

Eschatological Presuppositions

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We all interpret Scripture through the lens of our personal presuppositions, that set of underlying ideas that we have come to hold as undeniably true. When it comes to the more difficult eschatological scriptures, our interpretations may diverge greatly depending upon our individual presuppositions. It is appropriate, therefore, that your instructor should tell you up-front what his most important presuppositions are with regard to the interpretation of Bible prophecy:

1. The Bible Is A True Record of God's Dealings With Man

If the Bible is true it means that God has really spoken through His prophets and we can have confidence in their reports and their predictions as accurate and consistent with one another. This means that the Bible stands as its own final authority for interpreting the prophecies within its pages; no other book or prophet can interpret one biblical passage in a way that conflicts with other biblical passages.

2. God Intervenes In Human Affairs

Following directly upon the belief in the truth of the Bible is the belief that God does not stand aloof from His creation, but readily intervenes in human affairs. Among other things, this means that phenomena which we call *supernatural*—because they involve an injection of the spiritual realm into the natural order—are a real and plausible aspect of human existence. Therefore, we need not relegate the supernatural events of the eschatological scriptures to allegory or metaphor. The cosmic signs and wonders, as well as the battles of angels and demons, *can actually happen* and we must not interpret them as allegorical without compelling reason to do so.

3. Creation Is The Battleground For A Cosmic War

As part of His holy and eternal plan, God sovereignly permitted the rebellion of Satan and the fall of man. He has also permitted the ensuing battle for the souls of men that will conclude at the end of the Millennium. The fact that Satan is *released* for a short time after he has once been bound (Rev 20.7) underscores the fact that God has deep purposes in the outworking of the cosmic battle between His Kingdom and the Kingdom of Satan. Therefore, we should not dismiss descriptions of apocalyptic battle as purely metaphorical or as apocryphal and unworthy of a loving God.

4. The Church Includes All Believers Of All Time

As Paul tells us in the Seven Unities of Ephesians 4.4-6, there is only one body of believers. It is variously referred to in Scripture as the Church, the elect, the body of Christ, etc., but it is one flock made up of Jew and Gentile, with one Shepherd (John 10.16). The unity of the one body does not negate the cultural distinctions of its members nor the diverse historical contexts of their redemption, but it underscores the one and only basis of their redemption, namely, the atoning sacrifice of Messiah.

5. God Has Never Renounced His Promises To National Israel

The fact that Jews who do not receive Jesus as Messiah are “broken off” from Messianic blessing (Rom 11.19,20), does not imply that God has renounced His love or His intentions for the Jewish nation, “for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11.29). In fact, Israel is the test case for God’s promises. God said in Jeremiah 31.35,36:

Thus says the Lord, Who gives the sun for light by day, And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The Lord of hosts is His name: “If this fixed order departs From before Me,” declares the Lord, “Then the offspring of Israel also shall cease From being a nation before Me forever.”

If God were to renounce the nation of Israel before changing the fixed order of



the cosmos, we would all have to wonder if any of His promises were secure. The fixed order of the cosmos has not changed, however, nor has God cast off the Jews as a people, a fact powerfully demonstrated in our century by the reestablishment of a Jewish state in the Holy Land. God's faithfulness to His promises to Israel stands today as one of the most powerful apologetics for the truth of the Bible.

Israel is not only a testimony to God's faithfulness, but remains a chosen vessel for the outworking of God's redemptive plan for planet earth. As such, Israel has an important role to play alongside the church in the spectacular upheaval of the apocalypse.

6. Jerusalem Is The Geographical Center Of Eschatological Scripture

Since Israel retains an important role in the events of the last days, Jerusalem retains her status as the city of Messiah. As Benjamin Newton wrote, "The facts of prophetic history are made by Scripture to revolve around Jerusalem as their centre—and therefore any system of interpretation which violates this cardinal principle will soon find itself lost in inconsistency" (Newton, *Aids to Prophetic Inquiry*, p. 11). It is in Jerusalem that the final battle of the apocalypse will be fought, it is on her Mount of Olives that Messiah's feet will touch down when He descends from heaven (Zec 14.4).

