

WRITINGS OF EUGENE KIMBLE

by Eugene Kimble

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Eugene Kimble, compiled for study and devotional reading.

4 Chapters

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S. Alleged Discrepancies in the Bible

Alleged Discrepancies in the Bible Eugene Kimble, Ph.D.

Some critics of the Bible say there are discrepancies in the numbers found in the Bible, therefore the Bible is unreliable and not accurate. I propose that such alleged discrepancies in the numbers reported in the Bible can be resolved with diligent study and illumination by the Holy Spirit.

Here are ten examples of alleged numeric discrepancies and their resolutions that prove this hypothesis:

1. How many soldiers did Joshua send to ambush Ai? 30,000 or 5,000? a. He sent 30,000 men the night before the battle, Joshua 8:3-9. b. The next morning he sent another 5,000 reinforcements to conceal themselves in the immediate precincts of the town, Joshua 8:10-13
2. How much did Solomon pay the King of Tyre for materials and labor that Hiram provided for the temple at Jerusalem? a. 1 Kings 5:8-11 (NASB) is Solomon's payment to Hiram's royal household. b. Ezra, in 2 Chronicles 2:10, records the amount Solomon paid Hiram's servants who did the actual work.

3. How many men did Adino the Eznite slay? 2 Samuel 23:8; 1 Chronicles 1:1. a. 2 Samuel may well be referring to a different person and/or a different event than that noted in 1 Chronicles. Read both texts carefully. b. If both books should refer to the same person, Adino could have slain 800 on one occasion and 300 on another.

4. How much did David actually pay Araunah for his threshing floor/temple site? a. In obedience to God's Word through the prophet Gad, David bought the threshing floor and oxen (paying 50 shekels of silver) in order to offer a propitiatory sacrifice to stay a devastating plague – 2 Samuel 1:1-25 b. In the second instance (1 Chronicles 21:18-30; 1 Chronicles 22:1-6), Ezra combines the first purchase of the oxen and threshing floor for 50 shekels of silver with David's later purchase of the entire site (for an additional 600 shekels of gold) as a place to build the temple (See 1 Chronicles 21:25 and 1 Chronicles 22:1 ff).

5. How many males, twenty years old and upward, were in the tribe of Simeon? a. At the first census they numbered 59,300 (Numbers 1:23) b. At the second census, about 40 years later, there were 22,200

(Numbers 26:14)

Answer: In his prophecy concerning each of the twelve tribes, Jacob had foretold that Simeon would not prevail but would be scattered in Israel

(Genesis 49:5-7). Then just prior to the second census, God sent a plague upon Israel, destroying twenty-four thousand men because of their immorality and idolatry with the daughters of Moab (Numbers 25:1-18, Numbers 26:1). Because Zimri, a prince of Simeon (Numbers 25:14), was a main participant in this rebellion against the Most High, we probably should conclude that the

majority of the rebels slain in the plague were Simeonites. Because of these factors the tribe of Simeon declined in numbers over the forty-year span, whereas the other tribes maintained a relatively stable population.

6. How many people did the Lord strike down in the small town of Beth-shemesh? “[God} struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the Lord. He struck down of all the people 50,070 men, and the people mourned because the Lord had struck the people with a great slaughter” (1 Samuel 6:19, NASB. Cf. NIV). a. According to the Hebrew, “He struck down of all the people, 70 men [and] fifty sWṭàṭ (aleph) men. b. sWṭàṭ (aleph) is hard to translate in some contexts because it has several different meanings. It does not always mean 1,000 (10 x 100). It may mean:

(1) Cattle (herd), Deuteronomy 28:4, Deuteronomy 28:18, Deuteronomy 28:51, etc. (à is the Hebrew letter “A,” taken from the pictogram of a steer’s face and horns). Perhaps, since most of Israel’s cattle were domesticated, selT (a form of sWṭàṭ) was used to designate a docile, gentle lamb, (Jeremiah 11:19), a close friend, (Psalms 55:13), or a woman’s husband, (Proverbs 2:17)

(2) selT also designated the chief of a clan, (1 Chronicles 1:51). Apparently since sWṭàṭ can mean “herd (unit) of cattle” then óeJàṭ “chief” is the head of a group (unit) of people.

(3) Family, clan, unit, group. In 1 Samuel 10:19 “thousands” (the plural form of ólṭàṭ) in the KJV is translated “clans” in the NIV and NASB because the context clearly defines “thousands” (1 Samuel 10:19, KJV) as “clans [extended families]” (1 Samuel 10:21). Also, In Numbers 1:16; Numbers 10:4; Joshua 22:21, Joshua 22:30; 1 Samuel 23:23; Micah 5:2, the KJV has “thousands” where the other major versions have “clans, families.” Further, in Judges 6:15 “My family” in the KJV is literally “My thousand” (étÄIÀ`Ç) in the original. But in Numbers 10:36 the major versions rightly have “thousands.”

Conclusion: 1 Samuel 6:19 might mean that God struck down at Beth-shemesh seventy men and fifty of their cattle, which would have been “a great slaughter” for a small town. This view is probably the correct one because:

(1) Beth-shemesh was just a small town. (2) If 50,070 referred only to people, the round number of 50,000 would likely have been used. (Cf. 2 Samuel 10:18 and 1 Chronicles 19:18 below, and many other references, where very large numbers are usually round numbers). (3) “The 70 stands before the 50,000, which is very unusual,” K-D, Vol. V, p.68. Like English, the Hebrew language, when combining two numbers, normally puts the larger number first. This usual order would hold true if the meaning is “70 men and 50 of their cattle,” but not for 70 men and 50,000 men. (4) The footnote in the New King James Version, dated 1990, states, “6:19a Or ‘He struck seventy men of the people and fifty oxen of a man.’”

7. How many charioteers, horsemen, and foot soldiers were slain in David’s battle with the Syrians? a. “700 charioteers . . . and 40,000 horsemen,” (2 Samuel 10:18) “7,000 charioteers and 40,000 foot soldiers,” (1 Chronicles 19:18) b. As shown above in 6-b (3), aleph, the Hebrew word for thousand, also has the meaning of unit: i.e., family, tribe, clan, cattle, etc. (Cf. Judges 6:15; 1 Samuel 10:19-21; Deuteronomy 28:4, Deuteronomy 28:18, Deuteronomy 28:51, etc.).

(1) 2 Samuel records 700 charioteers slain, whereas 1 Chronicles records that 7 $\text{ó}\text{ł}\text{†}\text{à}\text{†}$ (units) of charioteers were slain. That is, 2 Samuel 10:18 defines the charioteers as being seven hundred in number, whereas 1 Chronicles 19:18 defines them as being seven units in number. This interpretation is reasonable, because when writing the Hebrew text, the scribe would be unlikely to confuse the number 100 ($\text{è}\text{B}\text{à}\text{î}\text{Â}$) with the number 1,000 ($\text{ó}\text{ł}\text{Æ}\text{à}\text{Æ}$).

(2) Of the 40,000 slain part were horsemen and part were foot soldiers, with each author setting forth a different part of the whole. (Cf., Matthew, Mark, and Luke's history of Jesus' ministry, where each writer often gives only part of the whole). Also, cf. the biblical use elsewhere of a part for the whole (synecdoche, e.g., Php 2:10-11) and the whole for a part (e.g., Mark 1:5).

