The following is an abbreviated selection of Benware's *Understanding End Times Prophesy: A Comprehensive Approach.* It has been excerpted as a review for those who've studied the whole chapters. Footnote numbers remain. To see references, refer to the original book.

Chapter 1: Interpreting Bible Prophecy (Excerpts)

1. PROPHECY WAS GIVEN BY GOD TO BE UNDERSTOOD.
The Lord has revealed prophetic truth so that we will be changed by it. This presupposes that truth can be understood

2. GOD HAS GIVEN US HELP IN UNDERSTANDING THE PROPHETIC WORD.
When we were born into the family of God, we were anointed by the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20, 27), and this anointing gives us the capacity to understand the truth of God. If that is true, then no Christian can legitimately say that Bible prophecy is unintelligible and the exclusive domain of a few scholars.

3. GOD HAS GIVEN TO US HIS SCRIPTURES.
As the apostle Peter put it, "We have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention" (2 Peter 1:19).

FOUR PRINCIPLES FOR PROPER INTERPRETATION

1. INTERPRET THE PROPHETIC PASSAGE LITERALLY.
 Of all the rules for interpreting prophecy, this is the most important. We interpret literally when we approach the words of a Scripture passage in the same basic way that we would any other literature or any ordinary conversation.

> The literal method of interpretation is that method that gives to each word the same exact basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage. ... It is called the grammatical-historical method to emphasize... that the meaning is to be determined by both grammatical and historical considerations.[1]

"To determine the normal and customary usages of Bible language," wrote Paul Tan, "it is necessary to consider the accepted rules of grammar and rhetoric, as well as the factual historical and cultural data of Bible times."[2]

Literal interpretation assumes that, since God wants His revelation understood by people, He based His revelatory communication on the normal rules of human communication.

Literal interpretation understands that in normal communication and in the Scriptures figures of speech are valuable as communication devices. Again, if I were to say to you, "I was sitting in the backyard the other evening, and there were millions of mosquitoes out there," you would immediately recognize "millions" as a figure of speech (in this case, a hyperbole).

It is essential, therefore, to have this literal mind-set as we approach the prophetic Word of God. Without it there is no reliable check on an interpretation, and the interpreter becomes the final authority. But when such spiritualizing or allegorizing takes place, the interpretation is no longer grounded in fact, and the text becomes putty in the hand of the interpreter. Our basic approach to God's prophetic Word, therefore, must be a literal one.

When John 1:28 tells us that John the Baptist was baptizing at the Jordan River, we have no interpretive problem. When the next verse records the statement that Jesus is the "Lamb of God," we have no interpretive problem with that either. We immediately recognize that the word lamb is used in a figurative way to communicate truth about the real man Jesus of Nazareth. When Isaiah prophesied that "a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit" (Isa. 11:1), we are dealing with figurative expressions of a literal person—Jesus Christ. "It will thus be observed that the literalist does not deny the existence of figurative language. The literalist does, however, deny that such figures must be interpreted so as to destroy the literal truth intended through the employment of the figures. Literal truth is to be learned through the symbols."[5]

Symbols are valuable tools of communication. Symbols communicate truth concisely, and they communicate it graphically. In Revelation 11 the apostle John could have spent a great deal of time describing the spiritual and moral condition of Jerusalem. Instead, he called the city "Sodom and Egypt." Quickly and vividly he communicated a volume of truth that remains graphically fixed in our minds. Symbols and figures of speech, then, represent something literal. It is the task of the interpreter to investigate this figurative language to discover what literal truth is there.

For example, in Revelation 2:10 the church at Smyrna is warned that they would have "tribulation [for] ten days." Does the "ten days" refer to a week and a half of intense trouble, or does it symbolize a brief period of time or perhaps ten periods of persecution? This church was literally headed for persecution, but whether or not the ten days is to be understood literally is a point of discussion among literalists. In Revelation 8:8, John says that one-third of the sea became blood as a result of a judgment from God. Does a part of the ocean actually become real blood?

But all literalists will likely be in agreement that this verse is telling us of some terrible judgment to come. So even if they did not agree on the lit-realness of the blood, they would not leave the literal approach and spiritualize this prophecy, seeing it as a picture of religious delusion coming on the world (Lenski) or the invasion of the Roman Empire by the Vandals (Barnes).7 These allegorical interpretations illustrate that, when the literal interpretation of prophecy is abandoned, there is a lessened accountability to the text itself.

