

CHAPTER 9

A MORE DETAILED LOOK AT WHY THE ALLEGORICAL APPROACH IS SO WRONG

¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, ²¹ because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

2 Peter 1:19-21 (RSV)

that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

2 Peter 3:2 (RSV)

*Every word of God proves true;
he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
Proverbs 30:5 (RSV)*

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures

Luke 24:44-45 (RSV)

A clearer and more detailed definition of what we mean by an *allegory* and the *allegorical approach*

We have seen that there are times when the Bible uses allegories. Indeed, sometimes it even says explicitly that it is using an allegory. So the concept of an allegory is a valid one and there is the potential that a particular passage could contain an allegory. A right-thinking person will therefore be open-minded to that possibility.

So, my opposition to the practice of allegorising the Bible is not based on any rejection of the concept of an allegory, or any denial that they are ever used in the Bible. Allegories can be valid and they do sometimes arise in the Bible. What I am opposing is the idea that we should allegorize the Scriptures *across the board*, in a general sense, and see allegories when they are *not* there.

That is the error of those who engage in allegorizing. But to examine that we need to take a step back and look at the whole subject of allegories in closer detail. Let us first define more clearly what an allegory is and also consider the views of some other writers on these issues. According to the Bible Handbook an allegory is:

"Any statement of supposed facts which admits of a literal interpretation, and yet requires or justly admits a moral or figurative one, is called an allegory."

So, when we speak of the *allegorical approach*, or 'allegorizing', we are not referring to those people who accept (correctly) that allegories do exist and are to be found, on occasions, in the Bible. We mean the approach taken by those people who wrongly believe that *the whole Bible*, especially prophecy, is *full of allegories* and that allegories and symbols conveying deep secondary meanings are the *norm* rather than the exception.

Allegorizing is the practice of seeing allegories and hidden secondary meanings all over the Bible, even where they do not exist. The person who sees allegories everywhere only tends to do so because he has been *taught* to do so. He would never think of such an approach for himself. Therefore he sees these allegories and hidden meanings, even when they aren't there, because he *expects* them to be there.

A person finds it very hard not to see what they expect to see. They also find it hard to be able to see what they do *not* expect to see, or which they have been *told* is not there. That is how a person who follows the allegorical approach can end up with distorted vision when reading the Bible.

They fail to see the plain, literal meaning which is staring at them from the page and see instead an allegorical meaning which isn't actually there. And it is all because they have always been *told* that it is there.

The allegorical approach to interpreting the Bible has been defined by *Bernard Ramm* as follows:

"Allegorism' is the method of interpreting a literal text that regards the literal sense as the vehicle for a secondary, more spiritual and more profound sense".

These quotes are rather complicated. Perhaps we could simplify this by saying that an allegory is where something has a plain meaning on the surface, but where we are meant to understand it in some other, deeper way. We sometimes see this technique of allegory in literature. It is used in stories which have a surface meaning, but another, more important, meaning underneath. However, the use of allegories causes us no trouble in stories or poems.

We tend to know immediately if there is meant to be a deeper, secondary meaning. It's usually very obvious. Our only problem is in working out whether or not we are supposed to handle *the Bible* in this way. Are we meant to be looking for other meanings? If so, then to what extent? Also, how do we know what they are, and whether those secondary meanings are actually the real meanings?

The dangers of the allegorical method of interpreting the Bible, i.e. "spiritualizing the text".

The allegorical approach to Bible interpretation is sometimes referred to as "*spiritualising the text*". By that its supporters mean that although the Bible may plainly say "ABC", its "*spiritual*" meaning (i.e. its deeper meaning) is actually "XYZ". The Bible never says anything which supports this approach.

It has led people to adopt all sorts of confused and mistaken ideas. Those misinterpretations have then led them into a series of further errors, as the implications of their wrong beliefs and assumptions build up, one on top of another. *Charles T. Fritsch* says of the allegorical approach:

"According to this method the literal and historical sense of Scripture is completely ignored, and every word and event is made an allegory of some kind, either to escape theological difficulties, or to maintain certain peculiar religious views."

The error of those who allegorize the Scriptures generally, i.e. across the board, is that they take a specific literary technique which the Bible uses occasionally and then they treat that exception as if it *was* the *general rule*. They therefore speak as if a large proportion of the Bible was made up of allegories and symbols. In fact they are the exception and only arise here and there, now and again.

It was not the general policy of the men who wrote the Bible, or of the Holy Spirit who inspired them, to write in allegories. Therefore the allegorical approach does not faithfully interpret what the Scripture is actually saying. Instead, it imposes onto the text whatever meaning the reader (or his

teacher, or denomination) *wants* it to have, or has been *told* that it has. *Milton S. Terry* has said of the allegorical method:

".... it will be noticed that its habit is to disregard the common (meaning) of words and give wing to all manner of fanciful speculation. It does not draw out the legitimate meaning of an author's language, but foists into it whatever the whim or fancy of an interpreter may desire. As a system, therefore, it puts itself beyond all well-defined principles and laws."

The allegorical method means that instead of the Bible being the authority, the reader himself, or his teacher, has the final say. It can, therefore, take a person absolutely anywhere that their imagination can invent. There are no boundaries and nobody can say whether anybody else is right or wrong.

Each person who pursues the allegorical approach becomes the author of his own theories and ideas. It is all interpreted according to his own personal rules and opinions. Things then mean whatever a man says they mean. So, if there are ten men, then the same passage can be alleged to mean ten different things.

There is no getting away from that, once you go down the road of assuming that the Bible largely consists of allegories. It is difficult to see the difference between this and the approach taken by Humpty Dumpty in *'Through the Looking Glass'*, by *Lewis Carroll*. In this extract Alice and Humpty Dumpty are speaking about the meaning of words. Their conversation goes as follows:

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory' " Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. *"Of course you don't - till I tell you. I meant 'There's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"*

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument' ", Alice objected.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, *"it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."*

When we hear Humpty Dumpty say this to Alice we are meant to consider it absurd. Yet, isn't he basically doing what the allegorical approach does? If not, what is the difference? Humpty Dumpty is a ridiculous figure because he has decided to give words whatever meaning he chooses to give them, rather than abide by their common meaning.

