

**The Principles and  
Practices of  
Bible Interpretation**

This Book Belongs to



# **The Principles and Practices of Bible Interpretation**

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# *The Principles and Practices of Biblical Interpretation*

## **Preface**

Much has been written on interpretation in recent years, some of which has been of much practical value, and some of which has been more of an academic exercise. Both are needed, but as a teacher I found my students needed more help in the practical areas. This booklet started as lecture outlines and notes on the practical development and application of hermeneutics, which I gradually expanded over the years.

I originally provided only an outline to my students, and more recently in abbreviated notes for students first at Fletcher Hills Bible College, and later for those at Southern California Bible College & Seminary (now Southern California Seminary). Its supplementary nature is not intended to replace standard texts on hermeneutics. It does not cover all areas found in those works, but deals with those of specific interest and needs supposed by the author.<sup>1</sup>

Also, this is not simply a work on hermeneutics, but a practical manual that incorporates some study methodology and assignments intended for my students. I have left them in, with the expectation that some may find them helpful, for to study interpretation without attempting to practice it can be like the road from Jericho to Jerusalem, dry, dusty, and winding.

While I have quoted some authors, I have not provided a bibliography in this presentation. The interested student is encouraged to consult standard works on hermeneutics.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, while I have dealt some with predictive prophecy, I have not provided a specific section on the various genre of biblical literature. There is nothing on apocalyptic form, nor on the interpretation of parables, nor on the poetic portions of Scripture. That material I reserved for graduate level classes that I taught where I could concentrate in more depth on the specific needs of those areas.

## *The Principles and Practices of Biblical Interpretation*

Like all students, I have had some excellent teachers who greatly influenced me in the interpretive process. Those who stand out are Charles Hauser, LaVerne Schafer, and Bernard Northrup. Without their kind and generous teaching I could not have continued my study of the Word, nor my later ministry.

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## 1. The Basics

Strictly speaking, hermeneutics is not the study of interpretation. It is not even the study of principles of interpretation, although it is often defined as such. Actually, it is the study of the *development* of principles of interpretation. Today, it is common to view hermeneutics more broadly than previously, and the first two definitions are generally accepted.

The development of rules of interpretation is sorely needed. The Bible student needs to have a well-grounded and firmly held system of hermeneutics. While it is not possible for each student to develop his own system, he should have a system that he has thoroughly considered and tested. Is it tautological to say that the student can only apply what he understands?

Logically, the study of hermeneutics should precede Bible study.

This work, therefore, consists of the consideration and practical application of principles of interpretation which have been developed and used by many successful students of the Word of God.

### What is Hermeneutics?

Since technically hermeneutics is the development of principles prior to the act of interpreting the Bible, the study of hermeneutics should precede the study of the Bible, though in practice this is rarely the case. Many, if not most, who study the Bible have not first developed basic hermeneutics. This is not as dire as it sounds, since the normal approach to spoken language will carry the student a long way in interpreting Scripture.<sup>1</sup> However, it behooves the student to codify those principles into a formal set of statements to apply regularly and not haphazardly. It will also help the student to have an adequate definition of the Bible.

### A Definition of the Bible

The Bible is the successful attempt by God to communicate the truths which He intended men to know through the medium of human language expressed in written form. This was done originally in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages in the Old Testament, and by the Greek language in the New Testament.

As a communication of truth, and because of its divine origin, the Bible expresses God's viewpoint perfectly and without error.<sup>2</sup> Since God intended men to know certain things, it follows that the Bible is a book that contains language that is comprehensible by men. And because it was written in human language, the Bible is understandable by the application of the rules of interpretation that govern any communication in human language.<sup>3</sup>

Confronted by a certain lawyer who desired to know something of religious import, Jesus Christ parried with a twofold question of His own at first: "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" (Luke 10:26). By so doing our Lord intimated several basic principles. First, God has spoken and that in the Bible, wherein lies an answer for all spiritual queries. Second, the Bible can be understood by man. Third, man is responsible for knowing what the Bible tells him. - John Henry Bennetch

This last statement is not meant to cast doubt on the Bible as the Word of God. We do *not* say that the Bible is just like any other book regarding its source, content, purpose or nature. However, we *do* say that is just like any other book regarding the communicative processes of human language. Since God desires us to understand the Bible, He used

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the normal grammar and word meaning of human languages in communicating His message, ancient though those languages are.

Therefore, believers should use the same methods of interpretation with the Bible that one would use with any communication written in human language. While the Bible is special from the point of view of its origin and nature, it is decidedly normal in its use of grammar (accidence and syntax) and word meaning. Certainly, there are special uses of words and phrases that are peculiar to the Bible, especially in figures of speech. But these are not the norm. Normally, the authors used terms with the meaning current *during the time in which they wrote*.<sup>4</sup>

The entire Bible was written in human language for human understanding. The individual Christian has the responsibility of studying the Bible using all the common methods of interpretation at his disposal.

### **The Relationship of Hermeneutics to Other Disciplines**

As previously stated, the study of hermeneutics logically precedes the study of the Bible. One should have developed the methods of interpretation and how to use them before beginning to study the Bible itself. In practice, however, people undertake Bible study with no thought as to the correct procedures to use in coming to correct conclusions. The danger of this procedure is that the student may approach the text of Scripture with preconceived ideas based on the teaching of others. Such an approach is nothing more than hearsay, and should be avoided.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Exegesis and Eisegesis***

The study of the text of the Bible in its original languages is called *exegesis*. Exegesis comes from the idea of taking meaning out of the text. (The Greek preposition *ek*, which forms the first syllable of the word *exegesis*, means “out of as to source.”) The consistent application of correct principles of hermeneutics tend to produce accurate *exegesis*, and not *eisegesis*, as is so often the case when no thought to hermeneutics is given to the process of determining meaning. (*Eisegesis* means to put meaning into the text rather than taking the meaning from the text. The Greek preposition *eis* means “into.”) By correctly applying the various principles of interpretation, we guard ourselves from reading our own bias into the text of Scripture.

### **Methods of Bible Study**

While a detailed discussion of Bible study methods is beyond the scope of this study, it is necessary to examine briefly the three basic methods in general use, for this work will deal with the application as well as the development of the principles of interpretation. These are the synthetic method, the analytical method, and the theological (categorical) method.

#### ***The Synthetic Method***

The synthetic method, sometimes called Bible survey, approaches the various books of the Bible as complete units. Using this method the student attempts to gain insight to such elements as the author’s purpose, theme, and broad outline, as induced from the book. When doing synthesis, the student looks for key words and phrases, relationships between parts of the book and the purpose and theme of the author.

Synthetic Bible study means studying the Bible books as complete units. It is contrasted with <i>analysis</i> , which looks at the individual parts of each book.
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The general method for synthesis is reading. The student reads the entire book carefully several times, preferably in different versions and in the original language. Using the synthetic method, the student observes the general flow of the book, but does not attempt the interpretation of individual verses. Through repeated readings, the student will gain the general context of each sentence, paragraph and section of a book of the Bible.

Historical, geographical, cultural and background study are also part of the synthetic approach. The student often observes such material when reading, and will desire to have access to Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, as well as works on Bible history, Biblical archaeology, geography and manners and customs. Bible introduction, with its discussion of authorship, date of writing, structure, etc., is part of the synthetic method as well.<sup>6</sup>

### ***The Analytical Method***

The analytical method is distinguished from the synthetic method by its attention to detail. When analyzing a book, the book is “taken apart” by the student, and each individual part is studied separately. This is sometimes called the “verse-by-verse” method, but it would be better called the “sentence-by-sentence” method, since the sentence is the basic unit of thought. This method consists of looking at the individual sentences that make up a paragraph. Grammatical analysis and word study are part of the analytical method.

### ***The Theological Method***

The theological method is sometimes called the doctrinal or categorical method. The student examines the various statements of the Word of God and categorizes them according to subject matter. This may be done as the student studies a particular book, or it may be done topically, that is by choosing a subject and finding *all* the Scriptural statements concerning it.

One note of caution. When approaching a subject topically, the student should be thoroughly grounded in the general approach to each book of the Bible. In other words, the student should have done at least a thorough synthesis of each book, and if possible he should have completed a sentence-by-sentence analysis of each book. Since this is not always practical, it is suggested that the student undertake a thorough contextual analysis of any sentences or verses that are studied when dealing with a theological topic. This will cause the student to avoid the tendency of taking passages out of their immediate context for the purpose of proving a previously held theological position.

The theological method uses all the activities mentioned in the first two methods. Biblical background study, such as the student employed in the synthetic method, and grammatical study, which the student used in the analytical method, are necessary to a consistent theological use of the Bible.

The following list of theological categories is provided as an aid to the student:

1. Bibliology (The Doctrine of the Bible)
2. Theology Proper (The Doctrine of God, including the Trinity)
3. Christology (The Doctrine of Christ)
4. Pneumatology (The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit)
5. Angelology (The Doctrine of Angels and Spirit Beings)<sup>7</sup>
6. Anthropology (The Doctrine of Man)
7. Hamartiology (The Doctrine of Sin)<sup>8</sup>
8. Soteriology (The Doctrine of Salvation)

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9. Ecclesiology (The Doctrine of the Church)
10. Eschatology (The Doctrine of Last Things)

### The Major Hermeneutical Principles

#### *The Rule of Context*

The Rule of Context is basic to the study of hermeneutics for three reasons:

1. It is very easy to interpret a passage without adequately viewing its context.
2. Study of the context provides insight into the development of the author's topic, which helps the interpreter in avoiding hasty conclusions.
3. Many, if not the majority, of interpretive problems are helped or solved by applying the rule of context.

#### *The Multi-Faceted Context*

The *immediate literary context* consists of the sentences and paragraphs directly preceding and following the statement being studied.

Through synthetic study, the student comes to understand the broader *book context*, that is, the general approach that is taken in the book in which the statement is found. The student notes the genre of the work, whether it is an epistle, a treatise, a history, a book of poetry, etc.

The *historical, or temporal context*, deals with the various historical, cultural and background elements that could have affected the author's statement. This includes geographical questions that arise during reading. Technically, the study of the original languages is part of the historical context.

The *scriptural context* relates the meaning of a statement to the entire Bible. This is particularly valuable when dealing with those passages where a progression of revealed material is evident.

#### *A Contextual Method*

As a check on one's contextual understanding, the interpreter should be able to answer some simple questions. Here are eight *preliminary* questions that the student should ask in helping to keep the multi-faceted context in mind.

1. Who is writing? What do I know about the human author and his background. Sometimes it is impossible to identify the writer. In that case, what can I infer about the author from the internal evidence of the document I'm studying?
2. To whom is the writer writing, and what do I know about the recipient or recipients of the document when it was originally written?
3. Who is speaking? What do I know about the speaker of a particular statement? This is not the same as number one above. In John's gospel, John is the writer, and Gentile Christians (the Ephesians, most likely) are the original readers. However, within the book Jesus speaks, Nicodemus speaks, the woman at the well speaks,

#### *The Golden Rule of Interpretation*

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise. - David L. Cooper

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etc. Therefore, the original Gentile readers must interpret, using normal rules of interpretation, the meaning of those being quoted from the original listeners' perspectives.

4. To whom is the speaker speaking? What do I know about the original recipients of the statement in the book? See number 3 above. A variety of recipients received Christ's communication in the Gospel of Matthew, for instance. Pharisees would have carried a different background and set of assumptions than Sadducees (the priests were generally Sadducees), and one must take that into consideration when one reads the relevant passages.
5. To whom or what do each of the pronouns in the context refer? State carefully to whom the words *I, you, he, she, it, we, they, them*, and other related pronouns refer. And do so every single time! Not only will this aid in interpretation, but the subsequent application of the message will be easier to determine.
6. About whom or what is the speaker speaking? What is the subject under discussion in the immediate context? How does this subject relate to the overall purpose for the writing of the Gospel, epistle, etc.?
7. When is the speaker speaking? That is, what temporal circumstances might affect the meaning of the speaker's statement? A broad background in the history of both Testaments is vital, and the placements of events in relation to the act of communication will facilitate accurate interpretation. For more information on this vital topic, see Chapter 5, "The Importance of History in Interpretation."
8. Is this statement quoted elsewhere in the Scriptures? Is this a quote from another author of Scripture? If so, what did the original author mean, and how is the current author using this information? (Elsewhere in this presentation the student will find a discussion of the various ways an author uses quoted material.)

### ***The Meaning of Literal Interpretation***

Some have objected to the term "literal interpretation" based on a misunderstanding of what the word *literal* means. Many assume that the opposite of literal is figurative. This is unfortunate, as the opposite of literal is non-literal. Literal interpretation does not mean that the student of Scripture overlooks figurative language. In fact, a thorough knowledge of figures of speech is vital to literal interpretation. (See Chapter Seven, "Figurative Language and Symbols.")

Literal interpretation means "normal interpretation" as opposed to "abnormal interpretation." The interpreter must not give words, phrases and sentences meanings which are not intended by the author, nor clearly understood by the readers. If, for example, the word temple is used in a context we are to discover what the author meant by the word, and to use his meaning in our understanding of the passages that use the word. We may not read church for temple as some have done in Old Testament passages referring to the future temple. Nor may we read back into the Old Testament New Testament concepts. The words of the New Testament are not necessarily dependent<sup>9</sup> on Old Testament ideas. Likewise, we are not to bring Old Testament concepts into the New Testament unless the Scripture itself clearly does.

Furthermore, the word temple is sometimes used as a figure of speech, and must be understood as such in certain contexts. See 1 Corinthians 6:19, for example. Literal interpretation includes the normal meaning of figures of speech, where the individual words in the figure lose their literal meaning, but the figure itself, as a whole, has a normal or literal meaning as intended by the author and understood by the original recipients.

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### ***The Application of Literal Interpretation***

Normal interpretation can only be made based on one simple fact. The human author, under the bearing-along ministry of the Holy Spirit,<sup>10</sup> desired for his readers to understand what he was writing. It is necessary for modern day readers to put themselves in the position of the original readers. One must, as much as possible, comprehend certain facts about those original readers, such as the language they used, and the cultural and historical background that they shared. The careful interpreter will not read modern word meanings, grammatical emphases, nor cultural understanding back into the text. Always interpret from the point of view of the original readers.

#### ***Exercise 1.1***

Psalm 2:8 is often taken as a promise for missionary effort. However, is this interpretation the intention of the human and divine authors of the passage? On a separate sheet of paper answer the eight questions of context about this passage. List each of the eight questions and provide a brief answer. After you have done so, answer the following question: Does Psalm 2:8 promise that if a missionary goes to a certain mission field that the heathen will be converted? Why, or why not? (After reading this work, do this exercise again, and see if you interpret and apply this passage the same way.)

#### ***Exercise 1.2***

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper:

1. Of what is hermeneutics the study?
2. Give the definition of the Bible as presented in the text.
3. Explain the relationship of hermeneutics to Bible study and to exegesis.
4. Summarize in your own words the three methods of Bible study.
5. Briefly describe each element of the “multifaceted context.”
6. Summarize the validity of literal interpretation.
7. What is “The Golden Rule of Interpretation?”
8. Explain the point of view that is to be used in the application of literal interpretation?

#### ***Exercise 1.3***

Choose a New Testament paragraph and answer concerning it the eight questions previously given which are designed to help study the context.

Do not choose a narrative passage for this exercise. The passage you choose should be a teaching passage from one of the epistles, or a paragraph in the gospels or Acts in which teaching occurs. For example, you may choose a paragraph from the Olivet Discourse, the Upper Room Discourse, or the Sermon on the Mount. Or you may choose a paragraph from one the Epistles of Paul, John, or Peter. Do not choose a passage from Hebrews or the Revelation, and James is not recommended. These books require some advanced understanding of interpretive information to correctly exegete.

## *Endnotes*

- 1 If it is applied! This is sometimes called common sense interpretation, though it is often ignored. The tendency to follow along with popular meanings, often taken out of context, and with no attempt to actually apply common sense to the Word of God has allowed some interpretations, wrongly considered and accepted, to become the norm among many. It results in an assumption based belief system, rather than a Bible based system.
- 2 Conservative scholars usually indicate that the original writings alone were inspired and therefore infallible. While this is undoubtedly true, the current editions of the Bible in its original tongue are quite reliable, with a relatively few textual problems with which one needs to be concerned. It is beyond the scope of this small booklet to deal with textual criticism, though much work has been done in the area by conservatives, with the result that the majority text as currently produced appears to be quite reliable.
- 3 This is not to say that there are no problems in interpretation, or even that grammatical and contextual understanding is automatic when one reads the Bible in its original languages. Any one who has studied the Bible consistently in those languages quickly becomes disabused of that fallacy. But such study is the best approach to understanding the text, and the kinds of problems which one encounters rarely, if ever, causes great doctrinal consternation.
- 4 One mistake that takes place is the interpretation of the Bible as a translated document. By this the author means that one cannot determine the meanings of words and grammatical structures from, say, modern English. Rarely, if ever, do translated words carry exactly the same meaning or nuances as their original language counterparts. The author remembers being taught as a youngster that the word *redemption* means “to buy again,” taken from the meaning of a prefixed “re” in that English word. However, the original Greek word has nothing to do with purchasing again, and it is a great mistake to take that English meaning and apply it to the doctrine of redemption in Scripture.
- 5 This is not to denigrate Bible teachers! The author is himself one. But no human teacher is infallible, and should only act as a guide, not as an authoritative source. The author regularly encourages his students with the following: “If you believe what I say just because I say it, even if I’m right, you’re wrong. I am not the authority. Scripture is the authority, correctly interpreted and correctly applied.”
- 6 Knowledge of who wrote a particular book and when it was written can be a great help in one’s understanding of Scripture. However, determining the author, for instance, is not always possible, especially in the Hebrew/Aramaic Bible. But even there, authors are often presented, many times at the beginning of the writing, though in some cases, little is known about those individuals (Malachi, for example). In the Greek New Testament, however, authors are usually known, and much has been written about them in works on biblical backgrounds. Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias are very helpful in this area of study.
- 7 This area of theology is wrongly named. The assumption that angels are the larger category of spirit beings is incorrect. Other words, such as *cherubim* and *seraphim* are independent categories. Perhaps the category should be named “Spiritbeingology.” (That’s a joke, folks, though my friends and I have often played around with other constructions from the Greek, such as pneumaontology, which means the same thing as spiritbeingology, only sounds more scholarly. Careful, though! Theologians are not supposed ever to be frivolous, lest someone accuse us of having a sense of humor!) The careful student will not assume that categories of spirit beings are kinds of angels unless Scripture explicitly states that to be the case. The *assumption* that a particular word comprehends and includes other words is a great danger. This has taken place throughout interpretive history, and should be avoided.
- 8 Here is another wrongly named category. The Greek word *hamartia* (sin) lends its name to a category of which it is actually a sub-doctrine. The broader word is *adikia* (unrighteousness), so my aforementioned friends and I have often called this category Adikiology. For some reason that name never caught on (I can’t imagine why), and so the category remains Hamartiology.
- 9 Take care here. New Testament doctrinal words often *do* relate in meaning directly back to Old Testament word equivalents. However, it is unwise to assume that a word which is found in both testaments means precisely the same thing each time. Contextual considerations must rule here. Sometimes Old Testament words occur, even in quotations, for something other than bringing their meaning forward to the New Testament context. See the presentation on Old Testament quotes in the New Testament found in the appendix to this work.
- 10 1 Peter 1:21 states, “For not by the will of man was *a* prophecy ever born along, but holy men of God spoke, being born along by the Holy Spirit.”





## 2. *The Interpreter of Scripture*

The interpreter of Scripture must be qualified in two general areas. He must be qualified spiritually and he must be qualified academically.

Spiritual qualifications are necessary because the Bible was written for believers. If one would be able to accurately apply Scripture to practical situations in life, a relationship with the triune God of the universe must be a reality. While unbelievers do interpret Scripture accurately, there is no life-changing application that can be made from their interpretive efforts. One reason for this is that they often reject the supernatural element in Scripture, and reject its source as being from God.

However, it is not sufficient to be a sincere believer who desires to know the truth of God's Word. One must be diligent in one's pursuit of an adequate educational background for biblical studies. This background may be obtained either through formal schooling, or through individual initiative, but it must be gained.

### **The Spiritual Requirements for the Biblical Interpreter**

#### *The Unbelieving Interpreter*

Truly, a person who is unsaved may understand the facts of the Bible. He may have all the academic background required to develop a thorough system of theology to accurately exegete Scripture and to prepare sermons and lesson outlines. Unsaved people can, and do, accurately interpret the Bible.

The reason for this is simple. The Bible, contrary to the belief of many sincere Christians, is not a mystical book. One does not need to become a member of a select organization to understand what the Bible is saying. The pages of Scripture are open to anyone, believer or unbeliever, who would approach the Word of God honestly.

However, the unbeliever brings a set of biases to the interpretive method. Often the historical/ critical methodology, which he assumes to be true, colors his conclusions. Furthermore, by definition, he will tend to discount the supernatural events that are expressed historical passages. Sometimes he may attempt to give such events a naturalistic explanation.

But sometimes even believers have a problem with supernatural events, and tend to interpret them as though they were unbelievers. Sometimes a believing interpreter will espouse "secondary cause" for supernatural events. Some have attempted to show natural ways in which the crossing of the Red Sea could be accomplished, for example. Perhaps a volcano exploded in the Mediterranean area, causing the Red Sea to retreat subsequent to a tidal wave. This reduces the supernatural explanation to nothing more than "God's timing."

Why do believers make such suggestions? Perhaps it's to appear more "scholarly" to the unbelieving world. Perhaps they think such explanations cause their audience to feel more comfortable. Indeed, one such author, who held almost exclusively to secondary causes in the miracles of the Old Testament, said to the author of this work that God always worked according to secondary causes as a way of emphasizing the supernatural character of "true miracles." When asked what made up a "true miracle," he responded, "Whatever cannot be explained by secondary causes."

There is a twofold reason revealed in Scripture why anyone who would expound the Word of God must enjoy the benefits of the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. The first is that the Holy Spirit alone *knows* the things of God. The second is that the Holy Spirit alone can *teach* the things of God. - Merrill F. Unger

## 2. *The Interpreter of Scripture*

The believing interpreter should not express meanings about the events in the text of Scripture apart from the propositions given in those texts. Correct interpretation takes the propositional statements of Scripture at face value. Read Exodus 14:21-30 and realize that the Bible teaches that Yahweh Himself parted the waters of the Red Sea. No secondary cause is stated by the author.

### *The Believing Interpreter*

Only the believer can adequately apply the truth of Scripture to life situations. God enlightens only understanding of the believer (Ephesians 1:18). Only the believer “by reason of use” can mature and grow through the correct understanding and application of Scripture (Hebrews 5:13-14).

While an unbeliever may know as much (or more) *about* the Bible than a believer, he can apply none of it to his own spiritual need, with the exception of the gospel of salvation which the unbeliever must know to become a Christian.