Because Jerusalem is the geographical focal point of the eschatological scriptures, we should recognize that prophetic references to "the earth" or "the land" may refer only to the land of Israel, and that references to "the world" probably refer to the "prophetic world", that is, the known world of the prophets' day. Unless there is clear indication in the text that *the earth* or *the world* refers to a greater region, we should probably take it as referring to *ha eretz yisrael*, the land of Israel or at most the greater Mediterranean world.

7. "The End Of All Things Is At Hand..."

At first glance it seems sensational to declare that the end is near, but the apostle Peter said it explicitly in 1 Peter 4.7. John, believed to have been the longest-lived of the apostles, also spoke strongly of the near end of the age (1Jo 2.18): "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour." Indeed, when John recorded his vision of the apocalypse, he was told (Rev 22.10), "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for *the time is near*." Were the apostles mistaken, just like modern-day date-setters? After all, nearly two thousand years have passed since they wrote their declarations of impending cataclysm. Were they wrong? Well first of all, they did not set a date for the end, they only wrote that the end was coming soon. Secondly, they defined what they meant by *soon*.

In 2 Peter 3.8, the apostle exhorted, "But do not let this *one fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." To understand his meaning, we read the fourth verse of Psalm 90 to which Peter alluded: "For a thousand years in Thy sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a watch in the night." The context of 2 Peter 3, together with the allusion to Psalm 90, make Peter's point clear: *soon* for God can mean *a long time* for us. Time is relative and is experienced quite differently by God who dwells in eternity and by people who dwell on earth. Nevertheless, as God considered the entire scope of world history from beginning to end, as He considered the long ages already past and the relatively short period that remained in His program for the world, He rightly declared through his apostle that the end was coming soon.

Peter understood this prophetic time scale well. On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted the prophet Joel to the effect that the pouring out of the Spirit, which they were experiencing in Jerusalem that day, marked the epoch of "the last days," that epoch which would close with the darkening of the sun and the moon and the arrival of the "great and glorious day of the Lord" (Act 2.16-21; cf. Heb 1.1,2). Peter realized that he had lived to enter that very last era before the God's judgment of the world and the restoration of all things (Act 3.19,20). However long the "last days" might last, they constituted the final epoch of human history, and that meant that unlike all previous generations God's people could now say, "the end of *all things* is near!" A global remaking was at hand that was more radical than that accomplished by the flood of Noah which only destroyed "all flesh." **If it was true that the end of all things was near in Peter's day, it is truer in ours.** As Paul wrote, "...now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand" (Rom 13.11,12).

Since these things are true, Messiah tells us in John 9.4, "We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work." This Hebraic expression did not point to a specific era of "night" such as the coming crucifixion, or later destruction of Jerusalem. It did, however, express that God has given each of us only a specific and definite time in which to fulfill our callings (Psa 139.16). Our time is now.

Hermeneutical Principles For Interpreting Scripture

1. THE RULE OF THE LITERAL SENSE

Interpret a scripture according to its literal sense unless it is obviously figurative or idiomatic. Archaeology as well as the literal fulfillment of numerous Bible prophecies establish this rule (e.g. Isa 53).

2. THE RULE OF LITERARY TYPES

Take into account the literary type of the biblical passage you are reading, along with any figures of speech or didactic devices it may employ. Remember that poetic books are rich in metaphor (e.g. Psalm 91.4), and *apocalyptic books abound with symbols* (e.g. Rev 1.20).

3. THE RULE OF INTERNAL CONSISTENCY

Never interpret one biblical text in a way that contradicts another. Like the Bereans, check unfamiliar propositions for consistency with the well established truths of Scripture (Act 17.11).