However, that is exactly what the allegorical approach does, which is why it leads us into chaos. What else can be expected from taking such an approach in any context, not just with the Bible? There is no external, objective way of testing what the reader or interpreter says. *Bernard Ramm* has said of this:

"To state that the principal meaning of the Bible is a second-sense meaning, and that the principal method of interpreting is "spiritualizing" is to open the door to almost uncontrolled speculation and imagination. For this reason we have insisted that the control in interpretation is the literal method."

If words are allowed to have secondary meanings instead of what they plainly say, then there are no limits to where we can end up. The only thing which preserves sense and order is to take everything at its ordinary meaning. Then we all know what we mean, what other people mean, and what God means.

That is why we all take that approach in every other area of life. Only in relation to the Bible do people systematically impose allegorical double meanings in place of the plain words that they read or hear. Can you think of any other context in life, or literature, where we ever do so?

Where did the allegorical method/approach come from?

No individual man is solely responsible for devising the allegorical approach. It grew out of the Alexandrian school of theology in North Africa in the second and third centuries. Men like Philo and Clement of Alexandria were among the first to put it forward. It was then taken up by Origen and later by the so called "Saint" Augustine of Hippo. His influence caused the allegorical approach to become widely accepted within what we now call the Roman Catholic church.

However, it was never accepted or used in the genuine, biblical churches, which continued outside of Catholicism. They carried on meeting in homes, schoolrooms and barns as they always had. By contrast, within Roman Catholicism, the allegorical approach took over completely.

The literal method, i.e. the "*golden rule*", (see above) which had always been followed beforehand, was abandoned by the Catholic church. However, it was kept by the genuine, Bible-believing Christians. They never lost it, just as they never lost the Gospel.

One of the reasons why the allegorical approach, or "spiritualizing" the Scriptures, was so eagerly adopted by the Catholic church was that it placed the responsibility for saying what the Bible means solely in the hands of their leaders. It therefore gave added power to the men at the top of the organization. According to them, only they were "*qualified*" to interpret the Bible.

That was convenient. It enabled them to dispense with any awkward or unwelcome Bible passage by "*spiritualizing*" its meaning and making it mean whatever they wished it to mean. They could then turn it into something more acceptable to the hierarchy of the Catholic church, there being no limits on what they could declare the real, or "*spiritual*", meaning to be.

That was not such a remarkable step to take, given that they had already begun to teach that the authority of the Pope was equal to, or even greater than, that of Scripture anyway. If the Pope is seen as higher than the Bible, then he can just reinterpret anything he wants anyway.

That is precisely what successive Popes did. That ongoing invention of new doctrines and reinterpretation of the Bible caused many more man-made ideas and pagan practices to spring up in place of, or alongside, what the Bible says.

What did the Protestant Reformers, Luther and Calvin, think of the allegorical method?

Despite all their many qualities and good work, especially in their early years, the Protestant reformers, Martin Luther and John Calvin, did not recognise the error of the allegorical approach. They therefore kept it and used it themselves, even though they had rejected many of the other wrong beliefs and practices of Catholicism.

So, the allegorical approach to interpreting the Bible is now adopted, in the Roman Catholic Church and *also* within the Reformed/Protestant, Calvinist/Presbyterian churches. That is the case, even though the Reformed churches assume (wrongly) that Luther and Calvin had got rid of all of the errors of Catholicism. If only they had. Sadly, they actually kept a great many of them.

The fact that Luther and Calvin continued to use the allegorical method is a particularly tragic example of this. It has seriously weakened the Reformed/Protestant churches and has caused them to retain or adopt many wrong and misguided beliefs, especially in relation to Bible prophecy.

However, the majority of Reformed believers today do not realise any of this and are quite unaware that they have a problem on this point. Ironically, Augustine, who was the main founder of the allegorical approach, was also one of the main architects of Roman Catholicism. Again, very few people from the Reformed churches are aware of that.

What they do often know is that Jean Calvin based most of his teachings on the writings of Augustine. Therefore many Christians in the Reformed churches mistakenly assume that Augustine must have been of like mind with the Reformers and that he would oppose Roman Catholicism. On the contrary - he would not. Augustine was thoroughly Roman Catholic in his theology, so much so that Roman Catholics see him as a pillar of *their* church, and rightly so.

Let us consider for a moment some of the other errors of this man, Augustine, who was also the principal founder of the allegorical approach. He was also the main source of inspiration for the exaggerated and unbalanced ideas, which Calvin later developed further, about what Calvinists call the 'sovereignty' of God.

In using that phrase they do not mean that God is simply in charge of the whole universe, or that He is more powerful than, anybody else. No right-thinking person could object if that was all that was meant by the word 'sovereignty'. The problem is that they mean something very different by it.

They think that God's sovereignty requires that He Himself must be the *direct cause and author of every event*, as opposed to allowing room for the free choices of human beings. That is a central belief of what is now called Calvinism. However, that belief is nowhere to be found in the Bible.

It is, instead, based on the over-extended application of human reasoning. Indeed, it is based on logic which has been taken to absolute extremes. They therefore end up believing what they believe, not because *the Bible* says any of it, but because it is the conclusion they have arrived at as a result of a series of *logical deductions*.

Moreover, it is a very lengthy and tenuous series of deductions. At any rate, long or short, the point is it is based on purely *human reasoning* rather than on any express statement made in Scripture. Though logical deduction has its place, and is even essential at times, it can lead us to form some very wrong conclusions if we take it too far, or if our own deductive reasoning is flawed.

A classic example of the hazards of pursuing human logic or reasoning beyond its proper limits is the famous '*Eleatic paradox*'. In brief, this is the proposition that it is impossible for an arrow ever to arrive at its target. That conclusion is based on the following reasoning. When the arrow is fired at a target which is, say, 100 yards away, the arrow must first travel half the distance and reach the half-way point before it can go any farther.

So, it firstly has to get to the point where it is 50 yards away from the target. Then it must, likewise, reach the point where it is 25 yards away before it can go any farther. This process of halving the remaining distance is then continued forever. So, even when the arrow is only one centimeter from the target, it still can't ever reach it, because it must first travel half a centimeter, and then a quarter, and then an eighth, and so on and so on.

The logical conclusion is, therefore, that no arrow can ever hit its target. Moreover, the logic is unbreakable, provided you stay within the assumptions upon which that reasoning is based. There is only one snag with this elaborate logic – it is completely untrue and does not work in practice. So, the Eleatic paradox is a good example of how purely human reasoning can lead a person into error and folly.