The Bible for the believer is profitable because he has a spiritual relationship to God. But this does not free him from his academic responsibilities when it comes time to interpret the Word of God.

### *The Ultimate Goal of the Believing Interpreter*

The ultimate goal of the interpreter is to understand and apply the truth of Scripture accurately. This includes the correct consideration of what not to apply to oneself, but to others, or even to no one. Later we will discuss the application of Scripture in more detail. But at this point, let us make a simple, yet often unobserved distinction.

The interpretation of Scripture is different than the application of Scripture. The correct order is interpretation followed by application. Interpretation is primarily an academic activity.<sup>1</sup> It requires some academic background, and a willingness to spend time using the tools of academic research. However, interpretation is not an end in itself. If interpretation is not followed by correct application, interpretation becomes a dry, dusty, and even moribund activity.

On the other hand, application must not precede, but must follow interpretation. Many sincere Christians, eager to gain spiritual benefit, jump to interpretive conclusions so that they can apply a passage of Scripture to themselves (or others). Without taking the time to interpret accurately, misapplication is bound to occur. The real meaning of the text is lost in the rush to use presumptive interpretation. Once this happens, correct interpretation is often difficult, as it seems to contradict the individual’s application experience.

Because an individual has an experience based on a misinterpreted passage of Scripture does not make his experience or his interpretation correct. It is the spiritual requirement of the sincere believer that he gauge the validity of his experience by a correct interpretation of Scripture, not the other way around. To gauge the validity of Scripture by one’s experience is a rejection of the communicative act of God.

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and bad.*

Hebrews 5:12-14

## 2. *The Interpreter of Scripture*

### *The Spiritual Qualities of the Biblical Interpreter*

Spiritual qualifications are essential to the one who would interpret the Word of God. Comprehension of the Word can only be realized through God's enlightenment of "the eyes of the heart."<sup>2</sup>

Intellectual brilliance is no substitute for the spirituality of the believer. Reliance upon the intellect, without dependence on the God leads to spiritual stagnation. Consequently, there are four specific requirements that must be met before reliability in the interpretation of Scripture can be assured.

#### 1. The Interpreter of Scripture Must be Saved.

The unsaved man is designated a "natural" man in 1 Corinthians 2:14. The word "natural" is a translation of the Greek word *pseuchikos*, which could be translated *soulish*. It is contrasted with the Greek word *pneumatikos*, translated *spiritual*. Thus we see the two basic designations of men in this passage, the saved and the unsaved.

In his unsaved condition the natural man is unable to understand (*distinguish*) the things of the Spirit of God. In the context of 1 Corinthians 2, the "things of the Spirit of God" refer to the deep things that have been transmitted from the mind of God to the mind of the human authors of Scripture through the process of revelation and inscripturation. (See verses 9-13.)

The Holy Spirit Himself must be the teacher of the Word of God. Without the indwelling of the Spirit of God in the life of the interpreter, spiritual things are foolishness. The reason for this is clear. No one other than the Holy Spirit knows the things of God. Without the divine tutor ultimate spiritual understanding of Scripture is impossible. At the most the unbeliever can understand the bare facts of Scripture, but the natural man is incapable of having an experiential relationship with God through the study of His Word.

An unbeliever can accurately interpret Scripture. But he will often have a bias against the truth, and attempt to "interpret around" difficulties. The rejection of the miraculous sometimes leads to natural arguments against such things as miracles. Oh, the unbeliever may grant that the original author and readers believed in miracles. But they were wrong, and the facts of miraculous events must be explained differently. The believer, on the other hand, is predisposed to accept the supernatural events of biblical history, and is not as likely to attempt to reinterpret those events in a naturalistic way.

#### 2. The Interpreter of Scripture must be Spirit Controlled.

Spiritual wisdom is dependent on Spirit-filling (Ephesians 5:17-18). The filling of the Spirit is contrasted with being drunk in this passage. A drunk man is controlled by his drink, just as the spiritual man is controlled by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:15-3:3 distinguishes between two kinds of believers. In 3:1, Paul states "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal." The word carnal is the Greek word *sarchikos*, which could be translated *fleshly*. Every Christian is either carnal or spiritual. There is no in-between.

In this passage Paul addresses Christian brethren who were unable to understand the teaching of the Word of God. They were carnal, that is they were not controlled by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), and therefore were unable to discern spiritual truth.

Paul seems to be saying that the believer in a carnal state is in a similar state to the unbeliever who cannot discern the things of the Spirit of God (2:14). Sometimes carnal believers become disinterested in Scripture, as their manner of living would be affected by a correct understanding of the biblical text. Such seems to have been the condition of some in Corinth who were described with the word babes.

## 2. *The Interpreter of Scripture*

### 3. The Interpreter of Scripture Must be in Regular Communication with God.

Without a constant walk with God which is evidenced by a strong communication life, the interpreter of Scripture will be lacking in that drive and desire to understand and apply the truth of God's Word. The Apostle Paul prays that the believers in Ephesus would have enlightenment so that they "might know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe...." He is referring to truths as revealed in Scripture. Spiritual discernment is not possible without spiritual enlightenment.

It is no accident that this great doctrine is taught as part of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. Let each serious student of the Word be constant in seeking God's ministry of enlightenment as he approaches God's communication to His people.

Furthermore, the correct understanding and application of truths concerning supplication, intercession and thanksgiving will cause the believer to maintain a correct attitude toward God's work in his life (1 Timothy 2:1-2).<sup>3</sup>

### 4. The Interpreter of Scripture Must be a Student and Practitioner of Scripture.

Spiritual maturity is directly related to the intake of "the word of righteousness" (Hebrews 5:13). The Hebrews had become "dull of hearing." That is, they were unable to understand the truth of God as given to them. They were babes and not "of full age." They were still partaking only of milk and not of solid food, much like the Corinthians.

The word translated exercised in Hebrews 5:14 is the word from which we get the English word *gymnasium*. It refers to constant use of the information gained. An individual who has intellectual skill in the word of God, but who does not exercise what he knows, is designated a babe.

Spiritual growth, then, is dependent on being constantly in the Word of God for the purpose of practicing the applicable truth that is learned. No amount of intellectual ability will substitute for spiritual activity based on correct understanding of Scripture.

## **The Academic Requirements for the Biblical Interpreter**

God has entrusted man with a mental capacity far beyond that of the animals. He has given man the ability to think abstractly, as well as concretely. God has enabled man to develop his mental abilities and to gain skills in technical areas. One of these areas for the believer is the interpretation of the Bible.

The three areas in which study should be undertaken by the student of the Bible are theology, language comprehension, and Biblical backgrounds.

### *Theological Awareness*

A theological awareness<sup>4</sup> is necessary for the interpreter of Scripture. He must be able to correlate data, and to systematize logically. He must make his system of theology internally consistent so that there are no obvious logical errors or paradoxes.

As one studies the Bible he should keep before him the categories of theology as previously given in this work. He must begin to develop a thorough theological system, not neglecting the more mundane areas of doctrine. Such areas as the nature of man and the hypostatic union of Christ are just as biblically important as the Christian life and the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The student should also develop a knowledge of theological terminology. Such terms as trinity, decree, millennialism, inspiration, and others are vital to one's communication of the various areas of doctrine. While some of these terms are not found in Scripture, they are helpful in categorizing the Word of God. But they must be filled with biblical content, not the suppositions of the human mind.

## 2. *The Interpreter of Scripture*

### *Language Comprehension*

Bible interpretation is based on language comprehension. Since God communicated to man using human language, it is fallacious to approach the Bible without some background in human language and grammar.

#### 1. **A Good Understanding of One's Native Language is Essential.**

The grammatical background one brings to the study of the Biblical text will, to a certain extent, determine his ability to understand and communicate the truth of the Word of God. If an English speaker's grammar is deficient, steps should be taken to remedy the situation before entering a serious study of Scripture.

The English speaking interpreter of Scripture must have an adequate understanding of such areas of English grammar as the parts of speech and their functions, the parts of a sentence, and independent and dependent clauses. If one would be able to study the Bible independently, a good English course on grammar would be very helpful.

Also, the student of English should have on hand a good grammar book. *Macmillan's Handbook of English*, the *Warner's English Series, Fifth Course* or the *Harbrace College Handbook* will answer most questions of grammar that the student might have.<sup>5</sup>

#### 2. **A Comprehension of Biblical Languages is Extremely Helpful.**

One's ability to interpret the Word of God *independently* is directly related to his ability to use the Biblical languages. The serious student is encouraged to take at least two years of *Koine* Greek for his study of the New Testament, and at least one year of Classical Hebrew for Old Testament studies.<sup>6</sup>

One professor of Biblical languages put it this way, "The only people who say that Greek and Hebrew are not necessary are those who have either no understanding or an inadequate understanding of those languages, and how to use them in interpretation." For the individual who is unable to take courses in the languages of the Bible, many helps exist which can free the student from exclusive dependence on English sources. The *concordances* by Young and Strong, *Greek word studies* by Wuest, Vincent and Vine, and the various *interlinear Bibles* are of great help.<sup>7</sup> Several helpful computer programs are available, some free of charge. At the very least, the student should memorize the Greek and Hebrew alphabets so as to be able to use Greek-English and Hebrew-English lexicons which alphabetize words in those biblical languages.

#### 3. **The Full-Time Bible Teacher *Must* Have Biblical Languages.**

Here we make no apology. There is no substitute for a thorough knowledge of Biblical languages. Bible teachers owe it to their students to be grounded in the languages of the Word. Today, there is no excuse for the main teacher in a local church to be lacking in this area. God chose the languages of the Bible for a reason. It is not by accident that Hebrew and Greek were determined by God to convey His message to mankind.

As the student of Biblical languages quickly learns, only a study of the syntax of those languages can adequately prepare him to expound God's Word with precisely the same meaning and emphasis in-

The accurate interpretation of any literary production, whether sacred or secular, depends upon an understanding of the original language in which it was written, and the Bible is no exception. In fact, by the nature of its inspiration in which each and every word of its text is inspired in a manner distinct from any other piece of literature, the comprehension of the original is of special significance. - Merrill Unger

## ***2. The Interpreter of Scripture***

tended by the divine author. Word studies are helpful, but the study of accident and syntax is essential to such an undertaking.

### **Accidence**

Accidence is the study of the *forms of words* in a language. Both Greek and Hebrew are highly inflected languages; that is, their words change form by adding prefixes, suffixes, and changes in spelling depending on what the word is doing in a sentence. Greek accidence is somewhat more complex than Hebrew accidence, but both languages require a comprehensive study of accidence to comprehend the meaning of grammatical units.

### **Syntax**

Syntax is the aspect of language study that relates the various words, phrases and clauses to one another grammatically. Without a study of syntax, the student is left with only word studies, which can be misleading if the words are not placed in their grammatical context. A good way to study syntax is by diagramming sentences, which many students have done when studying English. Diagramming provides a visual reference to the relationships between functions of the sentence such as subject, predicate, direct objects, prepositional phrases, and subordinate clauses.<sup>8</sup>

### **Translation**

Translations, though essential to the teaching of Scripture, are not adequate to convey the force of the original language. The old saying that “something is lost in translation” is clearly demonstrated by even the best of English translations. Biblical language courses that emphasize translation to the detriment of a thorough understanding of accident and syntax leave the student open to errors in understanding.

### ***Biblical Backgrounds***

As noted previously, historical and cultural information is vital to normal, literal interpretation. The adequate interpreter of Scripture must ground himself in sources for such study. History, culture, and geography are particularly necessary in the interpretive process. The more one knows about the events and customs that lie behind a particular portion of Scripture, the more likely the student is to come to a correct and comprehensive understanding of the text.

One of the most interesting studies in this area is Biblical archaeology. Archaeologists have discovered much valuable information that directly bears on the Biblical text. However, many, if not most, archaeologists, are unbelievers who reject the accuracy and authority of Scripture. One must not assume that their historical and doctrinal conclusions are necessarily valid.

### ***Conclusion***

Dr. Charles A. Hauser summarized the requirements for the interpreter of the Bible in a series of short statements,<sup>9</sup> as follows:

#### **Spiritual Qualifications**

The interpreter,

1. must be saved in order to understand the spiritual significance of Scripture (1 Cor. 2:14).

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2. must desire to know the truth and not use the Bible as a textbook to prove what he believes is true.
3. must be enthusiastic for the Word of God.
4. must be dependent on the Holy Spirit and His illuminating work.
5. must be spiritual and not carnal. Carnality makes it impossible to understand the depth of God's Word.
6. must have God's purpose for Scripture in mind. The purpose for understanding Scripture is to glorify God, not ourselves.

### **Intellectual Qualifications**

The interpreter,

1. must have a mind well-balanced in its approach to Scripture.
2. must have a mind that does not jump to hasty conclusions.
3. must have good perception to grasp the meaning of a writer.
4. must be able to see not only what the Bible teaches, but what it does not teach.
5. must be able to place one's self into the place of the writer.
6. must have a sound sense of judgment with which to compare. In other words, must be able to weigh reasons for and against certain interpretations.

### *Exercise 2.1*

The most basic unit of grammatical study is the sentence. Unfortunately, because Bibles have been divided into verses, students have a tendency to ignore the sentence divisions in favor of verse divisions. Using any adequate English version of the Bible, divide Philippians Chapter Three into its various sentences. Here is a suggested format using James chapter one from the New King James Version:

James 1:1-3.....Sentence One  
James 1:4.....Sentence Two  
James 1:5.....Sentence Three  
James 1:6.....Sentence Four  
James 1:7-8.....Sentence Five  
James 1:9-10.....Sentence Six  
James 1:11a.....Sentence Seven  
James 1:11b.....Sentence Eight

Please observe that some sentences are more than one verse (1:1-3, for example), while others are only part of a verse (vs. 11, for example.) The student is to do the same exercise with every sentence of Philippians three. Having done so, the student is ready to begin a preliminary grammatical analysis of the text.

The author recommends that the serious Bible student divide each book in the New Testament into sentences line by line. This can be done very easily using a computer. The following example is taken from the author's translation of Matthew 5:21-26:

1. 21 You *have* heard that it was said to the old ones, Do not murder.
2. And, Whoever murders shall be liable to the judgment.
3. 22 But I say to you that everyone who is wrathful with his brother without cause will be liable to the judgment.

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4. And whoever should say to his brother, Empty-headed, shall be liable to the sanhedrin.
6. But whoever should say, Fool, shall be liable to the Gehenna of fire.
7. <sup>23</sup> If then you should offer your gift on the altar and there should recall that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and depart.
8. First, be reconciled to your brother and then, after coming *back*, offer your gift.
9. <sup>25</sup> Be friendly with your adversary quickly, as long as you are on the road with him, lest your adversary give you over to the judge and the judge give you over to the court attendant, and you be cast into prison.
10. <sup>26</sup> Truly I say to you, you shall absolutely not come out of there until you pay the last quadrans.

After performing this simple task, the student should do an analysis of the grammatical structure of the sentence. See Appendix 4 for a discussion of this process.

### *Exercise 2.2*

Knowledge of biblical backgrounds is best gained by referring to books relating to the various subjects being studied. Perhaps the student already possesses an adequate library in this area. If so, this exercise will be very easy for that student. If you do not have such a library, you will need to arrange some time at a library that contains an adequate section on Biblical studies.

Using the standard format for bibliographical entries found in any current standard such as MLA, APA, Chicago Style, Turabian (an excellent up-date of the Chicago Style), etc., compose a bibliography that contains *at least* three works that you have, or that you would like to have in each of the following areas:

1. Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* [ISBE], *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* are but a few examples).
2. Bible geography and atlases.
3. Books and magazines dealing with the archaeology of Bible times.
4. Books on manners, customs, and daily living during Bible times.

### *Exercise 2.3*

Using the books that you have discovered in the previous assignments, answer the following questions dealing with biblical background material:

1. Who were the Hittites? When and where did they live? List at least three Bible passages where they are mentioned.
2. Who was Hammurabi, where did he live, and for what is he best known?
3. What are the tell-el Amarna letters and why are they important to the study of the Bible?
4. What is the Siloam Inscription? When was it produced and where was it found?
5. Who were the Herodians? When did they live? Give a brief description.
6. Who were the Hellenists? When did they live? Give a brief description.
7. What was a steward? What did a steward do?
8. Describe the burial customs of Jesus day.

### *Exercise 2.4*

Answer the following questions from chapter two:

1. In what two general areas must the interpreter of Scripture be qualified?
2. Why may an unbeliever be able to accurately interpret a passage of Scripture?
3. What may a believer do that an unsaved person is not able to do with Scripture? Why is this so?



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4. What is the ultimate goal of the interpreter of Scripture? What is the correct order?
5. It is the spiritual requirement of the sincere believer that he gauge what?
6. What are the four spiritual qualities of the Biblical interpreter of Scripture. Briefly describe each.
7. What must the interpreter of Scripture be able to do theologically?
8. What areas of language comprehension should the interpreter study?
9. To what is one's ability to interpret the Bible independently related?
10. What are *accidence* and *syntax*, and why are they important?

## *Endnotes*

- 1 This is not to discount God's ministry of illumination. But one must not expect God to enlighten the believer to the correct meaning of a text without adequate study using valid academic approaches. One cannot understand the meaning of the Bible through prayer and meditation *alone*. The sincere believer must avoid laziness in this area. Paul told Timothy to be diligent, carefully handling the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).
- 2 Ephesians 1:17-18 teaches that God the Father is the one who enlightens the believer. The word spirit in that context does not refer to the Holy Spirit, as earlier Paul clearly states that the Ephesian believers already had the Spirit as the down-payment of their inheritance. Paul's prayer that God give them "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him," identified by the statement in vs. 18-19, "the eyes of your heart having been enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,"<sup>19</sup> and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us who believe, according to the working of the might of His strength..." (translation by the author.) See my notes on Ephesians 1 for further discussion of this passage.
- 3 Observe that four different words occur in 1 Timothy 2:1 for communication with God. They are listed as δέησεις (supplications) προσευχάς (prayers) ἐντεύξεις (intercessions) and εὐχαριστίας (thanksgivings). Clearly, not all of these words refer to "kinds of prayer," as prayer is not even the first word in the list. Using normal interpretive methods, we must understand that there are several means by which the believer communicates to God, and that careful distinctions must be made between them. Indeed, there are four more words in the New Testament writings that refer to communication with God (ask, confess, praise, and vow), and they ought not be confused with prayer, nor considered kinds of prayer.
- 4 Theological awareness is not gained by studying books on theology. It is gained by categorical study of the various doctrinal topics of Scripture.
- 5 As with many fields, grammar has been greatly eroded in modern times. It is common for grammars to have been negatively influenced by political correctness and strange ideas about feminism. Even previously taboo words (words that are scatological or sexually profane) are finding their way into modern grammars. The author maintains a library of older grammatical works, as well as more modern ones, for this very reason.
- 6 These are the minimum number of years, and should only be the basis for further study in the languages. If it is possible to take more courses in each of these languages, the serious Bible student should certainly do so.
- 7 One must take care, even with these. Even otherwise excellent works can be mistaken. Wuest, Vincent, and Vine have some errors in their understanding of word meanings. The bound concordances listed have been superseded by computerized methods, though I still maintain them in my library. Sometimes they are easier to use than a computer, especially in the area of translation studies.
- 8 Because one spends so much time studying a foreign language, it is common to make language study more important than other studies, such as culture, background, and contextual study. While important, language study must not take the place of or cause the student to neglect the other equally important areas of study as he interprets Scripture.
- 9 These statements are from class notes taken in the course on hermeneutics Dr. Hauser taught at the San Francisco Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary in 1970.

### 3. *The Logic of Language*

If a teacher says “horse” and the student thinks of something that has two legs and swings from trees, it is obvious that there has been a failure to communicate. People must agree on the symbols they use to express thought if they are to understand one another. Languages grow into logical systems for this same reason. If language had no logic and no consistency, there would be no communication between individuals.

Generally, logic is based on common sense. But without codifying logic, common sense can be attacked by presuppositions and failure to think consistently. Therefore, the interpreter must study and understand certain principles of logic in order to maintain a consistency of interpretation.

#### **God Intends to Communicate to Man through the Bible**

The basic presupposition with which the student of Scripture proceeds is that the Bible is designed to be understood, rather than misunderstood. If the Bible is the Word of God, it is God’s communication to man of truths that He desired man to know.

If God is the one who produced Scripture, the truth of the Bible is absolute, and it is presented in human language in a clear manner. God used human language to accurately, and without error, present the truth He wanted man to know. If there are problems with man’s understanding of God’s communication, it is certain that the inability to correctly understand belongs to man and not to God’s ability to communicate truth.

Language, therefore, has certain laws of logic which must be understood. The greater the student’s understanding of these laws, the more likely he is to understand precisely what God intends for him to understand.

***Similarity is not identity.***

Distinguish between two words, statements or objects that are similar. Words and concepts are only identical *if they are affirmed to be.*

#### ***The Law of Identity or Affirmation***

According to Rollin Chafer in his article entitled “The Science of Biblical Hermeneutics” in the journal *Bibliotheca Sacra*, this law is as follows: “Everything is identical with itself, or what it is, and we may affirm this of it.” For instance, the Bible says that God exists. It says that He created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. Adam fell through an act of sin from his state of innocence. These things we affirm.

As a corollary to this law, we can say that when two things are said to be identical, they are; we may not assume so otherwise. 1 John 3:4 affirms that sin is lawlessness. In the original language of Scripture the words sin and lawlessness both have the article “the” before them. This is one way the Greek affirms identity. Sin and lawlessness are affirmed to be identical. (If, in the Greek language, only one of the words had the article, we would not be able to affirm their identity.)<sup>1</sup>

The primary need for a system of hermeneutics is to ascertain the meaning of the Word of God. - Albertus Pieters

### 3. *The Logic of Language*

It would be wrong to affirm the identity of two words or things unless Scripture does so. That is, one would not know that sin and lawlessness are identical if it had not been affirmed in Scripture. John does so in order to define the word *sin*, since the exact meaning of that word could possibly be misunderstood.

Certainly the words *sin* and *lawlessness* mean similar things. *But similarity is not identity!* The word *sin* does not mean the same thing as the word *lawlessness*. Therefore, John needed to make the statement of identity; otherwise one must distinguish sin from lawlessness. In identifying the two words, John puts his readers on notice. They must understand the word *lawlessness* in order to understand the word *sin*, because it defines *sin*.<sup>2</sup>

We must take care at this point. Not every definition of a word is done by affirmation of identity between two nouns. In fact, many definitions of words are *descriptions* made by adjectives rather than the identification of two nouns.

Furthermore, one must observe the Greek sentence. If either or both of the nouns connected by a form of a “to be” verb<sup>3</sup> are without the Greek article, the words are not being specifically identified.<sup>4</sup>

#### ***The Law of Non-Contradiction***

According to Rollin Chafer, the law of non-contradiction states, “Everything is not what it is not, and we may affirm this of it.” This law is closely identified with the previous law of affirmation. It might be said that it is the negative side of that law. Merrill Unger says, “This principle states that nothing can both be and not be, or that nothing can both be the same and different.” While this seems to be obvious, the law of non-contradiction is one of the most widely violated of all the laws of logic.

