

Understanding the Basics of Bible Prophecy

Session 3: Bible Prophecy Symbols and Applications

(Exploring the Biblical Interpretation of Prophetic Symbols)

Introduction: *In this lesson we are going to...*

- 1) **Unlock basic symbols of Bible Prophecy as given by the Bible itself.**
 - a. *Following the Bible teaching that all interpretation belongs to God and that “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20).*
 - b. *Note: These Bible symbols are foundational to the biblical understanding of prophecy and are often overlooked or ignored by various schools of thought.*
- 2) *As we unlock the symbols of Bible prophecy, we will then **put them to use** by examining various **applications** where they play a key role in helping us to understand prophecy.*

We'll begin with...

Unlocking and Applying the Basic Symbols of Bible Prophecy

Since we want to let the bible interpret itself, we'll examine how it explains its own symbols. *Theologically, this is the difference between eisegesis and exegesis (into vs. out/exit):*

*“Exegesis is legitimate interpretation which reads **out** of the text what the original author or authors meant to convey. Eisegesis, on the other hand, reads into the text what the interpreter wishes to find or thinks he finds there. It expresses the reader's own subjective ideas, not the meaning which is in the text.” [Jay G. Williams, 1973]*

Williams JG. Exegesis-Eisegesis: Is There a Difference? *Theology Today*. 1973;30(3):218-227. doi:10.1177/004057367303000302

Remember what we learned **in lesson one**?

“Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand” (Daniel 12:10). “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever” (Psalm 111:10). “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).

- a. God put prophecy into symbols desiring to shield its message from the wicked who may wish to destroy it, or defeat it if it were even possible (it's not possible).
- b. But the wise shall understand. This wisdom and understanding comes from obedience to God through the “fear of the Lord.” We must love and reverence God, and desire His way, wanting to do His will, and seeking by His grace and power to do so.

- c. *Fools despise or hate true biblical wisdom.* Today, we are going to let the Bible speak true wisdom to our minds. Let us pray for the “fear” of God, obedience, surrendered, and understanding hearts to accept what God’s word says to us and to apply it rightly.

Let’s begin exploring *the first of multiple key symbols* in Bible prophecy!

What does a Beast represent in Bible Prophecy?

- a. Many people are confused on this or forget it.
- b. Many will think it is Satan or a “beast of a man,” and so forth.
- c. But **the Bible** is crystal clear on this symbol of apocalyptic prophecy. We need not guess.
- d. “...interpretations belong to God” (Gen. 40:8).
- e. **Bible Interpretation:**
 - i. “These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth” (Daniel 7:17). [Note: Modern versions render “kings” here as kingdoms. This fact cannot be escaped. Kings and kingdoms exist together. Though clearly multiple “kings” can and do assume rulership within a kingdom, as is so here]
 - ii. “Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces” (Daniel 7:23).
 - iii. Clearly, “beasts” represent kings and their kingdoms. The Bible says so.
- f. **Example of Prophetic and Symbolic Applications:**
 - i. “And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast” (Rev. 13:3).
 - ii. This 7-headed “beast” is clearly not referring to an individual human. That would be *eisegesis*, or reading into the text our own ideas. Proper *exegesis* would be allowing the Holy Bible to *define the symbol, and then we read it with a biblical understanding*, to allow scripture to say what it intends to say.
 - iii. A “beast” is a kingdom. This one is popular and powerful on a world-wide scale. “All the world” “wondered” after this kingdom or beast. This kingdom also received a “deadly wound” to one of its heads, but it is later healed. A “deadly wound” to a political power or kingdom takes down their political reign, putting them out of action. BUT a wound “HEALED” means they RETURN to their former power. Is this making sense?

What does the sea or waters represent?

- a. The Bible is *very clear* on this symbol in prophecy. The following verses are only a few of the many verses in scripture identifying this Bible symbol clearly.
- b. **Bible Interpretation:**
 - i. “And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues” (Rev. 17:15).