8. Some alleged discrepancies are simply the Scripture's way of stating the statistic as a round number. a. Genesis 15:13 states that Israel would sojourn in Egypt four hundred years. Later revelation in Exodus 12:40 gives the exact time as four hundred and thirty years. b. Numbers 25:7-9 gives the number of those who died of the plague as

24,000. 1 Corinthians 10:8 gives the total as 23,000. The actual number could have been between 23,000 and 24,000 slain. c. 1 Kings 7:26 says the Sea (holding water to cleanse both priests and burnt offerings) held two thousand baths. 2 Chronicles 4:5 says the Sea held three thousand baths. The Sea probably held around 2,500 baths. d. Compare: "Then all Jerusalem was going out to [hear] him (i.e., John Baptist), and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan," (Matthew 3:5).

9. How many sons did Abraham have? "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice . . . his one and only son," (Hebrews 11:17, NIV). a. Abraham had many sons, Genesis 25:1-6. b. Genesis 22:2, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac." The Hebrew word for "only" ($\text{ã}\text{é}\text{ç}$ "éÿ") also has the meaning of "beloved, favored, precious," (Psalms 35:17, (NIV), Proverbs 22:20, etc).

Conclusion: Abraham gave gifts to his other sons and sent them away from Isaac (Genesis 25:6). "Only" son shows that Isaac was first in rank, or first in importance to God's Messianic program. See Victor P. Hamilton, Genesis, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, II, 122, Note 10, "Isaac was Abraham's uniquely precious son, but not his only begotten." F. F. Bruce, Hebrews, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 311, "Isaac was unique and irreplaceable."

10. Saul's regnal age and length of reign in 1 Samuel 13:1. a. $\text{I}^{\text{`}}\text{Å}\text{ø}^{\text{^}}\text{N}\text{À}\text{P IKÇ jIÇîÈ äðÈLÈ éz}\text{Å}\text{L}\text{Š}\text{Š}\text{Š}\text{Še Bè}\text{L}\text{Š}\text{ĩ}\text{~}\text{a}\text{š le}\text{à}\text{L}^{\text{~}}\text{äð}^{\text{^}}\text{L}^{\text{^}}$

$\text{ĩ}\text{a}^{\text{-}}$. See the various translations. b. Literal translation: "Saul was the 'son of a year' ($\text{äðÈL}^{\text{^}}\text{ĩ}\text{a}^{\text{-}}$) when he began his reign, and he reigned two years over Israel," 1 Samuel 13:1 a.

(1) When the Bible speaks of a one-year reign, or one-year span of time, the Hebrew reads $\text{ú}\text{ç}\text{—}\text{à}\text{—}\text{äð}\text{Y}\text{L}^{\text{^}}$ (one year), as in 2 Kings 8:26; 2 Chronicles 22:2 (also compare Exodus 23:29-30, 2 Chronicles 9:13; Ezra 1:1; Ezra 5:13; Ezra 6:3, etc).

(2) The dozens of times $\text{äð}\text{L}^{\text{~}}\text{ĩ}\text{a}^{\text{-}}$ (son of a year) occurs elsewhere than in 1 Samuel 13:1 it always refers to a mature, yearling animal, as in Exodus 12:5; Numbers 7:15ff, and etc.

(a) A yearling is an animal between one and two years old.

(b) "If it was already a yearling (NEB), then it was fully grown as well," Alan Cole, Exodus, TOTC, 106.

(c) "A year old, because it was not till then that it reached the full, fresh vigor of its life," Keil and Delitzsch, II, 11.

(3) The Passover Lamb typified Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7).

(a) Who began His ministry when He was fully grown (Luke 3:23; Exodus 12:5).

(b) Slain by the people, not by the priest (Exodus 12:6).

(c) His blood gave redemption to the people (Exodus 12:7, Exodus 12:13).

(d) Was without defect (Exodus 12:5; cf. 1 Peter 1:18-19).

(e) When partaking of Him, we are to set our heart on leaving the world (Exodus 12:11).

Conclusion: "Saul was a fully mature man when he began to reign,"

(i.e., somewhere between thirty and forty years old, 1 Samuel 13:1 a. See NIV, its footnote, and NASB translations on 1 Samuel 13:1 a).

(1) Immediately after Saul's reign began, He was sufficiently powerful to rescue the city of Jabesh Gilead from Nahash (1 Samuel 11:1-11).

(2) "Then Saul reigned two more years," (1 Samuel 13:1 b) in order to solidify his kingship before taking on the much more powerful Philistines. (Cf. 1 Samuel 13:2 with 1 Samuel 13:5-7). Also, He had enemies among his own people the Jews (1 Samuel 10:27) whom he wished to win over as allies before going to war (1 Samuel 11:12-13).

(3) The Philistine war in 1 Samuel 13:2-10 undoubtedly occurred in the early part of Saul's reign. This might imply that 1 Samuel 13:1 also refers to the first part of Saul's reign.

(4) Translation: "Saul was a fully mature man when he became king. Then when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul choose three thousand men from Israel [to do battle with the Philistines]," 1 Samuel 13:1-2. This translation fits the context and culture, while doing justice to and preserving the integrity of the Hebrew text

(5) Interestingly, of the major translations, the KJV ("Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul choose him three thousand men of Israel [to do battle with the Philistines].") best translates the Hebrew text, although it fails to catch the "fully mature" (yearling) meaning of ben shanah (בֶּן־שָׁנָה, "son of a year").

Conclusion: We are to accept the original text God has preserved for us. Changing the text only results in confusion of the author's intended meaning rather than enlightenment. With some diligent study and the Holy Spirit's illumination, most so-called discrepancies can be easily resolved.

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S. Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Principles Of Progressive Revelation

Introduction To interpret the Bible properly, one's hermeneutical principles must be based upon a correct understanding of biblical revelation. For some years now, God has been illuminating His Church with the understanding that biblical revelation is progressive.¹

1 Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, reprint, 1953), II, 91; Thomas Dehany Bernard, *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament – Eight Lectures Delivered before the University of Oxford on the Bampton Foundation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961); John Edward Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), 52-64; James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952); J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 18-19; Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, 1956), 101-104; W. Graham Scroggie, *Ruling Lines of Progressive Revelation* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, Ltd., n. d.); Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology, Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 14; and "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline," www.bsmi.org, 7; Daniel B. Wallace, "New Testament Eschatology in the Light of Progressive Revelation: Special Focus on the Coming Kingdom," www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/nteschat; Benjamin B. Warfield, "Revelation," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), IV, 2576, 2577.

However, an unbiblical view of progressive revelation has been proposed by the religious evolutionists, who recognized the progressive waves upon the surface of the divine ocean, but viewed evolutionary development as the cause.² They assumed that Israel's religion, along with that of the pagans, arose from polytheism and then gradually progressed in the minds of the Israelites into a monotheistic concept. This view is advocated by W. O. E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson, who say, "Hebrew religion, as the study of Semitic Comparative Religion abundantly proves, was very closely related to the religion of all the Semitic nations; indeed it was made up of elements common to the religions of all early Semites."³ Thus they believe that biblical revelation is a record of man's search for God and not the scriptural view of God's revealing Himself to man in infallible words.

2 On page 24 of his book, *The Modern Use of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), Harry Emerson Fosdick uses the term "progressive revelation." What he really means by it, however, is the evolutionary development of man's religious thinking, as he makes plain in *A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), ix.

3 *Hebrew Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), xvii.

Neither does neo-orthodoxy rise higher than classical liberalism in its view of biblical revelation. For example, Karl Barth's view of the inspiration of Scripture closely parallels that of Oesterley and Robinson.

