Woodrow Kroll: Let me suggest to you some of the mistakes that people make when they read and interpret the Book of Revelation. I think that’s important because we don’t want to make these same mistakes. Well, the mistakes I notice people make is that people sometimes study Bible prophecy for the sole purpose of discovering some new thing, you know.

They can’t discover some old thing because well, that’s already been discovered. But they study Bible prophecy because they want a new interpretation. They want a new angle on things. They want to have a new understanding of who the Antichrist is, for example. And sometimes they have a whole new system of interpreting the Bible based on their understanding of a few verses in the Bible.

Let me suggest something to you. I want to read from Acts 17, just one verse. This is not the Book of Revelation. This is the account of Paul when he was in Athens. And he was dragged before the philosophers on the top of Mars Hill. Listen to this: It says in Acts 17: 21, “For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or hear some new thing.”

Now when they went to the Aeropagus, the top of this bald hill which is adjacent to the Acropolis in Athens, they went there because they wanted to talk about some new thing.

Now, the new always intrigues us, doesn’t it? We don’t want to think about the old. We want to think about what’s new. But Solomon said that there’s nothing new under the sun. And some people approach the Book of Revelation thinking that, I’ll be the first. There’s the thirst to be first. I’ll be the first to have a new interpretation of the book.

Or perhaps there’s the thrill of novelty. I’m going to take and set aside everything the history of the church has believed for 2,000 years, and I’ll strike out on a new path with a new interpretation.

Some people just fail to understand the body of truth that’s given to them. Remember Paul said to young Timothy, 2 Timothy 2:2. He said, “I want you to commit to faithful men and women the things that have been committed to you” (paraphrase).

Now, what Paul was encouraging Timothy to do was not to try to find something new. What he was encouraging him to do was pass on a body of truth from one generation to the next.

Here’s what I see as a problem in the 21st century. We are so enamored with what’s new, we haven’t learned yet what’s old. We haven’t passed on the body of truth from one generation to
And if you live by new interpretations, if you live by new insights, if you live by new concepts, that you and you alone have, you’re living on shaky ground.

Someone [Edgar R. Fiedler] has said that “He who lives by the crystal ball soon learns to eat ground glass.” If you’re just living by “crystal balling” the Book of Revelation without the benefit of the rest of Scripture, that’s a mistake that we don’t want to make here. We want to find out what the Bible has to say, that it has to say something in context with the rest of the book.

Now, the first mistake we don’t want to make then is we don’t want to approach the Book of Revelation just to discover something new.

There is another mistake I think some people make in their study of the Revelation; and that is, they come to conclusions about how to interpret the Book of Revelation. And then they use those conclusions as the basis for their fellowship among other Christians.

I want to tell you right now, many of you will not agree with some of the things I interpret in the Book of Revelation. But I hope you’ll cut me a little slack. And I’ll cut you a little slack, too, that we can disagree and still have fellowship in the Gospel.

So, let me encourage you not to make your understanding of the future a test for fellowship for people around you. I think the key to fellowship is always salvation. We can fellowship with others who express genuine faith in the Savior. And we can disagree with them.

You will disagree with some things I say. I will disagree with some of the propositions that you probably will make as well. But that’s a great thing about being a Christian. We don’t have to be ugly in the way we disagree with things.

Let me read a passage to you from 1 John. In fact, if you have a Bible and would like to follow along, I would encourage you to do that. 1 John 1 talks about the basis for our fellowship. It’s a mistake, I think, for us to base fellowship on anything other than faith.

Here’s what it says, 1 John 1:1. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—[Now, watch; he’s talking about eternal life here, not the understanding of the future.] that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:1-3).

Now, what’s the basis of their fellowship? That which they had heard that relates to eternal life. Skip down a couple of verses to verse 6, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:6-7).

So, again, every time you find this concept of “with whom should I have fellowship in the church,” the basis is not the minutia of our understanding of prophecy. The basis is always our understanding of faith.