It was thinking of this type which led Augustine, and later Calvin, into profound error when it came to the subject of the sovereignty of God, i.e. as *they* define it, not as a right-thinking person would define it. The fact that Calvin got his faulty reasoning about God's sovereignty and 'election' from Augustine makes it all the more ironic that Calvinists imagine their beliefs to be far removed from Roman Catholicism.

In fact, in most of his theology, Calvin was drawing from the same flawed and contaminated source, i.e. Augustine, rather than from the Bible itself. In brief, their error about God's sovereignty comes

from their mistaken assumption that if God is sovereign, then that must mean that He always gets what He wants and that His will is always done.

In other words, they assume that for God to be all-powerful, or sovereign, then it must mean that no person, or indeed no animal or object, can ever defy God's will by doing anything that is contrary to His will. Their misguided logic tells them that if anybody or anything was to act contrary to God's will, then it would mean that God was not sovereign.

Therefore they rule out the possibility and tell themselves that it cannot happen. That is they conclude that even when we sin we must still be doing God's will because, otherwise, we would be defying God's will. Their logic tells them that that simply cannot happen.

So, according to their warped logic, that means that God is the author and cause of everything that ever happens, *including our sins*, but also every *accident or chance event*. They see all those things as having been equally pre-ordained by God, before time began and equally impossible to avoid or alter, no matter what we do.

Of course this is all unbiblical nonsense. Millions of things happen every day which are *directly contrary to God's will*. That is precisely why such things grieve and anger Him. But the fact that those things happen does not prove that He is not sovereign. On the contrary, all it proves is that He has given us *free will*, including the *freedom to sin*, which includes the freedom to defy Him.

See chapter 10 below for more details on the errors of Calvinism in relation to God's sovereignty, as they wrongly define it. In particular I include a section there on their misguided belief that God predestines people to be *damned*, irrespective of any faith or repentance on their part. Again, that is a purely man-made doctrine, based on nothing other than over-extended human logic.

The Bible *never* says that God does that. That particular error in Calvin's understanding of the nature and implications of God's sovereignty is profoundly damaging. It leads even good and sincere Christians to believe that God is the *cause* of everything, such that everything that ever happens, whether good or bad, is assumed to be His will.

It is a slander on the good name of God because it states, falsely, that every bad thing that ever happens is God's will. To add further insult, it is assumed that He directly *caused it*, as opposed to merely *allowing* it to be done by some human being or by a demon, or just to occur naturally, by chance.

This error has serious consequences in terms of causing people to misjudge God and to see Him as a cruel, monster-figure, playing games with our lives. For example, a family we know were told, when their young child was diagnosed as diabetic, that this was '*God's will*' and that He had *caused* it to happen for His "*inscrutable purposes*".

Thankfully, the family in question were sensible enough, and knew enough about the Bible and God's character, to realise that what they were being told was not true. They knew that although God had *permitted* this illness to arise, He had neither *caused* it nor *willed* it to happen.

But what if they had not been so sensible and well informed about God's character? What if they had accepted that false teaching and all its misguided implications? It could easily have warped their image of God and even undermined their whole relationship with Him. That is not merely hypothetical. It has had exactly that effect on many other people, and with tragic consequences for their faith.

This error within Calvinist thinking is also shared with Islam. The Calvinists' misconceived definition of the sovereignty of God is virtually the same as the fatalistic view of Allah which is taken by Muslims. They think that their god, Allah, causes absolutely everything, whether good or bad.

I have never been able to detect any material difference between the Muslim view of Allah, (in this specific respect), and the Calvinist view of God's sovereignty. That fact alone ought to identify this as a false teaching, and a misrepresentation of God's real nature.

I am not seeking to digress into a detailed discussion of the wider errors of Augustine and Calvin. I shall do that in a later book in this series, which is all about Calvinism. My only purpose at the moment is to invite you to consider that if Augustine and Calvin could be as mistaken as they clearly were about sovereignty, election, predestination etc, then they can also be wrong in their advocacy of the allegorical approach.

The problem of operating an arbitrary double standard, whereby some things are assumed to be literal, but others are viewed as allegorical

The two most well-known Reformers, Luther and Calvin, adopted a strange double standard, using two contradictory methods of interpretation at the same time. They basically took a literal approach to interpreting everything except prophecy. When handling prophecy, they chose to keep the allegorical approach which the Roman Catholic Church used.

The rest of Scripture, concerning the miracles, or creation, or salvation being based on faith alone, was all taken literally. At least in those areas they got it right. Luther and Calvin, therefore, took two opposite and totally inconsistent approaches to interpreting the Bible, depending on what type of passage they were reading. If it was about creation or sin or repentance or faith or salvation etc, then it was assumed to be literal.

But if it was about prophecy it was assumed to be allegorical. How can that arbitrary distinction make any sense? The Reformed/Protestant churches have continued to operate this misguided double standard for the last 500 years, without any logical basis, and without being able to point to anything at all in the Bible to support it.

Consequently, nearly a third of the Bible ends up being badly misinterpreted. The plain, literal meaning of every verse which contains prophecy is replaced with an unlimited number of man-made allegorical interpretations. Also the number of Reformed/Protestant denominations has grown as they have subdivided. Therefore lots of different denominational viewpoints emerged offering conflicting interpretations of these alleged allegories.

So, the Reformed, Protestant churches are generally far more accurate than the Roman Catholic church when it comes to the *non-prophetic* areas of Scripture. However, they are *not* more accurate when they deal with prophecy. Their main error in that regard is that most of them view the future events described in the book of Revelation, as having *already happened*.

They assume it was *all* fulfilled back in the first century, primarily at the time of the expulsion of the Jewish people from Israel by the Romans in AD 70. Many of them therefore assume that the antichrist was the *Emperor Nero*, or even the *Roman Empire as a whole*. If either of those interpretations is true, then the antichrist has already come and gone, and he need not concern us.

If so, then why is the antichrist in the Bible at all, and why is so much emphasis given to him? Likewise, they assume that the prophecies given by Daniel have all been fulfilled long ago. They do so even though Gabriel specifically told Daniel to seal up the prophecies because they apply to the *very end of world history*, i.e. "*the time of the end*".

Consider carefully what Gabriel actually said:

¹⁷ As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. "Son of man," he said to me, "understand that the vision concerns the time of the end."¹⁸ While he was speaking

to me, I was in a deep sleep, with my face to the ground. Then he touched me and raised me to my feet.¹⁹ He said: "I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end.