4. THE RULE OF CONTEXT

Interpret the details of a passage in the light of its overall thrust. The most extreme violation of this rule is when people close their eyes and stick their finger on a random verse, hoping to get a personal “word from the Lord.” What if their finger landed on a verse like Galatians 5.12? Along with the textual context, also take into account the historical and cultural context of a passage’s original audience: *a text cannot mean something contrary to how its original audience would have understood it.*

5. THE RULE OF PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

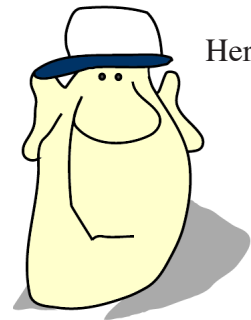
An early passage may not be the whole truth presented by Scripture on a given topic. God’s progressive revelation, developing through all 66 books of the Bible, requires that we consider any teaching given by the apostles on a topic before finalizing a doctrine rooted in the earlier revelations (see Act 18.24-26).

6. THE RULE OF EMBARKING FROM THE EXPLICIT

Let explicit statements interpret implicit ones, and clear statements explain the obscure ones—not vice versa! Revelation 3.10 has often been quoted in support of the “pre-tribulational rapture” doctrine. However, this verse says nothing *explicitly* about either the rapture or the final, great tribulation: our doctrine on such points must first stand on unequivocal passages, before implicit ones are brought in as props.

7. THE RULE OF HUMILITY

Christ’s statement in John 7.17 teaches us that we cannot expect to understand the scriptures until we are committed to obey them. It is as we approach the Bible in humble dependence upon Christ, and in full submission to His lordship that the Holy Spirit Himself will instruct us (1Jo 2.27).



Herman what?