Not for all ages and countries, but certainly for our own, it is part of the stumbling-block that like all ancient literature the Old and New Testament know nothing of the distinction of fact and value which is so important to us, between history, on the one hand, and saga and legend on the other...But the vulnerability of the Bible, i.e., its capacity for error, also extends to religious or theological content...It amounts to this, that, as we see it, many parts, especially of the Old Testament, cannot be accepted as religious and theological literature, but only as documents of secular legislation and history and practical wisdom and poetry, although the Synagogue and later the Church claimed to find in them witness of Revelation 4

4 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Part 2 The Doctrine of the Word of God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), I, 1, 203.

Both of these views hold that man's search for God evolved from much error mixed with little truth to less error mixed with more truth. J. Barton Payne comments, "The Old Testament is thus made [by liberal theologians] to conform to the contemporary thought patterns of the pagan world and to an assumed evolutionary progress."⁵ So, neither classical liberalism nor neo-orthodoxy has any concept of an authoritative, final revelation of God to man in infallibly recorded words, for both maintain that revelation is imperfect and still continues.⁶ 5 Payne, *op. cit.*, 527, 528.

6 Barth, *op. cit.*, 23; Fosdick, *A Guide to Understanding the Bible*, *op. cit.*, xiv. In contrast to classical liberalism and neo-orthodoxy, biblical progressive revelation with its organic unity of Scripture requires perfection of doctrine at every stage, from Genesis to Revelation. A valid, that is to say, biblical, definition of the proper attitude toward progressive revelation is given by Bernard Ramm and Geerhardus Vos:

By progressive revelation we mean that the Bible sets forth a movement of God, with the initiative coming from God and not man, in which God brings man up through the theological infancy of the Old Testament to the maturity of the New Testament.⁷ 7 *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, 1956), 102. The truth of revelation, if it is to retain its divine and absolute character at all, must be perfect from the beginning. Biblical Theology deals with the product of a supernatural divine activity, and is therefore bound by its own principle to maintain the perfection of revealed truth in all its stages.⁸

8 "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline," *op. cit.*, was Dr. Vos' inaugural address as Professor of Biblical Theology in Princeton Seminary, May 8, 1894.

Both definitions firmly reject any evolutionary development of biblical truths by describing revelation as God's action, not man's quest.

Organic Growth of Revelation As other growth, progressive revelation is (1) organic, (2) periodic, and (3) climactic. By being organic, revelation is understood to be absolutely perfect at all stages of progression; therefore, it can increase in complexity and quantity but not in quality as Vos notes:

It is sometimes contended that the assumption of progress in revelation excludes its absolute perfection at all stages. This would actually be so if the progress were non-organic. The organic process is from seed form to the attainment of full growth; yet we do not say in the qualitative sense the seed is less perfect than the tree. The feature in question explains further how the soteric sufficiency of the truth could belong to it in its first stage of emergence: in the seed form the

minimum of indispensable knowledge was already present.^{9 9} Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 15-16. The DNA in the apple seed has all the information needed to progress from a seed to a seedling to a sapling to a mature, apple-bearing tree. Because of its organic nature, the seed is not less perfect than the full-grown tree. An untrained eye examining a seed might not conclude that it would develop into a fruit tree. But it will, because of the indispensable minimum of information contained in its DNA. Similarly, the first revelation has in seed form all the truth of later stages. Apple seeds and God's revelation both grow just as Jesus illustrated the growth of God's Kingdom:

This is what the Kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head, (Mark 4:26-28, NIV).

Moreover, Scripture's organic nature is demonstrated by the progressive revelation of salvation through the Lamb of God from Genesis to The Revelation:

In Genesis the lamb is a necessity. The lamb is the sacrifice slain by an offended, yet compassionate, LORD God to provide salvation for our guilty ancestors ("The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them," Genesis 3:21). Then, Abel "brought of the firstlings of his flock," (Genesis 4:4; cf. Hebrews 9:22). Later, God provided a lamb as a substitute to die in the place of Isaac whom his father Abraham had been instructed to slay, ([God] "said, take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering...and Abraham went and took the lamb and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son," Genesis 22:1-19). In Exodus the lamb has efficacy. God had promised that when He came in judgment upon the land of Egypt, if He saw the lamb's blood sprinkled upon the doorpost, "When I see the blood I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13). The sprinkled lamb's blood effects deliverance from God's judgment for all who take refuge under it, then and now. In Leviticus the lamb has purity (without blemish): "take two male lambs without blemish and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish...and the priest shall offer the sin offering, and make an atonement for him that is to be cleansed from his uncleanness" (Leviticus 14:10; Leviticus 14:19). This unblemished yearling male represented the perfection of the species, even as did Christ who was "a lamb unblemished and spotless" (1 Peter 1:19) and "who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). The blood of both the type (the lamb) and the reality (Christ) made atonement for sin, which was not merely a covering for sin (the older sense) but a true "at-one-ment" with God.¹⁰ (10 See R. H. Harrison, *Leviticus*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 67.) In Isaiah the lamb has personality. At this point in God's progressive revelation, the Lamb becomes a man: "He was pierced for our transgressions," (Isaiah 53:5, NIV) and "led like a lamb to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7, NIV) and "cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people" (Isaiah 53:8). The personified Lamb's "grave was assigned with wicked men" (Isaiah 53:9), after which "the LORD will prolong His days" (Isaiah 53:10) by resurrection to life, followed by great honor from God (Isaiah 53:12).

All earlier revelation of the lamb reaches its full maturity and development in the New Testament. H. D. McDonald concurs, "All the ideas surrounding the figure of the lamb built up through the

progressive revelation of the Old Testament may indeed go into the concept as it occurs in the New Testament.”¹¹

11 “Lamb of God,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 618-619.

In the Gospel of John the Lamb is identified. The personified lamb in Isaiah is revealed by John the Baptist to be the promised “Messiah” (John 1:41), even “Jesus...the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Heaven itself testifies to the power of the Lamb’s blood to cleanse from sin. “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count...clothed in white robes...These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9; Revelation 7:13-14). Thus both John the Baptist and John the Apostle took all guesswork out of our quest for a personal Savior. In the Gospel accounts, the Lamb is crucified, telling us in what manner His blood would be “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28; cf. Is. 53:5; 1 Peter 1:18-21) and as a result His death would establish God’s “new covenant” with His Church (Luke 22:20). In the Epistles the lamb is typified. To instruct us that the Passover lamb with its efficacious blood pointed directly to Jesus, the Holy Spirit moved Paul to write, “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Peter also under the Spirit’s inspiration added more detail to the effectiveness of the Lamb’s blood to cleanse every sin, “Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things...but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19). In Revelation five the Lamb is magnified with worship (Revelation 5:8; Revelation 5:14) and praise from all creation (Revelation 5:11-13), because “with your blood You purchased men for God” (Revelation 5:9). In Revelation twenty-two the Lamb Jesus is glorified because of His own inherent worth and obedience in bringing mankind into rulership in God’s Kingdom through the cross. He and the Father sit upon one “throne of God and of the Lamb” as co-rulers over the eternal Kingdom of God, (Revelation 22:3). In this manner, salvation through the Lamb progressed from seed form in Genesis (“the LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife,” Genesis 3:21) to the attainment of full growth and development in The Revelation (“worthy [is the Lamb]...because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God,” Revelation 5:9, NIV; and “the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; and they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads...and they will reign forever and forever,” Revelation 22:3-5). This last revelation in which the Lamb rules jointly with His bond- servants over the eternal Kingdom of God clearly shows that justification is not an end in itself, but that salvation through the Lamb is God’s means to bring fallen, sinful men into rulership in His eternal Kingdom (cf. Romans 8:16-17; Revelation 5:9-10), where God had intended for man to be from the very beginning (Genesis 1:26; Hebrews 2:5-8).¹²

12 This is the revised form of a previous article I wrote on “The Lamb of God,” with thanks to H. D. McDonald for help with assonance in the Old Testament part. Ibid.

