The Jews had taken the writings of Moses, shrouded them with false ideas, and the result was closed minds and self-righteousness – a terrible duo.

This brings us back to the point. Truth is always larger than any one prophet. Truth is larger than all prophets combined, for God and His truths are infinite. God has not yet revealed the details necessary for salvation in the end time! When He selects the 144,000, He will reveal the truth necessary for salvation in the end time to

¹ John 3:19-20

² John 5:46

them. There will be two elements: First, the new truth from God will be consistent with moral law. Second, like the prophets of old, the 144,000 will greatly suffer the consequences of revealing more light.

The 144,000 will suffer greatly because they will make statements contrary to the beliefs of religious people. Understand that prophets are always regarded as mere human beings in their day. They are not exalted until they are killed or die. Prophets suffer greatly because there is a big difference between truth and that which is called truth, and this revelation often makes people angry.

Notice this endless cycle: The devil leads religious people to corrupt the teachings of a dead prophet so God's truth becomes highly corrupted. Later, God sends another prophet to *correct* the degenerate ideas people believe to be truth. The second prophet makes people angry and they kill him. Then, the second dead prophet becomes exalted. The devil leads people to corrupt the teachings of the second prophet so God's truth is corrupted again. Then, God sends a third prophet – Do you get the picture?

History and Chronology

There is one Bible topic in which we can distinguish between a prophet's personal opinion and those truths

he saw in vision. The test is simple. We simply compare his statements about timing with recorded history and notice the results. By doing this, I believe that many Old and New Testament writers alike thought they were living at or near the end of time. Notice the italicized words in the following texts:

1. **“The day of the Lord is *near* for all nations.”¹**
2. **“Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is *close* at hand.”²**
3. **“Wail, for the day of the Lord is *near*; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.”³**
4. **“For the day is near, the day of the Lord is *near*—a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations.”⁴**
5. **“The great day of the Lord is *near*—*near and coming quickly*.”⁵**
6. **“What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the *time is short*. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not.”⁶**
7. **“The end of all things is *near*. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.”⁷**

1 Obadiah 1:15, italics mine

2 Joel 2:1, italics mine

3 Isaiah 13:6, italics mine

4 Ezekiel 30:3, italics mine

5 Zephaniah 1:14, italics mine

6 1 Corinthians 7:29, italics mine

7 1 Peter 4:7, italics mine

8. **“You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is *near*.”¹**
9. **“Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is *the last hour*.”²**

Many scholars have used clever and fanciful footwork to show that “soon” or “near” in these texts means something other than “close at hand.” However, a jury of ordinary people would have to say on the basis of textual evidence that all the Bible writers listed above used the words “near” and “soon” to mean “close at hand.”

We should not lose faith in the prophets nor should we throw out the Bible because they did not know there would be thousands of years before Jesus’ return to Earth. In fairness, we must remember their understanding of truth was partial and thus deficient. It should not be a surprise to learn God revealed many things to the prophets that they *merged* into an opinion. They thought what they had seen was a soon coming reality. This is a crucial point. The prophets honestly believed what they saw was going to occur imminently.

¹ James 5:8, italics mine

² 1 John 2:18, italics mine

With respect to time and chronology, there are two tests that must be applied to the writings of prophets. They are:

- Historical record
- Apocalyptic prophecy

History clearly reveals almost 1,900 years have passed since the prophet John wrote, **“This is the last hour.”**¹ John did make a mistake in calculating his chronological position within God’s timing. God did not show John that he was living in the last hour because God does not lie. John’s mistake did not lessen his work as a prophet. It simply reveals John did not know about God’s timing even though he was acquainted with the 1,260 day time period in Revelation 12:6.

What John did not know is God reckoned those days as 1,260 years! God did not tell John he was living in the last days nor did God tell John the meaning of the time periods in Revelation. So, John was free to write his thought that he was living in the last hour.

There is another test we can apply to the truth-fullness of a prophet’s claim on chronology. The test is apocalyptic prophecy. Apocalyptic prophecy is defined as those prophecies in Daniel and Revelation having chronological structure. This means, apocalyptic proph-

¹ 1 John 2:18

ecy lays out the chronology of time and marks its passage through the fulfillment of events as they occur.

Daniel 2 is an excellent example of apocalyptic prophecy showing the passage of time, but John did not understand the prophecies of Daniel. If he had, he would have known that the little horn power of Daniel 7 would persecute the saints for 1,260 years. He would have known that the 2,300 year prophecy ended in 1844. However, it was not time to understand that part of God's truth in John's day. Therefore, a person cannot make an accurate statement about the nearness of Christ's return without first having knowledge of apocalyptic prophecies. This includes the prophets.

Prophets can say what they are shown in their own terms. This is the meaning of plenary inspiration. However, their claims about the nearness of Christ's return must be tested by history and apocalyptic prophecy. On both counts, they all made a mistake. Keep in mind, the mistake was not a moral issue. The mistake exists because, as Paul said, **"For we know in part and we prophesy in part."**¹

Summary

Inspired men wrote the Bible. True prophets who were ordinary people received revelations from God. They

1 1 Corinthians 13:9

were free to express what they saw in their own words and free to exercise their own opinions regarding what they saw.

Given the nature of dreams and visions, prophets of God can and do express opinions regarding chronology that have been shown to be wrong. The only way we can prove or disprove the chronological views of a prophet is through a harmony of historical records and by following rules of apocalyptic prophecy distilled from the Bible. Since Protestants claim that truth is ever unfolding, shouldn't we be calling for a no-holds-barred investigation of prophecy so it can validate the claim?

A broad understanding of inspiration sets the stage for a better understanding of Bible contents. A person needs such an understanding if he is interested in studying its prophecies. After all, the Bible is the only book on Earth that has revealed the history of God during man's existence and what He is about to do to terminate sin.

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