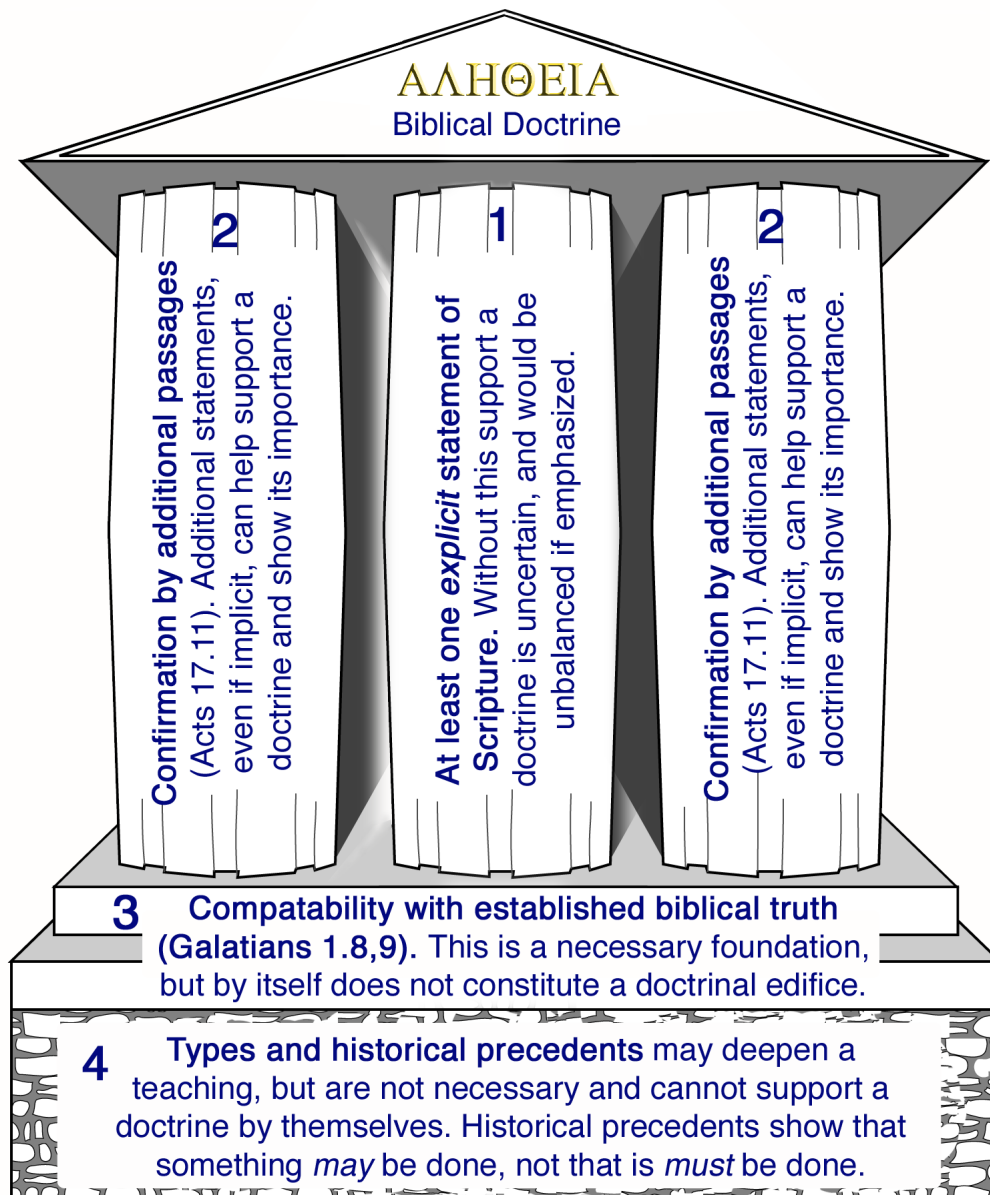
Hermeneutics

The Greek verb *hermeneuo* appears in passages like John 9.7, and means “interpret” or “translate.” From it we get our English word “hermeneutics” which is what we call the science of interpretation. The importance of understanding biblical hermeneutics cannot be overemphasized. Anyone unfamiliar with this discipline would do well to study Fee and Stuarts excellent little book *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Remember though, that whereas we tend to think of wisdom as intellectual, the Bible presents true discernment as moral, and dependent upon our character more than upon our knowledge. Understanding the technical rules of hermeneutics is not enough: *If we are committed to God’s will above our own, then we have the discerning attitude* (Joh 7.17).

The Bible says plainly in Ecclesiastes 10.2 that “A wise man’s heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man’s heart directs him toward the left.” It’s a biblical statement. However, if we tried to emphasize this assertion as a distinctive doctrine of our fellowship, perhaps suggesting a political application, other believers would rightly dismiss us as eccentric cranks. This example is extreme, but unfortunately, biblical beliefs stressed out of proportion to their scriptural basis have often resulted in debates that needlessly divide the church. Part of “handling accurately the word of truth” is discerning biblical *emphasis* as well as biblical meaning.

Any doctrine emphasized in Scripture will be supported by at least one **explicit** (definite and unambiguous) passage, *and* will be confirmed by additional passages, whether explicit or implicit. The absence of such support does not disprove a proposition, but it does indicate that it is unworthy of emphasis in our teaching.

