

## Prophecy in Perspective, III

**Introduction:** Turn over to Daniel 2. A number of people have asked about end time events. To even begin to understand time events, one needs to first understand prophecy and how it works, so for the past few weeks we've studied prophecy in general.

### Review: What have we learned about prophecy so far?

1. Biblical prophecy includes both **PPT>> fore-telling** and **PPT>> forth-telling** (preaching and predictions).
2. The purposes of prophecy include validating a message as **PPT>> genuinely from God** (fulfilled prophecy builds our faith!) and to give impetus to repentance or obedience.
3. We should be **PPT>> humble** in our interpretation of prophecy in light of the fact that the only prophecy the ecumenical creeds agree on is that **PPT>> 1) Jesus is coming again, PPT>> 2) the dead will bodily resurrect** at His coming and **PPT>> 3) the resurrected dead will be judged**.

It is worth noting that no creedal position is taken on the millennium, Israel, the rapture, seven years of tribulation, the anti-Christ, a one world government or the mark of the beast. Again, this calls for humility in our own convictions about these subjects. In general, these are not things one should break fellowship over (unless a person is being divisive).

4. Realize that many of the prophecies in the Bible have already been **PPT>> fulfilled**. Look for the time indicators: 3 days, soon, 40 days, this generation, some of you standing here will not taste death until, etc. I urged you to consider that Jesus' predictions in Matthew 24 were not concerning the end of the world, but rather the end of the age (the Jewish age). The disciples asked "when" the things Jesus predicted would occur and Jesus said:

ESV **Matthew 24:34** ... this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

5. We must read prophecy as **PPT>> literature**. We must read it literarily, understanding although prophecy has a literal meaning, it is sometimes clothed in such figurative language as metaphor, simile, symbolism and hyperbole.

I suggested that best way to learn how to interpret prophecy is by examining various Old Testament prophecies that everybody agrees have already been fulfilled and see how it was written. They used prophetic shop talk.

In particular we looked at the prophetic meaning of the coming of the Lord, the day of the Lord, the significance of clouds/coming on the clouds, cosmic chaos (melting mountains, shrived-up seas, cleft canyons, scrolled-up skies, blood moons and smothered suns and stumbling stars).

We then applied what we learned to Jesus' prophecies of Matthew 24. I urged you to remember that when you read in the New Testament about Jesus' coming, realize it may not refer to the Second Coming.

-----  
I've been asked, what's left? What about our future, the future of the church? What are we to expect? What comes next? Part of the answer is found Daniel 2 (which contains the really big picture).

### Daniel's Prophecies of Future Kingdoms

**PPT>>** In Daniel 2:1 we learn the king of Babylon had a troubling dream. (Read 2:1).

**\*\*\*\*What dream did the king dream (Dan 2:31-35)?**

**PPT>>** He saw a great and terrifying image of a man with gold head, chest and arms of silver, bronze middle and thighs, iron legs with feet of an iron/clay combination.

**PPT>>** Then, a stone cut out without hands struck the image on its feet, destroying it.

**PPT>>** The stone then grew to become a mountain that filled the earth.

**PPT>>** (let's call it Stone Mountain!)

**How does 2:34 hint at the supernatural nature of the stone kingdom?** It was described as a stone cut out with human hands.

-----  
**\*\*\*\*How did Daniel interpret the king's dream (Dan 2:36-45)? What type of thing does each of the different materials represent?** The various materials represent successive kingdoms.

**How many kingdoms were presented in this vision?** There were five (gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone).

**Based on 2:44, what is unique about the stone kingdom (2:44)?** Unlike the first four kingdoms that were destroyed, the stone kingdom will stand forever.

-----  
**PPT>> Gold Head:** It is clearly stated that the head of gold represents Babylonia, **Daniel 2:37-38.**

**PPT>> Lion:** In a later, parallel vision in the book of Daniel, Babylonia is depicted as a lion with wings.

Kingdom #1. **Babylonia, 626 - 539 B.C.** Babylonia ruled the Promised Land during most of Daniel's life.

**PPT>> Silver Chest:** The chest of silver represents the next kingdom that came after Babylonia, which was Medo-Persia. A later Babylonian king (Belshazzar) saw a supernatural hand that was writing strange words on the wall (thus our saying, "he saw the hand writing on the wall"). Daniel correctly interpreted the words as predicting the fall of Babylonia to Medo-Persia:

ESV **Daniel 5:28-31** "your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians." That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom ...

**PPT>> Bear:** In a parallel vision, Medo-Persia is depicted as a bear raising up on one side (Persia was stronger than the Media).