- ii. “But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt” (Isaiah 57:20). [*wicked waters/people*]
- iii. “And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth (Rev. 19:6). [*righteous waters/people*]
- iv. “12 Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! 13 The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters ...” (Isaiah 17:12-13).

c. Example of Prophetic and Symbolic Applications:

- i. “And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters” (Revelation 1:15)
- ii. Jesus speaks the voice of **many waters**. Jesus speaks the language and message that reaches to the deepest needs of every heart, of every soul, of every people.
- iii. “2 Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. 3 And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another” (Daniel 7:2-3).
- iv. Wind creates *turbulence upon the waters or the sea*. They “strove” “upon the great sea.” Through strife of many peoples and nations great “beasts” or **kingdoms** arose from among these varied peoples in a “great” or well-populated area. The kingdoms which arose are massive empires ruling over these peoples.
- v. Notice **Revelation 12:14-16**. What does the “Dragon” cast out of his mouth to destroy the woman? “**The earth**” by the way, is another symbol for *less populated areas – not much water there at all, by nature/design*. The “wilderness” helps the woman. (later, “another beast” arises from “the earth” Rev. 13:11)

What does the Bible say a woman represents in Bible prophecy?

a. Bible Interpretation:

- i. “I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate **woman**” (Jer 6:2).
- ii. “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2, Paul speaking of the Corinthian believers or “church”).
- iii. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;” (**Ephesians 5:25**; see also verses 31-32, husband and wife corresponds to Christ and “the church”-i.e. the “woman”).
- iv. Clearly, a woman represents God’s people or church – especially a “pure” or “chaste” woman.

b. How about an impure or immoral woman? Is that also in scripture?

- i. Revelation 17 mentions a “harlot” woman who is the “mother of harlots.” It would stand to reason that if a pure woman represents God’s faithful church (as in Revelation 12), then an *impure or immoral woman*, the “harlot” would represent

an *impure and unfaithful church*. Scripture also calls her a “mother” of “harlots” (i.e. plural). This would suggest there are multiple unfaithful churches who do not uphold the pure teachings, faith, and commandments of Jesus as the pure one does in Revelation 12:17 and 14:12.

- ii. The Bible is very *explicit* on this point. It does not leave us guessing or assuming.
- c. **Explicit Bible Interpretation on the symbol of an “Immoral Woman”**
 - i. How God referred to Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem when she was “unfaithful:”
 - **Jeremiah 3:1-10** (esp. 2,6,8) – A harlot
 - **Ezekiel 16:8,15,16,22,25,28,30.** – Israel “played the harlot”
 - **Ezekiel 23:1-5** – Jerusalem and Samaria “played the harlot” against God.
 - ii. *For what sins did God call Jerusalem a Harlot? (Ezek. 23:36-38)* Idolatry (idols/other gods), bloodshed of the innocent, profaning God’s holy sanctuary or temple by apostate offerings, idols, and practice (i.e. a false gospel and priesthood), and breaking God’s holy Sabbath. They were “in bed” with the kings and merchants of the earth. (mixing politics, economics, and religion)
 - iii. Any church or churches of this gospel age doing likewise would justly receive the same pronouncement from God (ex. Rev. 17-18). “Harlots,” “unfaithful.” God is faithful and changes not (Heb. 13:8; Malachi 3:6). James 4:4 “adulterers”
 - iv. God’s people must be careful not to join hands with corrupted organizations which disdain His holy truth (Rev. 18:1-5).

Many Other Symbols (we won’t cover today, or in detail)

We could cover other Bible prophecy symbols too, such as “trees” representing people (Daniel 4:20-22; Matt. 3:8-10; 7:15-20; Psalm 1:1-6), “grasshoppers” representing armies (Judges 6:5; 7:12; Jer 46:22-23; Nahum 3:17), “stars” representing godly people or angels (Good. But “fallen” are bad angels; Rev 1:20; 9:1; 12:4,9; Dan. 12:3; 8:10,24; Gen 15:5), the “dragon” being Satan (Rev 12:9; 13:2,11; 16:13-14; 20:2), etc. But the “time would fail us” (as in Heb 11:32).

In time-prophecy, what is the “day for a year” principle? Where does it originate?