We don’t want to make that mistake. And as we go through the Book of Revelation throughout the next several weeks, there will be issues that we cannot say with great clarity—in fact through the course of this week, I want to talk with you about two great ways to interpret the Book of Revelation. I’m going to choose one of those. Some of my friends may choose another. I disagree with them, but I still can have fellowship with them. Why? Because they are believ-
ers just like I am.

So, don't get sidetracked with things that don't relate to the truth. That's a mistake we dare not make. There are some people who get sidetracked on the Antichrist, and they miss the real thing. We want to find out who Jesus is in the Book of Revelation.

**Tami Weissert:** Wood, you said that we need to understand Revelation in context with the rest of the Bible. That sounds like a tall order, so what does that look like?

**WK:** Let's remember, Tami, that each author of the New Testament had a reason for writing what they did. The four Gospels are a record of the life, death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Then you have the Book of Acts and that's a history of the early church—how it began and how it developed. The epistles I think are more doctrinal in nature, less historical. They are designed to help us understand the theology behind the life and teachings of Jesus. And in that context, the Book of Revelation then gives us a peek into the future, the end of the church age. It focuses on what John calls “the things to come.”

**TW:** Now what about a brand new Christian or maybe somebody who's just not very familiar with their Bible. How soon should they tackle Revelation?

**WK:** I would suggest you don't try to figure out every little detail of the Book of Revelation regardless of when you begin to read it. Every person, even people who have been studying this Book for decades have trouble doing that. I think I'd aim for the big picture. I'd look to see what I can learn about Jesus in this book. And remember, this is not the Revelation of Saint John. This is God's revelation to Saint John about Jesus. So the book is all about Jesus and I think we should look to Him until we find Him.

Now, anytime you undertake something like the study of a book like Revelation that is apocalyptic in nature, it's open to varying interpretations. We have to make sure we apply the right principles of interpretation so that we come out with the right information; we get the right interpretation; we know what John meant when he wrote these things in the Book of Revelation.

Let me suggest to you five principles for studying Bible prophecy. Some of these things are just common sense things. They all come out of the Bible, but they are common sense things. And we want to make sure, as we study the Book of Revelation over the next several weeks, that we apply these principles in a way that makes sense and is faithful to the text of Scripture.

Principle number one is this: When you and I study Bible prophecy, we should never read the Bible through the newspaper.

In other words, don't let CNN interpret the Bible for you. There are lots of people who do that, you know. They have an understanding of Scripture, but they check the news today to find out whether that understanding is correct. And if the news changes, their interpretation of Scripture changes. That's the wrong way to go about understanding the future. So, don't let the newspaper color your understanding of the Bible.

One of the great things about the news is it changes every day. And if it doesn't support what you understand the Bible says one day, give it a day. It's going to support it eventually. But if you understand the Bible based on your understanding of what's happening in the world, if you interpret the Bible by thinking about what's going on in the world and thinking. Well, this must relate to that, you're going about it backwards in interpreting Scripture.

So, we're not going to read the Bible through the newspaper. We're going to read the newspaper through the Bible—principle number one.

Here's principle number two: Don't link the Bible to every cataclysmic event that occurs in history.
In other words, there have been a lot of people who have made predictions based on some natural disaster that occurred in the 1800s or the 1900s or in the 20th century. And we're doing the same thing in the 21st century.

Every time there is a natural disaster, like the earthquake in Haiti or the one in Chili, every time there is a hurricane like Katrina or the tsunami that hit Indonesia a few years ago, every time there is an oil spill, there are some people who get excited and they say, “Aha! There you go; we have to interpret the Bible a certain way based on this event.” That’s as bad as interpreting the Bible through the newspaper.

Now, look, Jesus said, “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilence, and earthquakes in various places.

“All these are the beginnings of sorrows.” That’s Matthew 24:6-8.

Now, if this is just the beginning of sorrow, then, I don't think we ought to see every natural disaster as indicative of the fact that God is now opening up the Pandora’s Box and the rest of the Book of Revelation is going to roll out of that natural disaster. The problem is, we've been doing that for generations. And it's a classic case of over-kill of enthusiasm.