Scripture never identifies things that differ. The error of systems like amillennialism and postmillennialism are promoted because of a lack of distinguishing between things that, while similar, are actually different.

Other areas of popular misunderstanding are the identification of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the filling of the Holy Spirit, the identification of an age with a dispensation, the lack of distinction between a dispensation and a household, and the identification of the word sin with the word unrighteousness. There are many other false identifications that cause confusion among believers.

#### ***The Five Judgments of Scripture***

1. **The Judgment of Believers for Sin** (John 5:24, Romans 8:1,2). This judgment took place at the crucifixion of Christ.
2. **The Judgment of the Believer for His Works** (2 Corinthians 5:10). This takes place immediately after the rapture and will result in reward or the lack of reward for works done during the Christian’s sojourn on earth.
3. **The Judgment of Israel** (Ezekiel 20:34-38; Jeremiah 30:4-7; Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:2-31). The Judgment of Israel takes place during the Tribulation period. The result of this judgment will be the purifying of Israel and the salvation of the remnant nation.
4. **The Judgment of the Gentile Nations** (Matthew 25:31-46). This judgment will take place at the end of the tribulation period. It will result in believing Gentiles entering the millennial state, and unbelieving Gentiles being cast into outer darkness.
5. **The Judgment of the Great White Throne** (Revelation 20:11-15). This final judgment is the judgment of all unbelievers throughout time. It will take place after the millennial period closes and includes the final judgment of Satan and his demons.

The distinctions between words, which are apparently synonymous, should be carefully examined and considered. - Thomas Hartwell Horne

### ***3. The Logic of Language***

Another contrast that is not carefully observed is the difference between Jews, Gentiles, and the Church. Each of these groups is carefully distinguished in the Bible. The Church did not come into existence until Pentecost, while God has dealt with both Jews and Gentiles in previous ages. Prophetically, members of each of these groups has a different destiny which must be observed.

One of the great studies of Scripture is the study of the various “gospels” presented in the New Testament. The gospel of the Kingdom, the gospel of salvation, the gospel of Christian maturity, and the “everlasting” gospel must be distinguished from one other.

The difference in interpretation between the covenant theologian and the dispensational theologian is based on the covenantalist’s lack of understanding of the law of non-contradiction. The covenant theologian virtually ignores the differences between God’s programs and substitutes “theological covenants” for God’s household program. The covenant theologian creates covenants which are not taught in the Bible and then uses these covenants to blur the distinctions in God’s program. The so-called “covenant of works” was, according to the covenant theologian, given to Adam before the fall, and after the fall the “covenant of grace” was given to all mankind. However, the Bible nowhere mentions these covenants. They were postulated by covenant theologians to support their logically weak position, which is that God deals with all people the same way all the time.

On the other hand, the *consistent* dispensational theologian observes the distinction between things that differ. It is clear in Scripture that God is dealing with individuals in the Church differently than He was dealing with those in Israel. The grace of God for daily living dispensed to the household of the Church must be distinguished from the law of God dispensed to those in Israel for their daily practice. God dispensed law to the household of Israel through His steward (dispenser), Moses, and He dispensed grace to the household of the Church through His steward, Paul.

Many other important distinctions could be cited, but this brief listing is sufficient to show the importance of the law of non-contradiction.

#### ***The Law of the Excluded Middle***

This common sense law states that something is either true or it is not true. If one thing contradicts another thing, they cannot both be true. In other words, “Of two contradictories, one must be true and the other false. If one is affirmed the other is denied” (Rollin Chafer).

For example, Scripture is either inspired or it is not inspired. It cannot be both at the same time. And since, according to the principle of affirmation, Scripture is affirmed to be inspired (2 Timothy 3:16), we must, according to the law of non-contradiction, distinguish inspiration from non-inspiration. That is, we must have an adequate definition of inspiration, and exclude, according to the law of the excluded middle, all that is not inspiration. The law of the excluded middle eliminates false theories of inspiration such as the partial inspiration theory, or the genius theory, since they are not part of the original affirmation about inspiration in 2 Timothy.

Another interesting application of the law of the excluded middle deals with the doctrine of spirit beings. Cherubim are often considered to be kinds of angels. The law of the excluded middle says that cherubim are either angels or they are not angels. They cannot be both angels and not angels at the same time. The law of affirmation says that in order for them to be affirmed to be angels they must be stated to be. Since they are not affirmed to be identical, and since they appear to do different things and have different appearances (the law of non-contradiction), we conclude that angels and cherubim are distinct.

### 3. *The Logic of Language*

Bible students are often guilty of saying that one thing is “a kind” of something else simply because they are similar. Both cherubim and seraphim are assumed to be “kinds of angels,” partly because the word angel occurs so many more times than either of the other two classes of spirit beings. But both the law of non-contradiction and the law of the excluded middle require that we make distinctions between them, and not assume that they are the same, or that one is a kind of the other. Just because all three words refer to spirit beings is not sufficient reason to identify them without distinction.

#### *The Law of Sufficient Reason*

The law of sufficient reason was formulated by the philosopher Gottfried von Leibnitz in the middle 1600s. It states, in essence, that one must not jump to conclusions, but base conclusions on adequate grounds. Usually in language words such as *then* and *therefore* are used to indicate a logical conclusion based on sufficient reason. The student of Scripture will recognize that the Apostle Paul often used this logical form in his epistles.

The law of sufficient reason is important to the Bible interpreter because the Bible as a whole is dependent on each of its parts. As we will see in the next chapter, the wholeness of the Bible causes us to prefer the inductive approach to doctrinal study over the deductive approach. That is, we must observe and study every place when a doctrine or topic is discussed in Scripture before drawing a conclusion. The law of sufficient reason teaches us to be cautious when making statements about the doctrines of Scripture before getting all the facts.

The Bible is not a handbook of logic. It is not a compendium of natural science. Its own themes, however, are developed in accordance with the principles of logic and in harmony with classification of proved facts. The logic of the sacred writers has been made a subject of special attack by radical critics, one such writer voicing the sentiment of the many...that Paul was too logical, that his logic is so inexorable that modern thinkers are forced to reject his conclusions. It is a sad commentary on certain phases of so-called orthodox theologies that this sentiment, now boldly voiced by spiritual outlanders, exhibits the evidence of its influence in various theological formulas. Sadder still is the fact that many hold these dicta to be normative as a standard by which the Word of God itself should be interpreted. In whatsoever measure this idea is allowed to influence the student's thinking it weakens to that degree faith in the fundamental fact of the Spirit's authorship of the Scriptures. *To attack the logic of the sacred writers is to attack the logic of God.* This is the necessary conclusion if the biblical doctrines of revelation and inspiration are accepted. - Rollin T. Chafer

#### **How Many Meanings Can a Biblical Statement Have?**

Since the early days of biblical studies, interpreters have held differing views on how many meanings a text can have. It was common in previous centuries to look for several layers of meaning. For instance, Origen (184-253 AD), who lived Alexandria Egypt, held to a threefold meaning of the text which corresponds to body, soul, and spirit. He held that the literal interpretation was represented by the body. This was, according to Origen, the milk of the word, and had little spiritual significance. The next layer was represented by the soul. It had a deeper meaning than the literal, though he rarely used this method. Finally, the spirit represented the spiritual, hidden meaning, available only to spiritual Christians. This was the only sense that had any value.

Another approach, dual layered rather than triple layered, is often found in so-called allegorical interpretation. Alva J. McClain makes the following statement:

### 3. *The Logic of Language*

Doubtless we should thank God that not all men are logically consistent in holding their erroneous opinions. What can happen when men cut loose from literality may be seen in Gregory the Great's exposition of the Book of Job, where we learn that the patriarch's three friends denote the heretics; his seven sons are the twelve apostles; his seven thousand sheep are God's faithful people; and his three thousand humpbacked camels are the depraved Gentiles.<sup>5</sup>

This two-fold literal/allegorical approach has been the norm for many groups down through the centuries, and is still considered legitimate by many today.

The consistent application of literal interpretation tells us that there is only one meaning to a text of Scripture. This is, however, disputed by those who reject literal interpretation. Indeed, even those who hold to literal interpretation sometimes fall into the trap of allowing a passage of Scripture to have more than one meaning. One example of this is called *sensus plenior*.

#### *Sensus Plenior*

The Latin phrase *sensus plenior* means "fuller sense." It is a relatively new phrase for an old idea. The old idea is that God has meaning layered in some texts of Scripture that go beyond the meaning presented by the human author. The phrase itself was coined in the 1920s by the Roman Catholic priest Andre Fernandez. The concept of *sensus plenior* was expanded by other Roman Catholic scholars, chief of whom was Raymond E. Brown, the first Roman priest to be accepted onto the faculty at Union Theological Seminary.

Brown defined *sensus plenior* as follows:

That additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation.<sup>6</sup>

This is an appealing idea for many, because it allows them to insert their idea into the text as something of a "deeper meaning" than was intended by the human author. Even some non-Catholics have fallen into the trap laid by this idea, including Roy B. Zuck of Dallas Theological Seminary, who says,

I would agree that God may intend more than was clearly intended by the human authors.<sup>7</sup>

To Zuck's credit, he does not fall into the deeper error followed by the Roman Catholic theologians. Brown and others want to lay a basis for non-literal "greater" meanings as promoted by the Roman Catholics. Zuck rightly asks, "What deeper meanings is he suggesting?"<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, in response to Brown's statement that authoritative interpretation becomes "authoritative in the sense that it comes from one of the guides to revelation, e.g., the NT, the Church Fathers, Church pronouncements, etc."<sup>9</sup> Zuck says, "This leaves the interpretation of Scripture open to fallible church dogma."<sup>10</sup>

Zuck is correct, because he understands why the Roman Catholic community would argue this view. It has to do with the sufficiency of Scripture, which the Catholics reject. Interpretive programs *other than* a normal approach to language must be used to support Catholic dogma, and it is for that reason the Roman Catholic apologist must not limit himself to Scripture alone. Tradition, previous teaching, papal announcements *ex cathedra*<sup>11</sup> must all be added to the normal meaning of the Scriptural text to support their edifice of doctrine.

### 3. *The Logic of Language*

We reject any idea of *sensus plenior*, since we reject the logical fallacy, that is, the circular argument, as well as the purpose behind the approach. *Sensus plenior* is a device to promote an authoritative doctrine from a text of Scripture which in actuality goes beyond the normal meaning of that text.

But the question remains: Why would a conservative scholar, Roy B. Zuck, from a conservative non-Catholic seminary, hold that it is possible that God may mean something more than the human author meant? The answer lies in another view of meaning, which is called *references plenior*.

#### *References Plenior*

This is another coined Latin term that means that a biblical statement may have dual (or even multiple) references. It is an attempt to answer the question as to why New Testament authors and speakers apply Old Testament texts to later persons or events that were not intended by the original author. Is there, then, a hidden meaning in the original text, placed into the text by God, but which could not have been understood by the human author?

In discussing this view, Zuck uses the example of Psalm 78:2 which was referenced by Jesus in Matthew 13:35. Concerning *references plenior* Zuck states:

In this view Psalm 78:2 has a single meaning (the writer said he “will open [his] mouth in parables”) but it has two referents, that is, it refers to two people – Asaph, the author of the psalm, and Jesus, who applied it to Himself in Matthew 13:35.... This seems a commendable way to express this view, for Psalm 78:2 and Matthew 13:35 refer to more than one item, while still having a single meaning.<sup>12</sup>

At first reading, this seems to be a commendable attempt to deal with a legitimate problem. Certainly Zuck is correct in his idea that the original writing has but a single meaning. But it is not correct to say that Jesus applied Psalm 78:2 to Himself. Here is the actual quote of the entire sentence in which 13:35 is a part:

<sup>34</sup> Jesus spoke all these things in parables to the crowds, and He did not speak to them without a parable, <sup>35</sup> so that the statement through the prophet might be fulfilled saying, I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things having been hidden from the foundation of the world.<sup>13</sup>

Note that the statement is in the third person. This is Matthew speaking, not Jesus. Jesus is not applying Psalm 78:2 to Himself as Zuck states, Matthew is. Furthermore, Matthew uses the word “fulfilled” to express HIS view that there is a relationship between Psalm 78:2 and what Jesus was doing. Jesus is not making that claim.

But what difference does it make? Either way the Bible states that what Jesus was doing fulfills the statement in the book of Psalms. The point, however, is this: Jesus is not speaking to the disciples about what He is doing. Matthew is speaking to his readers about the relationship of Christ’s actions to Psalm 78:2.

*References plenior* may seem to be a slick way of dealing with the problem, but perhaps the problem is not as difficult as Zuck makes it appear. There are many times an Old Testament truth is said to be fulfilled by a New Testament event or statement, and sometimes the original statement had no predictive element in it at all. Perhaps the problem can be resolved in a different way than resorting to speculation about whether God intended a reference to the original statement that the human author could not have understood.

Did God intend a double reference of the meaning of Psalm 78:2, or does the intention end with Asaph? In fact, Zuck has already partially answered the question starting on page 260 of the same book,



### 3. *The Logic of Language*

*Basic Bible Interpretation*, where he discusses ten purposes for New Testament quotes of the Old Testament. The ten purposes are as follows:

1. To point up the accomplishment or realization of an Old Testament prediction.
2. To confirm that a New Testament incident is in agreement with an Old Testament principle.
3. To explain a point given in the Old Testament.
4. To support a point being made in the New Testament.
5. To illustrate a New Testament truth.
6. To apply the Old Testament to a New Testament incident or truth.
7. To summarize an Old Testament concept.
8. To use Old Testament terminology.
9. To draw a parallel with an Old Testament incident.
10. To relate an Old Testament situation to Christ.

Note particularly numbers 8 & 9 in the above list. It seems quite possible that Matthew was indeed doing nothing more than using Old Testament terminology to draw a parallel with the Old Testament statement. Is there really any need to go into a highly technical discussion of something called *referentes plenior* to show how scholarly we are? How are we to understand that God intended a dual reference in Psalm 78:2, since no proposition in Scripture says any such thing. I'm reminded of Occam's Razor<sup>14</sup> here. The simplest explanation seems the best.

Perhaps, however, the word *fulfilled* is causing Zuck (and others) a problem. It is true that the word is often used *today* in a very specific sense that seems to imply that the original statement was intended by God to be used by the New Testament author or speaker. This especially seems true when the original statement was a prediction of some kind. It can be very confusing. But does the word *fulfilled* always refer to a prediction of some kind? Most would say no.

Rather than continue the discussion here, this notebook has an appendix in which the student can find the author's essay entitled "Old Testament Quotes in the New Testament." Please refer to that essay for a fuller discussion of the word *fulfilled*.

#### ***Conclusion***

The purpose of this chapter is to teach the student to be careful with the language of the Bible. The Bible contains propositional statements which affirm facts using regular principles of language and logic. Propositional statements are subject to the normal laws of the language in which they were originally presented. The believer is responsible to discover what God says before claiming that He did, in fact, say it.

Furthermore, it is axiomatic that a propositional statement have only the single meaning intended by both the human and divine authors of Scripture. The only exception to this axiom is if a particular figure of speech that carries in it double entendre is *used purposely* by the original writer or speaker to introduce an ambiguity. Such figures are legitimate literary devices.

#### ***Exercise 3.1***

Using a concordance, look up the Greek word *aiōn*, which is the word *age*, as it is used in Paul's epistles.

In the King James Version this word is translated *age* only two times out of 128 uses. Seventy-one times it is translated *ever*, which is probably a legitimate translation. Thirty-eight times it is translated *world*. Everywhere the King James Version translates this word *world* it should be translated *age* (The

### 3. *The Logic of Language*

regular Greek word for *world* is the word *kosmos*. The word *aiōn* should never be translated *world*.) Look up each of the seventeen places in Romans through Titus where the KJV<sup>15</sup> translates *aiōn* as *world*, and the two places where the word is correctly translated *age*. The student may wish to use a different version that has the translation *age* in these places. Then answer the following six questions.

1. Is the present age good or evil?
2. Who is the ruler of the present age?
3. What was Demas' attitude toward the present age, and what did it cause him to do?
4. What did none of the princes of this age know, and what did it cause them to do?
5. What is God going to show believers in "ages to come?"
6. What has been hidden from ages?

This exercise indicates to the student the importance in making correct distinctions. **The careful student observes that there is a doctrine of ages in Scripture that is different than the doctrine of dispensations.** It is also clear that, just as there are different acts of dispensing in the Bible, there are different ages to be discovered. Besides Paul's use of the word *age*, the study of ages in the gospels is also enlightening.

#### *Exercise 3.2*

Answer the following questions:

1. Why is it necessary for language to be logical?
2. Read the section on the law of the excluded middle again. How does this law show that it is unwise to call something by a term that is not used of it in Scripture? For instance, why should we not call a supplication by the word *prayer*? Likewise, why is it incorrect to call supplication a kind of *prayer*?
3. In order to see how the law of sufficient reason is used in Scripture, look up the word *therefore* in a concordance and discuss two instances where conclusions are based on preceding statements.
4. An interesting study of logic in the New Testament can be had by examining all the uses of the word *gar* (Strong's number 1063) in a concordance. Sometimes *gar* is used with the meaning "explanation follows." But many times *gar* means "inference follows." An inference is the act of passing from one proposition or statement considered true to another whose truth is believed to follow from the original proposition or statement.

As an optional exercise, when you have enough time, examine all the uses of *gar* in Paul's writings and attempt to determine the inferential uses. This is a massive study, as the word occurs 552 times in the received text of Paul's writings, which is a little over half of its uses in the entire New Testament (about 1068 times). But the study is very rewarding, and I encourage you to do it at some point.

## *Endnotes*

- 1 This is only one way to identify persons or objects in a language. Only comprehensive study in a particular language can determine all the various ways it achieves identification.
- 2 Be very careful here. Lawlessness (*anomia*) only defines sin when the word *hamartia* (sin) is used in this context. In other contexts the word *hamartia* does not mean *lawlessness*. John 3:4 uses the word *sin* to refer to acts of sin, which are defined by John as lawlessness. But there are two other doctrinal uses for sin that are not acts at all, and cannot be defined as lawlessness.
- 3 The forms of the English verb *to be* are the following: am, are, is, was, were, be, being, and been. One of the difficulties of English is its various uses of the *to be* verb. It is used as a complete verb as in “I *am* in a hurry.” It is used as an auxiliary verb with the past participle of another verb to indicate the passive voice, as in “The building *was* destroyed by the tornado.” It can also be used as an auxiliary verb to help indicate progression with the present participle of another verb, as “That greyhound *was* running as fast as he could.” It is often used as a copulative (linking) verb as in “That politician *is* a man of distinction.”
- 4 Such is the case in 1 John 5:17, which says “All unrighteousness is sin.” Many are confused about this verse, not realizing that in the original Greek neither unrighteousness nor sin has the article. They share a quality, but they are not identical! This statement is not, therefore, a definition of either sin or unrighteousness. Nor is it saying that every act of unrighteousness is an act of sin. The word *all* does not mean *all without limits*. When there is no article with its noun, *all* generally means *all kinds of*, as it does here. There are also kinds of unrighteousness that are not sin, such as mistakes. Any mistake or error is an unrighteous act, since the word *unrighteous* means to do any wrong thing, even those acts which are non-moral.
- 5 Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, page 143.
- 6 Raymond E. Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore: St. Mary's University, 1955), 92. Note the phrase, “development in the understanding of revelation.” Brown and others make the interpretation (understanding) to be authoritative in order to determine the “deeper meaning” of the text. Interpretation by certain parties, then, closes the loop. Revelation is authoritative because certain people interpreted it in a certain way (being Roman Catholics or “church fathers”), and the interpretation is authoritative because it provides the deeper meaning of the revelation. Logicians call this a circular argument.
- 7 Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Colorado Springs: SP Publications, 1991), 274.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Raymond E. Brown, “Hermeneutics” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 2 Vols. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968) 2: 616.
- 10 Zuck, op. cit.
- 11 *Ex cathedra* is Latin meaning “from the chair.” It is a metaphorical idea referring to the throne of a bishop in the Catholic church. Statements *ex cathedra* are authoritative. Statements by a pope, the ultimate bishop, which exercise papal infallibility are referred to as “solemn papal definitions” or *ex cathedra* teachings. This spiritually dangerous practice brings about the pretense of human infallibility.
- 12 Zuck, op. cit.
- 13 This is the author’s translation of the sentence.
- 14 Occam’s Razor is a logical principle (though not irrefutable) that says that a conclusion should be drawn from the fewest assumptions or presuppositions as possible. It is much simpler to apply Zuck’s statements about the reason for Old Testament quotes than to assume that God had an intention when the original statement was made that went beyond the understanding of the human author (*references plenior*).
- 15 The KJV is not the only version to incorrectly translate *aion* world. For example, the following versions translate it world in Romans 12:2: The American Standard Version, John Nelson Darby’s Version, The New American Standard Bible, The New International Version, The New King James Version, The Revised Standard Version.  
  
This is inexplicable. Perhaps tradition is so strong that no one can see the inconsistency in translating a word that relates to time (*aiōn*) with one that has little or nothing to do with time (world). Is it tradition? Probably, but tradition is not a good basis for any translation.

### *Endnotes*

To be fair, however, many later versions do translate *aiōn* correctly in other places. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:20, the NASB, the NKJV, the NIV, and the RSV all translate it *age*. The others in the above list retain *world* as the translation in that sentence. This same error occurs in other sentences as well, such as 1 Corinthians 2:6, for instance.

## 4. Inductive and Deductive Reasoning

The statements one makes about doctrine clearly shows the hermeneutical approach the person takes to Scripture. Every Christian holds to some Bible doctrine. Some say that they do not, but in so saying, they prove otherwise. The simple affirmation of salvation is a doctrinal statement. When one goes beyond the affirmation of salvation to the affirmations concerning the nature of Scripture, inspiration, the truth of the trinity, the second coming of Christ, etc. he is continuing to make doctrinal statements.

“Since the writers of the Bible and those who undertake to explain what is written therein are alike supposed to be in accord with the logical operations of the human mind, it is of the utmost importance that the expositor approach his task employing sound logical method. Unless his logic is sound, his conclusions and doctrinal generalizations are bound to be faulty.” Merrill Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching*, page 97.

Many Christians hold to doctrines for the wrong reasons. Often the reason that people believe something is because they have been taught it since they were children. Or perhaps they believe it because their favorite Bible teacher believes it. Indeed, many believers hold to *right doctrines*, but for the *wrong reasons*. And this is dangerous. If one’s foundation for belief is weak, it can crumble under onslaught, and leave the believer open to serious error.

