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A Step-by-Step Process

There are days when I come home and see that something significant has occurred. It's written all over the face of my wife. It's written on the faces of my kids. It's even written on the face of my dog! The silence is awkward as my wife pulls me aside to tell me of the day's events.

"Well, Honey," she says. "I have to tell you about something that happened today..."

Suspense grips me as I wait to hear what it was.

Usually, I have to hear the whole story before I finally learn what happened. It's the waiting that gets me because I have to endure the telling of how the events unfolded. But as difficult as the waiting is, the lengthy story is necessary so that I can properly grasp the context. Every time I try to wrestle out the conclusion before hearing the full story, I tend to make a wrong judgment.

God tells us in His Word that something significant will occur in the future. We must take the time to listen to Him. Our problem is that we, as human beings, want to skip over the long, tedious process and get right to the condensed version from someone who says they know the story. We tend to prefer glossy graphs from a human author over the long hours of searching the texts written by the true Author. In short, we tend to rely on men's word rather than God's Word.

I could just come out and tell you right now that "I found that the Bible teaches a [fill in the blank] understanding of the End Times."⁴ But that really means nothing. I would just be another

⁴ The study of End-Times prophecy is called *eschatology*.

PROPHECY'S ARCHITECTURE

man among many who says he knows what God's Word teaches about the subject. You might be persuaded to believe me because I write eloquently, tell entertaining stories, or appeal to your interests. But you would have no way of really knowing what I say is true unless you were to do the research yourself. Because there are so many different views offered today, by so many men who claim to be reading the same Word, we have to be wary of men's views, including mine. The only *real* source is God's Word (Isa. 40:8), not movies, videos, audiotapes, or novels.

Therefore, how does a fallible man like myself write a book on the End Times without succumbing to the trap of "man's opinion interprets God's opinion"? The answer is in the story of what God did in my life as I described in the previous chapter. I had to put away all other sources and teachers, and search only the Bible for my answers. This book tells of that journey, centering on the complete scriptures dealing directly with the End Times and their sequences. Rather than writing a book about how I understand the End Times, I am writing a book that starts at square one—having you, the reader, open your Bible and read it like I did. Yes, just start reading it, take notes, and look for any verses that might have something to do with this topic.

Originally, I had hoped to include chapters and even entire books of the Bible for you to interpret yourself. This way, you could follow my interpretations through these passages and make up your own mind. But in subsequent revisions, I found that readers had an easier time using their own Bibles for study. My hope was (and still is) that, at the end of this study, you will be able to quote scripture rather than a teacher to explain what you believe. And more than this, that you will understand the scriptures you quote in their native context rather than in the context of a teacher's persuasive argument.

You will only know for sure what you know if it comes from the Source of Knowledge. Don't believe me—believe the Word. You will need to read the Bible to find the Bible passages. This is listening to the whole story before you get to the end. *You must know in your own heart that the passages we are studying are indeed the ones we should be studying and that none have been left out.* You need to see for yourself that God has given us a clear and specific teaching on End-Times sequences.

Finding the Chosen Few

“Only five percent of you will ever go on to become architects.”

The professor stared into the large audience of students who had now become completely silent.

“Not all of you will have what it takes.”

I could hear feet shuffling around the 1920s-era auditorium; I guess I had squirmed, too, knowing that this nine-credit class was required to apply to the College of Architecture and Urban Planning.

“A number of you will get accepted into the architecture program here at the University of Washington, but some of you will not graduate from it. Others may graduate, but will never complete the internship to be eligible to take the state licensing exam. Of those who do take the exam, some will not be able to pass the 12-hour design problem. And even those who eventually become licensed will often gravitate into other fields.”

It was true. Of all the people in my graduating class, I know of very few who subsequently went on to become successful architects. The process of determining an End-Times doctrine follows a similar pattern. *The Bible may have many scriptures that mention future events, but there are few that really deal specifically with the subject.* Like all those students who dream about one day becoming architects, only a few of whom will actually go on to do so, only those believers who use the proper approach to studying Scripture will discover what God has to say on the subject. It is this approach to looking for answers from God’s Word that we will discuss in this book.

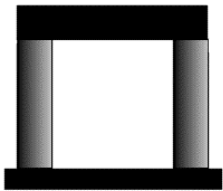
The process is quite simple. When we want to understand what the Bible has to say regarding a particular topic, we search for two things:

- Scriptures that deal *directly* with the subject.
- Scriptures that deal with the subject in any way, even remotely.

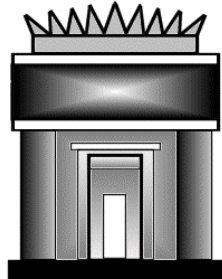
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Not every scripture will bring the same level of clarity to the issue. In fact, some may be quite general or indirect in their reference to End-Times events. In understanding any biblical doctrine, one must look at all of supporting passages to find the “stand-outs.” Some scriptures are very *explicit* (clear and detailed), while others are more *implicit* (general and suggestive). Some deal directly with the topic, while others mention the subject only in passing or in support of another concept. Clearly then, there are some passages to which we should assign more importance than others. Those of greater clarity we could call *primary* and the others *secondary*. Primary passages are what you need to study to develop the framework of a doctrine.

Primary passages represent the plain and core teaching of a doctrine. In this sense, Bible passages are like parts of a building. The primary passages are like columns and beams that carry most of the weight to the foundation. They all work together to hold up the building. If one has built things correctly, this framework should not change as the secondary components are applied.



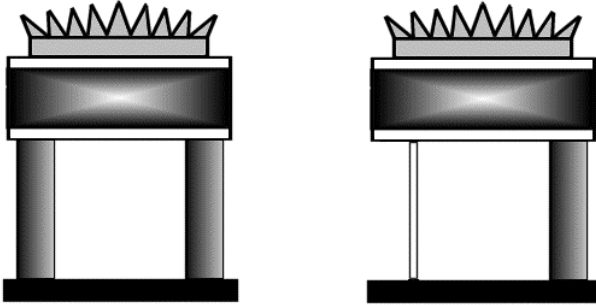
**Columns and beams
define the shape**



**The finished shape
based on the
columns and beams**

We can take these lessons into our study of scripture. In the same way that a builder would not place a flimsy 2x4 stud under a beam to carry the entire weight of the building, one would not take an implicit, secondary passage from scripture and use it to support an entire doctrine. This is a very important principle that will keep you from “staking it all” on a passage that was never intended to be the “end all” of a doctrine.

In architecture and construction, remembering this principle can save your life and the lives of others. In fact, there are many rules in place to prevent such blunders. These rules include building codes and the principles of structural engineering. In scripture, we have these rules, as well. They are called the rules of biblical interpretation. These rules will help to keep you from making fundamental errors in interpretation that, ultimately, result in wrong doctrine.



Strong

Weak

Common sense does make a difference!

The Bible is not a book filled with mystical ideas and hidden knowledge. Quite the contrary, it is God’s eternal Word meant for us to understand and live by. We *can* digest its meaning!

But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God...’” (Matt. 4:4, NASB)

In reading the Bible, there are rules that need to be applied. These rules are commonly referred to as the “rules of biblical interpretation.” If followed rigorously, they will help the reader understand what God is saying rather than what their imagination is saying. This is likewise true for the builder who follows building codes and blueprints so as not to construct a flimsy structure that is a hazard to safety.

In Chapter 4, we will look at the commonly accepted rules of interpretation. Here, I will tell you this—they follow common sense.