Daniel 8:17-19 (NIV)

"But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end -----"

Daniel 12:4(a) (RSV)

If what Daniel was prophesying relates to the very end of world history, then how can those events have already occurred thousands of years ago? That would have been long before "the time of the end". So, that is plainly not the right way to interpret these prophecies. The above verses demonstrate that fact by themselves, quite apart from all the other reasons for rejecting that notion.

The suggestion that these prophesied events are all in the past, and have already been fulfilled, does not fit either the facts of history or the words of the Bible. Nevertheless, many still believe it. Moreover they seem to feel that there is no need to explain or justify their assumptions.

Millions of people have simply been told that that is what it means and they have just accepted that traditional, denominational teaching without question. Therefore, most people in Reformed churches do not stop and ask themselves whether what they have been told is true, i.e. are these events really all in the past?

When people read the Bible after they have been taught these wrong ideas, it is as if they have been programmed to ignore the plain meaning. Instead they superimpose onto the page the meaning they have been *told* it has, without even being aware that they are filtering and editing God's Word in this way.

Once a person gets mistaken ideas like that fixed in their minds the errors are hard to shift. Moreover, it has a knock-on effect on all sorts of other things as well. It all gets out of line, like a shirt or cardigan which you have started to button up wrongly. All the other buttons then end up out of sequence.

Ironically, the book of Revelation was not even written until about AD 90-100, some 20-30 years after the events of AD 70. The apostle John was a very old man when he wrote it. So, if these events that he was describing really were already in the past he would have *said so*. Yet, he writes of them as clearly future. Some people, recognizing this problem, therefore try to argue that John must have written Revelation much earlier, in the AD 60s, but that is not the case.

**What are the arguments in support of the literal *approach* to interpretation? (the golden rule)
How can we be sure it is the right system to use as our starting point?**

There are many reasons why the literal approach to interpreting the Bible is clearly right and also much safer to use. Let us examine some of these:

Argument 1 - Words having plain, literal meanings is our normal practice in every other part of life

Taking words literally is the normal approach in all types of literature and in every language, almost all of the time. That's hardly surprising. Why would any sensible person adopt a non-literal approach in which words mean whatever the reader feels they mean? What if an insurance policy was written on that basis, or the terms and conditions of a car rental agreement? So why single out the Bible for such an approach, even if only in relation to prophecy?

Argument 2 - Secondary meanings would lead us into chaos

All secondary meanings of parables, types, allegories and symbols etc depend on there being already in place some fixed rules about the ordinary meaning of the words in the passage. Otherwise, any allegories used could not be explained anyway, because no words at all would have any clear meaning. If when you say "computer" you mean "chair" and when you say "fish" you mean "horse", and so on, how could anybody ever speak to you?

It would be bad enough if you were the only one to have your own private meanings for common words. But what if others operated like that as well, each with their own personal dictionary? It would degenerate into meaninglessness. The Holy Spirit chose to use everyday words and to be bound by the ordinary, plain meanings of those words.

When God says the word "fish" He limits Himself to the common meaning of that word. God does not allow Himself to step outside of the ordinary meaning of any word. So, if even God chooses to operate within the conventional rules of definition and grammar, how can we feel entitled to step outside of those rules ourselves?

What would be our authority for believing that we can do what the Holy Spirit does not even allow Himself to do? Clearly defined words and consistent grammar are the two fundamental requirements of all meaningful speech. That is all the more so when it is the Holy Spirit who is inspiring the writing.

Nature, which God also designed, is laid out according to equally logical patterns. So, why would God change His whole approach and adopt a fluid, and even anarchic, system when inspiring Scripture? If anything, He would use even more order and structure within Scripture than in nature, not less.

Argument 3 - It would be a strange coincidence for the whole Bible to somehow make perfect sense when read literally if it isn't meant to be read literally

Whether or not you agree with what it contains, it surely has to be admitted that the whole Bible makes perfect sense from beginning to end when interpreted literally. That could hardly be the case if God had never intended it to be read in that way. So, for it all to somehow make perfect sense, as it does, would be an amazing coincidence if it was actually meant to be a book full of codes, allegories and symbols.

How can it be that all of it "just happens" to make sense from beginning to end when read literally? That would be like a reverse code that has arisen entirely by accident. It cannot be. I have never heard any adequate response to this point from those who believe in the allegorical approach. It would require an impossible series of coincidences.

Argument 4 –Metaphors and symbols are legitimate. But they are *the exception, not the rule*

Adopting a literal approach does not prevent us from recognizing any *legitimate* figures of speech, symbols, metaphors, analogies, allegories and types that we do genuinely see in the Bible. Obviously there are some of these. But the point is that we are meant to come across them one by one, every now and again.

We are not meant to treat everything, or even most things, as allegorical, any more than we would in any other area of life or literature. So, in opposing the allegorical approach being applied across the board, to the Bible as a whole, we do not need to deny the existence or validity of allegories, or any other device, when they *are* really there in the passage.

We have no need, or reason, to deny any of that. All that we need to object to is the practice of seeing allegories when they are *not* there, due to making the error of thinking that that is how the whole Bible is generally meant to be understood.

Argument 5 - Wouldn't it be rather odd for God to leave it to the fourth century AD to tell us, for the first time, (through Augustine) how to read the Bible?

If somehow the allegorical approach really was the way God wanted us to operate, would He not have said so, at least once, somewhere in the Bible? Wouldn't He have revealed and explained this allegorical method through at least one of His prophets, or apostles? Then we could all understand it and know how to use it. Why would God leave it to Augustine, in the fourth century AD, to tell us, for the very first time, how to read the Bible?

That is 300 years or more after even the latest parts of the New Testament were written, and 1800 years after the earliest books of the Old Testament were written by Moses. It would also mean that Augustine was better informed than Daniel, Paul, and even Jesus, about how to interpret the Bible. One surely has to accept that that would be a very peculiar way for God to operate.

Argument 6 - Augustine was such a misguided and confused man, he is not safe to rely upon

Even if God did, for some unexplained reason, decide to wait for over 1800 years to tell us the right way to read the Bible, wouldn't He choose someone better than Augustine as His vehicle for revealing this alleged new truth? Why would God use such a confused and misguided man as Augustine, whose other ideas were so frequently unbiblical and mistaken, as we have seen with the crazy and fatalistic ideas about God's sovereignty?