### The Foundation of Faith

The danger of holding to the right doctrines for the wrong reasons lies in the foundation upon which one’s beliefs rest. Why is it that occasionally we hear of a person who appeared to be a strong believer, but who has become involved with a cult or other doctrinal aberration? It may be because their belief system was based on what they had been taught by men, rather than on what they had discovered for themselves from the Word of God. They were believing the right things for the wrong reasons. When they heard someone who was just as convincing as their other teachers, they believed him instead.

The only guaranteed way of keeping this sort of thing from happening is to ensure that one’s beliefs are based on the Bible rather than on the statements that someone says about the Bible, no matter how true and accurate those statements may appear to be. It is not sufficient that one’s doctrines have their ultimate source *in the Bible*. The individual believer must personally practice getting his doctrines *from the Bible*.

This is not to discount the value of Bible teachers, however. God has appointed some to teach the Word of God. But the wise Bible teacher does not desire for his students to become or remain dependent on him. He desires them to grow as he has grown, and to become strong in their faith because they have followed God and not the teacher.

### Two Approaches to Doctrinal Study

The Bible rarely presents a complete doctrinal statement in a single passage. The more normal situation is for a doctrinal topic to be taught in several passages, usually in several books. How one approaches these scattered passages will, to a great extent, determine his ability to derive a consistent doctrinal system.

## 4. Inductive and Deductive Reasoning

One approach to doctrinal study is called the deductive approach, and the other is called the inductive approach. The deductive approach starts with general statements about doctrine, and then goes to the Bible to attempt to prove them. It is reasoning from a general to a specific.

The inductive approach is just the opposite. It formulates general conclusions by examining all the specific examples concerning a doctrine. It is reasoning from the specific to the general.

Of the two approaches, the inductive approach is to be preferred over the deductive approach. This is not to say that the deductive approach has no value. While deductive reasoning is limited, it does add to our ability to formulate doctrinal truth.

### Deductive Reasoning

Deductive reasoning is based on a device known as a syllogism. A syllogism is a means of drawing a conclusion from general statements. It consists of three statements: the first statement is called the *major premise*, the second is called the *minor premise*, and the third is called the *conclusion*.

Before a conclusion can be reached both major and minor premises must be correctly and exactly formulated. Most errors in deductive reasoning derive from the incorrect formation of either the major or minor premise.

Examine the major premise in the above example. The fact that all healthy horses have four legs can only be derived by a careful examination of enough healthy horses to make that statement. A person who has never seen a healthy horse could not make the statement of the major premise. (The examination of enough healthy horses to make the statement of the major premise is *inductive* reasoning.)

Likewise, minor premises must be given careful consideration and examination before they are stated.

So many errors can be made in formulating a premise, that deductive reasoning is highly questionable as an approach in formulating specific doctrinal statements.

This is another example of an improper syllogism:

**Major Premise:** All healthy men have two legs.

**Minor Premise:** Henry has two legs.

**Conclusion:** Henry is a healthy man.

The problem with this logical sequence is that Henry *is not a man*. He happens to be a pet duck I had when I was a child. Things other than healthy men have two legs.

Here is an example of a correctly formed syllogism:

**Major Premise:** All healthy horses have four legs.

**Minor Premise:** Trojan is a healthy horse.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, Trojan has four legs.

**Major Premise:** Grass is green.

**Minor Premise:** My yard is green.

**Conclusion:** My yard is grass.

The incorrectly formed syllogism about grass above may seem to be a logical sequence. However, on closer observation it can be seen that this is an example of fallacious reasoning. A complete induction assures us that yard coverings other than grass are green, and not all grass is green all the time. In fact, a yard may be concrete painted green, or even green artificial turf!

It is best to avoid deductive conclusions unless one is well acquainted with the syllogism and the possible pitfalls which accompany it.

## 4. *Inductive and Deductive Reasoning*

For a good introduction to deductive reasoning the student may wish to read the chapter entitled “The Expositor and Deductive Reasoning” in *Principles of Expository Preaching* by Merrill Unger. He lists a short bibliography on deductive logic for further study.

### *Inductive Reasoning*

The primary importance of inductive reasoning to the Bible student cannot be over emphasized. Even though the interpreter of Scripture may never learn to formulate an accurate syllogism or be able to do deductive reasoning adequately, he can be enabled to handle Scripture accurately using the inductive approach.

In doctrinal study, the inductive approach begins with specific statements of Scripture and draws conclusions from them. Usually no single Scripture passage will contain all the information on a particular doctrine, so several passages must be examined before the complete doctrinal picture is seen. Since the Bible is a closed body of truth, it is not unreasonable to expect that the student will look up all references to a doctrine before drawing conclusions about the subject under consideration.

### **Errors in Induction**

One error of induction is not gathering all the facts before drawing conclusions. An incomplete induction can lead to erroneous conclusions, because something has been left out. This is particularly true when doing word studies.

Another error is the inclusion of information in the induction that does not belong. This usually happens when the student has not sufficiently grasped the laws of logic which are presented in the previous chapter.

Several tools will help the student avoid these mistakes.

### **The Tools of Induction**

#### 1. The Concordance

The major tool for doing a complete induction is a good English-Greek concordance. A concordance which only refers to an English version will not be sufficient. The student needs access to a concordance which will give him access to words in the original languages of Scripture. Strong's Concordance is very useful. Another concordance that many students find helpful is *The Word Study Concordance*.<sup>1</sup>

“Careful searching of the Holy Scriptures under a sound inductive method of dealing with what is discovered there, coupled with the Holy Spirit’s guidance, will guarantee the sincere seeker after truth that his goal will be reached.” Merrill Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching*

Today, computer programs, often free of charge such as E-Sword, have electronic concordances that greatly speed up the inductive study of words that relate to a particular category or doctrine. Some commercial computer programs actually allow the Greek student great flexibility in doing word and doctrinal studies. One such is Bible Works, but there are others.

Suppose the student desires to study the doctrine of prayer. A look at the index of *The Word Study Concordance* shows that four different Greek words were used in the King James Version of the Bible for the English word prayer.<sup>2</sup> Immediately the student should recognize that according to the laws of the logic of language, unless they are specifically stated to be identical, the student must distinguish the

## 4. *Inductive and Deductive Reasoning*

words. The fact that all four are translated by the same English word “prayer” is unfortunate, and will lead to erroneous conclusions if care is not taken.

In order to completely understand the doctrine, the student must study each word, and make careful distinctions between them. We will examine briefly one of these words.

The Greek word for prayer that occurs the most often is the noun *prosuke*, which occurs 37 times. At this point the student must examine each occurrence of the word in its sentence and in context. The data can be then be formulated into a doctrinal statement concerning the word involved. (It will be noted at this point that there is also a verb form of this word, pray, which occurs 87 times in the Greek New Testament. All the data from its uses must also be examined before an overall doctrinal picture can begin to take shape.)

One can see from the foregoing that doctrinal study using the inductive method is time consuming and laborious. But the rewards of diligent study to the student of Scripture are well worth the effort involved.

The following works should not be consulted until the student has performed an inductive analysis from a concordance on all the Bible words which he understands relate to a specific topic.

### 2. The Topical Bible

The student of Scripture should have access to a topical Bible for his inductive study. A topical Bible gathers together various Bible passages that discuss the same subject. Many times the study of a topical Bible will fuel the imagination of the student. He will see connections that might have otherwise been missed.

Many times subjects covered in topical Bibles can be subdivided into individual doctrinal areas. It is from a topical Bible that a student may find that there are multiple judgments in Scripture, that there are different kinds of spirit beings, or that intercession is not the same as supplication.

*However, topical Bibles can be misleading*, as the categories are from the point of view of the organizer, and he may have a doctrinal agenda or bias that he is following. The student must use the topical Bible very carefully, and not assume the accuracy of its categories, or the passages that should be included in those categories.

### 3. Books on Theology

While books on theology must be used with great care, they can be of help in searching out theological and doctrinal themes and terms. Many times passages which would otherwise be overlooked can be discovered using these works. However, the theological position of the author will often cloud his judgment as to which passages are categorized under which doctrines. Sometimes wrong passages are included, and correct ones excluded.

The beginning student should avoid authors whose hermeneutical principles are not the literal, grammatical, historical approach such as amillennial or covenantal works. While these authors have a certain value, their weaknesses may outweigh that value. The student should examine the Scriptural teaching for himself using the inductive method before consulting such authors.

Once a student has “searched the Scriptures” as the Bereans of old, the study of theological works, including book commentaries, can be of value. These works can be categorized in the following manner.

1. Liberal works. These are theological discussions written by those who reject the authority of the Scripture. They should be used only with extreme care, if at all. Usually the student will find the next listed works of greater value.



## 4. Inductive and Deductive Reasoning

2. Conservative works. Conservative works can be further subdivided into several categories:
  - a. Works by covenant authors. These include all those works by men who hold the amillennial or postmillennial position, as well as those who hold to what is generally referred to as the “reformed position” regarding salvation. (There are some reformed theologians who are premillennial, and even pretribulational, but they are rare.)
  - b. Works by dispensational authors. Generally, these works take a more consistent hermeneutical stand than those written by covenant authors. It is to these works that the student should first attend. However, just because an author *is recognized* as dispensational does not mean that he has understood the nuances of God’s revelation, even in dispensational areas. Indeed, many dispensational writers are dispensational in name only, and actually hold views that are not consistent with a normal interpretive approach.

The “bottom line” with doctrinal studies can be summarized in one short statement, “Be very careful.” Theological works of any kind, including book commentaries, should not be consulted until AFTER the student has done his own work.

### Exercise 4.1

To see the value of a correctly formulated syllogism, complete the following:

**Major Premise:** Murder and adultery are violations of the sixth and seventh commandments of the law.

**Minor Premise:** King David committed murder and adultery in the matter of Uriah the Hittite and his wife Bathsheba.

**Conclusion:** Therefore?

### Exercise 4.2

Using a library that contains standard theological works develop a bibliography of tools for induction. List at least three works under each category below. Prepare the list according to a standard style such as MLA, APA, Chicago style, Turabian, etc.<sup>3</sup> These works are available through some college bookstores, or may be found in any standard public library. Include works under the following headings:

1. Concordances
2. Topical Bibles
3. Theological works and commentaries.

(This exercise was designed for my students in Bible college and seminary. Unless one has ready access to a library for such an institution, it is best to skip it.)

### Exercise 4.3

Using the inductive tools available to you, make a list of all the verses that contain information on the doctrine of *spirit beings* in the New Testament. Look up the word *angel* to begin. Note that not every passage that uses the word *angel* is a reference to spirit beings. And some passages may be disputed, such as the identity of the angels of the churches in the Book of Revelation. You must decide which verses to include as being part of the doctrine of angels as spirit beings, and be able to support your inclusion through sound reasoning.

You must also look up some other words to do a complete induction on spirit beings. The student should study such words as demon, spirit(s), Satan, devil, cherubim, seraphim, etc. In fact, the first step in studying a doctrine is to “brainstorm” and arrive at a list of Bible words which relate to the doctrine being studied. There are more words in this doctrine than the ones listed here!

#### ***4. Inductive and Deductive Reasoning***

For this exercise, make a list of all the words you can think of that might relate to the doctrine of spirit beings in the New Testament. Provide the biblical reference of every verse you find that deals with this doctrine in both Testaments.

### *Endnotes*

- 1 This work is still available, though it seems to be out of print. Check on-line, as Amazon and others may have it available in used editions.
- 2 The same results can be obtained from E-Sword by doing a word search on the English words *pray* and *prayer*. A look at the accompanying Strong's numbers will indicate the different Greek words used.
- 3 Any accepted style will do. Turabian, which was a reconstructed Chicago style, may no longer be available, but there are manuals and grammars, such as the *Harbrace College Handbook*, that provide information on how to format a bibliography using MLA and APA styles.



## ***5. The Importance of History in Interpretation***

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a correct use of historical materials in the study of Scripture and to develop a methodology for applying this material to the text of the Bible. This chapter presents several aspects of the historical approach.

### **The Human Author**

God used human beings to pen the pages of the Old and New Testaments. Each author had differences of style in writing, in cultural outlook, in temperament, and even some differences in theological perspective. This distinction in perspective is most obvious when examining the different viewpoints of the Old Testament authors and the New Testament authors. It should not surprise us then when we read in the Pentateuch statements about the law that distinguish its application from those in the New Testament.

Following are some questions that may help in the study of the human author of any book of the Bible.

1. When did the author and/or speaker live?
2. Who were his contemporaries?
3. What do I know about his birth and early years?
4. What do I know about his cultural background?
5. What is known of other of his writings, if any?
6. What was his native language?
7. What is known of his spiritual background?
8. What was his approximate age at the time of his writing the particular material under consideration?
9. What events in his life may have affected his writing (Paul's road to Damascus experience, for example)?
10. What can I learn from other authors of Scripture about him?

In researching these questions the student should first search the pages of Scripture. Other sources can then be used. Such works as Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, biographical sketches in books and magazines, the writings of ancient historians, and even the findings of archaeology could be used to great advantage in this area of study.

### **The Speaker**

Sometimes the speaker in a passage is different from the human author. For example, the various writers of the Gospels quote Jesus, John the Baptizer, secular officials, priests, etc. Paul even quotes a secular poet. Many authors of the New Testament refer to the Old Testament.

When the speaker of the passage is different from the human author he also must be researched. The student should use the same approach as presented above in finding out as much about the speaker as possible.

## 5. *The Importance of History in Interpretation*

### **The Recipients**

Who is the writer or speaker addressing? Sometimes more than one person is being addressed. While Luke addressed his letters to only one person named Theophilus, Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders as a group in the book of Acts, Chapter 20.

If an individual is the recipient, what is known about him from both Biblical and extra-biblical sources?

If a group is being addressed, what characteristic or characteristics cause them to be considered a group? In other words, are they a local church, a group of elders, Jewish believers dispersed among the nations, the leaders of Old Testament Israel, or a group of believers from several local churches? This characteristic will be vital in both interpreting and applying the Scriptural passages addressed to them. Many times the application of a passage written to such a group is extremely limited because of the specific group characteristic.

As much as possible should be learned about the group regarding geography, culture, religion, etc.

### **The Subject**

About whom or what is the speaker or author talking? Sometimes the reference to the subject is easily identified as it is clearly stated in the context. To insure that one is being accurate always identify the antecedents to any personal pronouns the author is using. When Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 38:9, “Thus says the Lord, Do not deceive yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans will surely depart from us, for they will not depart” who was in Jeremiah’s mind when he wrote “yourselves” and “us?”

As noted previously care should be exercised in identifying the antecedents of pronouns. Does the pronoun “I” in a passage refer to the author or to the speaker, if there is a choice?

Also, is the word “we” inclusive or exclusive? Sometimes the word “we” includes the author and the readers, is a limited reference to the author himself (the so-called editorial plural), or refers to the author and his companions or colleagues, and excludes the readers.

It is extremely important to take note of all pronouns and discover to whom they refer. Ask yourself, “Who is being mentioned by the pronouns *I, you, he, she, it, we, you, and they?* To whom do the pronouns *me, him, her* and *them* refer?” The student should also examine the references to other pronouns such as *who, whom, himself, herself, which,* etc.

Once you have identified all the references of this sort, do historical research on all the individuals who are mentioned in a context. Sometimes this may be complicated by the fact that more than one person may have the same proper name or designation. (The name James, for instance, is used of more than one individual, as is the name Mary.)

### **The Time Element**

The writings of the Bible are bathed in history. Every writer was a real person with a relationship to the world around him. Events affected him, and God used these situations when the human author wrote Scripture.

It is important to ask the right questions concerning the history that affects the passage of Scripture being studied. Following are four questions that should be answered concerning every passage the student approaches.

1. What important historical events and people are likely to bear on the writer? Investigate names of political figures mentioned in the text. Use a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia to research the

## 5. *The Importance of History in Interpretation*

historical setting, and you may desire to consult secular works on the history of individuals and events.

2. What is the political situation under which the writer is writing? Again a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia can be helpful here, but do not eschew secular works. Many historical treatises contain valuable information. Be sure to examine more than one source, and make sure your sources list their sources.
3. What is the speaker's or writer's personal situation at the time? This is sometimes difficult to find, but someone like Paul has extensive background information found in the book of Acts. Likewise, David wrote Psalms that grew out of his personal experiences.
4. What is the personal spiritual situation of the speaker or writer? Internal information in the book or epistle may give insight to this question. It's evident, for instance, that the Corinthians had several spiritual problems that Paul was addressing.

### **A Word to the Wise**

Students sometimes become confused by terminology. This can happen when a word or phrase is used differently than the norm, which happens occasionally in theological studies. One such possible misunderstanding is the use of the words "history" and "historical."

#### ***An Unorthodox Use of the Word Historical***

A process known as "historical criticism" began in the 1800s. It has also been called "higher criticism."<sup>1</sup> Several men who rejected biblical authority began to analyze the biblical documents with radical presuppositions:

1. They rejected the supernatural origin of the Bible and attempted to explain its existence through natural means as determined by rationalistic arguments.
2. They assumed the biblical texts went through several editors and sources. For instance, Julius Wellhausen believed that the Pentateuch showed evidence of four different authors and sources. These he designated them J, P, E, and D, which stood for four different documents. Hence this approach became known as the documentary hypothesis. J stood for an imaginary document that emphasize the name "Jehovah" (Yahweh). The P document was the "priestly" document. The E document emphasized the name Elohim. The D document was the source for unique information in Deuteronomy. This view has been adequately refuted by able scholarship, but one can still hear or read about it today. The best simple book that refutes Wellhausen's view is *The Documentary Hypothesis* by Umberto Cassuto.<sup>2</sup> Others, such as Rolf Rendtorff and John Van Setters, have also expressed views on the historical origins of the Pentateuch quite similar to Cassuto's.
3. In New Testament studies, many unbelieving rationalists began to dissect the New Testament writings on "historical grounds." Many of these arguments were not historical at all, but based on subjective evaluations of the writing styles. For instance, some taught that Paul didn't write some of his epistles, and that others had been edited by different writers with somewhat different styles of writing. The best refutation of the details of this approach is still Donald Guthrie's *Introduction to the New Testament*.

## 5. *The Importance of History in Interpretation*

### *A Redefinition of the Word History*

Another confusion exists with the use of the word *history* that came out of the writings of “neo-orthodox” writers of the early to middle twentieth century. Neo-orthodoxy was a reaction against radical liberalism of the nineteenth century. German writers such as Karl Barth (pronounced *bart*), Emil Brunner, and Reinhold Neibuhr were not orthodox at all, and sometimes accepted the arguments of historical criticism, especially the idea that the Bible contains errors.

But since they rejected the historical accuracy of Scripture, they came up with some strange ideas. One of these is that there were two different kinds of history. Provable, objective history they called by the German word *historie*. Unprovable or obviously false (to them) historical statements in Scripture they called by the German word *geschichte*. This was “holy history” (*heilgeschichte*), history that was valid for teaching religious truth, but mythological otherwise. The terms “myth” and “mythological” were also used abnormally. A myth was simply some historical narrative in the Bible that couldn’t be proved by secular sources. It may or may not have happened in reality, but that wasn’t important. What was important was what the modern reader got out of it.

Neo-orthodoxy is a highly subjective system. Barth and others rejected propositional truth. To Barth the Bible “became the Word of God” when a reader encountered it and gained benefit from it. This encounter neo-orthodox writers called a crisis, hence neo-orthodoxy is sometimes called “crisis theology.”

When reading theology books, be careful what view the author is espousing. He may be a radical liberal and using the word *historical* in the sense of historical criticism, or he may be neo-orthodox (there are various varieties) who uses the word *history* in the sense of a Scriptural myth. In either case, they may use the phrase “historical interpretation” in a totally different way than we are using it in this work.

#### ***Exercise 5.1***

Read Romans chapter six carefully, and list all the pronouns given verse by verse. Identify by name or description each person or persons to whom each pronoun refers.

#### ***Exercise 5.2***

Investigate and write a short biographical summary (500-1000 words) on at least TWO of the following:

1. Alexander and Philetus
2. Cretans
3. Alexander the copper smith
4. Onesimus
5. Sylvanus
6. Sosthenes
7. Timothy
8. Titus

List all sources from where you gained information on your subject using a standard bibliographic format.



### *Endnotes*

- 1 “Lower criticism” is another term for textual criticism, which attempts to determine the original text of Scripture from differences in various ancient manuscript families.
- 2 Cassuto was not a Christian. He was a Jewish rabbi who was a recognized expert in the Hebrew language. He clearly understood the basic fallacies of the documentary hypothesis, though he also accepted some “historical criticism” of the New Testament.



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According to the principle of literal interpretation, the Bible is to be interpreted according to a normal, rather than an abnormal, approach to the meaning of language, including literary contextual considerations and figurative language. According to the principle of historical interpretation, the Scripture is to be interpreted in light of its historical context. According to the principle of grammatical interpretation, the Bible is to be interpreted with a view to the normal grammatical functions of the language in which it was originally written. It is necessary to use all three principles of interpretation when approaching any particular passage of Scripture.

### **The Implementation of the Grammatical Method**

The interpreter who must rely on English sources exclusively is limited in doing any original, independent study of the Word of God. The serious student of Scripture must come to grips with the original languages in which the Bible was written. While not all believers have neither the desire or ability to master the Biblical languages, every Christian can do some things in order to rid himself of sole dependence on English sources.

Some tools are especially designed for the English reader to help him overcome limitations in the language area. Total dependence on English works is thus eliminated, and while the student may still be limited in the study of syntax, at least a basic, rudimentary understanding of the text of the original writings can be determined. Therefore, we will begin our discussion of the grammatical method with how to perform a Greek word study.

### **Greek Word Studies**

#### *The First Principle of Word Study*

The building blocks of language are words. In doing study in any language, word study, at least on the lexical level, is vital. But looking up words in a dictionary or lexicon<sup>1</sup> is not sufficient for the student who would go beyond the mere repetition of translated meanings. He must learn to do independent word study.

The first principle of word study is that such study must be inductive. Words have meaning by virtue of the way that they are used in their historical context. The words of the Bible are no different in this respect. These words gain meaning by their overall relationship to culture, people, and the events of their day.

In the Bible, words took meaning from their non-Biblical surroundings, as well as from the way that the Biblical authors used them. An inductive study of a word would then involve both Biblical and non-Biblical source materials.

The true meaning of a word can only be determined by its use. Many fallacious arguments have been made using the derivation of a word (its etymology) as its primary meaning. While the study of etymology has its place, it is not the derivation of a particular word that determines its meaning, but its current meaning in the day and circumstance in which it was used. The Latin phrase is *usus loquendi*.

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### *Biblical Sources*

As an illustration we will use a word that occurs in Acts 2:4. The Greek word translated *filled* is ἐπλήσθησαν (*eplēsthēsan*), which is the aorist tense, passive voice, indicative mood, third person plural of πίμπλημι (*pimplēmi*). Those who have a knowledge of the syntax of the Greek would do well to analyze the tense, voice and mood using a good grammar such as *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* by Dana and Mantey. Such a study is beyond the scope of this work.