**PPT>> Ram:** Daniel later saw yet another vision that was a parallel vision to the King's statue; it was of a ram with two horns (Medo-Persia) that defeated all other animals.

Kingdom #2. **Medes and Persians, 539 - 332 B.C.** Babylonia was defeated by the Medes and Persians.

-----

**PPT>> Bronze Thighs:** We know both from world history and later vision in Daniel that the 3<sup>rd</sup> kingdom was that of the Greeks.

**PPT>> Leopard:** In a parallel vision, Daniel saw the Greeks represented by a leopard with four wings and four heads (Alexander is the leopard and the four heads are his four generals).

**PPT>> Goat:** In yet another vision, Daniel saw the Greeks as a goat with one horn that broke off and became **PPT>>** four horns. The interpretation clearly identified the coming of the Greeks:

ESV **Daniel 8:20-22** As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia. And the goat is the king of Greece. And the great horn between his eyes is the first king. As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power.

Kingdom #3. **Greece, 332 - 63 B.C.** The Persians were defeated by the Greeks, led by Alexander the Great, who then took control of the Promised Land. After Alexander's death at a young age, the Greek empire was divided among four of his generals.

-----

**PPT>> Iron Legs:** The 4<sup>th</sup> kingdom, the one that defeated the Greeks, was the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was much stronger than all the preceding kingdoms (iron is much harder than gold, silver or bronze).

**PPT>>** In a parallel vision, Daniel saw the Romans as a great beast with iron teeth with ten horns (1<sup>st</sup> ten Caesars? The ten provinces of the Empire?).

4. **Romans, 63 B.C – A.D. 476.** The Romans defeated the Greeks and then took control of the Promised Land. (There was brief time when the Jews were independent of the Greeks before the Romans moved in). The Romans were in control when Jesus was born and during His entire life.

**Insight:** Daniel's vision takes us up to at least the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (the fall of the Roman Empire).

-----

**PPT>> Stone Mountain:** The 5<sup>th</sup> and final kingdom is identified as one set up by God.

**PPT>>** In a later vision it is again identified as God's kingdom that will never be destroyed.

### **What can we learn from Daniel 2 about the 5<sup>th</sup> kingdom, the one that God will set up?**

**1) Supernatural Origin:** That the cut stone was quarried without hands means it is of supernatural origin. Jesus is the chief cornerstone, the rock of our salvation, and his coming was supernatural: God in the flesh, born of a virgin.

**2) Steady Growth:** That it grew to fill the whole earth suggests it will start small and slow grow to overtake the whole earth:

ESV **Matthew 13:3-32** ... The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

ESV **Matthew 13:33** ... The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.

**3) Ultimately Invincible:** Unlike the first four kingdoms, God's kingdom will never be destroyed, **2:44**. Of course there will be ups and downs, set-backs and advances, but ultimately it will grow "from victory unto victory ... till every foe is vanquished" (as the hymn says).

**4) Timing:** God's Kingdom will not be set up until the days of the kings of the fourth kingdom (i.e., the days of the Roman Empire). Since the Jewish kingdom had already been established and subsequently destroyed, this suggests that the 5<sup>th</sup> kingdom would somehow be different from Judaism. Many believe this 5<sup>th</sup> Kingdom, initially established during the time of the 4<sup>th</sup> Kingdom, is the Church. The New Covenant that established the church really is a new deal compared to the Old Covenant with the Hebrews. Indeed, the Church started within the Roman Empire, which tried to extinguish it, but grew to conquer the Empire, eventually becoming not only a legal religion but the official religion of the Empire. The church spread not only throughout the Roman Empire (North Africa, the Middle East, Europe) but beyond to

the whole world. The Roman Empire is long gone, but the church still exists. The church truly is the process of filling the world earth. There are few places it does not exist.

**5). The Church, A.D. 33 – Eternity.** Notice there is overlap between the Roman Empire and the Church. Both existed simultaneously for many years.

-----

**What does the future hold for God's people?** I am optimistic about the future. The church may weaken in one country but it will be growing strong in another. The future holds battles and some set-backs but ultimate victory and world-wide expansion.

ESV **Revelation 5:9** ... by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation ...

### Applications:

1. God is in control of history.

ESV **Isaiah 40:15-17** Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust ... All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

ESV **Isaiah 40:22-24** It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

2. God is in control of your life:

ESV **Matthew 10:28-30** And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

-----

## Revelation

**Revelation Backwards:** Many of the more well-known aspects of Revelation do not occur until the very end of the book. Studying the book backwards will bring this to light, focusing on the words, "Then I saw ..." (ESV). So, let's start with Revelation 22 and read it backwards, noting in reverse order what John saw.

