

*A Hermeneutics Primer &
the Premillennialism of the Early Church*
(REV71)

Guidelines for Interpreting Prophetic Scripture

We hold to a *literal* or *normal* hermeneutic.

Hermeneutics are the rules by which we interpret the Bible.

We should always interpret prophetic passages (and all other passages) literally.

- ✠ This is the single most important rule in interpreting prophecy.
- ✠ We should not come to a prophetic passage with preconceived notion as to its meaning.
- ✠ Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost writes: “The literal method of interpretation is that method that gives to each word the *same exact basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage.*”¹
- ✠ We believe that (1) since God desires that His Word be *understood* by people, (2) He used the *normal* rules of human communication to communicate prophetic truth.

We should be careful not to leave the literal approach when interpreting symbols.

- ✠ Symbols communicate truth concisely, and they do so in a graphic way.
- ✠ Not all passages are clearly symbolic or literal.

¹ Pentecost, J. Dwight, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958), p. 9.

- ✚ In “spiritualizing” a text, objectivity in interpretation is lost. One allegorical interpretation is just as valid as another.
- ✚ When I doubt, ALWAYS default to the literal.
- ✚ General rule: If a text makes sense literally in its context, seek no other sense!

As often as possible, we should interpret by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

- ✚ **2 Peter 1:20:** “No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation ...”
- ✚ Peter’s point includes the idea that no prophecy found in Scripture is to be interpreted by itself but, rather, in reference to *everything* God has said on the subject.
- ✚ God is not the author of confusion and obviously will not contradict Himself as He sets forth the *things to come*.

As often as possible, we should interpret figurative language by using Scripture:

- ✚ Figures of speech and symbols represent something literal.
- ✚ Figurative language is often used to reference other passages of Scripture.

Context, context, context!

- ✚ We interpret in light of the immediate context. The prophet himself will often interpret some symbols in the text.
- ✚ We interpret in light of the larger context. Prophetic symbols involve those whose meaning is suggested by other Scriptures outside of the immediate text.
- ✚ We interpret in light of the historical-cultural context.

- ‡ Some symbols do not find meaning in other portions of Scripture but, rather in the historical setting of the author/audience.

We should NEVER resort to newspaper eschatology!

- ‡ The news is exciting but may have absolutely no prophetic significance!

A Number of the Early Church Fathers were *Premillennialists* and Expected a *Future Antichrist*

“Many of the early fathers, including Papias (c. 60 – c. 130), Justin (c. 100 – c. 165), Irenaeus, Tertullian, Victorinus of Pettau (d. c. 304) and Lactantius (c. 240 – c. 320), were premillennialists, [that is,] they expected the personal coming of Christ in glory to inaugurate a millennial reign on earth before the last judgment . . . This belief was not only an interpretation of Revelation 20, but also a continuation of Jewish apocalyptic expectation of an interim messianic kingdom.”²

***The Didache or The Teaching of the Apostles* (Second Century)**

“For in the last days the false prophets and the destroyers shall be multiplied, and the sheep shall be turned into wolves, and love shall be turned into hate. For when lawlessness increases, they shall hate and persecute and deliver up one another; and then shall appear the world-deceiver as Son of God, who shall do signs and wonders, and the earth shall be delivered into his hands, and he shall do lawless deeds such as have never yet been done since the beginning of the world. Then shall the race of men come into the fire of trial, and many shall be offended and shall perish . . .”³

Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem (Fourth Century)

“This aforementioned Antichrist comes when the times of the sovereignty of the Romans shall be fulfilled, and the concluding events of the world draw nigh. Ten kings of the Romans arise at the same time in different places,

² Ferguson, Sinclair B., David F. Wright and J.I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p.428.

³ Lightfoot, J.B., *Apostolic Fathers*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1891), p.235.

perhaps; but reigning at the same period. But after these, the antichrist is the eleventh, having, by his magic and evil skill, violently possessed himself of the Roman power. Three of those who have reigned before him, he will subdue; the other seven he will hold in subjection to himself. At first he assumes a character of gentleness (as if a wise and understanding person), pretending both to moderation and philanthropy; deceiving, both by lying miracles and prodigies which come from his magical deceptions, the Jews, as if he were the expected Messiah. Afterwards he will addict himself to every kind of evil, cruelty, and excess, so as to surpass all who have been unjust and impious before him; having a bloody and relentless and pitiless mind, and full of wily devices against all, and especially against believers. But having dared such things three years and six months, he will be destroyed by the second glorious coming from heaven of the truly begotten Son of God, who is our Lord and Savior, Jesus the true Messiah; who, having destroyed Antichrist by the Spirit of His mouth, will deliver him to the fire Gehenna.”⁴

Gregory of Tours (Late Sixth Century)

“Concerning the end of the world, I believe what I have learnt from those who have gone before me. Antichrist will assume circumcision, asserting himself to be the Christ. He will then place a statue to be worshipped in the Temple at Jerusalem, as we read that the Lord has said, ‘Ye shall see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place’.”⁵

⁴ Oden, Thomas C., *The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2000), IX., pp.111-12.

⁵ Pink, Arthur, *The Antichrist*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Klock and Klock, 1923), p.25.