Vos likewise illustrated the organic nature of Scripture by demonstrating the progressive revelation of salvation through the covenants.

Although the knowledge of God has received material increase through the ages, this increase nowhere shows the features of external accretion, but throughout appears as an internal

expansion, an organic unfolding from within. The elements of truth, far from being added one to the other in lifeless succession, are seen to grow out of each other, each richer and fuller disclosure of the knowledge of God having been prepared by what preceded, and being in its turn preparatory for what follows...each subsequent increase consisted in what was germinally contained in the beginning revelation. The Gospel of Paradise is such a germ in which the Gospel of Paul is potentially present; and the Gospel of Abraham, of Moses, of David, of Isaiah and Jeremiah, are all expansions of this original message of salvation, each pointing toward the next stage of growth, and bringing the Gospel idea one step nearer to its full realization. In this Gospel of Paradise we already discern the essential features of a covenant relation, though the formal notion of a covenant does not attach to it. And in the covenant-promises given to Abraham these very features reappear, assume greater distinctness, and are seen to grow together, to crystallize as it were, into the formal covenant. From this time onward the expansive character of the covenant-idea shows itself. The covenant of Abraham contains the promise of the Sinaitic covenant; the latter again from its very nature gives rise to prophecy; and prophecy guards the covenant of Sinai from assuming a fixed, unalterable form, the prophetic word being a creative word under the influence of which the spiritual, universal germs of the covenant are quickened and a new, higher order of things is organically developed from the Mosaic Theocracy, that new covenant of which Jeremiah spoke, and which our Savior brought to light by the shedding of His blood. So dispensation grows out of dispensation and the newest is but the fullest expanded flower of the oldest.¹³ 13 Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline," op. cit., 7.

Scripture further manifested its organic nature through the progressive unfolding of the doctrine of the Trinity: beginning in Genesis ("Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness," Genesis 1:26); continued by the Angel of the LORD in Exodus ("My name is in him," Exodus 23:21); and further developed in the virgin-born Son (Is. 7:14) who would be the "Mighty God, Eternal Father," (Exodus 9:6). The perfect seed form of earlier revelation concerning the Trinity burst into full bloom in the New Testament which identified Jesus Christ as the "only begotten [Son, Himself] God" (John 1:18, author's translation), who fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of the coming virgin-born Son who would be God in human flesh (Is. 7:14; 9:6; cf. Matthew 1:23). Later revelation associated Jesus with the manifested Trinity (Matthew 3:16-17) and then furthered the progression by revealing the glorified Jesus Christ in heaven receiving equal worship with the Father (Revelation 5:13-14) and the two reigning co-equally upon one "Throne of God and of the Lamb" (Revelation 22:3) over the universal kingdom of God "forever and forever" (22:5). Robert H. Mounce comments on Revelation 5:13, "The praise of the entire created order is addressed to the One who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb. Throughout the Apocalypse the two are regularly joined."¹⁴ Leon Morris concurs with Mounce,

This song ends by linking Him that sitteth upon the throne with the Lamb. The two are joined in a way which is characteristic of this book (Revelation 6:16; Revelation 7:9-10; Revelation 7:17; Revelation 14:1; Revelation 14:4; Revelation 21:22-23; Revelation 22:1; Revelation 22:3). There cannot be the slightest doubt that the Lamb is to be reckoned with God and as God.¹⁵ 14 Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 150.

15 The Revelation of St. John, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981),

102. The Holy Spirit, of course, appears in The Revelation as the One who speaks to the churches through Christ's Word (Revelation 2:7; etc.) and is manifested there as the "seven lamps of fire burning before the Throne, which are the seven Spirits of God" (Revelation 4:5, cf. Zechariah 4:1-6 where the seven lamps are equated to the one Spirit).

Further still, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments should not be viewed as inferior old covenant empowering by God's Spirit in believers' lives versus a richer, fuller new covenant empowering. One is the earlier and germinal revelation of the Spirit's work, and the other is a later, fuller, and more detailed revelation of the earlier universal principle.¹⁶ After all, Old Testament believers were indwelt by the Spirit (1 Peter 1:11), filled with the Spirit (Exodus 35:31; Numbers 27:18), empowered by the Spirit (Judges 13:25; Judges 14:19), spoke by the Spirit's power (Numbers 11:25-26; cf. Luke 1:67), wrote by the Spirit's inspiration (Acts 4:25-26), and at times grieved the Holy Spirit (Judges 16:17-20; Psalms 51:11). Can anyone really find a major difference between Noah's Spirit-empowered preaching to the wicked people of his day (1 Peter 3:18-20; cf. 1 Peter 4:6; 2 Peter 2:5) and that of Spirit-filled Peter's proclaiming the Gospel to his rebellious countrymen at Pentecost, or between Isaiah's divine inspiration and that of Paul? It seems somehow a little bit out of place to think that if Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, et al., had by the Spirit what we have today, they would have really been blessed and more effective in God's work. God's revelation and progressive illumination have always been divinely given to meet the current needs of His people for further enlightenment and spiritual strength. God's grace in giving advanced revelation in the New Testament and then later progressive illumination upon particular aspects of certain truths might mean nothing more than our present rebellion against God and the darkness of our spiritual understanding is much greater than that of earlier generations. Divine revelation is also periodic with its growth periods corresponding roughly to God's giving of the several biblical covenants. These divinely revealed truths develop organically in cycles of varying degrees and times, with the degree of doctrinal growth depending upon the need for that particular truth in the lives of God's people. Lastly, revelation is also climactic, which is to say, the doctrine reaches a stage where it is fully developed. There may be later reflection upon it but nothing new is added. The periodic and climactic characteristics of progressive revelation are self-evident and require no further proof.¹⁷

¹⁶ Neither is there a difference in principle in the Old Testament statement ("the Spirit came upon, fell upon") and the New Testament phrase ("filled with the Holy Spirit"). See Timothy Lin, *How the Holy Spirit Works in Believers' Lives Today*, www.BSMI.org, 23.

¹⁷ Vos, *ibid.*, 16.

Progressive Revelation Is the Key to Biblical Hermeneutics

"The concept of progressive revelation is the Key to Biblical hermeneutics," wrote Edward John Carnell.¹⁸ He then set down five hermeneutical rules to interpret progressive revelation:

(1) The New Testament interprets the Old Testament, (2) The Epistles interpret the Gospels, (3) Systematic passages interpret the incidental, (4) Universal passages interpret the local, and (5) Didactic passages interpret the symbolic.¹⁹ ¹⁸ Edward John Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox*

Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), 52.

19 Ibid., 53-64.

Carnell's rules are basically sound; but it is best to condense his five rules into two, to add an entirely new one, and then to explain clearly their proper use. Carnell's first two rules can be shortened into one: (1) Later revelation interprets earlier revelation. One principle of interpretation should be added to Carnell's list: (2) Earlier revelation elucidates later revelation. Otherwise, the Old Testament would be unable to aid in interpreting the New Testament. Then Carnell's last three rules can be condensed into one: (3) Individual instances, local application, and symbolic passages in biblical revelation are to be interpreted according to universal principles. As deduced, therefore, from the progressive and organic nature of revelation, three Hermeneutical Principles²⁰ by which to interpret Scripture are:

²⁰ These principles relate only to the progressive nature of revelation as it touches upon hermeneutics. Other rules and approaches must also be utilized to arrive at a proper understanding of Scripture.