He does not sound like the right sort of man for God to use to tell us all, for the first time, how to understand the Scriptures. Surely, if God wanted an allegorical system to be used He would have got someone much more reliable, like Moses, to set it all out for us, not a mixed-up person like Augustine.

Argument 7 - Jesus, the apostles and the prophets all interpreted the Bible literally on every occasion

Jesus Himself, plus all the apostles, and all of the Old Testament prophets always interpreted the Bible literally. Wouldn't it be odd, therefore, for God to operate in that way consistently, from 1500 BC onwards, even during the earthly ministries of Jesus and the apostles, and then suddenly to change His mind and ask us to read the Bible in a totally different way from the fourth century AD onwards? Common sense suggests not, and the fact that it has led to such confusion ever since would corroborate that.

Argument 8 - Some prophecies are so detailed they can't possibly be allegories. For example, consider the nine whole chapters in Ezekiel which describe the measurements and design of the new Temple that will be built in the Millennium

Have you ever read chapters 40-48 of the book of Ezekiel? If you have, you may have wondered why God has gone to such lengths to give us so many highly specific details about the design, shape, dimensions, contents, personnel and procedures of the Millennial Temple that will be built in Jerusalem during Jesus' 1000 year reign.

It is so intricately detailed that it cannot possibly be an allegory for anything. It is far too exact and exhaustive for that. Here is just a short extract, to give you the flavour of it, but remember that it goes on for another eight and a half chapters. This short passage is just dealing with the dimensions of the outer court of the future Millennial Temple. All of the rest of Ezekiel's account is equally detailed:

⁵And behold, there was a wall all around the outside of the temple area, and the length of the measuring reed in the man's hand was six long cubits, each being a cubit and a handbreadth in length; so he measured the thickness of the wall, one reed; and the height, one reed. ⁶Then he went into the gateway facing east, going up its steps, and measured the threshold of the gate, one reed deep; ⁷and the side rooms, one reed long, and one reed broad; and the space between the side rooms, five cubits; and the threshold of the gate by the vestibule of the gate at the inner end, one reed. ⁸Then he measured the vestibule of the gateway, eight cubits; ⁹and its jambs, two cubits; and the vestibule of the gate was at the inner end. ¹⁰And there were three side rooms on either side of the east gate; the three were of the same size; and the jambs on either side were of the same size.

¹¹Then he measured the breadth of the opening of the gateway, ten cubits; and the breadth of the gateway, thirteen cubits. ¹²There was a barrier before the side rooms, one cubit on either side; and the side rooms were six cubits on either side. ¹³Then he measured the gate from the back of the one side room to the back of the other, a breadth of five and twenty cubits, from door to door. ¹⁴He measured also the vestibule, twenty cubits; and round about the vestibule of the gateway was the court. ¹⁵From the front of the gate at the entrance to the end of the inner vestibule of the gate was fifty cubits. ¹⁶And the gateway had windows round about, narrowing inwards into their jambs in the side rooms, and likewise the vestibule had windows round about inside, and on the jambs were palm trees.

Ezekiel 40:5-16 (RSV)

Given the extraordinary amount of fine detail in the book of Ezekiel, it seems impossible to come to any conclusion other than that God is saying that there will really be a physical Temple during the Millennium and that these will be its actual measurements. I would defy anybody to give those nine chapters any credible allegorical meaning. Nobody can, because if it really was symbolism, it would be absurdly over-detailed.

Another possible reason why God provided so much intricate detail in the book of Ezekiel is precisely in order to create a difficulty for those who allegorize the Bible. It shows that their approach is wrong. They have no way of handling passages like Ezekiel 40-48 other than to ignore them, which is what they generally do. When did you last hear anybody preach on these nine chapters, if ever?

Conclusion

Without wishing to be harsh, one feels obliged to conclude that the allegorical approach has got nothing going for it. It is not just a weak theory, or an argument which has some holes in it. It is entirely misconceived and without merit. I cannot think of even a single point to make in its favour. If I could think of one, I would be honour-bound to include it.

Neither have I ever been able to find anybody else, in any book that I can find, who makes any coherent, credible, authoritative point in its favour. That said, the supporters of the allegorical approach don't generally even attempt to explain or justify it. It is presented as a given.

They just assert it, as if it was self-evidently correct, and does not need to be supported by any authority. Therefore it is surprising that, despite all these problems and weaknesses, so many people still accept the allegorical approach. Most do so passively, just because their denomination teaches it.

That shows the power of tradition and denominational loyalty. Even leaders and preachers seem to see no need to question all of this for themselves. That's another example of why it's never safe to let other men do your thinking, or your interpreting, for you, no matter who they are.

Does it really matter if the allegorical approach is wrong? Can it do us any harm if we don't take the Bible literally?

If you misunderstand or avoid the 30% of the Bible that is made up of prophecy then it matters greatly, even if you understand the rest of the Bible correctly. God gave us the prophetic Scriptures for a good reason. They are not there just to fill up space. It really matters for us to get our doctrines right, and in every area. That includes understanding what the future holds.

That's why God gave us the prophetic Scriptures. Why else would He do so? He wants us to be aware, alert and ready for everything that is coming. If all that the prophecies can do is to create chaos and waste everybody's time, it would be better if they weren't in the Bible at all. Each prophecy means exactly what *God means by it*, no more and no less.

We are not free to create our own private meanings or interpretations. Our only duty is to find out what God means by the prophecy and to believe that. We are not free to create our own meaning in place of that. Neither is our own leader, or the leader of any other church, free to create their own private meaning. See how apostle Peter put this point:

²⁰But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, ²¹for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

2 Peter 1:20-21 (NASB)

As we saw earlier, Peter did not mean, as the Roman Catholic church claims, that ordinary people are not qualified to understand the Bible for themselves, such that they need a Priest to interpret it for them. The real meaning of those verses is simply that we are not meant to create *private meanings* of our own. We are to find out what the Bible *actually means*, which we do by interpreting it in the right way.

We are not to interpret it in our own unique way, as is done by those who take the allegorical approach. Such people have ended up developing a wide range of inaccurate, distorted and invented doctrines. That confusion causes many problems, which really harm the church. Let's look at a few more examples of their wrong doctrines to illustrate this problem more fully:

Examples of wrong doctrines that flow from the allegorical approach to prophecy.