This biblical interpretive principle is foundational to understanding Bible time-prophecy. Throughout history, solid Bible expositors have utilized it. Into the 1800s, it was the main *interpretive understanding, that “one prophetic “day” equals one literal year.*

In modern times, however, most popular prophecy teachers have largely abandoned the principle, favoring understandings derived from Francisco Ribera (1537–1591), a counter-reformation Jesuit scholar. These teachings employ the concept of “day=day.”

In spite of modern trends, I want to demonstrate from the Bible and related evidence, the importance of the “day for a year” principle. There are many prophecies in scripture which are affected by this principle and the time elements related to them.

For example, the 1260 days, 2300 days, 42 months, and a “time, times, and half a time” (i.e. one + two + one half a prophetic year = 3.5 prophetic years), the 1290 days and 1335 days in Daniel. Revelation 2, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 also includes *time prophecies*.

Why the Day/Year Principle Matters: The Biblical, Historic, and Contextual Evidence

- a. **The Dreams of Genesis.** We learned that “three branches” represented three literal days (Gen. 40:12), and “three baskets” also represented three literal days (Gen. 40:18). *In these symbolic prophecies the **units of “branches” and “baskets” were symbolic while the number “three” was a literal number.** Symbolic prophecy therefore is **KNOWN** to employ symbolic units with literal numbers.*
- b. **Daniel 9 and Messiah.** This prophecy refers to “**seventy sevens**” (or 70 weeks) (Dan. 9:24-26). This equates to 490 days. Most all Bible scholars recognize this period as “70 weeks of years” meaning that each “day” of the “70 weeks” represents a literal year. So, the 490 “days” are literally 490 years. The first 483 years (represented by “days”) bridge from the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem in the time of ancient Persia until the Messiah Jesus would show up to perform His public ministry. We cannot miss the fact that each day here of symbolic time prophecy represent a literal year. The beginning and ending events are very monumental and clearly known to span this long period of time.
- c. **The History.** Bible expositors across the board **applied this principle evenly across all the time prophecies of symbolic, apocalyptic Bible prophecy** until the mid-1800s.
 - i. At this time, another view began to gain some ground. In England there was the **Tractarian Movement**, in the Anglican Church. *Tracts were circulated from Oxford presenting a view based on counter-reformation Jesuit interpretations. Most leaders of this movement left Anglicanism and became Roman Catholic again. Those who adopted the views **changed their message of prophecy.***
 - ii. In modern times, these views have been exalted and sensationalized through **End-time novels** and popular theological schools, *nearly saturating the churches!*
 - iii. *Many “futurists” (as the view is called) however, **could not seem to part with or abandon the “day-year” principle for Daniel 9.*** The terms were *too explicit, the implications too painful.* Inconsistency results, though attempt is made to dismiss it based upon the concept of “seventy sevens” somehow being unique or distinct from “days.” But in fact, the “seventy sevens” are units of seven days multiplied by seventy (490 days=490 years).
- d. We must let **the Bible interpret itself** (Bible rules), **rather than trends or politics.**
- e. **Ezekiel (4:4-6) was given the “day for a year” principle,** in *prophetic context.* He was a contemporary of Daniel (Ezek. 14:14,20; 28:3).
- f. **Moses encountered it.** God made Israel to wander **40 years** in the wilderness, “each day for a year,” based upon the number of days (i.e. 40 days) they searched the Good Land. Num. 14:34.
- g. **It’s in Hebrew Biblical literary Parallelism.**
 - i. “the days that Adam lived were...” 930 years (Gen. 5:5)

- ii. “yet his days shall be 120 years” (Gen. 6:3)
 - iii. It is familiar to the Hebrew mind (e.g. Job 10:5; 15:20; 32:7; Deut. 32:7; Ps. 77:5)
 - iv. Old Testament scholars such as William Shea have noted this (William H. Shea, Selected Studies in Prophetic Interpretation, p. 69)
 - v. *However, we need not rely on mere parallels to know this principle. The biblical and contextual evidence is abundant.*
- h. **Duration of Nations leads to “day-year” principle.** Prophetic and historic evidence for the duration of nations (i.e. “beasts”) and the specified activities surrounding them calls for longer periods than mere days. For example, 1260 days alone is 3.45 years (not comparable to the life of nations).
- i. **Fulfillment Demonstrated.** History clearly demonstrates these prophecies have met fulfillment utilizing the day for a year principle with perfect accuracy.