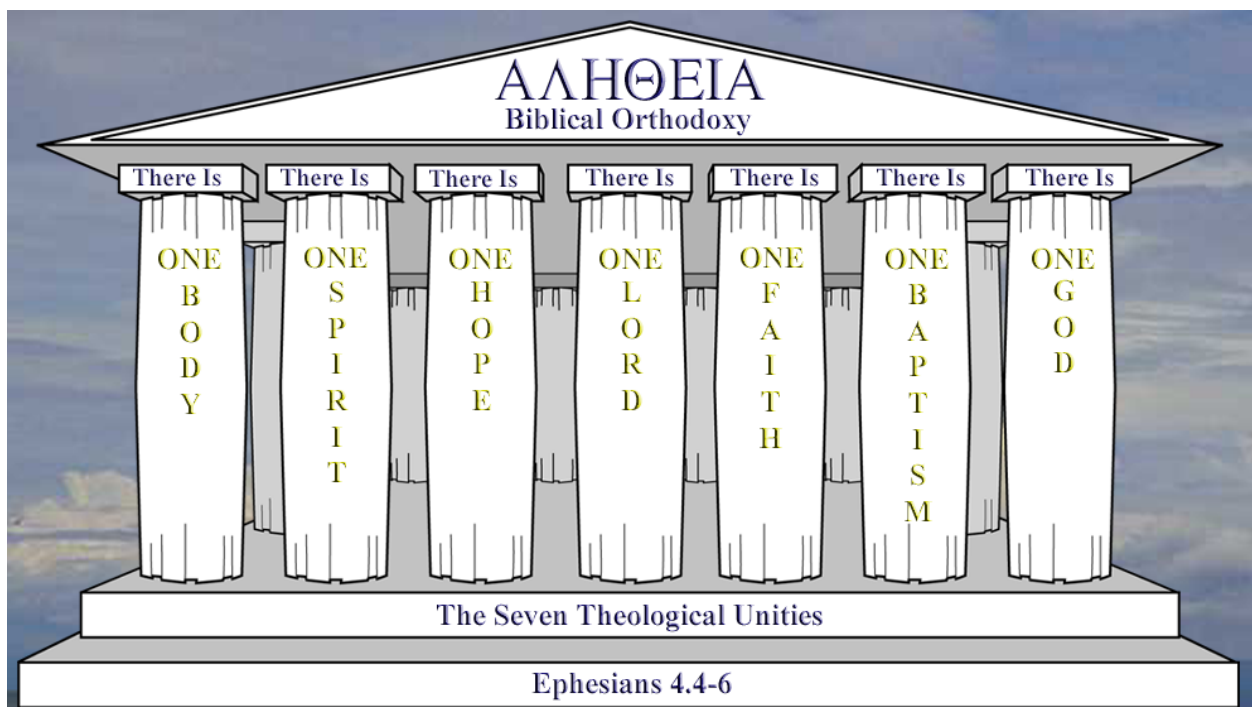
When confronted by a novel or controversial teaching, see how well it stands up next to a solid *Temple of Truth*:



Biblical orthodoxy is conformity to the cardinal doctrines of Scripture. But which doctrines of the Bible are the most important ones? How do we avoid arguing over issues of doctrine too trivial to warrant a breach in fellowship? On the other hand, how do we know when a doctrinal error is important enough to denounce energetically? The Seven Unities of Ephesians 4.4-6, presented graphically below, provide a concise summary of those truths we must be prepared to fight for. They form the pillars of our faith and provide a simple test against all the major heresies that have arisen through the centuries.

To help you appreciate the applicability of the Seven Unities, identify the unities violated by the following teachings:

- “*The Church* includes only believers who have lived after Pentecost and before the rapture; believers of other eras belong to other, distinct spiritual bodies.” **This violates the unity of the One** _____ .
- “Old Testament saints had to trust in a different atonement than do the New Testament saints.” **This violates the unity of the One** _____ .
- “Spirit-filled Christians will be the bride of Christ in heaven; the rest of the saints will have a different reward.” **This violates the unity of the One** _____ .
- “Jesus, the Father and the Spirit are three different gods.” **This violates the unity of the One** _____ .
- “The earthly leader of our religion is the true Lord for today.” **This violates the unity of the One** _____ .
- “The spirit that speaks through our guru is a holy spirit just like the one that spoke through Jesus.” **This violates the unity of the One** _____ .



Please Note: The preceding ideas about interpreting Scripture, and particularly about interpreting eschatological passages, are fully developed in the 42-page document entitled ***Polishing Our Hermeneutical Glasses***. I highly recommend that you download this treatise at:

http://www.tmin.org/pdfs/polishing_2007.pdf

The 21 hermeneutical principles explained in the document include:

- Always prioritize ***“The Spirit of Prophecy.”***
- Recognize the ***Cumulative Fulfillment*** of prophecy.
- Learn from the ***Already/Not-Yet*** tension in prophecy.
- Expect a ***Literal Fulfillment*** of prophecy.
- Recognize prophecy as given from ***God’s Eternal Perspective***.
- Understand the use of ***Apocalyptic Symbols*** in Bible prophecy.
- ***Document Distinctions*** between similar elements in prophecy.

The section on understanding the use of ***Apocalyptic Symbols*** has special application for our study of the Revelation.