Those (such as amillennialists) who resist this principle of literal interpretation adhere instead to the spiritualization of prophecy. A spiritual (or allegorical or mystical) approach treats the literal sense as secondary to a deeper, more spiritual meaning. Those who spiritualize prophecy work on the principle that these portions of the Bible have a hidden meaning. They assume that the literal approach obscures the real, deep meaning of the passage. It should be added that most objectivity in biblical interpretation is lost, since one allegorical interpretation is as valid as another.

A consistent literal approach, letting language be language, will avoid such an inconsistent and somewhat arbitrary approach to the Scriptures. This example highlights the inherent contradiction of using two different systems of interpretation. The first and great interpretive rule, then, is to interpret prophetic passages literally. "The literal system is necessary because of the nature of Scripture. First, Scripture is sufficiently clear in context to express what God promised to do. Second, Scripture is sufficiently complete in context to establish valid expectations of the future acts of God."9

2. INTERPRET BY COMPARING PROPHECY WITH PROPHECY.
The apostle Peter said that "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20). Peter's point includes the idea that no prophecy found in Scripture is to be interpreted by itself but, rather, in reference to everything God has said on the subject.

But an interpreter cannot disregard the statements of the Old Testament as if they are inferior to deeper, spiritual New Testament meanings. Passages such as Isaiah 2:2–4, which speak of a marvelous golden age to come on this present earth, must not be disregarded by means of spiritualization. Concerning the amillennial spiritualization of such Scriptures, one postmillennial writer observes that they leave "a whole continent of prophecies unexplained, many of which then become quite meaningless."10

3. INTERPRET IN LIGHT OF POSSIBLE TIME INTERVALS.
When the prophets proclaimed God's message, they frequently were unaware that there was going to be an interval of time between prophetic fulfillments. "In such passages, the sacred writer, as he foresaw these events in his day, viewed them in the distance of time like peaks of a mountain range, without realizing that valleys of time lay between them. This is true especially concerning events in the first and second advents of Christ."

Jesus Himself interpreted this passage in Luke 4:16–21, indicating that these words referred to His first-advent ministry. In fact, Jesus stopped His reading in the middle of a sentence and commented that those words were presently being fulfilled. This telescoping phenomenon is found a number of times in the prophets and reveals gaps in prophetic fulfillment.

4. INTERPRET FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE SCRIPTURALLY.

It is helpful to note three different interpretive categories of prophetic symbols: (1) the immediate context, (2) the larger context, and (3) the historical-cultural context.

First, we should consider the immediate context. Some symbols are interpreted in the text by the prophet himself. At other times an interpreting angel appears in the text to explain a particular symbol, or the Lord Himself reveals the meaning to the prophet. In Ezekiel's famous vision of the "dry bones," the Lord reveals that the dry bones represent the entire nation of Israel (Ezek. 37:11).

Second, we should consider the larger context. A second category of prophetic symbols involves those whose meaning is suggested by other Scriptures outside of the immediate text. A large number of symbols and figures of speech have been used in one place in the Bible, then used in another place by another writer. It is no surprise to find Daniel, for example, using a symbol found in Isaiah, who wrote more than a century earlier. New Testament writers had the symbolic wealth of the Old Testament to draw on, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the final author of the Old Testament, they employed many of these symbols. This is especially true of those symbols found in the New Testament book of Revelation where

> a count of the significant allusions which are traceable both by verbal resemblance and by contextual connection to the Hebrew canon number three hundred and forty-eight. Of these approximately ninety-five are repeated, so that the actual number of different Old Testament passages that are mentioned are nearly two hundred and fifty, or an average of more than ten for each chapter in Revelation.12

With statistics like that it becomes pretty clear that a knowledge of the Old Testament is essential to an understanding of the book of Revelation and crucial in keeping an interpreter from getting involved in prophetic speculation and excesses.