Principle One. Earlier revelation (e.g., the Lamb personified in Isaiah fifty-three) should be interpreted according to later revelation of the same truth (e.g., the Lamb identified and crucified in the Gospel accounts). Further, not only should the "Lamb" in the New Testament interpret the "Lamb" in the Old Testament, but within the Old Testament itself, Isaiah fifty-three interprets the Passover Lamb in Exodus twelve, and both interpret God's salvation implied by "garments of skin" in Genesis 3:21. Further still, within the New Testament, the revelation that the atonement of Christ makes possible our own justification, sanctification, and glorification²¹ interprets more fully what Christ Himself said, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" and what Peter preached at Pentecost, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins," Acts 2:38. Hence, we should conclude, I would suggest, (1) there was progression in biblical revelation before as well as after Christ's earthly ministry, and (2) all later revelation concerning a certain truth sheds light upon earlier revelation of the same truth. Concerning the first conclusion Daniel B. Wallace says, "I am simply arguing that we need to read the Bible in light of the progress of revelation—not only between the testaments but also within each testament. Even within the New Testament there is progressive understanding."²²

Concerning the second conclusion, I will later argue that instead of using earlier revelation to interpret the Apocalypse, as is frequently done, that book should govern and guide all earlier interpretations of the same truth. This principle applies to many truths (e. g., personal salvation through the Lamb of God, the Trinity, the millennium, the full deity of Christ, the believers' rulership in the eternal Kingdom of God, etc.). However, I will use the Apocalypse primarily to interpret earlier revelation concerning the fact of the Rapture, the judgment seat of Christ, and His Second Coming in the light of progressive revelation.

²¹ See all of Romans 4:24 to Romans 8:29, but especially, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification," Romans 4:25, NIV; "For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin," Romans 6:6, NIV; "For those God foreknew He also predestined to be

conformed to the likeness of His Son,” Romans 8:29.

22 Wallace, *op. cit.*, 2. This principle, that later revelation of a particular truth interprets earlier revelation, extends from The Revelation to Genesis. For example, the full revelation of God’s intention for man to be joint-heir with the Lord Jesus Christ over the universal Kingdom of God is given in The Revelation (“To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery—just as I have received authority from my Father,” Revelation 2:26-27; see also, Revelation 3:21; Revelation 5:10; Revelation 12:5; Revelation 20:4; Revelation 21:7; Revelation 22:5); and clearly shows that God’s original plan for man (“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule...,’” Genesis 1:26) has been brought to a triumphant conclusion, despite man’s sinfulness and Satan’s schemes.

Principle Two. Conversely, earlier revelation (e.g., the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament, Genesis 1:26 and subsequent passages) elucidates later revelation of the same truth (e.g., the Kingdom in the synoptic Gospels and The Revelation). Moreover, the sacrificial, atoning death of the Lamb in Exodus twelve and Isaiah fifty-three strengthens the truth that Christ’s crucifixion for sin was more than a mere moral example of selflessness, and that it certainly was not just a first century method of explaining Christ’s death, which, as a doctrine, is no longer binding.²³ Rather, the Old Testament truth of the Lamb’s substitutionary atonement (e.g., Is. 53:5-7) strengthens the later revelation that Christ willingly gave Himself upon the cross to die for us (Matthew 26:42) and then presented His Own blood to God the Father to placate His holy wrath against our rebellion and sin (Hebrews 9:11-28). In fact, “Hebrews nine and ten show that the same basic system of sacrifice underlies both testaments.”²⁴ ²³ Ramm, *op. cit.*, 101.

²⁴ Ramm, *ibid.*, 229. The book of Hebrews’ description of the Old Testament institution as a “figure,” a “copy,” and a “shadow”²⁵ has reference to their illustrating by visible means eternal realities which the New Testament further explains through Christ’s death; however, the illustration (earlier revelation) is by no mean inferior to the explanation (later revelation), for both are simply means of revealing to man the eternal truth of God’s plan of salvation completed before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8).

²⁵ Hebrews 9:9; Hebrews 9:23; Hebrews 10:1. The Old Testament serves as an illustration to the New Testament in two ways. (1) It taught spiritual and moral principles that are equally applicable to every age through the use of historical events and symbolical ceremonies. (2) It prepared for New Testament revelation through prophesying future events as well as illustrating them by types. Old Testament history and poetry are written for didactic example for every age (“Now these things happened [to Israel] as examples for us,” 1 Corinthians 10:6; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:11; Romans 15:4) and are a rich source for devotional and homiletical study. For example, the lives of the main Genesis patriarchs vividly portray the Christian’s spiritual life from beginning to end with Adam representing the sinner saved by grace, Cain and Abel indicating the distinction between lost and saved, Noah showing the deliverance from great destruction that God’s grace brings (“But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD,” Genesis 6:8 NKJV), Abraham demonstrating the trials and triumphs of faith, Isaac suggesting the life and growth of sonship, Jacob evidencing the responsibility of serving God through one’s life and work as a servant, and finally Joseph representing the reigning with the powerful king (Genesis 41:38-43) which awaits every good and

faithful servant of Christ (“He who overcomes, and he who keeps my deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS,” Revelation 2:26). Old Testament prophecy of Messiah’s virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:6-7), Spirit-filled ministry (Isaiah 11:1-5; Isaiah 42:1-4), and death by crucifixion as the Suffering Servant (52:13-53:12) clearly prepared the way for the Gospels. The Passover and the tabernacle served as dramatic symbols of the future work of Christ as God’s Paschal Lamb slain for sinners (“For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed,”¹ 1 Corinthians 5:7) and as the victorious High Priest Who entered the eternal Holy of Holies once for all on every sinner’s behalf (“He entered the holy place once for all...who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God,” Hebrews 9:12; Hebrews 9:14; cf. Hebrews 9:1-28; Hebrews 10:10-14; Hebrews 10:19-22). By keeping in mind the organic nature of progressive revelation and carefully avoiding allegorical or typological extremes, the Christian exegete can use the historical and poetic sections of the Old Testament to illustrate eternal principles for spiritual and moral living and can use Old Testament prophecy and types to illustrate vividly Christ’s work. Because of its tremendous importance in laying the foundation for the New Testament, it may be validly asserted that no man can fully understand New Testament theology without an adequate understanding of its Old Testament background.

Therefore, it is not hermeneutically sound to say that the New Testament interprets the Old, without stating the converse, that the Old Testament elucidates the New. In other words, later and earlier revelations of the same truth strengthen and clarify each other. Without this second principle, the Old Testament becomes useless as our authority for theology, preaching, and practical living. Regarding this point, Ramm states as one of his rules of hermeneutics, “The Old Testament must be continuously searched for help in interpreting the New Testament.”²⁶ J. C. K. von Hofmann adds:

Just as the Old Testament would lose its saving significance if its contents were interpreted as ordinary history rather than as holy history, so also the spiritual value of the New Testament would be diminished by such a purely historical interpretation in which the antitypical character of its events and the Old Testament forms of expressing its message were not appreciated.²⁷ 26 Ramm, *op. cit.*, 116.

²⁷ *Interpreting the Bible*, trans. Christian Press, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), 169.

Jesus never discredited the Old Testament but exalted it as the inspired eternal Word of God whose basis principles are valid in every age. Anyone who disregards the earlier revelation God gave in the Old Testament in any way is not following the example of Christ.

Thus the organic nature of progressive revelation insures its perfection and saving sufficiency at every stage. A lesser degree of detail does not mean inferiority of revelation, neither should any part of Scripture ever be exalted above another, but each should be treated as an integral part of an organic whole that mutually strengthens and interprets each part.

