



## 5 Truths that will shape your eschatology

As I'm sure you're aware, eschatology (the doctrine of the end times) is one of those doctrines where godly people disagree. Many of these people have spent years studying the Scripture and searching out the best possible interpretation. They have attended schools of academia. They have studied the original languages. They have read from the brightest minds in history. And yet, these men whom we respect, have been unable to find common ground on this subject.

So why study eschatology? Why waste our time looking at a doctrine at which the experts can't agree? Well, the simple answer is found in 2 Peter 1:3. Peter writes, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence." In this verse Peter says that we have access to everything we need to live the Christian life the way that God expects. it happens when we access "divine power" — the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit who strengthens us for the Christian walk. And it happens as we pursue the "knowledge of God" that is found in the Bible — the knowledge of God from Genesis to Revelation.

**So why study eschatology?** We study it because it's in the Bible. We study it because we believe it will lead to greater knowledge of God. We study it because we know that in some way it will help us to live the life that God commanded us to live. And we study it because we want to grow in our worship of God.

Our approach will be a little different from other studies we have done. Rather than looking at the individual pieces of this puzzle and trying to arrange them into a cohesive picture, we're going to zoom out to the broader themes of Scripture that will help us understand the doctrine as a whole. Rather than trying to create a detailed timeline of events that lead to a final conclusion, our study will seek to provide a roadmap that so we can sort out the details for ourselves. We're going to focus on the broader truths upon which most theologians agree, and then allow those truths to shape our personal perspective of this doctrine.

We'll take those truths one at a time, and then perhaps take a closer look at how these truths relate to the COVENANTS (i.e. promises) God made to his people throughout the Old Testament. Here's a list of the 5 truths that we'll cover in the next several weeks.

- 1. God's word is clear (perspicuity) and is meant to be interpreted literally.
- 2. Israel and the church are one in Christ, yet distinct.
- 3. God will fulfill his unconditional covenants to Israel.
- 4. The "day of the Lord" is a time of physical judgment of the wicked on the earth.
- 5. Those who are "in Christ" through faith will not experience God's wrath because Christ already endured it on the cross.

# GENESIS 1:1 to REVELATION 21:21 THE CLEAR WORD OF GOD

How important is the Word of God? And how should we understand it? Since God created LIFE and LANGUAGE, let's see how God expected His Word to be understood. From the very beginning of the Bible we'll see that God's word is CLEAR, DIRECT, SIMPLE, and POWERFUL.

Genesis 1:1 – "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

- 1:3 "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light ...."
- 1: 6 "And God said, 'Let there be an expanse ....' And it was so."
- 1:9 "And God said, 'Let the waters under the heaven be gathered into one place, and let dry land appear.' And it was so."
- 1:11 "And God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation...' And it was so."
- 1:14 "And God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse...' And it was so."
- 1:20 "And God said, 'Let the water swarm with swarms of living creatures...' So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves..."
- 1:24 "And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kind...' And it was so."
- 1:26 "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...' So God created man in his own image..."

**Did you notice? What God said – happened.** And it happened exactly as he said it. LIGHT responded. Expanse appeared. Water gathered. Vegetables sprouted. Sea life swarmed. And living creatures walked and slithered. They all responded to the WORD in the EXACT way in which they were COMMANDED. God's WORD had power to CREATE, and creation responded to the clear commands from the Creator.

Thousands of years later, God would come to earth in human flesh, and he's introduced in a way that points back to the beginning of TIME.

- John 1:1-4 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men."
- John 1:14 "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Jesus came into the world to offer a new kind life – life with God through faith in Christ. This life would come through WORDS; words that were powerful, clear, and profound. Let's observe the Word of God in action and MARVEL at the mercy of God in revealing himself in such CLEAR and DIRECT language.



### INTERPRETING the WORD

As we saw in the introduction, God's word is CLEAR. It is meant to be taken at face value. Theologians refer to this as **perspicuity** – "clarity, especially in expression, freedom from obscurity, to be clear and easy to understand." This conviction fueled the Reformation and inspired godly men like Martin Luther and William Tyndale to translate the Scripture into the language of the day. They resisted the **allegorical approach** that sought "hidden, spiritual" meaning that could only be interpreted by "qualified men." Instead, they believed that God's Word was clear enough to be understood by Christians regardless of their education or background.