The first step in our study will be to list all the times that this word is used in the Greek New Testament. A look at a Greek language concordance shows us that this word occurs only twenty-four times in the New Testament. We should then examine each of its 24 occurrences, and study the context of each carefully. We will note that the word is variously translated in the King James Version as follows: *was furnished, filled, were accomplished, and full time came*. The student will also note that the word occurs only in the Gospels and Acts, the last occurrence being in Acts 19:29, where a whole city is said to be “filled with confusion.” It is also worthy of note that this is *not* the word for *filled* used in Ephesians 5:18.

In checking other words translated *filled* in the index of the concordance we find that the King James authors translated ten other words in this way. The most important of these words for this study is the word πληρώω (*pleroō*). It is translated many ways, the most usual being *fulfilled* and *filled*. Significantly, this is the word that is used of the filling of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 5:18. Here the verb is present tense, passive voice, imperative mood. Thus we see that there are two distinct words used of “Spirit filling,” and as we shall see, they do not have precisely the same meaning.

The laws of logic tell us that since these two words are different, we must not confuse them. Unless they are affirmed to be identical, we must assume that they are not. Therefore, the filling of the Spirit in Acts 2:4 is somehow a different Spirit filling than that taught in Ephesians 5:18, where the second of our Greek words is used.

These two fillings of the Spirit are generally taken to be one doctrine by those who do not make careful distinctions between words and grammatical forms in the New Testament. The Bible actually discusses two distinct fillings of the Spirit, one which took place on the Day of Pentecost, that, for grammatical reasons, indicates that those filled had no part in the filling. It was totally the work of God in applying a control of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The filling of the Spirit in Ephesians 5:18, on the other hand, is commanded of all Christians. The verse may be translated, “Be continually filled by the Holy Spirit.” The filling of Acts 2:4 *was not* sought by those being filled. But because of the imperative mood of the verb, the filling of Ephesians 5:18 *is* to be sought by those being filled.

### *Non-Biblical Sources*

Our word study is incomplete. We must go beyond the simple examination of words in the Biblical context, as vital as that activity is. We should study the use of our Greek word πληρώω (*pleroō*) in extra-Biblical sources as well.

#### 1. The Greek Old Testament

Perhaps the most significant non-Biblical use of the words of the Greek New Testament is found in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint. We call this non-Biblical Greek because the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic, not in Greek. The Greek of the Old Testament is *translation* Greek, and must be used much more cautiously than the Greek of the New Testament in determining word meanings. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament is of variable accuracy;

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that is, it is more accurate in some places than others when compared to the original Hebrew or Aramaic.

The easiest way to check an Old Testament use of a Greek word is by using *A Concordance to the Septuagint* by Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath. If the student does not have access to this work (it is quite expensive) a somewhat limited study can be made by using Greek Lexicons. For instance, the lexicon by George Abbott-Smith gives the Hebrew word or words most often translated by the Greek word in question.

Today, with the use of the electronic computer and the internet, various tools are available to help in this type of study. Currently, E-Sword and other programs like it are free on the internet, and can help in comparing the Greek Old Testament with the original Hebrew. The student can also use it in doing word studies. Or a student may purchase a program such as *Bible Works* which is quite advanced, and is recommended only for the Greek and Hebrew student.

### 2. The Papyri

Beyond the Septuagint, one should check the use of Greek words in the papyri. The volume which deals with this subject in detail is *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* by James Hope Moulton and George Milligan. Some help in this area is also available in commentaries on the Greek text, and books on Greek word studies. Care should be taken with these, as they often present conclusions rather than straightforward evidence. The student of the New Testament desires to draw his own conclusions.

*Papyrus* is a reed which grows in swamps and along rivers and lakes in some parts of the world. It was made into something like sheets of paper (it is the word from which the word *paper* is derived). Perhaps the original writings of the New Testament were written on papyrus. Many wrote legal contracts, marriage documents, and letters on papyrus scrolls. A large number of these have been preserved in collections in some libraries, and are a source of information about ancient languages.

### 3. Other Sources

Sources such as the Greek church fathers can be checked if one has access to the early writers in their own language. Word studies done by Greek and Hebrew scholars can be of great help. These works often give information gleaned from sources to which the student does not otherwise have access. However, these are “secondary sources” and care must be taken with the conclusions which the writers have drawn.

### 4. Word Study Aids

The student should examine what other students have discovered concerning the meaning and use of the word. *This should not be done until the student has performed an inductive study.* Use lexicons and other works such as word studies done by men such as Wuest, Vine, Vincent, Robertson, etc. to discover information that might have been missed. Again, these are secondary sources.

## Hebrew Word Studies

Equally valuable is the study of words from the Hebrew Old Testament. Much the same process is used when doing Hebrew word studies. Again, E-Sword is a great help when the student wishes to look up the various occurrences of the Hebrew word.

The Hebrew Old Testament is much larger than the Greek New Testament, and consequently Hebrew words regularly occur hundreds of times each. While there are some words that occur this often in the Greek New Testament, the great majority of theologically important Greek words occur

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fewer than fifty times. Hebrew word studies can be time consuming and laborious. This is not to say that the student should ignore them, but be prepared to spend many hours studying significant doctrinal words in the Old Testament.

An adequate lexicon is necessary when doing Hebrew word studies. The best available is still *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Brown, Driver, and Briggs. Unless the student is planning to pursue Hebrew studies, it is better not to purchase this volume, as it is difficult to use for the non-Hebrew student.

*The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* by Harris, Archer, and Waltke, another secondary source, is perhaps a more valuable tool for the non-Hebrew student. It's index is keyed to Strong's numbering system, and it can be used adequately by the English speaking student.

### **Syntax and Other Grammatical Considerations**

Word studies are insufficient for the Bible student. In fact, word studies can be misleading if other grammatical information is not correctly understood. One often hears preachers using the meaning of Greek words, but incorrectly using other grammatical data, so that entirely wrong conclusions are drawn from the text of Scripture under consideration.

Consequently, it is desirable that the Biblical exegete<sup>2</sup> go beyond word study. He should be able to deal with the *language* of the Bible. For several reasons, it is best that he deals with the original language of Scripture.

### *The Relationships between Grammatical Elements*

The relationships between words, phrases, and clauses are different in the original languages of Scripture than in English. As noted, these syntactical relationships can only be adequately analyzed by the student of the original languages. The unfortunate fact is that these studies are being under emphasized in the modern academic climate of biblical studies. It is even possible to gain a master's degree in theology today with only a rudimentary knowledge of Greek and Hebrew syntax. This deplorable situation can only be remedied by serious Bible students demanding a return to these language disciplines. The student cannot know how much is actually being lost in understanding unless he has pursued the study of the original language.

### *Word Order*

The word order of sentence in both Greek and Hebrew is different than the word order usually presented in the English translation. In Greek, for instance, the first word in a sentence or clause is being emphasized as of primary importance. The last word is also being emphasized as being important, though it is secondary in emphasis to the first word.

An illustration of this occurs in Philippians 1:12. The verb which is translated "understand" in the KJV (actually it is the Greek infinitive *ginoskein* [γινώσκειν], meaning *to know*) occurs first in the sentence. This word order would make the sentence sound rough in English, so the translators were forced to "smooth out" the sentence. In doing so, they lost some of the peculiar emphasis of the Greek language. This is inevitable when going from one language to another.

In Hebrew a different word order is normal. Often the verb is placed first in the sentence or clause. If another word, such as a noun, is placed before the verb, generally it is being emphasized. An illustration of this may be seen in Isaiah 1:14.

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Only through a study of the original languages of Scripture can the student hope to put the emphasis on meaning where the divine author intended.

### *Verbal Tense and Voice Functions*

Tense and voice functions in the original languages are quite different than in English. In both the Hebrew and Greek verb tenses, the aspect of the action is more important than the time. In fact, in ancient Hebrew, there is no time element *inherent* in the verb at all.

In English and Hebrew two voices exist, the active and the passive. In Greek, three voices occur, the active, the middle, and the passive. The middle is often left untranslated because there is no adequate way to translate it consistently into one of the two voices in English.

Biblical language study is a necessary field for the serious Bible student who wishes to do independent research. It has been strongly affirmed by some that it is not necessary to study the languages of the Bible in order to be an independent and accurate student of the Word of God. Someone has said that the only people who make such claims are those who either have never studied Greek and Hebrew, or who have studied the languages but who did not learn how to use what they learned. Many of the latter took courses in the languages because they were required to, and did not go beyond “classroom” study. Consequently, in their post-college or post-seminary ministry they found the languages impractical. As a result they ignorantly lead their flock into misunderstanding the Word of God because they are unable to determine what Scripture actually says. Such ignorance in our Bible teachers should not be tolerated.

### *For the Non-Greek/Hebrew Student*

If you are limited to your native language in your study of Scripture, should you ignore the grammatical approach? Certainly not! The student can, and should analyze the grammar of the translation which he is using. However, a word of warning is in order. The English-only student needs to choose a translation that uses a word equivalent approach to translation, not a dynamic equivalent, or a paraphrase. While there may be some value in such works, they are not adequate for the study of grammar.

#### *Exercise 6.1*

Do a chart showing all the places where the Greek word which is translated *dispensation* occurs. Answer the following questions concerning the word.

1. By what various English words is this Greek word translated in the King James Version?
2. What two dispensations are mentioned in the book of Ephesians?
3. What is Paul’s designation concerning the dispensation in which we are now living?

#### *Exercise 6.2*

Using a good concordance, make a list of all the places where a particular word is used in the New Testament. Choose a word that occurs fewer than 15 times in the New Testament. Beside each reference that you find, comment on how you think the word is being used in its context. The good tool for this is E-sword<sup>3</sup> for the computer literate, and *The Word Study Concordance* otherwise.

#### *Exercise 6.3*

Several terms are used by books on word studies with which the student must be familiar. Find the meaning of each of the following words?

- |              |                   |
|--------------|-------------------|
| 1. Etymology | 2. Usus Loquendi  |
| 3. Idiom     | 4. Hapax Legomena |
| 5. Synonym   | 6. Antonym        |

## *6. The Importance of Grammar in Interpretation*

### *Exercise 6.4*

Using James Chapter 2 do the following:

1. Divide the chapter into sentences.
2. Isolate each verb.
3. Analyze the tense of each verb, (past, present, future, perfect). Use Greek if possible, or English if necessary.



### *Endnotes*

- 1 A lexicon is a limited dictionary. A lexicon of New Testament Greek limits its selection of words to those found in the New Testament. Furthermore, it limits the various contents (meanings) of each word to those found in the New Testament. Some Greek words had secular meanings that are not found in biblical usage, and therefore are not provided in many New Testament Greek Lexicons.
- 2 An exegete is, of course, a person who does exegesis.
- 3 E-sword is free for the program itself, though some of the resources must be purchased. I believe that the Strong's Concordance numbers and dictionary come with the free download. However, the Strong's dictionary is not adequate for the conscientious student, as some of its definitions are inaccurate.



## 7. *Figurative Language and Symbols*

### Examining a False Accusation

Those who interpret literally are often accused of ignoring figures of speech and symbols. This, of course, is an untruth, though it is widely believed because it has been widely disseminated. The opposite of literal is not figurative. Rather it is non-literal. The careful analysis of figurative language and symbols is basic to a literal interpretation of any body of literature, including the Bible. However, one must handle these two areas with great care, and some who have held to a literal hermeneutic have not given either enough study. This chapter is an introduction of figures and symbols, and the author hopes those who read and understand it will continue their study beyond its basic presentation. First, then, some preliminary matters.

### Expressing an Important Distinction

A figure of speech is not the same thing as a symbol. A figure of speech is a word or group of words used in some way *other than* that which reflects their normal meaning. A symbol, on the other hand, is a word, phrase, sentence, story, or object which represents something other than itself. Its very symbolical nature is based on understanding its primary literal meaning.

While a figure of speech is simply the use of words in some way that is different than their ordinary use, the symbol is a literal statement which in some sense *represents* a reality apart from itself. A symbol logically contains two elements: The symbol itself, and reality which it represents. Both must be identified and stated before the “fact” that a symbol is being used can be affirmed.

### Identifying Common Figures of Speech

This chapter presents the most common figures of speech used in the Bible. If the student desires a fuller discussion, he should consult the works by Terry or Bullinger. (Bullinger’s *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, however, contains many literary elements that are not true figures of speech. For instance, Bullinger lists ellipsis as a figure of speech, though modern scholarship would not do so.) Biblical writers used figures of speech constantly. One can hardly read a page of Scripture without some kind of figure of speech being involved. It is the interpreter’s duty to identify each figure and provide a reason for its existence, and the meaning of the figure as intended by the author.

By definition, a figure must be relatively easy to spot in the original language of the writer or speaker. Several principles come into play when we attempt to identify a figure of speech.

1. Unless a figure of speech is obvious, it is probably not a figure of speech. One may not claim something is figurative just because it suits one’s theology. For example, the 144,000 Israelites

“It must be noted that not every word-picture in prophecy is a symbol. Many of these are plain everyday figures of speech. When the angel in Revelation 19 invites the fowls to ‘the supper of the great God,’ figurative language is used. When Isaiah exclaims that ‘in the last days, the mountains of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains...and all nations shall flow unto it’ (Isaiah 2:2-3), the prophecy is not a symbol of the Christian church and world evangelization. The prophet Isaiah is using figurative language to describe the glory of the Jerusalem temple in the millennium.” Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, page 164.

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mentioned in The Revelation is not a figure of speech (nor is the language symbolical). John is talking about a literal group of people, 12,000 each from a literal tribe of Israel. But, some say, could not the numbers be rounded numbers? Rounding numbers is not a figure of speech, but a device of arithmetic. Such a device does not eliminate the literal meaning of the words *tribe*, or *Israel*. Here is the principle to follow in determining if something is figurative: If you can legitimately *identify* the figure as a recognized figure without changing the meaning of the words *not* in the figure, you can call a word or phrase a figure of speech.

2. If a statement contains an absurdity or impossibility, it is a figure of speech. The Revelation refers to the Lord Jesus as a lamb. He is not a lamb, so the word is a figure of speech. The earth cannot hear, therefore Micah 1:2 contains a figure of speech. Trees do not have hands, therefore Isaiah 55:12 contains a figure of speech.

The eating of Christ's flesh and the drinking of His blood in John 6:53-58 is a figure of speech. The passage does not teach that in the "communion" or "mass" that the elements become the literal body and blood of Christ. One can see that the interpretation of such elements must not reflect something outside the context of the passage in order to support an already-arrived-at false conclusion.

3. Sometimes the figure will be explained in the context. "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" in Ephesians 6:12 is such a passage. We're told that the word *sword* does mean a literal sword, but is a figure of speech. Peter refers to the Lord as a "living stone" in 1 Peter 2:4. Obviously stones are not alive, and the context requires that we apply the word stone to the Lord Jesus as a figure of speech. The church is called "the body of Christ," a clear metaphorical use of the word "body."
4. As stated previously, figures of speech should be fairly obvious and easy to spot. However, it is easy to overlook figures of speech if we do not know the literal meaning of a word. Some words and phrases become so common their figurative element seems to be lost. One such word is the word "dispensation." Literally, a dispensation only took place when a *literal* individual in a *literal* household distributed *literal* goods belonging to a *literal* master. But when Paul refers to the "dispensation of the grace of God," he is using the word dispensation as a figure of speech. The church is viewed as *figurative* household, Paul a *figurative* steward (dispenser), and grace as being *figuratively* dispensed. It is the close association between the literal, cultural acts, and the doctrinal figurative acts, that gives the figure of speech its force.

The above provides general guidelines for determining what a figure of speech is. The final requirement is to be able to identify a supposed figure with a specific identification. If the student cannot state the specific figure of speech by name, he has not completed his homework. The following section identifies the most common figures of speech that the Bible student can expect to encounter.

### **The Most Common Figures of Speech in the Bible**

#### *Simile and Metaphor*

The two most common figures of speech in both biblical languages are the simile and metaphor. Both deal with comparison.

A **simile** is a *stated* comparison between two objects. It *always* uses either the word *like* or the word *as* in the comparison. A **metaphor** is an *implied* comparison between two objects. It does not use the

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words *like* or *as*. A metaphor is not to be confused with a type or figure. Things that are actually metaphorical are often wrongly taken to be typical.

A good illustration of the difference between a simile and a metaphor can be described using Peter's statement in 1 Peter 1:24, "All flesh is *as* grass." This statement is a simile. It uses the word *as* to show the comparison. Had Peter said, "All flesh is grass" he would have been using a metaphor. The simile and the metaphor do the same kind of thing in two different ways.

### *Hypocatastasis*

**Hypocatastasis** is, in fact, a type of metaphor, but we list it separately for clarity. It might be called "metaphorical." This figure names an individual with the figure. John called Jesus the Lamb of God in John 1:29. A pure metaphor would have been, "Jesus is the Lamb of God." Hypocatastasis simply calls an individual the name, "Behold, the Lamb of God."

For more examples of hypocatastasis see Psalm 22:16 and Philippians 3:2.

### *Paradox, Oxymoron, and Irony*

A **paradox** is a literary absurdity or contradiction. It is used by an author or speaker to emphasize the unusual conditions he is describing. A good illustration of a paradox occurs in Matthew 13:12 where Jesus says, "For whoever has, it will be given to him, and he will have an abundance, but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." Another example of paradox is in Galatians 2:20.

An **oxymoron** is an absurdity between a noun and its modifier. Proverbs 12:10 speaks of the "tender mercies of the wicked." It further describes them as being "cruel." The idea of "cruel mercies" is an oxymoron. See also 1 Timothy 5:6, Mark 8:35 and Matthew 6:23.

**Irony** is a statement that means the opposite of what it says. Note Elijah's mocking of the Prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:27, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened." (NKJV) See also Job 12:2, 1 Corinthians 4:8, 2 Corinthians 11:19 and Matthew 27:29.

### *Personification, Anthropomorphism, and Anthropopathy*

Each of these figures has in common the transference of characteristics from one person or thing to another person or thing.

**Personification** is the transferring of personal animate characteristics to inanimate objects. See Isaiah 35:1 and Numbers 16:32.

**Anthropomorphism** is the transferring of human or animal *physical* characteristics to God. Ruth 2:12 refers to God as having wings, which, of course, He does not. See also Genesis 8:21.

**Anthropopathy** is the giving of human feelings to God. Zechariah refers to God as being jealous (Zechariah 8:2). This is a figure of speech to accommodate our human inability to comprehend God's personal nature. God certainly isn't jealous in the human spiteful sense.

### *Paronomasia and Hyperbole*

**Paronomasia** is a pun or play on words which suggests two or more meanings. It is one of the few language elements that allow for something other than a single meaning. It is often difficult to discern a pun in translation because it usually turns on a sound or visual similarity in the original language. A well-known example of paronomasia is found in Matthew 16:18. Here the play on words has to do with

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two words for *rock* which sound and look similar in the Greek. A not-so-well known example is Philippians 3:2-3 where a Greek pun is used in the words translated *concision* and *circumcision*. Sometimes, such as in Philippians 3:2-3 the pun comes across in English.

**Hyperbole** is an exaggeration as an emphasis. Today hyperbole is common in every day speech. Often we hear something like “I’ve told those kids a hundred (or thousand, or million) times to clean up their room.” Actually, they only said it a few times, but the hyperbole is readily accepted and understood. When the author was a child there was a television personality named Sid Caesar who, by several accounts, was extremely strong in his upper body. It was said that he was “as strong as an ox.” But he wasn’t, even if he could lift a heavy desk by himself, a story that was recounted more than once.

Hyperbole is a legitimate figure of speech that has nothing to do with being untruthful. When hyperbole is used by God, He expects His listeners to understand that fact, just as we understand it in situations like the above. In 2 Samuel 1:23, the exaggeration is obvious when David says of Saul and Jonathan, “They were swifter than eagles, They were stronger than lions.” (NKJV) See Deuteronomy 1:28, 1 Samuel 18:7, Psalm 6:6, Luke 6:42 and 15:52.

### *Litotes, Synecdoche, Metonymy, and Merism*

Each of these four figures substitutes one thing for something else in some way.

**Litotes** uses a weaker for a stronger, or emphasizes by denying the opposite. Understatement is an aspect of litotes as in Numbers 13:33, “we were like grasshoppers in our own sight,” where litotes is included in a simile. Luke uses litotes regularly in Acts. See Acts 12:18, 14:28, 19:24, 27:20.

See Romans 1:16 for an example of denying the opposite. When Paul says, “I am not ashamed” he means that he is just the opposite of being ashamed. See Isaiah 42:3 for an example of emphasis by denying the opposite. 1 Corinthians 9:5-6 contain two examples of litotes.

**Synecdoche** is using a part for the whole, the whole for a part; genus for species, a species for a genus; a singular for a plural, a plural for a singular; or a member of a class for an entire class. In Luke 2:1 the Roman Empire is referred to as “all the world.” In Jeremiah 8:7 the singular of animals is used for all their class.

The Apostle Paul used the word *Greek* refer to Gentiles, not just those from Greece. This was probably because Gentiles in general all spoke the Greek language. See Romans 1:16, 10:12; Galatians 2:3, 3:28; Colossians 3:11.

**Metonymy** uses cause for effect, effect for cause, abstract for concrete, or container for the thing contained. A literal translation of Genesis 45:21 says that Joseph gave them wagons, “according to the mouth of Pharaoh.” The King James Version translates “mouth” by the word “commandment,” which is without doubt what is meant. However, the force of the metonymy is lost by such a translation. It is much more forceful, and gives a better idea of the emphasis that God intended, by correctly translating the word “mouth.” Only Pharaoh’s mouth could have made the statement, as only he had the authority to say what he did. In this case, the metonymy emphasizes the importance of Pharaoh.

See also Matthew 3:5 (Jerusalem going out), Jeremiah 18:18 (attack with the tongue), 1 Corinthians 10:21 (marriage bed for sexual relations), Hebrews 13:4 (drink the cup), Hosea 1:2 (land guilty of adultery). Sometimes an individual word is used as metonymy, as when the word “house” refers to the people in the house, or even metaphorically as a spiritual household.

**Merism** is sometimes listed as a specialized type of synecdoche because it uses elements or parts of something to represent the whole thing. A common form of merism is the use of extremities to refer to

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all that encompasses something. For instance, Psalm 139:2 states, “You know my sitting down and my rising up” indicating that God knows all the psalmist’s actions.

One purpose for a merism is to limit a reference to a specific area. The very first statement in Scripture does this with the merism “heaven and earth,” which refers to the totality of God’s original act of creation, referring to the universe. But it leaves out some things that God created, as well. What did it include, and what did it leave out? Think about it.

A series of merisms occurs in Romans 8:38-39. See if you can spot them.