To summarize: The Bible gives all the interpretive evidence we need. We have the clear evidence of explicit definition in prophetic use, Messianic prophecy, circumstantial evidence, prophetic applications and fulfillments of history leaving no room for error. In Ezekiel 4:4-6 and Numbers 14:34, **God himself explains the principle. Is there room to error on this? No.**

The Shame of Calculated Mass Deception and Unbelief is Astounding

- a. With all the solid Biblical, historical, and practical evidence it is a great shame and pity that so many have abandoned the biblical principle in exchange for teachings of men (Matthew 15:9). But, were we not warned of this? (Matt. 24:11,24; 2 Tim 4:2-5). *Much of this was “by design,” but not God’s.*
- b. **God says, “Be astonished, O ye heavens.”** *“11 Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. 12 Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. 13 For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:11-13).*
- c. The *onus or burden of proof* must fall upon those who have abandoned, ignored, or perverted biblical truth. They must explain their rejection of *the scriptural definitions for these symbols*. They are reading symbolic time literally, in disregard of biblical evidence.
- d. **God has a message against false prophecy and false prophets among His people.** He’s not pleased by it (**Ezek. 13:9-10, 13-14**). **Error must come down. The Lord will take it down, He promises.** No walls of “untempered mortar.” *How did all this come about? (“one built up a wall...others daubed it with untempered mortar”)*
- e. *Jesus says, “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (Matthew 15:13) [the “blind leading the blind” leads into ditches, v.14].*

For those wondering, “Is there a last day application of these time-prophecies and prophetic powers we are reading of? Let’s answer that briefly.

The *first* **beast of Revelation 13** receives a “deadly wound” at the end of their **historic** 1260 prophetic days (**i.e. literal years**) of reign. But that deadly wound gets healed so that “all the world wonders after the beast” (Rev. 13:3).

*This is not a mere man, but a religious-political “beast” power or **kingdom** who receives worship. Satan will impersonate Christ. The Dragon, beast, and false prophet work to deceive.*

***Does it hinge on time though at the end?** We do not really see it in scripture. We see powers at work, such as the 2nd Beast of Revelation 13 who causes the world to “worship the first beast whose deadly wound was healed” (v.11-12). The players and activities are there at that final point of history (in their proper sequence), but no time is written or associated with their reign.*

We cannot do full justice to these prophecies in our short time together for this lesson. It would be proper to study more in future lessons together. But suffice it to say for now, that the 1st beast will be revived and praised worldwide, and the 2nd beast will tell people to worship it (giving a false prophetic message or role). True prophecy leads to Jesus, His commandments, and His word as the Bible itself will define the truth. (God defines truth, not man).

We should all go back and study, letting the Bible interpret itself.

Jesus is coming soon. Let’s get ready. Let’s be ready to meet Him and know His word of truth, seeking Him more deeply.

Let’s apply what we’ve learned on *the biblical interpretation of these symbols*.

Applying our Knowledge to the 1260 days of Bible Prophecy

- The 1260 “days” are representing *literal years* of history in the middle ages (allowing the Bible to interpret its own symbols).
- The **little horn** in **Dan. 7:25** persecutes God’s people for this time period.
- The beast in Revelation 13 making war with God’s people for this same period.
- The woman or church *fleeing into the wilderness* during this time to escape the persecution and “waters” (or people) the devil (‘dragon’) cast out after her.
- Holy things are being *trampled down* during this time period by corrupt powers.
- *These same powers will be alive and active in the final showdown of earth’s history!*

Appeal and Looking Ahead: Let us seek God and His word more deeply to know the real meaning of these things and to not be deceived by the cunning messages of the enemy clothed in supposed “light.” The truth is too important for us to assume anything upon popular notion, but rather go back to the scriptures and let God’s word define His truth and give us an accurate understanding. Is this your desire?

Reach out to us. Visit www.SeminarsByBen.com to connect & view other courses. Study to find out what God is saying to us as we study His prophecies, which He has given to guide His people faithfully and truly through the perils of the last days, safely into His arms. *Be not deceived.*