Of course, there are parts of the Bible that are harder to understand than others. As we saw in 2 Peter 3:16, even Peter admitted that the apostle Paul wrote some things that were "hard to understand." But generally, when we read through the Bible, we should look for the PLAIN meaning of the words regardless of the genre (history, law, poetry, prophecy, gospels, epistles, apocalyptic literature). Let's work through an example from each genre of Scripture in order to establish the pattern of CLEAR, DIRECT interpretation.

 HISTORY: In Genesis 2:15-17 God puts man in the middle of the garden of Eden and gives him a direct command. "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

In the next scene Satan shows up in the form of a serpent and speaks to the woman. **Genesis 3:1** – "... he (the serpent) said the woman, '**Did God actually say**, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'"

What is Satan doing?

How did Eve interpret God's words?

**Genesis 3:2-3** – "And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"



2. <u>LAW</u>: God came to Moses on Mount Sinai and delivered the law. This law would govern the behavior of the nation of Israel and would establish the terms of their relationship with God (covenant). The law permeated every aspect of life – public and private life, family and national life, ceremony, hygiene, intimacy, occupation, eating, worship, disease - EVERYTHING. The law spelled out in detail the specific commands that governed life in TOTALITY. Proper interpretation and obedience to the LAW would determine the future health of the people.

**Deuteronomy 6:1-3** - <sup>1</sup> "Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, <sup>2</sup> that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. <sup>3</sup> Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

What do you notice about the clarity of Scripture? Who can understand it? What is the expectation? What are the benefits of obedience?

- 3. <u>POETRY:</u> While poetry employs the use of figures of speech, the PLAIN sense of the words is always intended. Look at each example and determine the meaning. <a href="https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/chart-19-02/">https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/chart-19-02/</a>
  - a. **Sometimes** poetry assigns **human qualities** to **inhuman things**. We call this **personification**.

**Psalm 77:16** – (speaking of the parting of the Red Sea) "When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled."

Can you think of other examples of personification?



Sometimes poetry compares two dissimilar objects using simile (using "like" or "as") or metaphor (direct comparison using "is").

**Psalm 1:3** – "He is <u>like</u> a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf shall not wither. In all that he does, he prospers."

Psalm 23:1 – "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."

c. Sometimes poetry uses word pictures.

**Psalm 19:10** – (speaking of the Word of God) "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb."

d. **Sometimes** poetry uses **exaggeration** to make a point. This is called **hyperbole**.

Psalm 42:3 – "My tears have been my food day and night..."

- 4. PROPHECY: It's important to understand that the rules of interpretation do not change once we get to prophetic literature. Consistently, when the prophets spoke of future events, the details of those events were expected to happen exactly as they were conveyed. The future Messiah would be born of a virgin (Is 7:14), would come from the line of David (Is 11:1), would be indwelt by the Spirit (Is 11:2; 61:1), would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), would be preceded by a messenger (Is 40:3-5; Mal 3:1), would be rejected by his own people (Is 53:3), would bring good news to the poor (Is 61:1) just to name a few.
  - a. In **Ezekiel 12:21-25**, God confronts the people who were **complaining** about his "**delay**" in **keeping** his **promises**. Then God sets the record straight on how to interpret his word given to the prophets.



**First, the complaint:** "<sup>21</sup> And the word of the Lord came to me: <sup>22</sup> "Son of man, what is this proverb that you have about the land of Israel, saying, 'The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing'?

The people are so irritated with God that they created a proverb that was said among the people – "a catch phrase or a saying." What were they complaining about regarding God's prophecies?

NOTICE that they had properly interpreted the prophecy but were unhappy about the delay.

**Next, the response of God:** <sup>23</sup> Tell them therefore, 'Thus says the Lord God: I will **put** an **end** to this **proverb**, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel.' But say to them, The **days** are **near**, and the **fulfillment** of **every vision**. <sup>24</sup> For there shall be no more any **false vision** or **flattering divination** within the house of Israel. <sup>25</sup> For I am the Lord; I will **speak the word that I will speak, and it will be performed**. It will no longer be delayed, but in your days, O rebellious house, I will **speak the word and perform it**, declares the Lord God."