Principle Three. Individual instances, local application, and symbolic passages²⁸ of revelation are to be interpreted according to universal principles. Later revelation (e.g., the Epistles) elucidates earlier revelation (e.g., the Gospels) in two ways: (1) by giving the divine interpretation of the significance of the facts recorded in the Gospels and (2) by further applying the ethical principles

of Christ to the local problems of the church. This rule, however, should not be applied in such a way as to consult only the Epistles for a doctrine, because in every case to properly interpret a doctrine or moral principle every reference to it in the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the Epistles in a progressive order should be collected and examined in order to establish the complete biblical teaching.

28 The interpretation of individual instances, local application, and symbolic passages are Carnell's rules 3 through 5. The organic whole of revelation is made up of all the systematic passages and individual instances and thereby forms certain universal principles that must be followed in interpreting each particular revelation. Whereas certain passages deal with specific truths in a systematic way (e.g., justification by faith in Romans and Galatians), other passages deal with these truths only incidentally (e.g., 1 Peter 1:18-25; Revelation 5:9). All of the passages related to a specific truth, whether systematic or incidental, together make up the universal principle. This means that the unity of the whole of revelation is tremendously important to proper interpretation. J. C. K. von Hofmann's comment is instructive:

"It is in its totality and intrinsic unity that [Scripture] forms the object of Biblical hermeneutics. The foremost question is how the activity of the interpreter of Holy Scripture is determined by the specific way in which he is confronted by the Bible in its totality."²⁹ 29 Op. cit., 18.

Further, the systematic passages in the Epistles (e.g., justification by faith in Romans and Galatians) should interpret all the incidental references to this doctrine (e.g., Php 3:6-9; Titus 3:5-7). But they cannot be used to explain all other doctrines. Neither Romans nor Galatians systematically teaches reigning with Christ; yet this is the ultimate end of justification.³⁰

30 Revelation 5:9-10; Revelation 22:3-5. To teach justification as the ultimate goal and chief emphasis of Christianity shows a two-fold error of failing to understand the general theme of Scripture and of neglecting the progression of illumination. The Kingdom is the theme of all Scripture from Genesis 1:26 to Revelation 22:5, and justification is actually the means to the end of reigning with Christ. Failure to emphasize the end leaves the Christian life after justification with only a vague indefinite purpose. Since justification by faith was the Reformation doctrine used by God at that time to be especially stressed to correct the Catholic Church's concept of justification by works, to insist that it should be the chief doctrine emphasized in every age is to deny progressive illumination, for in successive ages, as Strong has pointed out, God has illumined men to explain certain doctrines never understood before to meet the particular need of the times.³¹ Finally, the systematic principle of various doctrines must be properly related to each other by comparison of their biblical revelation; for example, the purpose of justification by faith, sanctification, and glorification is to prepare the redeemed to reign with Christ ("His bondservants will serve Him...the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and forever," Revelation 22:3; Revelation 22:5). Hence, these doctrines can never be completely understood except in light of their relation to the Kingdom.

31 Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1958), 340. Progressive revelation must be viewed as complementary and not as contradictory to Systematic Theology. Both are tools enabling the interpreter to better understand God's Holy Scriptures.

Moreover, local application of revelation should be interpreted by the universal principle. This principle is necessary for the practical use of the Bible as the contemporary authority for the spiritual life, even though it was written to meet particular needs in ancient times. The distinction must be made between local application and the essential universal principle, or else Scripture has no relevance for succeeding generations and diverse cultures. For example, the solemn apostolic injunction for Christian women to have long hair and to wear veils³² was a local application to teach, "The head of the woman is the man";³³ for in first century Corinthian society no virtuous woman wore short hair or went unveiled. To obey the essential principle of subordination to the husband, the Christian wife of Paul's day needed to have long hair and to wear a veil; however, in the twenty-first century a Christian wife does not need to wear her hair by the first century style nor does she need to wear a veil in order to obey the universal principle of the Pauline injunction. To insist that women wear a heavy veil similar to that intended by Paul would certainly not per se be a public testimony to the scriptural obedience of a wife to her husband. Therefore, to understand proper application of Scripture to the present and to avoid hindering the Gospel by extreme reactionary practices, every local application must be interpreted in the light of its intended principle.

32 1 Corinthians 11:3-16.

33 1 Corinthians 11:3.

Finally, symbolic passages must be interpreted by the universal principle. The universal principle for symbolic passages is obtained by means of first understanding the symbol, then to take the definition of that symbol as clearly stated in an obviously literal passage and to apply its meaning to a highly figurative passage. For example, the Lamb who had been slain in Revelation 5:6-14 is identified by John 1:29 and 1 Peter 1:19 as Christ Jesus Himself. The explanation of the vision of one like the Son of Man in Revelation 1:12-18 is made plain by considering that over eighty times in the Gospels Christ called Himself the Son of Man. Sometimes the interpreter must go as far back as Genesis to get the incidental revelations. However, in making the final interpretation, extra weight should be given to information the author places in his own book to be sure the interpretation fits his context. Also, special attention should be given to the use of double symbols in Scripture; for example, sin is pictured as a crouching lion in Genesis 4:7, and Satan is clearly called a roaring lion in 1 Peter 5:8; yet in Revelation 5:5 Christ, "the Root of David," is called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." In every instance the local context of the symbolic passage must determine the validity of the identification suggested by the literal passage. Later, I will use this principle as an aid to interpret "Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place where will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," (Matthew 25:30).

Conclusion

Progressive revelation is not an evolutionary development of biblical truths but a movement of God, with the initiative coming from Him and not from man, in which God makes Himself, His Word, and His plans known to mankind by a gradually advancing organic growth from perfect seed form to the full manifestation. Such disclosure is perfect at every stage because of its organic nature and the perfection of God. Because of its organic nature, possessing a minimum of soteric knowledge at every stage, later revelation interprets earlier revelation; and conversely, earlier revelation elucidates later revelation and both hermeneutical principles can be illustrated by the

progression of salvation revealed through the Lamb of God, as well as through the covenant-idea existing in Eden in germinal form and fully revealed in the new covenant which was ratified at the cross by the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ (“and in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood,’” (Luke 22:20)).

All biblical truths progress as the historic, linear unfolding of the mind and will of God—even prophetic/apocalyptic truths. Charles Augustus Briggs said more than a century ago,

The [Olivet] discourse of Jesus...is intermediate between the apocalypse of Daniel and the apocalypse of John. As it depends upon the former and advances upon the Messianic idea contained therein so it is the prelude to the latter and the key to its interpretation...We ought to expect that Jesus in His predictions would bridge the time between the apocalypse of Daniel and the apocalypse of John, and give an intermediate stage in the development of apocalyptic prophecy.³⁴ *The Messiah of the Gospels* (Edinburg: 1894), 132, 134.

Daniel B. Wallace speaks even more specifically to the topic I will address when he writes,

Curiously, most students of the Bible assume progress between the Testaments, but deny it within the New Testament. To be sure, the time frame is much shorter. But there is ample evidence of progressive revelation within the New Testament about several themes—that is, certain themes are not developed/recognized until after some time (including the deity of Christ and of the Spirit, the idea that our souls go immediately to heaven, the fact of the rapture, etc.)³⁵

³⁵ www.Bible.org/docs/soapbox/netschat, 1. In his brief article, Dr. Wallace gives the caveat, “The following rough essay is intended to be something to think about; it is neither a polished piece nor altogether finalized in my own thinking. I welcome interaction and criticism from all quarters.”