**Beginning at Revelation 22:21 and scanning backwards, where is the last instance of “I saw” and what did John see?**

4. **Re 21:1-2** ~ PPT>> New heaven, new earth, PPT>> new Jerusalem, PPT>> pearly gates, PPT>> streets of gold

This is what we commonly think of as heaven. Notice that it does not yet exist! When people die today, they go to heaven, where Jesus is, but they go to the old heaven. The new one is still under construction and not yet occupied!

3. **Re 20:11-12** ~ PPT>> Great white throne judgment, PPT>> heaven and earth flee away and PPT>> the resurrection of the dead.

ESV **John 5:28-29** ... hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Brother, this is the stuff of creeds! When a person dies, he goes to heaven as a disembodied spirit, a ghost! We will not get our resurrection bodies until this point right here: the resurrection of the dead.

2. **Re 20:1-6** ~ PPT>> Satan bound, PPT>> the thousand-year reign of Christ (Millennium), PPT>> Satan released; Gog & Magog, PPT>> Satan cast into Lake of Fire

Some believe the Second Coming will occur before the Millennium. This is called Pre-Millennialism. Others believe the Second Coming will be after the Millennium. This is called Post-Millennialism (A-Millennialism is a form of post-millennialism).

**19:11-21** ~ PPT>> Jesus coming out of heaven on white horse (2<sup>nd</sup> coming?), PPT>> Angel calling buzzards to gather for feast; Armageddon (16:16); PPT>> Beast and false prophet cast into Hell

Some hold this to be the Second Coming. Others see it as Jesus leading the church in victory as the Gospel surrounds the world before the Second Coming.

**Observation:** The more famous parts of Revelation don't happen until the very end of the book (Re 19a-22). Also, there is considerable question as to whether these last events are sequential or not. In English, the word “then” (as in “then I saw”) carries a different meaning than “and” (“and I saw”). The Greek behind “then” (*kai*) can mean “then” but it fundamentally means “and.” Thus, if you asked me what I did yesterday, I might say, “Well, I cut some wood **and** I went to the store **and** I cleaned the house **and** I called my mother on the phone **and** I got ready for church.” My answer would not necessarily mean I did all those things in the order listed, just that I did them all—so too with what John saw. They may be sequential, they may not. In fact, some of them may be parallel events or even jump back in time.

-----

### Four Main Views of Revelation:

There are four main ways to view/interpret Revelation 1-19a. What people believe about Revelation 1-19a is sometimes disconnected from what they believe about 19b-22.

**Historicist View:** Revelation 1-19a is a chronological prophecy of the whole PPT>> church age and has been being fulfilled over the past 2,000 years. It identified the office of the papacy as antichrist and the Catholic Church as the whore of Babylon. This was the view held generally by all Protestants from between the 1500s and the 1800s. Examples are Wycliffe, Knox, Tyndale, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Whitefield, Spurgeon, Matthew Henry, John & Charles Wesley and other famous Christians. This view posits that the whole of Babylon is the Roman Catholic Church and the breast is the office of the papacy.

PPT>> A book Historicists commonly used to interpret Revelation was Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

**Preterist View:** The prophecy of Revelation 1-19a was mostly fulfilled in PPT>> A.D. 70. Preterists see Revelation as John's commentary on Matthew 24(PPT>> destruction of the temple).

This view was popularized by the Roman Catholic Church as part of the counter-reformation in order to deflect Protestant criticism that the office of papacy is antichrist (if it all was fulfilled in A.D. 70, then the Pope could not be antichrist). The whole of Babylon was apostate Judaism and the beast/antichrist was Nero.

PPT>> A book commonly used by preterists to help prove their view is Josephus' *Jewish Wars*.

**Futurist View:** The prophecy part is all still future. This is the view popularized by the PPT>> *Left Behind* series. It has grown in popularity since the mid-1800s. You've heard of the Great Tribulation or a Seven Year Tribulation. Futurists typically see the first 19 chapters of Revelation as about a future, terrible, tribulation period. Another prominent feature of a version of the Futurist View is the secret PPT>> rapture of the church seven years before the Second Coming.

PPT>> A source futurists commonly use to prove their view is the morning newspaper. Prophecy in the news today! Jack and Rexella Van Impe embodied this approach.

This view was also popularized by the Roman Catholic Church as part of the counter-reformation in opposition to historicism. The idea was the Pope could not possibly be the antichrist since whoever that would be will not be alive until the very end of time, way off in the future.