### Some Less Common Figures and Literary Devices

**Euphemism** is not strictly a figure of speech, though it may contain one. The word refers to the literary device of the softening of language, and this can be done by the substitution of a metaphorical statement for a harsher word or phrase. Hence, death is sometimes called “falling asleep” in the Bible. See Acts 7:60, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15, Hebrews 13:4.

**Ellipsis** is a literary device that consists of omitting words or phrases in a statement because they are to be understood by the reader or listener. If one says, “My dog is a purebred, but her puppies are not,” ellipsis is involved. The full statement after the “but” is actually, “her puppies are not purebred.” Sometimes the verb can be left out as well. “My dog is a purebred, but not her puppies.” But the words “are” and “purebred” are understood as in the previous example. This kind of thing is quite popular in the Bible, and the word or phrase omitted is sometimes supplied, and placed in italics by translators.

A good example of ellipsis is found in the correct English translation of Ephesians 2:8-9:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this *is* not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (NKJV)

Note that the words “is” and “it is” are in italics. They have been supplied because they are elliptical in the original Greek text. However, the word *is* should be understood as occurring three times in this statement, rather than just two times as in the above translation. Here is another translation where all the elliptical words have been inserted in bold italics:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this ***is*** not of yourselves; ***it is*** the gift of God; ***it is*** not of works, lest anyone should boast.

**Zeugma** is a form of ellipsis where two subjects are attached to a single predicate, but where only the first actually goes with the stated verb. A good example of zeugma is Luke 1:64:

“Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue *loosed*, and he spoke, praising God.” (NKJV)

Note that the verb *loosed* is added. The original Greek simply states “Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue....” Tongue does not go with the only verb, “opened.” One opens one’s mouth, but not one’s tongue.

**Aposiopesis** is a thought that is left incomplete. It is sometimes considered a form of ellipsis, but this is not accurate. It is a literary device for emphasis sake. Note John 6:62:

“Then if you should see the Son of Man ascending *to* where He was before—?”

To get the full sense, add the words “what then?” to the end of the statement. Aposiopesis occurs quite a few times in Scripture, but is often masked in translation where the words are actually supplied by the translator. For instance, the NASB adds the word “what” to the beginning as though this were a simple ellipsis:

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“What then if you should behold the Son of Man ascending where He was before?”  
(NASB)

**Apostrophe** is the act of a speaker directly addressing an imaginary listener or an inanimate object. See Isaiah 14:9-20 where the dead are addressed. See also Jeremiah 47:6, 2 Samuel 18:33 and Micah 1:2.

**Interrogation** is asking a question without expecting an answer. It is sometimes called a *rhetorical question*. See Hebrews 1:14 and Romans 8:33-35 for examples. See also Luke 12:17; Jeremiah 32:27; Romans 8:31. Many examples of rhetorical questions occur in Paul’s writings, as it seems to have been one of his favorite literary devices.

Some linguists include the leading question as a form of interrogation, though this is arguable. John 6:67 says, “Therefore, Jesus said to the twelve, You do not also desire to go away, *do you?*” This is a leading question, rather than interrogation. It expects an answer, which Peter provided in the next verse.

Sometimes leading questions are asked in the negative expecting a negative response, an unusual state of affairs.<sup>1</sup> In this case Peter answered the question with another question in 6:68, this time a true rhetorical question, “To whom shall we go?” This was an obviously negative reply to the Lord’s leading question.

**Pleonasm** is a literary redundancy.<sup>2</sup> The writer or speaker repeats words, or adds words of similar meaning for emphasis. The most famous pleonasm in the Bible is the phrase “Holy, holy, holy,” used in Isaiah 6:3, and repeated in Revelation 4:8 as a sort of literary “echo.”

Once again, the pleonasm is sometimes hidden by the translation. Isaiah 26:3 in the NKJV reads, “You will keep him in perfect peace...,” which reflects the common translation of virtually all versions. However, the Hebrew actually reads, “You will keep him in peace, peace...,” which is a perfect example of pleonasm.

See Proverbs 20:14 in the NASB for another example where some translations (NKJV, for example) obscure the pleonasm.

**Anadiplosis** is similar to pleonasm, in that it is the repetition of a word or idea for emphasis. However, it is built into a sentence in a different way than pleonasm. For example, “Mary Anders took a different road, a road that led to destruction.” The repetition of “road,” itself a metaphor for “direction,” is anadiplosis.

Ephesians 3:20-21 contains an anadiplosis, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, <sup>21</sup> to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (NKJV) Anadiplosis sometimes occurs, as here, when a word or phrase is somewhat separated from its original use to bring the readers mind back to the issue at hand.

### **Symbols**

As stated, a symbol is one thing that stands for something else. One cannot communicate without symbols, as the very sounds that come from our mouths are but vibrations in the air that represent something else. We call these sounds words, though other things such as screams are also symbols that communicate something. Words are actually representative of specific ideas or thoughts. Some call words “thought symbols.” When words are put together in certain ways they produce “complete thoughts.”<sup>3</sup>



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The letters on this page are also symbols. The individual letters stand either for individual sounds, or in combination with other letters a combination, variation, or even elimination of sound. They are therefore sometimes called “sound symbols.” Taken together in written form, letters form word symbols. The words, themselves, may be spoken. The “written word” is a set of symbols that are put together to represent first, the sound of individual words, and then the combination of words into grammatical units, sentences, paragraphs, etc.

Symbols are often visual representations where no actual written words are necessary. If one sees a red colored octagon (eight sided shape) standing by the road, even if no word is written, one knows it’s a stop sign. The written word “STOP” simply adds emphasis to the fact.

We could go further and discuss numbers as symbols, even representing written words, etc., but the foregoing is enough to show the importance of symbology (the study, interpretation, and use of symbols) in modern communication. But symbols have always been important in communication throughout history. And the Bible is no exception to that truth.

### **Symbols in the Bible**

Unfortunately, other than types, symbols are perhaps the most abused elements in the interpretation of Scripture. There seems to be a tendency to assume something is a symbol, and that symbol has a particular meaning. The student must guard against making an object symbolical unless he has adequate evidence to substantiate his claim.

#### *Determining a Symbol*

The first step in determining whether an object is a symbol is to find out if there is sufficient reason for its use symbolically in Scripture. If it is not, perhaps it is not a symbol. A good illustration of this is the seven churches of Asia mentioned in Revelation. There is no reason to claim these are symbols since there is no evidence to support the claim that they somehow *stand for* the history of the Christian church, as they are often taken. They appear to be the actual churches which received the letters. The tendency to jump to conclusions in symbology is very dangerous, and it is a violation of the laws of language logic.

If an object is a symbol, it was obvious to the original readers in their culture and with their history. They would recognize that its meaning cannot be upheld in the context in which it occurs. Sometimes that is obvious even two thousand years later. For instance, Satan is called a dragon in Revelation 12. However, Satan is not a dragon, but a spirit being. In John’s vision a dragon was used to symbolize the person of Satan. Satan is the reality behind the symbol.

This brings us to a largely overlooked requirement for a symbol. It must be a visual, auditory,<sup>4</sup> or physical reality stated in written form. Saying that something is similar to or like an object, does not make that object a symbol unless someone actually experienced the reality. But even then, it may be nothing more than a figure, a simile or metaphor. Many interpreters are very confused about this. Several things are represented as being symbols that have no visual or physical reality implied in the passages that make up the so-called symbolical reference.

For example, when the Lord showed His disciples bread and wine in Luke 22:19-20, those physical realities that the disciples could see fit the criteria as being symbolical. However, if blood is referred to in a passage without a physical visual reality, that does not mean that blood is a symbol of something else. Leviticus 17:11 is often thought to be symbolical, whereas the teaching is that blood must not be

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lost in great abundance if the flesh is to live. The life of the flesh is in the blood, but blood does not symbolize life, it maintains life by its presence.

If an object is obviously a symbol, that is to say, it has no obvious meaning apart from some symbolical element, and if it is not interpreted in its context (symbols often are interpreted, as in Revelation 12 above), we suggest the following process for interpreting the symbol.

1. Read and reread the context thoroughly. Make sure there is some kind of visual or physical presence involved in the symbol. And even if there is, that presence may be stated to be a comparison (simile, for instance) rather than a symbol. Remember that a symbol *stands for* its referent, not simply describes it.
2. Check other passages where the symbol is used, as they may give indication of its existence and meaning. However, note #5 below.
3. Attempt to determine if there is anything inherent in the symbol which might suggest its meaning. A lion might symbolize strength, perhaps. However, in another place it might suggest something else, such as aggression. In another place it might not be a symbol at all, but a simple metaphor or simile. Or a lion may just be a lion. Be careful!
4. If you cannot find out definitely what the symbol represents, it is better to be silent than to speculate.
5. One symbol may represent different things in different passages based on different contexts or even cultural considerations. Do not assume that a symbol always has the same referent or significance. In fact, it is highly unlikely that it will, especially when going from one cultural or historical setting to another.
6. Be very careful not to assume symbolism from previous experience or from bias. Many things that are assumed to be symbols may not be. They may be metaphorical, or someother figure of speech. The passover lamb is not symbolical of Christ, for instance. When Paul calls the Lord “our passover” in 1 Corinthians 5:7,<sup>5</sup> he is using a simple metaphor, not establishing a symbolical relationship.

“It is our conclusion that the mystical or symbolical interpretation of numbers has little place in a sound system of hermeneutics.” John J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology*, page 124.

Likewise, the dove is not a biblical symbol of the Holy Spirit. In three gospels, the phrase concerning the Spirit is “descending like a dove.” That is a stated comparison called a simile, not a symbol. One gospel, Luke, states that the Spirit descended in bodily appearance (σωματικῶ εἶδει) like (ὡσεὶ) a dove. This is also a simile, not a symbol.

Another assumed symbol is Christ, the lamb of God (this is different in kind than the passover reference of Paul mentioned above). This is somewhat more difficult, because in the Revelation John saw a visual representation of the Lord as a lamb. But that was limited to the Revelation experience of John, and is not to be taken as a general doctrinal assertion. When the Baptizer referred to Jesus as the Lamb of God, he was making a metaphorical statement, not a symbolical one. All in all, it is better not to think of Christ as being symbolized by a lamb in the general sense. Rather, He is compared to a lamb in a specific sense, and in specific passages in the Revelation He may be represented by a lamb symbol. Certainly the Levitical lambs *do not* symbolize Christ.

## 7. *Figurative Language and Symbols*

One finds many more examples of assumed symbols in theological writings. Assume the posture of the benevolent skeptic when approaching such claims. If something is truly a symbol in a specific passage because it meets the criteria, that is good. Even if it is so found to be, do not assume every time the word is used it is a symbol, and even if it is a symbol, that it represents the same thing every time.

7. Be careful with numbers. Only in those passages where it is obvious that a number cannot be taken literally can we assume a numerical symbol. The 144,000 Israelites in Revelation, for example, are symbolical of nothing.
8. Generally speaking, colors have no symbolic (or typological) meaning. Usually the passages where they are so taken can be explained more easily as a figure of speech. In cases where a color is used symbolically, be careful to identify the reality of the symbol in terms of the people to whom the symbol was originally given. While a color can be symbolical in some passages, it is not necessarily always so in other passages, or it might represent something altogether different. White is such a color. Sometimes it may represent purity or righteousness. Other times it may represent age. Sometimes white is just white.

### *Deciding the Meaning of a Symbol*

Symbols have, in fact, a metaphorical element to them. The reason the symbol is effective is because there is a point of comparison between the symbol and its referent. Once the interpreter determines that a symbol exists and what its referent is, then his task is to determine the meaning of the symbol. That is, he must decide what the point of comparison is between the symbol and the referent for which it stands.

Often symbols are used in predictive passages. When the event or person predicted has come to pass, the significance of the symbol is easier to determine. If it has not come to pass, the significance of the symbol is more problematical, and must be pursued very carefully.

The following must be kept in mind while attempting to determine the meaning of the symbol:

1. The symbol is generally a real thing, person, or event. The symbol must be considered in its literal sense before a point of comparison can be determined. If a lion is a symbol, what qualities does a lion have that compare to the qualities of the referent? Sometimes, however, the symbol is not real. The beasts in the prophetic passages of Daniel and the Revelation are not real, yet they represent something symbolically. Usually it is the elements that make up the imagined beast that are the basis for symbology. The heads, the horns, the likeness of the bodies, etc. are open for comparison to something else.  
In this regard, symbols are almost always visual in the comparison, at least in some sense. The prophetic symbols were almost always seen in a vision or dream, such as the statue of Nebuchadnezzar, or the beasts of Daniel 7.
2. As previously stated, what point or points of comparison between the symbol and the referent can be observed. Look for qualities, activities, or other characteristics of the literal symbol. Indeed, sometimes the actions of the symbol are quite revealing, such as the star falling in Revelation 9.
3. Look for statements in the contexts where the symbols are used for statements concerning what it symbolizes. The dragon of Revelation 12 is stated to be the devil, for example.
4. Always keep in mind that there may be a point or points of comparison without a symbolical element being present. Satan is said to be *like* a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour in 1

## 7. *Figurative Language and Symbols*

Peter five. The lion is not a symbol passage, but a clear simile. In other words, Peter is not presenting a visual image that can be taken symbolically.

- Remember Occam's Razor. Keep the interpretation as simple as possible, with as few presuppositions and assumptions as you can. If your interpretation gets too complicated, you are probably reading more into the passage than is warranted.

### *Exercise 7.1*

Each of the following passages contains either a simile, metaphor or hypocatastasis. Write down the reference and state which, and then explain what and how two things are being compared in each statement.

- |                 |                    |                    |                 |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Isaiah 1:8   | 5. Matthew 5:14-16 | 9. Jeremiah 2:13   | 13. Hosea 5:12  |
| 2. 1 Peter 4:10 | 6. Isaiah 57:20    | 10. Psalm 1:3      | 14. Acts 2:3    |
| 3. Titus 1:7    | 7. Titus 1:12      | 11. Proverbs 25:11 | 15. John 21:17  |
| 4. Matthew 5:13 | 8. Jeremiah 4:7    | 12. John 10:9      | 16. Isaiah 53:6 |

### *Exercise 7.3*

Identify the figure of speech used in the following verses:

- Job 12:1,2
- Mark 8:35

### *Exercise 7.4*

Identify the figure of speech in each of the following verses:

- Psalm 2:4; 114:3
- Isaiah 65:2

### *Exercise 7.5*

Identify the synecdoche in the following passages:

- Judges 12:7
- Psalm 46:9

### *Exercise 7.6*

Identify the metonymy in each of the following verses. Take care as you read, and think about what metonymy is before you answer.

- Proverbs 12:19
- Leviticus 19:32
- Exodus 12:21

### *Exercise 7.7*

Identify the symbols, if any, in the following, what the referent and point of comparison are.

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. The lampstand in Zechariah 4:2       | 6. The keys in Matthew 16:19        |
| 2. The lion in 1 Peter 5:8              | 7. The lamb in Isaiah 53:6          |
| 3. The burning bush in Exodus 3:2       | 8. The boiling pot in Jeremiah 1:13 |
| 4. The lampstands in Revelation 1:12-20 | 9. The washing in Titus 3:5         |
| 5. The lion in Revelation 5:5           |                                     |

## *Endnotes*

- 1 Often negative leading questions expect a positive response. We do this often in English when we say something like, “Don’t you want some ice cream?” A negative response of “no” would be unusual, though not unprecedented.
- 2 Pleonasm in the Bible is usually words being repeated. Sometimes in poetic writing, entire phrases or clauses which say the same thing in different words occur. These are partial pleonasms. It is even possible to write two paragraphs explaining the same idea with different words for didactic purposes. You may recall the cliché “repetition is the mother of learning.” These are also partial pleonasms.
- 3 One traditional definition of a sentence is that it is a complete thought. The author was taught that as a child, and this definition stands today. For example, *Warriner’s English Grammar and Composition, Fifth Course* defines a sentence this way: “A sentence is a group of words expressing a complete thought.” You can find this on page 25 of the 1977 edition. A more accurate definition might be “A sentence is a group of words that contain at least one subject and one predicate.” But, of course, this definition depends on the student knowing what a subject and predicate are.
- 4 The blowing of a horn may symbolize danger, for instance. But the experiential element still stands. A symbol is not something that is simply similar to something else. Similarity is not identity, nor does it prove symbology! And unless a specific reality, visual or auditory, is stated or implied, be it in a vision or in a person or person’s personal presence, a symbol cannot be inferred.
- 5 Christ is said to be similar to the passover in which a lamb was sacrificed, but He is not symbolized by the Levitical sacrificial lambs.



## 8. *The Interpretation of Prophecy*

### **A Clarification of the Meaning of the Word Prophecy**

Perhaps there is no more gratifying area of Bible study than the topic of Biblical prediction. The Apostle Paul, in concluding his statement of the rapture in 1 Thessalonians, says that believers should “comfort one another with these words.” Prophecy is directly related to the comfort and encouragement of the saints.

Unfortunately, predictive prophecy is open to many abuses that do not seem to occur in other areas of doctrine. For this reason, a section on the interpreting of this vital area is included in this work.

A major problem with the interpretation of prediction in the Bible is because of the use of the word prophecy itself. Unfortunately, the modern use of the word prophecy to mean prediction has obscured the biblical doctrine. In Scripture the word primarily refers to God’s revelation to man, whether predictive or not.

In the Old Testament, for instance, the English word prophecy only occurs 6 times (KJV), and translates three different Hebrew words. There is no clear reference to prediction in their uses, though prediction may be implied. The more interesting and relevant word in the Hebrew Scriptures is the word prophet.

The common Hebrew word for prophet is *navee* (נָבִיא), and it occurs some 315 times. Again, it does not primarily refer to an individual who predicts the future, though he may. A prophet was primarily a spokesman for God, one who received revelation and spoke it to the people.

The verb form prophesy, *naba* (נָבָא), occurs 115 times, and likewise primarily means to receive revelation and speak it, which may include prediction.

This is consistent with the Greek word in the New Testament from which we get the English words prophet, prophecy and prophesy. They can refer to prediction, but also to simply non-predictive revelation. In fact, all Scripture was viewed by the New Testament writers as prophecy.

Peter referred to “prophecy of Scripture” in 2 Peter 1:20. He means prophecy that consists of Scripture (genitive of apposition), that is, written prophecy. He did so to distinguish the writing prophets from the speaking prophets. The doctrine he expresses in that section of 2 Peter deals only with written prophecy, which is all Scripture, and not all prophecy is predictive because not all Scripture is predictive.

The discussion in this chapter will deal with predictive prophecy, but it is important to realize that predictive prophecy is not separated out by the writers of Scripture. All the general principles of interpretation for non-predictive prophecy also pertain to predictive prophecy. But not everyone agrees. Many have formulated special rules for interpretation of prediction which allow them to interpret predictive prophecy differently than any other Scripture, which brings us to the major approaches of interpreting predictive Scripture.

## ***8. The Interpretation of Prophecy***

### **The Four Main Systems of Prophetic Interpretation**

#### ***The Liberal Approach***

The liberal theologian does not believe in predictive prophecy. To him, prediction is but an accommodation to the weakness of the unrefined human minds of Biblical times. The predictive element is rejected, and the prophet is viewed as nothing more than a moral reformer. This approach is obviously unacceptable to the Bible believing interpreter of Scripture.

One of the side effects of a proper emphasis on the doctrine of the rapture is that it seems to have the curious result of promoting orthodoxy in theology as a whole. - John Walvoord, *The Church in Prophecy*, page 119.

#### ***The Roman Catholic Approach***

The Roman Catholic approach is equally unsatisfactory. To the Roman Catholic theologian, the prophetic Kingdom of God is identical with the Roman Catholic Church. Consequently, he will treat any reference to the Kingdom of God as allegory which does not fit into his preconceived scheme. This view is in accordance with the idea that the Roman Catholic organization is the repository of all correct doctrine, and that nothing that has been established by the Catholic church can legitimately be refuted.

#### ***The Orthodox Jewish Approach***

The orthodox Jewish approach is more satisfactory to the Bible believing Christian of today. This approach says that prophecy in the Old Testament should be taken literally, and will be fulfilled in the future. Unfortunately, most Jews today take a liberal rather than an orthodox approach.

#### ***The Conservative Protestant Approach***

##### **The Non-literal Protestant Approach to Prophecy**

The non-literal Protestant approach is that which is taken by both the amillennialist and the postmillennialist, although the postmillennial theologian tends to retain literal interpretation in some passages.

The non-literal approach to certain passages taken by both the amillennialist and the postmillennialist are post-interpretive. That is to say, the conclusions which the non-literal theologians desire to reach determine the method of interpretation used in any given passage. The non-literal theologian has already determined his interpretation before he actually considers the scriptural evidence.

Any student of Scripture who approaches the Word of God without a theological bias, and who takes the meaning of the statements of Scripture as he finds them, cannot be either amillennial or postmillennial in his understanding of future events.

Even such a preeminent spiritualizer as Floyd E. Hamilton admits that if one applies a literal interpretation to Old Testament prophecies, it would give us just the picture of the millennium as the premillennialists teach (*The Principle of Spiritualization in Hermeneutics*, page 5).

##### **Amillennialism**

Amillennialism came out of the Alexandrian school in Egypt. Its best known early theologians were Clement of Alexandria and Origen. The early amillennialist taught that the millennium consisted of the age between the two advents of Christ. But it was Augustine who, in the late 300s, taught that the king-



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dom of God was the church itself. This became the view of the Roman Catholic church, which applies the kingdom of God to itself exclusively.

When the Reformation occurred, nothing changed. Virtually all the reformers such as Wycliffe, Luther, and Calvin were amillennial. (William Tyndale, however, was premillennial.)

The amillennialist does not believe that there will be any kind of earthly kingdom in the literal sense. The prophetic references having to do with the first advent of Christ he takes literally. However, the prophetic passages dealing with the second advent, with the exception of those passages that deal with the advent itself, he allegorizes. That is, he concludes that Christ will literally, physically return to earth a second time, but he also concludes that this has nothing to do with the setting up of the messianic kingdom as prophesied in the Old Testament and the Gospels.

Non-catholic amillennialism goes back to Augustine's view that the kingdom of God consists of the church. The false interpretive system can be described in three ways:

1. Israel and the church are the same people of God. This is sometimes expressed as the "unity of the people of God." They ignore the fact that Israel also had negative predictions made concerning its kingdom relationship to God. They transfer the blessings of Israel to the church, but reject its judgments. Convenient.
2. An outgrowth of the "unity of the people of God" error has to do with salvation. This is part of the error of covenantalism which postulates false covenants as the basis for the salvation program for mankind. According to covenant amillennialism, the program of God in salvation never changes, so therefore, the church and Israel do not have separate programs.
3. As a consequence of confusing Israel and the church, amillennialism must find a way of applying the Old Testament program of the kingdom to the church. Since a literal interpretation of the Old Testament kingdom passages leads to a literal kingdom as taught by premillennialism, the covenant amillennialist spiritualizes those passages. The clear geographical references to the kingdom must be made non-geographical. The clear passages about the position of the king must be made non-literal. The statements about how animals will behave in the kingdom period (Isaiah 11:6ff, for instance) must be applied to human beings.<sup>1</sup>

### **Postmillennialism**

Daniel Whitby, a radical theologian of the 1700s, invented postmillennialism. Whitby, an Anglican priest, was known for being a strong Arminian. He also held to Arian and Unitarian views. Though he was anti-Calvinistic, some Calvinists such as Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, and Augustus Strong were attracted to his views. But he was very influential in the Arminian movement, especially Methodism. Charles Wesley was an advocate of Whitby's postmillennialism.