What is God's response? What could they expect?

**NOTE:** Seventy-five times Ezekiel uses the phrase, "then they will know that I am the LORD." This phrase comes after detailed prophecies concerning Israel and the surrounding nations. When they saw the DIRECT fulfillment of these specific prophecies they would know that God's word was TRUE and CLEAR.



b. One of the confusing things about prophecy is that the timing of the fulfillment is sometimes hard to determine. Often, the prophets would speak of events that would be fulfilled in the NEAR future and mix them with prophecies that would be fulfilled in the DISTANT future. They did this through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who guided them. You see, every prophet needed to establish his credibility by speaking words from God that actually came true in the lifetime of their audience (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). But intermingled with these NEAR prophecies, there were also DISTANT, END-TIME prophecies. But just as the fulfilment during the prophet's lifetime was physical, clear, and precise, the future fulfillment of his prophecies would also be physical, clear, and precise.

A couple weeks ago we looked at Joel 1 and 2. Let's examine it again.

Joel 1:14–17 - <sup>14</sup> Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord. <sup>15</sup> Alas for the day! For **the day of the Lord is near**, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes. <sup>16</sup> Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? <sup>17</sup> The seed shrivels under the clods; the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are torn down because the grain has dried up.

Joel is writing about the "day of the Lord," which is a day of judgment. In these verses, how is the "day of the Lord" described? Is this a NEAR fulfilment, or a DISTANT fulfillment?

Joel 2:1–2, 10, 30-31 - <sup>1</sup> Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for **the day of the Lord is coming**; it is **near**, <sup>2</sup> a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations. ... <sup>10</sup> The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. ... <sup>30</sup> "And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. <sup>31</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.



What do you notice about the "day of the Lord" in chapter 2? Is it NEAR or DISTANT? Does this sound familiar – (HINT: remember Jesus' words in Matthew 24:29-31)

5. GOSPELS and EPISTLES: In the first four books of the New Testament we read about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. These books are called the Gospels. In them, we find that Jesus speaking in a way that was CLEAR, POWERFUL, and AWE-INSPIRING. Crowds multiplied, and even children gathered to hear him teach. Luke writes that "Even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities (Luke 5:15)."

Halfway through his Galilean ministry Jesus shifts his teaching strategy. Instead of speaking in plain language, Jesus would teach with parables. This confused the disciples who then question him: "Why do you speak to them in parables? (Matthew 13:10).

Then Jesus responds: <sup>13</sup> "This is why I speak to them in **parables**, because **seeing** they **do not see**, and **hearing** they **do not hear**, **nor** do they **understand**. <sup>14</sup> Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: "'"You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." <sup>15</sup> For this **people's heart** has grown **dull**, and with their **ears** they can barely **hear**, and their **eyes** they have **closed**, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' (Matthew 13:13–15)

Why did Jesus change his strategy? What does that indicate about the clarity of his teaching before and after his parables?



6. APOCALYPTIC Literature: This segment of Scripture is "a specific form of prophecy, largely involving symbols and imagery and predicting disaster and destruction. We find this type of language in Daniel (the beasts of chapter 7), Ezekiel (the scroll of chapter 3), Zechariah (the golden lampstand of chapter 4), and Revelation (the four horsemen of chapter 6). The Prophetic and Apocalyptic books are the ones most often subjected to faulty eisegesis and personal interpretation based on emotion or preconceived bias. However, Amos 3:7 tells us, "Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets." Therefore, we know that the truth has been told, and it can be known via careful exegesis, a familiarity with the rest of the Bible, and prayerful consideration. - <a href="https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-genres.html">https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-genres.html</a>.

The book Revelation is full of images that are hard to comprehend, but it is intermingled with sections that contain CLEAR, DIRECT language. For example, chapters 2-3 contain letters to 7 churches. Those letters provide specific encouragement and warning to believers regarding their walk with God. They help to establish the consistent pattern of interpretation – taking God's word at face value. Even as we read the DESCRIPTIVE sections that are full of VISIONS and SPECTACULAR images, we are REMINDED that we need to LOOK for the PLAIN meaning of the text whenever possible. Let's look at a couple verses from Revelation 6:12-17.