Doctrinal error 1 - Not realising that there will be a Day of Judgment for Christians and not understanding prophecy and eschatology generally

There are many clear statements in the Bible about the judgment that lies ahead for Christians, not just for the unsaved. Nevertheless, multitudes of people, even real Christians, do not know anything about it or do not believe in it. Thus the majority of people who go to church, and probably even the majority of real Christians, have no idea that Jesus is going to judge each of us, one to one.

He will do so primarily on the basis of what fruit our lives produced for Him, the extent of our faithfulness and what we did with the time, the gifts and the talents He gave us. So, in one sense, our whole life is a test or exam and we are being continuously measured.

Obviously, a person is less likely to do well in an exam or test if they don't even know that they are sitting it, or what it is about. (See Book Four in this series for more detail about the Judgment Seat of Christ)

I was recently at a men's meeting when the subject of judgment arose, i.e. for non-Christians. In the course of the discussion that followed I raised the subject of the Judgment Seat of Christ which is for Christians. I said I felt apprehensive about standing face to face with Jesus in His capacity as Judge and having my whole life as a Christian (i.e. since conversion, not before) scrutinized and evaluated.

However only one person in the group had any idea what I was referring to. The rest had never even heard of it. Yet these were men from a relatively good evangelical church, which is part of the FIEC (Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches). The point is that due to their faulty interpretation of the Bible, and lack of teaching, these men had no knowledge whatsoever of the judgment that awaits each of them.

One man, a PhD student, tried to reassure me that I need not fear having to face God's judgment. He thought I was confused and that I was expecting to have to go to the Great White Throne judgment which is for unsaved people. He truly had no idea what I was referring to.

He had never heard that there is also going to be a separate, quite different, judgment for Christians. That being so, how can that man prepare now, and change the way he lives, so as to achieve a better outcome in that awesome 'interview' with Jesus, at which He will hand us our 'test-results'?

If he was facing a viva with the Head of Department at his university for his PhD, he would want to spend a lot of time, and put in a lot of effort, preparing for it and putting things right now. Yet he did not even know that he faced a far more daunting appraisal, face to face, with Jesus.

Contrary to what its advocates assume, the allegorical approach does not, in general, promote a high view of Scripture. It actually diminishes and even trivializes it. At the very least, it makes it much harder to make sense of the Bible. I have come across quite a few people from Reformed/Protestant/Calvinist/Lutheran/ Presbyterian backgrounds who will privately admit that they find much of the Bible baffling, especially prophecy.

Therefore they either avoid the prophetic parts altogether or they only skim-read them. They have that difficulty because they have been pre-programmed with faulty ideas, which make the Bible confusing and hard to read. As a result, a lot of people from the various Reformed churches end up ignoring or avoiding the prophetic Scriptures entirely.

They realise that what they have been taught doesn't really make any sense, but they don't know why, or what to do about it. So they just leave the whole subject of Bible prophecy well alone. They often blame themselves for that confusion and assume that they are just not clever enough, or spiritual enough, to make sense of it.

It never occurs to them to think that the whole approach could be wrong. Therefore people from the Reformed churches usually know very little about prophecy or about eschatology, (the study of things to come), even from their own denomination's perspective, let alone from any other.

Moreover, prophecy and eschatology are rarely taught in those churches today, primarily because even the leaders find it all so baffling. They don't know how to handle it and sense instinctively that what they have been taught by their own denominational hierarchy doesn't add up. But they don't know why, and they don't know what to do about it either.

Therefore they mostly do nothing and just focus exclusively on other areas instead, where the Bible does make sense to them. I am thinking in particular of two large Reformed evangelical churches

which I know. The leaders of both of those churches never preach a sermon on anything to do with Bible prophecy or eschatology. That is not a coincidence.

They are giving 30% of the Bible a wide berth and deliberately avoiding teaching on it, firstly because they can't understand it and, secondly, because they know that if they do ever try to say anything about the prophecies in the Bible somebody will disagree and ask questions which they can't answer.

This is a self-inflicted problem, which could so easily be solved by just extending the range of the literal method of interpretation to cover the whole Bible, including prophecy. However, even the church leaders who have this problem tend to assume that their inability to understand Bible prophecy is their own fault.

It adds to their general sense of insecurity and lack of confidence in handling the Bible. In fact, it is not limited to them. It is a far deeper and wider problem, which has to do with the whole approach that they have been taught to use. However, it does not occur to them to blame their denominational tradition or theological training.

That is partly because many churches have taught, both explicitly and also by example, that the two things you should never challenge are your own leaders and your own denomination. Thus, any errors in their teaching become further entrenched and prolonged. (See Book Eight for more discussion of the problems created by unbiblical church tradition and authoritarian, hierarchical leadership.)

Doctrinal error 2 - Most of those taking an allegorical approach wrongly end up adopting 'replacement theology', i.e. the belief that the Church has replaced Israel

This profound error known as '*replacement theology*' is now very firmly entrenched within most British churches. It began, as so many errors did, with the so called 'Church Fathers' in the third and fourth centuries. Their ideas formed the foundations of the Roman Catholic church.

The idea of the Roman Catholic church replacing Israel appealed to them. It enabled them to elevate their own importance at the expense of Israel. Those who hold to this mistaken idea say that the Church is now the sole beneficiary of God's promised blessings to Israel.

However, in asserting that, they don't also claim for themselves the many curses that God equally promised would come upon Israel if they disobeyed God. These curses are ignored and are not thought to have been transferred to the Church. The Roman Catholic church assumes that it is *their* church which has replaced Israel, but the same mistake is made by the Reformed churches.

The only difference is that in their minds it is *they* who have replaced Israel, rather than the Catholic church. They both make the same error of foisting themselves, uninvited, into the centre of God's plans, illegitimately taking the place of Israel. In doing so, they are both equally presumptuous, and equally wrong.

Doctrinal error 3 - Most of those who take the allegorical approach make the error of concluding that God has finished with Israel and that Israel has no future role.

God has a hugely important plan for Israel, to which He refers hundreds of times in the Bible and it hasn't all taken place yet. There's much more still to happen. Instead of writing off the Jewish people, God wants us to be watching out for their welfare, praying for Israel, protecting their land, speaking up for Israel when it is criticised and generally blessing and supporting the Jewish people.