In Revelation 12:14, for example, the woman is given two wings of the great eagle to escape from the serpent. The chapter itself points to the woman representing the nation of Israel and the serpent being Satan. But what are the wings of the eagle? Does it mean that in the last days Israel will be rescued by an airlift? Probably not. The imagery of the eagle's wings is found in Exodus 19:4 and in Isaiah 40:28–31 and speaks of the care and deliverance of our powerful and loving God. Revelation 12:14 teaches that God will rescue His people in those last days just as He did at the time of the exodus out of Egypt.

The passage reveals what God is going to do but not how He is going to do it. Prophetic symbols, then, are not an invitation to let one's imagination run wild.

Third, we should consider the historical-cultural context. Some symbols are related to the historical-cultural times of the writer. Those symbols do not find meaning in other sections of Scripture but, rather, in the days of the writer himself. For example, the "white stone" found in Revelation 2:17 and the "pillar" in 3:12 come from the cultural context of John's day.

SOUND PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION

Without clear interpretive principles guiding us we will not arrive at clear interpretations.

Prophecies that have been fulfilled completely have been fulfilled literally, and that gives us confidence to expect that those prophetic utterances that are not yet fulfilled (or completely fulfilled) will also end up being fulfilled literally.

As we study the prophetic word we must do so with personal diligence and with a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit, the author and illuminator of the truth of God.

Benware, Paul. Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach (pp. 19-32). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

THE SEVEN STRONG ARGUMENTS FOR A PRETRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE

The seven lines of argument given in this chapter emerge out of a study of a number of key Scripture passages.

1. The distinction between the church and the nation of Israel
2. the stated purposes for the tribulation found in the Scriptures
3. the church's exemption from the future wrath of God
4. the concept of imminency are strong arguments for the rapture taking place before the final seven years of tribulation.

An analysis of the rapture and second coming passages reveals some striking differences between the two events—differences that make the pretribulational position a viable one.

These arguments, combined with

5. the need for some amount of time between the rapture and second coming because of three important events and
6. the lack of specific evidence for the church being in the time of tribulation, present a good case for the pretribulational rapture of the church.

SOME IMPLICATIONS OF A RAPTURE BEFORE THE TRIBULATION

In conclusion, three points of a practical nature ought to be highlighted.

First, the writers of the New Testament always discussed the rapture in the context of godly living. The truth of the rapture was to bring about changes in the way believers thought and lived. The truth of the Lord's return was to help Christians become more loving, diligent, generous, and righteous and less impacted by sin and by Satan's world system. In all of our theological discussion and analysis of the rapture (as important as these things are), the end result ought to be a movement toward greater godliness in our personal lives.

The **second** point is a reminder to pretribulationists that the rapture is a signless event; therefore, we are not to be looking for signs. The unwise practice of setting dates and the habit of finding fulfillment of prophecy in current events must cease. This has caused harm to many of God's people, cast suspicion on God's Word, and brought considerable embarrassment to the cause of Christ. To see certain events or situations as possibly setting the stage for the fulfillment of prophecies is legitimate, but to declare a particular event as a fulfillment of prophecy (without direct validation by Gabriel or some other heavenly messenger) is not legitimate. We must be careful and wise in how we view the events in our world and how we relate them to the inspired Word of God.

A **third** point relates to the charge by some opponents of the pretribulational rapture view that it breeds an escapist mentality as well as social irresponsibility. It is difficult to answer such a charge because it contains a mixture of truth and error. It is perhaps true that some have developed a "bunker mentality," withdrawing from life around them, hoping desperately for the rapture to come to remove them from all their troubles and pain. But that attitude certainly has not generally characterized pretribulational believers over the years who have served Christ and their fellow man effectively and faithfully. Nor was it the attitude of the writers of the New Testament, who saw the any-moment coming of the Lord as a strong incentive for action. This dynamic truth motivated them to reach out to others in a variety of ways. It enabled them to live vibrant and useful lives in spite of sufferings and pain. For example, the apostle Paul was possessed with a desire to see Christ and be part of the living at the rapture event, and yet his life was spent in "toil and labor" as he served Christ energetically.

The rapture ought to shape the attitude of believers today in similar ways. The any-moment return of our Lord should energize us to serve faithfully and enthusiastically because the Judge is right now standing at the door with His hand on the knob. Maranatha!

Benware, Paul. *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* (pp. 260-262). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.