Do earthquakes relate to Bible prophecy? Absolutely! Does every earthquake that ever occurs relate to Bible prophecy? I don't think so. So, one of the principles of interpreting Bible prophecy is not to link prophecy with every cataclysmic event that occurs in the world. We're going to try not to make that mistake as we study Revelation over the next several weeks.

Here's principle number three, I want you to keep in mind: Don't be afraid when you're thinking about Bible prophecy; don't be afraid to read those with whom you disagree.

You know, there are some folks who fall into one camp of interpretation, and they never read anybody in the other camp because, I think, they're afraid that, that might change their minds. Don't be afraid to read people with whom you disagree; but, on the other hand, don't accept their interpretation without a challenge from their equals.

You know, there are lots of folks who will raise challenges to the way I might interpret Scripture. And my job is not to say, “Oh, well, I can't answer that. Therefore there must not be an answer for that.” But that's not true. Because I can't answer it, doesn't mean someone can't answer it.

So, don't be afraid to read people who may disagree with you or with whom you may disagree. But don't automatically accept their interpretation simply because you don't have an answer for it. This is an issue that has been a part of the church since the day of Pentecost. We're not going to solve this issue in our understanding of Revelation in the next several weeks.

Now, two more principles I want us to follow.

Here's principle number four: Pay close attention to little things.

You know, the Bible is a big book. There are 66 books here. There are a lot of chapters in each of these books. There are a lot of words in each of these chapters. And sometimes we read over things that would help us in interpretation if we only paid attention to the little things. Let me give you a great example.

There's great controversy over how to interpret Matthew 24 and 25. That's one of the portions
of Scripture that divides Christians in their interpretation of the future. And here's a verse out of Matthew 24:

Verse 29 says this, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days." Now, let me stop there because, while those are words you and I would read right over because the next words are, "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken," we're so enamored with the sun being darkened and the moon being blotted out, we forget the obvious.

Now, what was the obvious in this verse? "Immediately after the tribulation of those days."

We can get some sense of timeline here by paying close attention to little things. When will the sun be darkened? When will the moon not give its light? It will happen immediately after the tribulation of those days.

Now, there are some people who get that backwards. They think the tribulation is coming at the end of all this or they think there is no tribulation at all.

So, if you don't pay attention to the little things in Scripture, you can fail to understand the Bible correctly. We're going to try to pay attention to little words as we study the Book of Revelation because that's, I think, where the great meaning of Scripture lies.

One last principle that we want to follow over the next several weeks, studying this book together and that is we need to keep place references in mind.

You know, when the Bible talks about a certain place, we need to make sure that we don't forget where that place is. Everything has to happen somewhere. And if it's happening in heaven, that doesn't necessarily mean it's happening here on earth.

Let me give you an example of that. I'm going to go to the Book of Revelation. Chapter 19, verse 11 says this, "Then I saw heaven opened." Automatically, my attention now is on a place. It's heaven. "And behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war."

If my understanding is correct, this is the Lord Jesus he's talking about here. But if my understanding is correct, He is also in heaven when it's talking about Him, Why? Well, because that's what it said. I want to keep place references in mind.

Now, it talks about Him coming out of heaven, the saints coming with Him and making war against the evil forces of this world. All of that relates to a time when Jesus is in heaven but comes to earth.

So, my understanding of the future has to square with what the Bible says are the place references. Jesus can't be doing things on earth if He is in heaven. And He isn't going to be doing things on earth while He is in heaven.

So, one of the things we have to do as we study the Book of Revelation is keep place references in mind. We will pay close attention to that because, I think, a lot of people go astray in their understanding of Scripture simply because they don't pay attention to the little things.

And grammar is important; words are important. They are the vehicles by which we communicate meaning. And if we want to understand the meaning of the Book of Revelation, we have to follow some principles that lead us to truth. That's our goal over the next several weeks, to follow the principles that lead us to the truth of the Book of Revelation.