They were, still are, and always will be, His chosen people. These false ideas about the Church having replaced Israel warp the way that most of us see the Jewish people. As a result of all this, most churches which take an allegorical view are either hostile to Israel, or indifferent at best.

That is so tragic, given how emphatically God assures us that He will never, ever, under any circumstances, abandon His chosen people. He makes Himself unmistakably clear on that issue. (See later books in this series for more detail.) He also commands us repeatedly to love and bless the Jewish people.

Remember that the Lord Jesus Himself was, is, and always will be, *a Jewish man*. Very few people seem to realise that, or remember it. The truth is that most of us actually see Jesus as a Gentile, without ever saying so explicitly. For many of us it is a purely unconscious impression. Nevertheless, it still colours our thinking about the whole Bible.

But if God really had abandoned Israel, then the whole Bible would be a valueless and unreliable book. Moreover, God's promises would be of no use to the Church. We can be sure, therefore, for all those reasons, and many others, that He has not abandoned Israel and that He never will.

Indeed, He has categorically promised that He won't. The theology of those who believe that the Church, whether Catholic or Reformed, has replaced Israel never seems to lead them to care for Israel more. On the contrary, it always points them the other way. Having a belief in replacement theology never promotes love of Israel, only the opposite.

That error really matters, because God takes Israel very seriously. Although the Church is the bride of Christ, the Bible says that Israel is God's wife. It also says that He hates divorce. Moreover, it is Israel, not the Church, that is said to be the apple of God's eye. That is still the case. That means Israel is like the pupil of His eyes, about which He feels extremely sensitive.

It is not a good idea, therefore, to set yourself up as an enemy, or even a critic, of Israel. Indeed, why would you want to be even a neutral or indifferent observer? God has said that He wants you to be their staunch supporter, even if doing so means that you have to stand alone. God wants us to pray for the Jewish people and to help them and love them, not to ignore them.

He certainly does not want us to try to usurp their place in His affection or His plans. Imagine you had a very wealthy friend who felt unbearably sad because he had been rejected by his delinquent son, with whom he was seeking earnestly to be reconciled. Consider how your already heartbroken friend would feel if he discovered that you were telling other people:

- a) that he has disowned his son and written him off,
- b) that he no longer loves his son and has no further plans for him,
- c) that he has chosen to make you his sole heir and beneficiary in his will, in place of his own son,
- d) that he no longer intends to honour any of the solemn promises that he made to his son in the past.

Can you even imagine yourself saying any of those outrageously impertinent things about your friend or his son to your friends and neighbours? Think what your friend's feelings and reaction might be when he learns of what you have been saying. He would be appalled, to say the least.

Yet, isn't that list of things exactly what much of the Church is saying that God has done to Israel? If nothing else, such teaching is an insult to the *character* of God. It contradicts everything God has said in the Bible and makes Him out to be a liar and a promise-breaker whose Word cannot be relied upon.

Because of his mistaken understanding of how to interpret the prophetic Scriptures, Martin Luther held on to the Roman Catholic idea that the Church has replaced Israel. He basically just deleted the word 'Catholic' and inserted the word 'Protestant' instead. If that was not bad enough, Luther went on, just one week before his death, to prepare a sermon in which he said some bloodthirsty anti-Jewish remarks.

He called for Jews to be killed and for synagogues to be burned down, and he meant every word of it. His thinking in this area had gone very far astray. Sadly, it was largely due to his having followed the allegorical approach. What Martin Luther wrote concerning the Jews later became the theological basis for the Nazi holocaust.

Adolf Hitler was able to quote him, *accurately, and in context*, to justify murdering Jewish people. One does not wish to offend those who admire Martin Luther, but facts need to be faced. Therefore, however controversial it may be to say this, Luther has to be seen as one of the architects of the Nazi holocaust.

That illustrates how even a great man, as Luther was in many ways, can become dangerously mistaken, and end up as a false teacher, if he uses a misguided approach to interpreting the Bible. That's how serious this issue of interpretation is and why it is so crucial that we adopt the correct approach. It really does affect every part of our lives.

Doctrinal error 4 - Not accepting that the physical Land of Israel has been set aside and reserved by God for the Jewish people and that it is theirs forever.

God has given the *Land* of Israel to the Jewish people forever. That land is very important indeed. They will possess it during the Millennial Kingdom, and even during the Eternal Kingdom thereafter. It is not only God's promises to the Jewish people that are denied by replacement theology. It is also His promises concerning the *Land itself*.

Whether we like it or not (and why should we dislike it?) that land has been promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to their physical descendants, forever. The word 'forever' is not a complex, technical expression. Neither is it a symbol. It means forever. Given that God has spelled out His position so very clearly, who are we to disagree with it or deny it?

In particular, who are we to say that God has changed His mind or broken His promises concerning the Land? You might only really grasp how offensive this is to God if you think of yourself, if we extend our earlier example, spreading a false rumour that a local farmer has broken his promise to let his son inherit the family farm and is leaving it to you instead.

Imagine spreading that false rumour around a rural village. What would the farmer think of you? How then do you think God feels when we say the same false things about the Land of Israel? Many of us don't see the practical relevance or significance of this, or understand why it angers God when we deny that the Land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people.

However, consider what God says concerning the Gentile nations who will, one day, conspire together to divide up the Land of Israel. Before we look at this passage from the book of Joel, remember that at this very moment, many governments around the world are lobbying and also conspiring to try to force Israel to divide up their land.

The aim of the United Nations is to create what has become known as "*the two-state solution*". By that they mean creating a new Palestinian state, using a large part of Israel's own territory. Remember also that many of the people pushing for our governments to impose this, and criticizing Israel's reluctance to accept it, are churchgoers. Most are in the Roman Catholic church, and in liberal Anglican churches.