**Revelation 6:12–17** - <sup>12</sup> When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black **as** sackcloth, the full moon became **like** blood, <sup>13</sup> and the stars of the sky fell to the earth **as** the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. <sup>14</sup> The sky vanished **like** a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. <sup>15</sup> Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, <sup>16</sup> calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, <sup>17</sup> for the **great day of their wrath has com**e, and who can stand?"

a. Notice some of the figures of speech and descriptive language – <u>simile</u> which uses "like" or "as" | personification which gives human characteristics to objects (v. 16). How do these descriptions help or hinder interpretation?



b.	What are some of the obvious things that are happening in this passage?
	Notice the circled words.

### UNDERSTANDING the WORD

- As we have studied the book of 2 Peter, we saw the essential importance of "knowing" God through his word. Let's review, what do we gain through our knowledge of God and what does that indicate about its CLARITY?
  - a. **2 Peter 1:2** May grace and peace be multiplied to you **in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord**.
  - b. **2 Peter 1:3** "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness **through the knowledge of him who called us** to his own glory and excellence."
  - c. 2 Peter 1:5-7 "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.
  - d. **2 Peter 1:8** "For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they will keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the **knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**"



- 2. Paul talks about the significance of the word of God in 2 Timothy. Who can understand the word, and what does the word accomplish in the life of a believer? What does this suggest about the clarity of the word?
  - **2 Timothy 3:15–17** <sup>15</sup> and that from **childhood** you have known the **Holy Scriptures**, which are able to make you **wise** for **salvation** through faith which is in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> **All Scripture** *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* **profitable** for **doctrine**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for **instruction** in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the **man** of God may be **complete**, **thoroughly equipped** for every **good work**.
- 3. Not only is God's word clear, but God has also given us the Holy Spirit to make it accessible. How does God lead us in understanding of his Word?
  - a. 1 Corinthians 2:9–14 9 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." 10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

b. **1 John 2:20–21, 27** - <sup>20</sup> But you have an **anointing** from the **Holy One**, and you know all things. <sup>21</sup> I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. <sup>27</sup> But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.



#### APPLYING the WORD

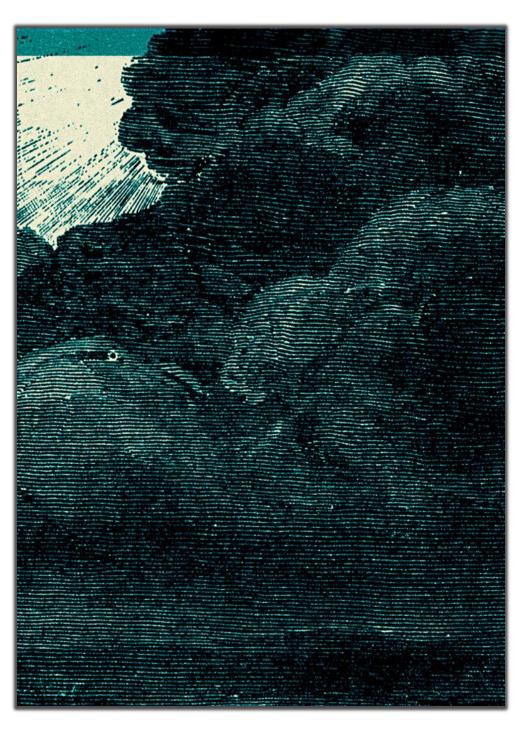
1. In response to all of this we remember the words of the apostle Paul in Colossians 3:16-17. What does a person who loves the Word look like?

**Colossians 3:16–17** - <sup>16</sup> Let the **word** of **Christ dwell** in you **richly** in all wisdom, **teaching** and **admonishing** one another in **psalms** and **hymns** and **spiritual songs**, **singing** with **grace** in your hearts to the Lord. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** to God the Father through Him.

### PRAYING the WORD

1. Colossians 1:9–12 (NKJV) - <sup>9</sup> For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; <sup>10</sup> that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; <sup>11</sup> strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.





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