**PPT>> Idealist View:** Revelation is a timeless, poetic prophecy about the spiritual battle that rages in general between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. **PPT>>** Jesus, of course wins in the end. It identifies no specific events in history as being predicted in Revelation, but rather sees spiritual principles with the book. It was developed in the mid-1800s.

### So What?

**Concluding Perspective:** As we study this, we should try to adopt the attitude expressed by the Acts 29 church planter's network:

**PPT>>** "We ... believe that divisive and dogmatic certainty surrounding particular details of Jesus' Second Coming are unprofitable speculation, because the timing and exact details of His return are unclear to us."

**PPT>>** *In other words, chill!* The only position that is truly unacceptable is the one that says that the second coming of Jesus has already happened (heretical hyper-preterism).

**Application Review:** God is in control of human history and of course He is in control of our lives. The Lord is good. Faith accepts this truth even when it seems like God is not in control or is not good.

Stephen E. Atkerson  
NTRF.org  
05/19/15



## Extra Material:

**\*\*\*\*How can you get a blessing from the book of Revelation (1:1-3)?** A blessing is promised both for reading the book aloud and for hearing and keeping it.

**Application:** Rather than being scared by the prophecies of Revelation, we should look forward to a blessing!

**Why is it necessary to read “aloud” (ESV) to get the blessing (1:3)?** In the days before printing presses, most people did not have their own copies of the Bible. Thus, Bible readings were common. The person who had the Bible (or portion of it) would read it aloud for the others to hear.

ESV 1 Timothy 4:13 ... devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture ...

**Example:** The church in China is growing so fast that many people do not have a copy of the Bible, especially in the countryside. At a meeting of Chinese church planters, I asked what such meetings were like. I was told that they sang, they prayed, various people would give testimony of God’s work in their lives, and that the person who had the Bible would read aloud from it.

**What does the word “revelation” (1:1) mean?** It is from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, “unveiling” (basis for our word “apocalypse” ~ not to be confused with apothecary!). The idea is that of a stage where the curtain is pulled back, allowing the audience to see the set and actors. The book of Revelation is a supernatural revealing of things that were future to John’s readers.

**According to 1:1, what is the source of this revelation?** Jesus Christ. According to 1:2, it is the “testimony of Jesus Christ.”

**Based on 1:1, what is the purpose of this book?** Its purpose was to show the servants of Jesus “the things that must soon take place.”

**What does “soon” (1:1) mean?** “Soon” is from *tachos* (5034, basis for “tachometer”), “speedily, quickly” (Thayer). BAGD’s lexicon generally defines it as “speed, quickness, swiftness, haste” (p. 807). Specific examples from antiquity given by BAGD are “quickly, at once, without delay” and “soon, in a short time”.

**In 1:1, how might it change the meaning if it read “quickly” instead of “soon”?** “Quickly” is associated with methodology and “soon” with time. Some feel that *tachos* is with reference to when these things will happen (“soon”) and others feel that *tachos* has reference to how these things will happen (the way it will happen: rapidly, “quickly”).

**Translation Survey:** “Soon” (ESV, NIV, RSV), “shortly (KJV, NAS, ASV).

**What does 1:3 indicate about how soon “soon” was in 1:1?** In 1:3 it says that “the time is near” which suggests that the “soon” of 1:1 really does mean “soon” (in time) and not “quickly” (in method).

**How do the time statements in 1:1-3 help us to decide on which of the most common interpretive approaches (preterist, futurist, historicist, and idealist) is most likely correct?**

**Futurist:** The futurist approach assumes that the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecies is at least 2,000 years removed from the first century. That hardly seems to be “soon” (1:1) or “near” (1:3) to the first century. Though they can explain away the “soon” as “quickly”, not so with “the time is near.”

**Idealist:** The idealist would say these prophecies applied then (soon) and ever since then, that the time is always near.

**Historicist:** The historicists would say that the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecies was soon to start; the time of the beginning was near. They would say the book continues to be fulfilled, though now we would be nearing the final chapters.

**Preterist:** The time statements in 1:1-3 seem to best fit with the preterist view (that the prophecies were fulfilled within the lifetimes of the original readers).

**It says that the time is near (1:3); the time for what is near?** The fulfillment of the words of prophecy in this book was near.

**Why might it not be valid to explain away the time indicators of 1:1-3 by appealing to 2 Peter 3:8-9?**

ESV **2 Peter 3:8** ... do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

God may experience time in the way described by Peter, but people do not. To write a book to people using God’s perspective of time would be deceitful, a trick, purposely misleading. One may as well have not been given any time frame; it becomes meaningless. It seems to be a desperate attempt to explain the time statements away.