However, they are, increasingly, also in evangelical churches too. That is an extremely unwise stance for anybody to take. Look at what God says through the prophet Joel about those who seek to divide up the Land of Israel. Then reconsider whether you really wish to continue to be part of that group, if you are currently in it:

¹*“For behold, in those days and at that time,
When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,
²I will gather all the nations
And bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat.
Then I will enter into judgment with them there
On behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel,
Whom they have scattered among the nations;
And they have divided up My land.*

Joel 3:1-2 (NASB)

¹²*Let the nations be aroused
And come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat,
For there I will sit to judge
All the surrounding nations.*

Joel 3:12 (NASB)

¹⁹*Egypt will become a waste,
And Edom will become a desolate wilderness,
Because of the violence done to the sons of Judah,
In whose land they have shed innocent blood.
²⁰But Judah will be inhabited forever
And Jerusalem for all generations.
²¹And I will avenge their blood which I have not avenged,
For the LORD dwells in Zion.*

Joel 3:19-21 (NASB)

Joel chapter three is a frightening passage, and for two main reasons. Firstly it appears very clearly to refer to our own day, because it was Great Britain which, in the 1920s, first divided up the Land. They had been given responsibility for it by the League of Nations under what was called the "Mandate". However, instead of giving it to the Jews, as they had promised, the British Government bowed to Arab pressure.

Therefore they gave 78% of that land to create an Arab state, Transjordan, which we now call Jordan. The land used for creating Jordan was part of the Land of Israel, which Britain had indicated, by the Balfour Declaration in 1917, would be used to create a state for Jewish people to live in, not Arabs. The Arabs already had, and still have, an abundance of land which is *500 times larger* than the whole of Israel.

Tragically, that promise to the Jewish people was broken and I believe that that breach of trust led to God's fierce judgment coming on Great Britain, through the loss of the Empire in particular. That all happened within a couple of decades, after having kept the Empire intact for centuries. I am not asking you to approve of the Empire, but merely to recognise that its rapid dismantling, and the drastic reduction in British power and prestige, was a judgment from God upon Great Britain.

To make matters worse, the Western nations, supported by many misinformed and misguided churches and individual Christians, are now pushing to further divide even the small residue of land that Israel does have. They are trying to force them to give up part of what remains to create a new 'Palestinian' state. This is despite the fact that 99.8% of the land in the Middle East is already in Arab hands and only 0.2% is in Jewish hands.

While using them as a propaganda tool, no Arab nation is willing to offer citizenship, or even a temporary home, to any of the Palestinian refugees anywhere in the 99.8% of the Middle Eastern land that already belongs to the Arabs. Yet those so called 'Palestinians' are actually all Arabs.

They entered the Land of Israel, when it was called Palestine, in the early decades of the twentieth century. However, they were just immigrants from neighbouring Arab countries. They are not 'Palestinians' and most of them had not been in the Land for very long, contrary to what is claimed.

For example, even the late *Yasser Arafat*, the former leader of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, the PLO, was born and brought up in *Egypt*, not 'Palestine'. So, whilst condemning Israel for not wanting to allow the Palestinian Arabs to have any of the tiny area of Israeli land, the Arabs have never offered any of their own land to provide a home for them, even though they have a vastly larger amount of territory.

Saudi Arabia alone is larger than Germany and there are many other Arab nations too. Any one of them alone could accommodate all the Palestinian Arabs. If they all joined in and shared the burden together it would be very easy for the whole Arab world to find homes for all of the refugees, especially as many of those Arab nations are fabulously wealthy due to their oil.

The main reason why they don't is that it suits the Arab nations, politically, to keep these Arab refugees living in camps, so that they will continue to be a thorn in Israel's side. The world, meanwhile, is determined to further divide that 0.2% of land in the Middle East that is in Jewish hands and to take a large part of it away from Israel.

All of this is being done in direct defiance of what God has said about His promises to His people, Israel, and His plans for the Promised Land. Therefore, we can fully expect God's judgment, and a severe one at that, if we get involved in pressing for the further dividing up of the Land of Israel. Accordingly, we must not do it.

If we had a better understanding of what the Bible says, and did not mistakenly think that the Church has replaced Israel, and that the Land of Israel has no purpose or future, we would not be in this mess. As it is, the nations of the world are moving towards a head on collision with Almighty God over the issue of the Promised Land, which He swore He would give to Israel and to nobody else.

A friend of mine recently went to see the senior leader of an evangelical church which he attends. He had asked to see the leader to ask him about his views on the present role and purpose of Israel and the Jewish people. He asked these questions because he could see that the leader never spoke about Israel.

When pressed, the leader confirmed that he believes that the Church has replaced Israel and that there is now no purpose or place in God's plans either for the Land of Israel or the Jewish people. Both were irrelevant, as far as that leader could see. From the perspective of that leader, it would have been like asking him what his views were about God's plans for the land and people of Norway or Guatamala.

That is effectively how most people see Israel, i.e. as nothing special or unique and not at the centre of God's plans. Therefore it is unsurprising that such leaders spend little or no time thinking anything at all about Israel. It simply isn't on their agenda.

Those who believe in replacement theology do not usually realise that as well as dispensing with the Land of Israel and the Jewish people, they are also getting rid of Jesus' role as the Messiah of Israel. That was, and still is, one of His titles and roles. But, if there is no longer any Land or people of Israel, in which and over which He can be the Messiah, then He too has effectively been made redundant.

At the very least he has been stripped of one of His titles. So, coming back to the point, remember that these grievous errors about Israel and replacement theology would never have arisen were it not for the even deeper problem of the allegorical approach.

Doctrinal error 5 - Not accepting that there will be a literal man, whom the Bible calls "*the antichrist*" or "*the beast*", who will rule over the whole Earth just before Jesus returns.

As we have seen, if the antichrist really was the Emperor Nero, or the Roman Empire as a whole, and if he, or it, came and went in the first century, then none of this would need to trouble us today. It would all be irrelevant to us. That is one reason why most people today ignore the antichrist entirely, and have no understanding of what is coming.

They have no expectation of a real, literal man who will rule the whole world, as a grotesque substitute for Jesus Christ, and bring unprecedented wickedness, suffering and death in the seven year tribulation period. If a person is not a real Christian and is not taken to Heaven by Jesus in the rapture, but left behind, then they are unlikely to see through the deception of the antichrist that will follow when he rises to power after that rapture.

They will then be much more likely to become wrapped up in the one-world religion that the antichrist and his false prophet will establish. It is also more likely that people who don't understand the truth about the antichrist, or Israel, or God's plans for the Jewish people, will find themselves deceived into taking part in the antichrist's attempt to invade Israel and destroy the Jewish people.

We know that the armies of the world will join together to attack Israel in the Armageddon campaign. The Bible says so. The question is whether *you* are going to support that attack ,or even take part in it. Those who understand the Bible properly will not. However, those who do not understand it are likely to support it, to their great cost.