Therefore, I will use the first and second hermeneutical principles of progressive revelation as an aid to interpret the fact of the Rapture, the Judgment Seat of Christ, and the Second Coming of the Son of Man primarily in the Gospels, the Epistles, and The Revelation with a glance at Daniel. Further, when I get to Revelation 12:5 (“and she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and His throne”) I will use hermeneutical principle three of progressive revelation as an aid to answer the question, “Who is this child?”

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S. The Prophetic Time Frame In The Day Of The Lord Prophecies

The Prophetic Time Frame In The Day Of The Lord Prophecies Eugene Kimble, Ph.D.

“The Day of the Lord” is a sweeping phrase Scripture uses to describe God’s intervention in human history. First, it may describe a divine visitation within history: In Joel 1:15, it consists of a locust plague, datable to about the eighth century B.C.¹ In Isaiah 13:6-13 that Day relates to the taking of Babylon by the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C. In Zephaniah 1:7 it concerns the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Second, “the Day of the Lord” may be a final divine visitation that climaxes history in which God assembles all pagan nations to battle and ultimate destruction, delivers His people, and establishes His royal rule. Zechariah vividly describes such a time:

Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. And you will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him! And it will come about in that day that there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light. And it will come about in that day that living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter. And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one. Zechariah 14:1-9 (See also Isaiah 66:18; Ezekiel 38-39; Zechariah 12; Revelation 16:14-16; Revelation 19:11-21).

¹ Roland Kenneth Harrison dates Joel in the fifth century B.C. Introduction to the Old Testament (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1969), 876-79. That Day, also, may involve a blessing (Joel 2:28-29), a curse (Joel 2:1-17) or both: an eschatological and apocalyptic destruction of God’s enemies (Zephaniah 3:6-13) and deliverance for His people (Zephaniah 3:11-20). It may involve cataclysmic and cosmic upheavals (Joel 2:30-31) or come in a local and providential manner (Joel 1:1 to Joel 2:28). It may both purify the saint (Jeremiah 46:28) and exterminate the sinner (Jeremiah 46:10).² Some have summed up “the Day of the Lord” as “the day monopolized by Jehovah as His day of victory.”³ ² David W. Baker, Obadiah, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 94.

³ Geerhardus Vos, Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 313

Or, as O. Palmer Robertson says, “On this day, He establishes His sovereign lordship over men. Either by instituting the covenant or by enforcing the provisions of the covenant, Yahweh manifests His lordship on that day.”⁴

⁴ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, *The New International Commentary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 268. Telescoping Events In “the Day of the Lord” prophecies, chronologically separate events are often telescoped, “which refers to the joining together in one context events that are widely separated in their temporal accomplishments.”⁵ For example, “the Day of the Lord” prophecy in Joel involved: (1) a contemporary locust plague (1:1-2:27), (2) the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Joel 2:28-29; see Acts 2:17-21), and (3) the yet-to-come final salvation of Israel and the overthrow of all pagan nations (2:30-3:21). Joel placed these three prophecies in one context without any time differentiation, which is a characteristic feature of biblical prophecy whether the “Day of the Lord” phrase is used or not.⁶ ⁵ J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 466.

⁶ O. Palmer Robertson, *op. cit.*, 267.

Isaiah likewise prophesied without time indicators. He said that the contemporary Syrian/Israelite war against Judah (“to tear it apart and divide it among ourselves,” Isaiah 7:6) would ultimately fail. And it soon did. Isaiah goes on to foretell that God would raise up a virgin-born child to deliver His people Israel (Isaiah 7:14) and that the child would be God in the flesh, whose shoulders would carry all government (Isaiah 9:6-7). The first prophecy was fulfilled about 735 B.C., the second began about 2 - 4 B.C., and the latter part of the third is still unfulfilled. Some of Isaiah’s other prophecies have also yet to be realized (cf. Isaiah 11:1-16; Isaiah 66:17-24).

Writing of prophetic telescoping Ladd says,

Jesus spoke both of the fall of Jerusalem and of his own eschatological parousia. [C. E. B.] Cranfield has suggested that in Jesus’ overview the historical and the eschatological are mingled, and that the final eschatological event is seen through the “transparency” of the immediate historical. The present author has applied this thesis to the Old Testament prophets and found this foreshortening view of the future to be one of the essential elements in the prophetic perspective.⁷

⁷ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 198.

Knowing that Old Testament prophecy often telescoped into one context events separated widely in their temporal fulfillment will enable us to better understand Matthew 24:1 to Matthew 25:46 where Jesus’ prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Matthew 24:1-22; see also Luke 21:20) is compressed into one context with the yet-to-come Rapture and the Second Coming (Matthew 24:23 to Matthew 25:46). This telescoping could also apply to Paul’s prophecy in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 to 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, where the Rapture and Second Coming prophecy may well be two chronologically separate events compressed into one context. In fact, I will argue later that such is exactly the case.

Foreshortening Time

Every system has principles and laws which are not necessarily applicable to other systems. This is true of biblical prophecy's reference to time in which, not only are different chronological events telescoped into one context, but there is also a foreshortening of time. Both "telescoping" and "foreshortening" are time frames (with both, at times, occurring in the same biblical passage) that make up the "prophetic perspective." When prophesying of the coming destruction of Babylon, Isaiah said (c.732 B.C.), "Wail for the day of the LORD is near...I will stir up against them the Medes...Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms...will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah" (Isaiah 13:6; Isaiah 13:17; Isaiah 13:19), which calamity occurred in 539 B.C., roughly 163 years after Isaiah uttered, "the Day of the Lord is near." Isaiah again said, "In a very short time will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field" (Isaiah 29:17 NIV) referring to Israel's return home from the Babylonian exile in 539-538 B.C. Moreover, the same prophecy in Isaiah 29:18 ("On that day the deaf will hear words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see") and in Isaiah 29:23 ("But when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, they will sanctify My name; indeed, they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel") probably refers to the Church era and was fulfilled about A.D. 30.⁸ Here we see not only a telescoping of several events into one context but also a foreshortening of time, with the phrase "In a very short time" often referring to events which could take centuries, or even millenniums, to happen.

⁸ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), II, 332. For example, Zephaniah prophesied (c. 625 B.C.), "The great day of the LORD is near—near and coming quickly" (Zephaniah 1:14 NIV), with the historical referent probably being the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.⁹ However, the same prophecy goes beyond Zephaniah's historical proximity to God's final judgment on the nations ("Therefore wait for Me," declares the LORD, "For the day when I rise up as a witness. Indeed, My decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out on them My indignations, all my burning anger; for all the earth will be devoured by the fire of My zeal," Zephaniah 3:8) and the redemption of His people ("Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O Israel!...The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you will fear disaster no more. In that day it will be said to Jerusalem: 'Do not be afraid, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is in your midst...Behold, I am going to deal at that time with all your oppressors...At that time I will bring you in...Indeed, I will give you renown and praise among all the people of the earth," Zephaniah 3:14-17; Zephaniah 3:19-20).¹⁰ ⁹ David W. Baker, *op. cit.*, 95.