Postmillennialism moderates the non-literal approach to a certain extent. Concerning the kingdom of God on earth, this view holds to some literal and some non-literal interpretations. Basically, the postmillennialist says that the church will make the world better by its evangelizing efforts, until the world is prepared in righteousness for the coming of Christ so that He can set up His earthly kingdom. Rather than the messiah intervening in history, as the Old Testament presents, the postmillennialist holds that the setting up of the kingdom of God on earth is the logical result of the evangelistic and social activity of the church.

Postmillennialism died a sudden death after the First and Second World Wars. As a result of the terrible events of those wars, the idea that the church was making radical changes in the world system was seen to be wishful thinking. Today postmillennialism is making a comeback. Sometimes called

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Restoration Theology, or Theonomism, it is affecting the previously amillennial community found among the reformed churches in America. It is characterized by a lack of understanding of the nature of the evil world system which, according to Scripture, is passing away. In its attempt to change the social order, it has diluted the gospel message to nothing more than a political, social reformation.

The current “dominion theology” movement is a form of postmillennialism. Dominion theology teaches that Christians should take over the political program on the earth. The word system, they seem to say, can be modified so that the Lord Jesus will eventually come to earth after the church establishes the kingdom. Unlike amillennialists, who teach there is no literal kingdom, postmillennialists teach that the church will bring in the millennium by Christians establishing control over all political systems.

Dominion theologians such as Bahnsen, Gentry, North, and Rushdoony have been very influential in the right-wing Christian political movement. Many Christians who consider themselves premillennial have been deceived by these men, and have erroneously concluded that the church has a political responsibility in the world today.

### **The Literal Protestant Approach to Prophecy**

#### **Premillennialism**

Premillennialism is the view that the Lord Jesus Christ will return to earth and subsequently establish the earthly kingdom predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures and in the Gospels. It is a view that is held almost exclusively by conservative, biblically based theologians, going back to the earliest days of the church. Before the end of the first century, Christians were expounding a premillennial view. Clement of Rome<sup>2</sup> wrote a letter to the Corinthians in which he espoused a premillennial view. This letter is generally dated 96 AD or before. Other early writers, such as Polycarp, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, and Tertullian seem to have been premillennial.

“The premillennial philosophy of history makes sense. It makes a Biblical and rational basis for a truly optimistic view of human history. Furthermore, rightly apprehended, it has practical effects. It says that life here and now, in spite of the tragedy of sin, is nevertheless something worth-while; and therefore all efforts to make it better are also worthwhile.”  
Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, page 531.

Premillennialism is characterized by a literal interpretation of prophetic elements dealing with both the first and second comings of Christ. It holds to a consistent distinction between Israel, the Gentile nations, and the church. As such, the view that Christ will return to establish His kingdom on earth through the forceful subjugation of His enemies is upheld. It is the only consistently normal approach to Bible prophecy.

### **Rules for the Interpretation of Prophecy**

The non-literal amillennial or postmillennial theologian says that special rules are needed for the interpretation of the prophetic genre.<sup>3</sup> This is affirmed because such theologians do not desire to interpret prophecy in the same way that other passages must be interpreted. Such doctrines as the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the nature of the trinity, etc. can only be upheld by a consistently literal approach to the passages that teach these doctrines. With this, the amillennial or postmillennial theologian agrees, but refuses to use the same principles when approaching predictive prophecy.

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The “special rules” they advocate are spiritual and allegorical methods. That is, they add a layer of meaning beyond the normal, a layer that must be understood by an individual to have a true concept of the Bible. These methods, though distinct to a certain extent, are the same as rejecting the validity of the literal, normal, historical-grammatical method of interpretation. They change the normal meaning of words, terms, and grammar to fit a doctrinal construct of their own devising.

The ultimate result of this is that only those who have the key can understand the Bible. One must not think that he or she can approach the text using the codified common sense of the literal method, and thereby understand what God wants you to know.

The application of the spiritual/allegorical method varies from writer to writer, so that there is a great divide between the amillennial and the postmillennial theologian. They use the same methods to arrive at widely divergent conclusions. The only thing they seem to agree on is that they are opposed to literal interpretation, which some denigrate as being “unscholarly.”

In fact, no special rules for interpreting prophecy are necessary. If the student uses the same principles which have been presented in this course for interpreting the Bible in general for interpreting prophecy, the correct premillennial view will be forthcoming.

### **The Hermeneutics of Premillennialism**

Roy B. Zuck on page 227 in *Basic Bible Interpretation* lays down the following basics of premillennialism:

1. Normal, grammatical interpretation of Scripture.
2. Israel in the Land with a King.
3. Israel and the Church.<sup>4</sup>
4. Consistency in Interpretation.

In fact, numbers two and three above are the normal result of applying one and four. The Bible teaches that the kingdom of God is geological (has land) and that there is a difference between Israel and the church.

If one consistently applies literal, historical, grammatical interpretation principles, the premillennial understanding with its various nuances will come forth.

### ***Steps for Interpreting a Prophetic Passage***

The following process of interpretation was presented in a hermeneutics class by Dr. Charles A. Hauser at the San Francisco Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary. The student will recognize that there is no essential difference in Dr. Hauser’s method of prophetic interpretation than that which is presented throughout this work:

What is our greatest need today? It is burning hearts and illumined minds, as God’s prophetic Word is expounded by men who approach the exegetical skills of our Lord. But can we ever know how Christ handled the Scriptures on the road to Emmaus to bring about such remarkable effects? I believe we can know and must know. We can know because the Scriptures give us numerous examples of His literal, grammatical-historical use of the old Testament. And we must know because otherwise we have no right to expect God in a similar way to warm and illumine the hearts and minds of men concerning His revelation in the Scriptures today! - John C. Whitcomb, Jr., in his Foreword to Paul Lee Tan’s book, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*

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1. Interpret prophetic passages as you would any other passage using the procedures of grammatical-historical-literal interpretation.
2. Determine the historical background of the prophet and the prophecy.
3. Determine the meaning of all names, events, and geographic references.
4. Determine if predictive prophecy is fulfilled, unfulfilled, or conditional.
5. Determine if the same theme or thought is treated elsewhere in Scripture.
6. Pay close attention to the context.
7. Determine the part of the prophecy that is local.
8. Literal interpretation is the key to prophetic interpretation.
9. Determine the subjects of the prophecy.
10. Observe the distinctions of Scripture.
11. Recognize the principle of compenetration.
12. Determine the purpose of the prophecy in its immediate context. Some prophecy is given to comfort (1 Thessalonians 4:18), some is given to exhort to service (1 Corinthians 15:58, note the *therefore*), and some to exhort to holiness of life (1 John 3:2,3).

### ***The Principle of Compenetration***

Compenetration is the idea that a certain statement is made that has an object in mind other than the one addressed. This does not mean that the statement has a double meaning, or even a double reference. Hauser says, "Compenetration has to be put into the passage by divine intention. We must not read Christ into the Psalms, for example. Compenetration does not change the meaning of a verse."

As an illustration of compenetration, Hauser gave the Ezekiel 28:12-18 passage dealing with the king of Tyre. The elements in the prophecy go beyond that person of history and refer to Satan. The reason it cannot actually be addressed to the human king of Tyre was obvious to the human author, Ezekiel. The actual statements of the address go beyond the description of a human being. For example, the human king of Tyre was not in Eden, the garden of God. The human king of Tyre was not an anointed cherub. The human king of Tyre was not perfect in his ways from the day he was created, and so on.

Normal interpretation requires that we understand the word *cherub* in its regular biblical sense referring to a spirit being. There is no reason to spiritualize or allegorize the information to try to make it fit a human being.

It is obvious to the literal exegete of Scripture that this principle must be used very carefully to guard against unwarranted allegorizing of the text, as some have done. Compenetration is simply a literary device to heighten the drama and emphasis of a text of Scripture.

### ***Exercise 8.1***

Read the entire second chapter of Joel. Do an analysis of the prophetic teaching of Joel 2:28-32. Present this analysis in a short paper of not more than 2,000 words. Make certain your paper uses the literal, grammatical, historical approach to interpretation as provided in this presentation.

## *Endnotes*

- 1 Lorraine Boettner, who is postmillennial, applies the Isaiah passage to Paul who went from a raging beast before his conversion to a gentle lamb-like animal afterward. See Boettner's work *The Millennium* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1957), 90.
- 2 Clement of Rome is sometimes called "the bishop of Rome." However, the hierarchical approach to church government, a violation of Scripture, had not yet materialized. Clement was not called a bishop (*episkopos*, meaning overseer) in the hierarchical sense in his letter, nor were the leaders of the Corinthian assembly. Clement referred to them as elders (*presbuteros*). The word translated "bishop" refers to the same position as elder in the New Testament, and in a letter by the Corinthians back to Rome, they refer to Clement as "your overseer." This does not mean that he was the only one, however. The early assemblies had a plurality of leadership, as is taught in Scripture.
- 3 This work does not deal with the problem of the genres of literature found in the Bible. One of these genres, apocalyptic literature, in which much predictive prophecy occurs, should be studied in light of normal interpretive procedure, with a consideration of some of the elements of that genre which influence such elements as figures of speech and symbols. However, literal interpretation must not be abandoned in the various genres of Scripture such as the apocalyptic, parabolic, and poetic. While there are certain unusual symbolic and figurative emphases in those genres and some unusual stylistic considerations, the genres themselves must still be approached using normal, literal methodology.
- 4 By this Zuck means the distinction between Israel and the Church. They are not the same people of God.



## 9. *The Interpretation of Types*

### What is Typology?

This is not as easy a question to answer as it seems, since many definitions of what a type is exist, as well as different approaches to typology. There is, in fact, very little agreement among Bible students on this subject. One thing, however, seems certain. Types are generally said to be people, events or objects mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures which look forward in some way to something or someone mentioned in the New Testament. People who write on the subject of types differ widely in not only which things are a type in the Old Testament, but also what any given type looks forward to in the New.

The following statement by Roy B. Zuck speaks to both the definition of types, and the approaches to typology:

...Bible interpreters differ widely on the extent to which types are to be seen in the Scriptures. Some say types are evident throughout much of the Old Testament. Numerous objects and events are said to be pictures of New Testament truths.... Others say types are those that are either explicitly designated in the New Testament or are implicit. Some Bible students suggest that types are only those that are designated as such in the New Testament, that is, those that are explicitly said to be types. Still others suggest no typology is seen in the Bible at all.<sup>1</sup>

Zuck then proceeds to discuss the various ways the Greek word *typos* is used in the New Testament, at the conclusion of which he makes this statement:

Obviously, the word *typos* (*typos*) is not a technical term in that every time it is used it means the same thing or always suggests a theological type. In fact the only occurrence of *typos* which is related to a prefiguring in the Old Testament of something in the New is Hebrews 8:5.<sup>2</sup>

So, how does one define typology? By digesting all the various statements typologists make, we can say that a type is a *supposed* person, object, or event in the Old Testament that looks forward to or prefigures something similar in the New Testament.

Virtually every typologist places emphasis on the “prefiguration” idea. Furthermore, when a typologist defines the theological significance of the word type, he uses words like *similarity*, *resemblance*, and *correspondence*, referring to how the Old Testament element relates to the New Testament element, which he generally calls an *antitype*. Zuck says that the antitype “should not be thought of as some superficial relationship, but rather a genuine and substantial counterpart. It should be natural and not forced.”

If you, the reader, are paying attention, you will realize that it is much up to the interpreter to determine if such a correspondence exists, how superficial or not the resemblance is, and whether or not the interpreter is forcing the idea of similarity, or whether it is “natural.”

We offer one last consideration before we examine the views of typology. How does normal interpretation enter into this determination? It appears that the interpreter cannot ask things such as, “Did the original author consider this to be a prefiguration,” since it’s clear that no actual prediction is being made in the Old Testament. Clearly there is an idea among typologists that the original type is prophetic of a future reality *in some way*, which appears to be somewhat undefinable. Evidently the

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interpreter cannot ask, “Did the original author understand this thing to be prophetic of a later reality?” because if he does he seems to imply some kind of double reference that only God would have understood, and that the interpreter can only understand if he avoids normal interpretive procedures.<sup>3</sup>

### What are the Views of Typology?

In general, three views have been presented with regards to types.

1. The first view might be called the *imagination view*. It says, essentially, that if there is something in the Old Testament that is somehow similar to something in the New Testament, then it must be typological. According to this view, it is exclusively up to the imagination and opinion of the interpreter as to what a type is.
2. The second view could be called the *limited typology view*. It is the one usually attributed to Bishop Marsh, who said, “Whatever persons or things, therefore, recorded in the Old Testament, were expressly declared by Christ or by His apostles to have been designated as prefigurations of persons or things relating to the New Testament, such person or things so recorded in the former are types of the person or things with which they are compared in the latter.”<sup>4</sup> This view says that only things expressly stated to be types actually are.
3. The third view is the *preliminary rule view*. It is so called because those who hold it make rules to limit what can be considered types before they actually study the doctrine. It is also the position which is held by most literal interpreters of Scripture today. It rejects what it calls the two “extreme” views stated above, and attempts to define principles for determining what are types and what are not types. Thus it rejects the idea that anything can be a type at the whim of the interpreter, but it states that things can be types which are not expressly stated to be as stated by Marsh. The way these types are determined is by whatever principles a particular theologian desires to enumerate.

It seems to the author of this work that typology is one of those abused areas of Scripture which seems to be popular at various times in Church history. In their interpretation of types, otherwise literal interpreters of Scripture seem to hold to a typological position inconsistent with their normal sound, literal interpretive practice. Many passages which are said confidently to be typological simply are not.

Paul Lee Tan’s position on typology is an excellent illustration of the position of many literal interpreters of Scripture who hold the third view above. After carefully stating the first two positions, he says, “We must be careful that extreme positions do not influence us in deciding the extent of typology, for it is between these two extremes that the real extent of Biblical typology lies.” He goes on to say, “It is safe to assume that a divinely designated type exists when (1) the Scripture expressly states it, (2) an interchange of name exists, and (3) there is an evident and manifest analogy.”<sup>5</sup>

However, others use somewhat different principles.

It appears to the author that the only difference between the *preliminary rule view* held by Tan and others, and the *imagination view*, is where the limits are placed. In the *imagination view* the limits are left to the imagination or opinion of the interpreter exclusively. In the *preliminary rule view* one states limits before he approaches Scripture, but these limits are still based in the imagination or opinion of the theologian.<sup>6</sup>

Paul Lee Tan’s terminology is highly suggestive. He uses the phrase “extreme positions” to describe the two views with which he disagrees. The assumption is that the reader of Tan’s work does not want to be considered “extreme” in his view. After all, in modern political-speak the moderate, middle-of-the-road position is what one must prefer. It’s the old right wing versus left wing political paradigm



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brought into theology. If you're extremely to the right, you're a Nazi. If you're extremely to the left, you're a Communist.

We must reject such a position as Tan's. The question is not, Is a view extreme? The question goes back to how one interprets the Bible in the first place. Only a consistently literal, historical, grammatical method should be applied to the Bible to determine the truth of any statement about typology, or any other doctrinal or theological matter.

The following statement by Roy B. Zuck illustrates the confusion of the typical typological presentation:

“The first characteristic of a type is that a resemblance, similarity or correspondence exists between the type and the antitype.... However, not everything that has correspondence or resemblance is a type, though all types must have the element of correspondence<sup>7</sup>.”

Having made the above statement, Zuck gives no clear definition of the word “type” itself. His subsequent discussion is extensive, but he gives no reasonable explanation for why the characteristics he lists are specifically related to the doctrine of typology. He lists the following elements that *he says* are necessary to have an “official” type. One supposes a type is “official” because it follows these requirements:

1. Persons, events or things in the Old Testament that are types of things in the New Testament had historical reality.
2. A type had a predictive or foreshadowing element to it.
3. In typology, the antitype is greater than, and superior to the type.
4. Types are not mere analogies or illustrations which Bible readers note. Instead they are resemblance planned by God.

One is forced to ask, Why are these necessary for something to be an “official type?” They appear to be an amalgamation of views pulled together to justify something that simply is not taught in Scripture.

Which brings us to the issue of how literal interpretation approaches typology.

### **How Does Typology Figure in Literal Interpretation?**

When one studies the words that are traditionally used of typology in Scripture, using the normal literal approach that one should take, it becomes rapidly clear that the only consistent approach to take is the *limited typology view*. There is no otherwise legitimate interpretive basis for making things types that are not so stated in Scripture.

Typologists state many things to be types that are actually something else. Several “typological elements” are actually symbolical or are used in figures of speech. Many, such as the Passover lamb being a type of Christ, are best understood as a figure of speech because that is exactly what they are! The statement in 1 Corinthians 5:7 does not say that the Passover lamb is a *type* of Christ. It says, figuratively by using a metaphor, that *Christ is the Passover*.<sup>8</sup> Here is an implied comparison, a metaphor. The word *Passover* is to be taken literally. The word *Christ* is to be taken literally. Christ is *like*, or similar to, the Passover. This passage is a reference to His death on the cross for the sins of mankind. Similarly the Passover lamb died (though NOT for the sins of mankind). To make the Passover lamb a type of Christ implies that there is a predictive element in the Passover as it occurred in the Old Testament. This would have come as a shock to the Israelites in the Old Testament. The yearly Passover meal looked *backward* to their deliverance from Egypt, not *forward* to the Messiah. There is no predictive element revealed in the Old Testament when using literal interpretation.

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When one actually studies the words that are considered in the so-called doctrine of typology, a totally different picture emerges than that which is almost universally presented. Paul Lee Tan's explanation notwithstanding, there is simply no interpretive basis for making anything a type that is not directly stated to be a type. Nor is it acceptable to substitute other words for type, such as *shadow*, or *copy*, so as to broaden the doctrine of typology. No consistent literalist would do that in any other area of doctrine. Why do so in this area? Only typologists know for certain!

### **The Traditional Words for Typology in the Bible**

In traditional typological circles, four words in the New Testament are said to have specific significance to the "doctrine of typology." These words, however, do not all deal with types, as we will see.

#### *Type*

The first, and most obvious word, is the word *type* itself. As noted, the Greek word is *tupos* which occurs only 16 times in the New Testament. It is never translated type by the King James translators. Rather they translated it *ensample*, *print*, *figure*, *example*, *pattern*, *fashion*, *manner*, and *form*.

An excellent example of the Biblical use of the term can be seen in John 20:25, where the King James translators twice translated it *print*. It refers to the marks made in the body of Jesus by the nails when He was crucified. This is near to the basic meaning of the word, the imprint made by striking or pressing one object into another. (The verbal form of this noun, *tupto*, means to strike or beat.)

In Acts 7:43 the KJV translates the word *tupos* as *figures* and refers to idols of the gods Moloch and Remphan. But in the very next verse the word refers to the tabernacle in the wilderness, translated *fashion*. In Romans 5:14 we have our first legitimate type in the theological sense. Adam is said to be "the figure (type) of him that was to come."

Now, Romans 5:14 is not a prophetic passage, and nothing in the Old Testament statements about Adam suggest that he is somehow predictive of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Him that was to come" simply means that in relation to the human race, Christ came after Adam in time. Paul does not mean that Adam predicted or even prefigured Christ. In fact, Adam was a type of Christ simply in the sense that there is a similarity between them. *There is no predictive element in Genesis!*

Paul's purpose in using *tupos* was to suggest this similarity between the two persons and the two doctrinal truths that relate to his statements in the context of Romans 5. It has to do with how God sees the relationship of the human race to two distinct people. One relationship, Adam's, is actually negative, while the other's relationship, Christ's, is positive. Adam is, doctrinally speaking, a negative of Christ. How, then, does the word *tupos* indicate the similarity and how are Adam and Christ similar? A careful study will show that both are related to certain results applied to humanity through their actions.<sup>9</sup> That seems to be the sum total of the way they are being compared.

We are dealing here with a metaphorical comparison, something that virtually all interpreters ignore. The word *tupos* means something that is used to strike something else so that an imprint is left behind. So, if one takes a signet ring and strikes it into wax, the resulting wax image is similar to the image on the ring. In Paul's use of *tupos*, he is using the word metaphorically! In the same way that a wax image resembles a ring, Christ resembles Adam. There is a difference between the resulting image and the original ring, and there is a difference between Adam and Christ. In this case, the differences are more important than the similarities.

The typical similarity between Adam and Christ is that both performed actions which had results that were applied to humanity. What are the differences that Paul is discussing in Romans 5? The an-

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swer lies in a detailed examination of verses 14-21, which is beyond the scope of this paper. But observe the first statement in vs. 15:

“But the free gift is *not like* the offense.” Note the contrast between gift and offense. They are not like one another in the same way that Christ is not like Adam. Adam and Christ stand at the head of two columns starting in vs. 14. The Christ column contains the positive relationships that Christ provided through His work, and the Adam column contains the negative relationships to mankind that Adam’s sin act (vs. 14) produced. Other uses of *tupos* confirm this approach.

Another “type” is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 10:6 and 7. Here those Old Testament saints who were delivered from Egypt are given for *examples* (*tupos*) to the believer. The application of this type is limited by purpose, as Paul says that it is given in order that the believer “should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.”

Philippians 3:17 says Paul is an *example* (*tupos*) for the believer, so that the Christian might walk in a certain manner. 1 Thessalonians 1:7 says that the believers in Thessalonica were *examples* to all the believers of Macedonia and Achaia. The word *tupos* is used in a similar manner in 2 Thessalonians 3:9 and 1 Timothy 4:12. See Also 1 Peter 5:3 and Titus 2:7.

The final use of the word *tupos* which we will observe is in Hebrews 8:5:

...who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, See that you make all things according to the pattern (*tupos*) shown you on the mountain.

Here again the word *tupos* is used in a tabernacle-in-the-wilderness context, translated *pattern* in the NKJV. This verse is often used as a proof-text to say that the tabernacle has typological significance. However, it is clear that in this sentence the type is not the tabernacle itself. Rather, the word *tupos* refers to the blueprint which God showed Moses on the mount before he built the sanctuary. It does not refer to the tabernacle itself, which is confidently asserted by some typologists. Moses was to build the tabernacle *according to the type* or *pattern* which God showed him, which makes the tabernacle properly the physical “antitype.” This is consistent with the use of the word *antitypos* in the New Testament.