IMPORTANT DATES IN ESCHATOLOGY

A.D.

54-68	Reign of the antichristian emperor Nero.
60	The prosperous banking city of Laodicea refuses Roman disaster relief after an earthquake, preferring to rebuild from its own resources. (Keener)
66-74	Roman-Jewish War.
70	Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans.
81-96	Reign of the antichristian Emperor Domitian.
135	Jerusalem razed and the Jews dispersed. Jerusalem renamed "Aelia Capitolina" and made a Roman colony. Israel loses its national identity.
150-179	Montanists predict the imminent end of the world and gather to await the apocalypse in Phrygia.
375-400	Martin of Tours, Bishop of Gaul, writes: "There is no doubt that the Antichrist has already been born. Firmly established already in his early years, he will, after reaching maturity, achieve supreme power." (Abanes)
500	The year predicted for the consummation of the ages by Hippolytus (d. 236). (Abanes)
1000	Europeans relieved the world did not end on January 1.
1033	The millennium of Christ's death and resurrection, expected by some Europeans to be the true date of the apocalypse.
1186	The populace fears that a planetary alignment would bring the end of the world. (Abanes)
1260	Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135-1202) predicted the appearance of Antichrist in this year. (Abanes)
1420	The year that God's fiery wrath would consume the world according to the Taborites.
1533	The year of Christ's return according to Melchior Hoffmann (c. 1495 -1543). (Abanes)
1534	Hoffmann supporter, Jan Matthys, preaches violent preparation for Christ's coming by Easter of this year. (Abanes)
1792	The Shakers believe that the world will end by this year. (Abanes)
1844	"The Great Disappointment" of the Millerite movement (named for William Miller), that expected the second advent on October 22. (Abanes)
1874	Revised date for the second advent proposed by the Millerites who formed the Second Adventist movement. (Abanes)
1910	Many people think that the arrival of Halley's comet will destroy the earth. (Abanes)
1914	The year of Armageddon according to the Jehovah's Witnesses.
1925	The Jehovah's Witnesses' revised date for Armageddon.
1938	Orson Welles' broadcast of "War of the Worlds" on October 30, convinces thousands of Americans that the end of the world had come via Martian invasion.
1948	Israel's national existence reestablished in the Holy Land.
1962	Many people throughout the world fear that the planetary alignment of February 4 will bring global destruction. (Abanes)
1981	Based on Hal Lindsey's bestseller <i>The Late Great Planet Earth</i> , many Christians believe the rapture will occur and the tribulation will begin this year. (Abanes)
1982	Many wonder if the "Jupiter Effect" of a planetary alignment will bring doomsday.
1988	Edgar Whisenant claims the rapture will occur in September.
1991	Louis Farrakhan identifies the Gulf War as the final war of Armageddon. (Abanes)
1992	The Korean Hyoo-go movement predicts October 28th as the day of the rapture. (Abanes)
2012	The date by which Jack Van Impe predicts Christ will return. This is the year the Mayan calendar runs out. (Abanes)
2014	On June 29, the Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) announced a Caliphate, a Muslim state that spanned Syria and Iraq.

Abbreviations Used In This Syllabus

<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Antiquities of the Jews</i> by Josephus
c.	circa, i.e. “about,” referring to approximate dates
Ed	Editor
ET	English Translation (or Translator)
Grk	Greek
Heb	Hebrew
LXX	Septuagint (Grk translation of Old Testament)
MS	Manuscript (pl. MSS)
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
<i>Wars</i>	<i>Wars of the Jews</i> by Josephus

A Note On Biblical Citations

We are in the process of standardizing the method of citing biblical passages throughout the publications of Timothy Ministries. Therefore, wherever abbreviated biblical citations appear throughout this syllabus, they will likely appear with the 3-letter book name abbreviations used in the BibleWorks software program. The book name abbreviations are not followed by a period. However, in a convention that is our own preference, a period rather than a colon separates chapter and verse numbers. For example, Act 2.39 would designate the 39th verse of the second chapter of Acts.