¹⁰ O. Palmer Robertson, *op. cit.*, 253-347. This prophetic time frame is not an incidental, but a prominent, feature of biblical prophecy. Joel's eighth century prophecy "the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision" (Joel 3:14), is yet to happen. A few more examples are: "Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious places. Her [Babylon's] time is at hand, her days will not be prolonged" (Isaiah 13:22 NIV). "My righteousness is near, my salvation has gone forth, and My arms will judge the peoples" (Isaiah 51:5). Obadiah foretold, "For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations. As you [nations] have done [to God's people] it will be done to you," (Obadiah 1:15), spoken about 585 B. C. and partially fulfilled about 500 B. C. when the Arabs expelled the Edomites from their ancestral homeland. The last verse of the prophecy (Obadiah 1:21) is best understood as referring to the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom, when God's people will rule the earth under their Messianic King.¹¹ ¹¹ David W. Baker, *op. cit.*, 43. In like

manner, Ezekiel said, "For the day is near, the day of the LORD is near...I will disperse the Egyptians among the nations and scatter them through the countries...Then they [all Egypt] will know that I am the LORD," (Ezekiel 30:3; Ezekiel 30:26 NIV). Verse three was fulfilled in Ezekiel's time, but Ezekiel 30:26 is still future.¹² And finally, "Then all your people will be righteous; they will possess the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hand, that I may be glorified. I the LORD will hasten it in its time," (Isaiah 60:21-22). Edward J. Young comments here, "although the work of God may seem slow to us, nevertheless, in His own time He hastens it (i.e. He suddenly acts when men are not expecting it)."¹³ Young's concluding comment may explain why God used foreshortening of time. In both the Old and New Testaments, it is one wonderful method by which God keeps His people in every generation faithful to Him, persevering in His cause, by setting up tension between imminence and delay in the believer's expectation of Christ's Return. The stress on imminence is needed in order to create a response of watchfulness in Christians' lives. The delay is needed for God to work His program, to train His people for the coming Kingdom of God, and to show mercy upon mankind. The prophets (both Old and New Testament) spoke to people in their historical situation and called upon them to serve God without reservation as they awaited His salvation. In doing this, prophecy took on a time-shortened perspective, allowing for both imminence and delay of future events. Ladd sets forth the grand result: "it is the nature of biblical prophecy to make it possible for every generation to live in expectancy of the end."¹⁴

¹² John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1969), 202, 205.

¹³ Young, *Isaiah, III*, 457 ¹⁴ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary of the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 22.

Conclusion

Understanding God's telescoping of prophecy helps us to interpret New Testament passages such as Matthew 24:1 to Matthew 25:46, where the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Rapture of the Church and Christ's Second Coming to judge the nations follow the established "prophetic perspective." Many scholars recognize this telescoping feature in Matthew 15 What is seldom discussed, however, is that the Rapture and Second Coming in both 1 Thessalonians 4:13 to 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and in 2 Thessalonians 1:3 to 2 Thessalonians 2:12 may well be a case of events telescoped into one context that later revelation shows to be distinct and chronologically separate.¹⁶

¹⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew, New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody MA: Hendricksen Publishers, Inc, 1985, 1991), 228. See also George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 64-70; J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 466; and David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew, The New Century Bible Commentary*, (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 323.

¹⁶ Michael J. Svigel, "The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation" (www.bible.org). A version of Svigel's paper was presented at the Southwest Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Friday, April 7, 2000. Later a 50-page version was published in *TrinJ*, the Theological Journal of Trinity Seminary. Wilber B. Wallis, "The Coming of the

Kingdom, A Survey of the Book of Revelation” (www.bsmi.org), 19-22, 36. This article appeared in Presbiterian, The Theological Journal of Covenant Seminary. Both Svigel and Wallis argue cogently that the rapture occurs in Revelation 12:5, and the Second Coming happens some time later in chapter 19. If these scholars are correct, and I believe they are, they provide significant reasons to believe that the Rapture and the Second Coming are telescoped in both the Gospels and the Epistles.

Moreover, being aware of the prophetic perspective will help us to understand more accurately such utterances by Paul as “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Romans 16:20) and “Let your gentle spirit be known unto all men. The Lord is near” (Php 4:5). Also, such awareness will enable us to understand why Christ has not yet returned even though John wrote over 1900 years ago, “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show His bondservants, the things which must soon take place...Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it, for the time is near” (Revelation 1:1; Revelation 1:3). And again, “‘These words are faithful and true’; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angels to show to his bondservants the things which must soon take place...and he said to me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near,’” (Revelation 22:6; Revelation 22:10).¹⁷ It should be expected that a biblical prophet would write and speak from the time frame references of his culture. This John does.

17 R. C. Sproul has a list of verses that speak of the “nearness of the last days to the Apostles” and “References to the last times.” *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 86-88.

J. Stuart Russell exhibits a weak understanding of the prophetic time frame when he writes,

If there be one thing which more than any other is explicitly and repeatedly affirmed in the apocalypse, it is the nearness of the events which it predicts. This is stated, and reiterated again and again, in the beginning, the middle, and the end. We are warned that “the time is at hand”; “These things must shortly come to pass”; “Behold, I come quickly”; “Surely I come quickly.” Yet, in the face of these express and oft-repeated declarations, most interpreters have felt at liberty to ignore the limitations of time altogether, and to roam at will over ages and centuries, regarding the book as a syllabus of church history, as almanac of politico-ecclesiastical events for all Christendom to the end of time. This has been a fatal and inexcusable blunder.¹⁸

18 J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord’s Second Coming*, new ed. (1887; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 366.

George Eldon Ladd has a more accurate view of the biblical data:

These events are “soon” to “take place” (cf. 11:18; 22:10). These words have troubled the commentators...The problem is raised by the fact that the prophets were little interested in chronology, and the future was always viewed as imminent. We pointed out in the introduction that the Old and New Testament prophets blended the near and the distant perspectives so as to form a single canvas. Biblical prophecy is not primarily three- dimensional but two; it has height and breadth but is little concerned about depth, i.e. the chronology of future events. There is in chronology a tension between the immediate and the distant future; the distant is viewed through the transparency of the immediate. It is true that the early church lived in expectancy of the return

of the Lord, and it is the nature of biblical prophecy to make it possible for every generation to live in expectancy of the end. To relax and say, "where is the promise of his coming?" is to become a scoffer of divine truth. The "biblical" attitude is "take heed, watch, for you do not know when the time will come" (Mark 13:33).¹⁹ 19 George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 22-23.

C. H. Dodd agrees with Ladd, saying, "When the profound realities underlying a situation are depicted in the dramatic forms of historical prediction, the certainty and inevitability of the spiritual processes involved are expressed in terms of the immediate imminence of the event."²⁰

²⁰ C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London, 1936), 71. See also Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950), 150.

Henry Alford also concurs with Ladd: "He told them the attendant circumstances of His coming; He gave them enough to guard them from error in supposing the day to be close at hand, and from carelessness in not expecting it as near."²¹ 21 Henry Alford, "Matthew", *The Greek New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), 235.

One of the soundest rules of biblical interpretation is "The Analogy of Scripture," based on the principle that the Bible is its own best interpreter. Since the Old Testament undoubtedly had a "prophetic perspective," which included telescoping of events and time foreshortening, those New Testament passages with a prophetic time frame similar to the Old Testament passages should be similarly interpreted, which is to say, the New Testament futuristic phrases including such expressions as "the things which must shortly take place," (Revelation 1:1), and "Behold, I am coming quickly," (Revelation 22:12) are by the Analogy of Scripture principle to receive the same time frame interpretation as "the Day of the Lord is near" utterances in the Old Testament. Furthermore, since time foreshortening is a specific characteristic of prophecy, John's description of events in *The Revelation* as "things which must soon take place" (Revelation 22:6) does not mean either that he was wrong or that all *The Revelation* occurred in the very early history of the church. John was simply being a first-century Jewish /Christian prophet who, like his Old Testament counterparts, prophesied of "the Day of the Lord" ("to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty," Revelation 16:14), and like them he too used foreshortening of time in his futuristic utterances. This kind of thinking may be difficult for the modern, occidental man, but it is consistent with the biblical material. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly.

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