Do not confuse types with figures of speech or symbols. As previously stated, Christ as “the Lamb of God” is metaphorical rather than having some typical sense. That the Old Testament used lambs as sacrificial agents simply intensifies the comparison between Christ and the literal lamb of the Old Testament sacrificial system. Many things which are often called types can best be explained in other ways without losing the beauty of their significance.

### *Antitype, Shadow, Copy*

The word most closely related to *tupos* is *antitypos*, that is “antitype.” The word itself refers to what is derived from the *tupos*. To return to the signet ring and wax analogy, the ring was the type which struck the wax, while the image in the wax was the antitype.<sup>10</sup> The literal meaning of antitype is “instead of the type.”<sup>11</sup> It occurs only twice in the New Testament. In Hebrews 9:24 the word *figures* translates *antitypos*, but *copies* is the better translation as below:

For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies (*antitypes*) of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. (NKJV)

Again we see that the word *antitypos* indicates the tabernacle in the Old Testament, and that it is only a copy of the actual holy place, that is, heaven itself.<sup>12</sup> Christ did not enter into the wilderness tent, but into the actual holy place, heaven. Here the statement is that the Old Testament tabernacle is a copy, that is, the antitype, and that the dwelling place of God, heaven, is the original from which the copy, or

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antitype was made. It is significant that NOWHERE in the Bible is the tabernacle, nor conversely, the temple, ever referred to as a type. Yet countless books and articles have been written indicating the typological significance of the various parts of the building and its furniture. In fact both the tabernacle and temple are but antitypes of heaven. The type was the pattern God gave Moses.

The word antitype is also used in the controversial passage having to do with baptism in 1 Pet. 3:21, which we will not discuss in this work.

The word for *shadow* is *skia*. It means the same thing as the English word by which it should always be translated. As a metaphor, the word means something that is indistinct, and temporary. In Colossians 2:17 it is a metaphor for some Old Testament observances which are said to be only shadows of things to come. In the context it is evident that these shadows have no present force, but are excluded from the practice of a believer who is related to the body of Christ.

In Hebrews 8:5 the Old Testament priestly system is contrasted to the perfection of Christ's present priestly ministry in heaven. They are shadows of heavenly things. Likewise, Hebrews 10:1 contrasts the law which had a shadow of good things to come with the sacrifice of Christ. The shadow itself is always contrasted in an inferior manner with the reality to which it is related.<sup>13</sup>

The final so-called typological word is *hypodeigma*. It is variously translated in the KJV *example*, *ensample* and *pattern*. It occurs six times in the New Testament in the following passages; John 13:15; Hebrews 4:11, 8:5, 9:23; James 5:10; and 2 Peter 2:6. See Exercise 9.2 below.

### ***Exercise 9.1***

Be prepared to express your view of typology on the final examination. You are not required to hold to the position of the author of this course. Do not simply repeat what others have said, or what your opinion is because of some emotional attachment you have to a particular passage of Scripture. You must be able to integrate your view with a literal, historical, grammatical approach to hermeneutics.

### ***Exercise 9.2***

Look up each of the previously mentioned verses which contain the Greek word *hypodeigma*. Do a short paper after the manner of the treatment accorded to the words *type*, *antitype* and *shadow* in this chapter. That is, do a short descriptive analysis of each of the verses with a view to understanding the meaning of the word in each context, and why the author used it.

### ***Exercise 9.3***

Adam and Christ are similar (*typos*) because both performed actions that affected humanity. They stand at the head of two columns, starting in Romans 5:14. The elements in each column are negative things in Adam's case, and positive things in Christ's case. On the following page is the beginning of the columns, with the first negative/positive elements indicated. Now, read through Romans 5:14-21 and identify which contrasting elements should be in Adam's column, and which in Christ's column. Write your conclusions on a separate sheet of paper.

### *9. The Interpretation of Types*

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Adam</i>	<i>Christ</i>
Romans 5:15	the offense	the gift
Romans 5:15	by the one man's offense many died	much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.

## *Endnotes*

- 1 Zuck, pg. 169.
- 2 Zuck, pg. 170.
- 3 The author has read extensively in this area, and not one time has he found a typologist asking the basic interpretive questions mentioned in this paragraph. If you find one, a note would be appreciated.
- 4 This statement is quoted by Patrick Fairbairn in *The Typology of Scripture*, page 20.
- 5 Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, pages 170, 171.
- 6 One desires to ask, “Why are Marsh’s limits extreme, while Tan’s are not? What makes the addition of the statement by Tan that when an interchange of name exists, or there is an evident and manifest analogy is a type allowed? Who says that these two criteria are the basis for determining what a type is? Wherein lies Tam’s authority for such a statement? Does he have more personal authority than Marsh?” One could go on asking such questions when one abandons normal interpretive procedures.
- 7 Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, “Testing the Types and Sensing the Symbols,” pg. 172.
- 8 The passage does not even include the word lamb, though a historical case can be made that the word lamb was in Paul’s mind when he made the statement. At the time of Paul’s writing, the word “passover” was used both of the event itself, as well as the sacrificial lamb.
- 9 Theologians often state from this passage that both Adam and Christ are viewed as “heads of the human race.” Much ink has been applied to paper attempting to justify this terminology and to codify the “governmental relationships” to the human race by both Adam and Christ. No one using normal interpretive methods would ever find it necessary to waste ink on this non-doctrine.
- 10 We still use the word *type* the same way. The type on a typewriter is what produces the image on the paper. Technically, that image could be called the *antitype*, though such is not used today.
- 11 The Greek word “anti” prefixed to “type” carries more than one meaning. As in English, it can mean “against,” either in a spacial sense, such as to lean against something, or in the sense of being opposed to something. But in Greek it also carries the sense of “instead of” as it does in the word antitype.
- 12 The tabernacle in the wilderness (and the later temple) was typical of nothing. It was, in fact, antitypical of heaven. The word *antitype* means that which exists instead of the pattern, which pattern is actually the type. *Antitype* refers to the physical reality, not the type. It is errant doctrine to call the tabernacle typical, since the Scriptures simply never call it a type. It is an antitype.
- 13 For this reason, the study of the Old Testament shadows, while historically profitable, should not be emphasized theologically. It is the later reality which should occupy the serious Bible student, for it is from the reality rather than the shadow that spiritual benefit for today occurs.

## 10. *The Application of Scripture*

Perhaps the most pernicious activity in Christendom to day is the act of applying a passage before interpreting it. This can result in misinterpreting the passage later to justify the false application.

By application<sup>1</sup> we mean that a statement or series of statements of Scripture are intended to be used by an individual or group. For instance, the commands to stone adulterers were given to a specific group of people, and may only be applied to that group. The requirements to live under grace are intended for the body of Christ only, and may not be applied backward to Israel, nor forward to the tribulation or kingdom program.<sup>2</sup>

One must have followed correct procedures of interpretation before applying Scripture to one's self or one's listeners. To avoid the misapplication of Scripture, we will review a few normal principles of application.

1. Do not apply a passage to individuals or groups that the original author did not have in mind. This will be determined by context. Sometimes the application cannot go beyond the original historical audience. Other times, it may, but only if the application to the original audience is based on something that can also be said of a later audience. For instance, if something is written exclusively to or about males, females cannot apply it to themselves. Likewise, if something is written to or about wives, only wives may apply it, not men, and not unmarried women.

A passage written to a group of people may be applied to readers today if they are in the same relationship to God. If not, do not apply it. If something is written to believers in the early church because they were in the transition between law and grace, the transition between the kingdom age and the current age, or the transition between the household of Israel and the household of the church, do not apply it.

However, if something is said to someone who has been transitioned from a previous relationship to the same relationship that believers today have to God and His program, it may be applied.<sup>3</sup> If something is written to people in a current culture that has practices which are not the practices of today,<sup>4</sup> it is acceptable to not apply such writings. This is particularly true of such acts as foot washing, greeting one another with a kiss (a handshake will do, thank you), or eating locusts (even if they have been dipped in chocolate). It is not necessary to perform those acts today.

2. While a passage may be applicable in many different situations, there is only one correct application of any given passage of Scripture, and that application must be based on the correct interpretation. The idea that there is one interpretation but many applications has no foundation in truth.<sup>5</sup>

The literal method of interpretation is concerned with interpretation, not with application. The interpreter is primarily interested in what the Bible says; then he makes practical applications based on what has been interpreted. Applications are fair to the Bible when they are based on that which has been literally interpreted. To base interpretations of the Bible on applications is erroneous, and will end in chaos. - Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, page 34.

## *10. The Application of Scripture*

3. Scripture may be applied only when an individual or group has the same relationship to God as the original recipient. Since there are no apostles today, we may not apply those passages to ourselves which were originally applicable to them. See 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 as an example.
4. Historical events occurred only once and cannot be repeated. The Day of Pentecost, the day on which the Church began, cannot be repeated in the life of the believer today. Nor can the last Passover feast that was observed by Christ and His disciples.
5. Narrative passages are not to be applied to the individual directly. Narrative passages are for the purpose of showing God's working among people. God may or may not be working the same way today. It is not the purpose of Biblical narrative to be spiritualized and then applied. However, narratives can be used as illustrations and examples. Paul does so with those who wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. He did not, however, spiritualize the wanderings of Israel and then apply them to the Church. He did not make the sin in the wilderness somehow typical of Christians' sins today.<sup>6</sup>
6. There is no such thing as a "secondary" application. By "secondary application" we mean an application that ignores or violates the meaning of the text as determined by the literal, historical, grammatical procedure. The idea of primary and secondary application violates the correct single interpretation of a passage. One does not use some "secondary application principle" when using other forms of written communication. For example, one would not pick up a newspaper or magazine and attempt to apply the material to himself in a secondary manner. Secondary application is actually an attempt to use Scripture in any way that the reader wishes, rather than according to the principles of correct interpretation. We must believe what the Scripture says, not what we want it to say, or even what we have been taught that it says. Every believer is responsible before God to correctly approach, interpret, and use the Bible.
7. This point is a partial pleonasm. Passages applicable to people who are related to other ages and households are not applicable to people who are related to the present age and household. Since the believer is not under law today, we ought not apply those passage of the Bible which were intended for believers in the Old Testament who were under law. While some passages in the Old Testament are not directly household related, most are. Only those passages which deal with the nature of the human condition as a whole can be applied to today, and those passages are few indeed. (See number 1. above.)
8. It is never legitimate to draw a principle from Scripture that was not intended by the divine author. Unless a passage of Scripture intends to teach a general principle, the interpreter should not attempt to derive such a principle.<sup>7</sup>

Interpretation must always precede application.

### **Application and Profitability**

Some have stated that since all Scripture is profitable (2 Timothy 3:16), it is all applicable. Those who make such assertions have not thought through the implications of their positions. Many passages of Scripture were given for general information purposes, not for the purpose of direct application to the practice of the believer. Yet these passages are profitable, and are to be believed beyond question.

The fact that all Scripture cannot be applied equally to us in no way invalidates its authority over us. We must still believe what it says. Many of the Old Testament passages which are not for our practice do teach us truth about God, His nature, attributes, and essence. Some teach us about human nature, in-



## 10. The Application of Scripture

cluding those passages that relate to the sin principle coming into the world through Adam. And then there are all those Messianic passages which relate to the two comings of Christ, which are not directly applicable to us today.

We are not implying that the Old Testament is of no value. Indeed, we affirm that “all Scripture is profitable” and that we should study it all, and apply those portions to ourselves which God intended for us to apply. Profitability is not applicability, nor is the value of Scripture based on its applicability.

### Exercise 10.1

This is an exercise in the correct application of Scripture. To show that not all Scripture is equally applicable to the practice of all believers (every promise in the Book is NOT mine) fill in the following chart. Remember, differences are more important than similarities.

There are four different dietetic arrangements in the Bible. They are not contradictory because they are given to different people at different times under different conditions. Not all are intended to be applied at any given time. This is the usual way in which God’s programs work. What was intended for the application of one individual or group is not necessarily intended to be applied to other groups.

For each of the four diets listed answer the following questions:

1. Who received the diet?
2. What did the diet contain?
3. When was the diet given? That is, under what dispensation was it applicable?
4. And when explained in the passage, tell why was the diet given.

### The Four Diets in Scripture

#### Genesis 1:29

Who:	What:
When:	Why:

#### Genesis 9:1-4

Who:	What:
When:	Why:

#### Leviticus 11

Who:	What:
When:	Why:

#### 1 Timothy 4:1-5; Acts 10:9-16

Who:	What:
When:	Why:

## *Endnotes*

- 1 Another aspect of application is the “body of the faith” truth. Much Scripture is given over to teaching nonapplicable material that is nevertheless part of “the body of truth” taught in Scripture. We must believe what the Bible says. Some refer to this as “applying the Bible to our faith.”
- 2 It is the position of this author that the individual application of Scripture to others is not a specific task of the Bible teacher. Rather, application of Scripture is a matter of personal relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. It is, however, part of the Bible teacher’s responsibility to inform his listeners what legitimate applications can be made from a specific passage, and to encourage the believer to correctly apply it as it was intended to be applied.
- 3 I say it may be applied, not that it must be applied. There were various stages in the transition process, and some believers only transitionalized to a certain point because further revelation was not yet available. Such was true of the audience of James’ Epistle. Paul’s grace teaching was not yet available, and much of what James teaches his readers is not applicable to us today because of further revelation. Some commentators apply passages in James because they have not adequately examined the transition content of the book.  

Zuck seems to treat one statement of James as applicable when it certainly is not. That is the statement in James 1:22, “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.” On the surface this statement seems to be a wonderful principle. But James is not teaching a principle, he is teaching a specific requirement to early believers who were still under law. To ignore the legal context of the book produces such incorrect application. See Zuck’s statement in *Basic Bible Interpretation*, pg. 279. For an analysis of the passage that Zuck applies, see this author’s work, *The Epistle of James to the Twelve Tribes*.
- 4 This is sometimes called “the cultural break on application.” There is no need to perform acts of a cultural nature which do not carry the same cultural significance for a later time. One must take care, however, to not assume a cultural break because of a desire to simply not perform a specific task.
- 5 This idea of “one interpretation but many applications” has caused much misuse of the text of the Bible. In written prose one would not normally apply the writing in different ways that was intended by the author. This goes for newspapers, cookbooks, and instruction manuals on how to build a radio. Indeed, any prose writer of practical facts assumes the individual will apply its statement in only one way. If one wants to learn Italian, get an instruction manual on Italian, not on Swedish. If you attempt to apply French vocabulary and grammar to Swedish, only chaos results.
- 6 The fact that Paul so illustrated from the Old Testament does not give interpreters today the right to do the same thing without first having correctly interpreted the Old Testament passage. This will ensure that the actual meaning of the passage is used, making the illustration legitimate.
- 7 The generalizing of a text to teach a principle is not legitimate. Even if a general principle underlies a text, it may not be the purpose of the text to teach the principle. For instance, murder is forbidden both under the Mosaic law system, as well as the Pauline grace system. But the purposes for the passages of the two testaments is not to teach the principle that murder is evil. The passages in question have specific reasons for mentioning murder, and one must teach the reason for the passage in its context, not simply the principle of the forbidding of murder. This goes back to the requirement that the interpreter understand the purpose of the author in relationship to his original readers.

## *Appendixes*



# Old Testament Quotes in the New Testament

## The Hermeneutical Question

Confusion reigns in the understanding of Old Testament quotes in the New Testament. Some interpreters hold that the New Testament authors used the Old Testament in a way that is inconsistent with a normal, literal hermeneutic. A careful examination of the New Testament finds this to be a false assumption. Apart from the fact that many Old Testament references in the New Testament are literary allusions and do not purport to interpret the Old Testament at all, those passages that the New Testament quotes never indicate a practice of allegorizing the Old Testament text.

Nevertheless, there are regular attempts to explain the rationale of the New Testament references, including direct quotes, of Old Testament passages. The New Testament, they say, seems to ignore the meaning of the original passage, and reinterpret the information from the Old Testament to support a New Testament idea.

It is the position of this paper that the New Testament authors had no such intention. They did not reinterpret the Old Testament so as to change the original meanings. What they did, in fact, was use the Old Testament as a literary source for a variety of legitimate purposes.

## The Nature of Old Testament Quotes

1. *New Testament writers often quote from the Old Testament for several literary purposes. Zuck, on page 242 of his book *Basic Bible Interpretation*, gives 10 purposes for analogous language, that is, language which shows an analogy between an Old Testament passage and a New Testament situation:*

  - a. To point up the accomplishment or realization of an Old Testament prediction.
  - b. To confirm that a New Testament incident is in agreement with an Old Testament principle.
  - c. To explain a point given in the Old Testament.
  - d. To support a point being made in the New Testament.
  - e. To illustrate a New Testament truth.
  - f. To apply the Old Testament to a New Testament incident or truth.
  - g. To summarize an Old Testament concept.
  - h. To use Old Testament terminology.
  - i. To draw a parallel with an Old Testament incident.
  - j. To relate an Old Testament situation to Christ.

2. In none of the above reasons do we find reason to think that the New Testament author was in any way changing the meaning of the original text. In the majority of the above reasons, the reader must assume the literal meaning of the original Old Testament statement in order to realize the purpose of the quotation.

## Old Testament Quotes in the New Testament

There is no great secret here. Much ink has been spread on paper trying to discern some deeper meaning built into the Old Testament so that the New Testament could use the information. Such ideas as *sensus plenior* (fuller meaning) have been used to what God is doing.

Sometimes individuals use typology to support the idea of a deeper, meaning that only God knew, and the New Testament writers knew! No such meaning was built in.

3. *New Testament writers quote specific Old Testament statements that refer to a specific time and place in the New Testament.* Sometimes there is a predictive element in the Old Testament statement, other times there is not.

- a. There is confusion concerning the meaning of the word *prophecy*.
  - i. All Scripture is prophetic. Prophecy refers to receiving information from God and proclaiming it to an audience (2 Peter 1:20 “prophecy of scripture”). *Not all prophecy is predictive, although all Biblical prediction is prophetic.*
  - ii Predictive prophecy is a particular class of prophecy that foretells a future event. From today’s perspective two kinds of predictive prophecy exist: 1) those which have been realized, and 2) those which have not been realized.<sup>1</sup>
- b. There is confusion concerning the meaning of the word *fulfilled*.
  - i. The use of the word *fulfill* (Greek = -πληρόω) does not always mean a prediction is coming to pass. See Matthew 5:17-18: Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup> For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. - Here the word *fulfilled* means *to bring to completion, to keep perfectly*, as Christ did in His human nature. The perfect human kept the law perfectly.
  - ii. Often a passage is fulfilled in the New Testament because the author refers to a specific element of a historical passage that perfectly *corresponds* with a New Testament event. Thus, the New Testament author finds fulfillment of the Old Testament quotation through that *single point of correspondence*. Only a thorough, literal approach to the original statement in the Old Testament will reveal the nature of the singular correspondence that the New Testament author is indicating. In this type of quotation there is only one analogy which the author is making. The author is not suggesting that the original statement was in any way predictive. When interpreting passages such as these, the student must look for the *single point of comparison* that is being made.
    - a) Matthew 2:17-18; Jeremiah 31:15- Here the single point of comparison is weeping. Matthew is not reinterpreting Jeremiah's statement allegorically. He is simply stating that there is a similarity in the events. Both events caused weeping by bereaved mothers.

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<sup>1</sup> Currently it is popular to use the word “realized” rather than “fulfilled” when referring to prediction that has already taken place. One reason for this is that the words “fulfill” and “fulfilled” do not always refer to the completion of a predicted event, so Bible students have searched for another word family to use for that purpose.

## Old Testament Quotes in the New Testament

- b) Matthew 2:15; Hosea 11:1- The single point of comparison is the fact that both Israel and Christ spent time in Egypt and subsequently returned to the land of promise. At that point the comparison ends, since Hosea 11:2 clearly represents Israel in sin. Matthew is not changing the original literal interpretation of Hosea 11:1.<sup>2</sup>
- iii. When New Testament states that an Old Testament predictive prophecy is fulfilled, the interpreter must not overlook the principle of compenetration, which is the act of God by which he uses a single event in two different ways for illustrative purposes. There is one specific point of comparison between the two events, but there is only one actual realization of the prediction.
  - a) Compenetration means that a single prophecy has two (or more) literary references. The first reference indicates a specific historical event that occasioned the prophecy. The second reference is by a later person and *does not relate to the original historical situation* at all.<sup>3</sup> But there is a point of similarity.
  - b) Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 7:14 - The original statement is a prediction concerning the defeat of two kings, Rezin and Pekah, who were tormenting Judah's king Ahaz (Isaiah 7:1-9). As a sign of their defeat, a child who would not know the difference between good and evil was to be born of a person before the destruction of the two kings (7:16). The predicted historical event takes place in Isaiah 8:1-4. The Hebrew word unfortunately translated by the KJV translators "virgin" is *almah* which refers to a young woman, who may or may not have been a virgin. Historically the prophetess gave birth through natural means.

Matthew, in his statement, is not disputing, changing or allegorizing the original prophecy. He is not saying that Isaiah predicted the virgin birth of Christ. He is saying that the prophecy is finding its ultimate use<sup>4</sup> *in a*

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2 Some have attempted to draw an analogy between Christ as the Son and Israel as the son, both being brought out of Egypt. But no such analogy exists, since Christ is a Son *in a totally different way* that Israel was a son. Others have attempted to show that as Israel was in sin and was to be judged by God, that Christ ultimately, as Son, was judged by God. It is highly doubtful the Matthew's original readers would have thought of this, as it is not explicitly so stated by a proposition. These kinds of attempts miss the point. Neither Hosea nor his readers would have thought that there was any such purpose behind his statement, though such a purpose is often thought to exist today. Matthew is using Hosea's statement as an example of the same kind of thing. See letters h. and i. Zuck's list above.

3 This second use of Isaiah 7:14 was not in the mind of the original human author, but only in the mind of the omniscient author, God. It is fallacious to attempt to find a human attempting to predict beyond his knowledge, or to say that God had something in mind that the original human author could not understand.

4 I say again, this use was in God's mind, not in the human author's. There is a prediction and realization in Isaiah, but that prediction *had nothing to do with the Lord Jesus Christ*. It was realized historically, one time. *There was never a time in which that the divine person Christ did not know the difference between good and evil!*

Matthew expresses the Hebrew *alma* (young woman) by the Greek *parthenos* (virgin). Matthew knew that *alma* had nothing to do with a virgin birth, and he used the word *fulfilled* in the legitimate use of *brought to a literary completion*, not in the sense of a prophecy being realized. That happened in Isaiah 8. We must not forget that God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, was bearing Matthew along as he wrote (2 Peter 1:21), and brought to Matthew's mind a good illustrative passage to bring GOD'S use of Isaiah 7:14 to fulfillment, that is, to completion.

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*literary sense* in the virgin birth of Christ. Matthew expresses *almah* by the Greek word *parthenos* which indicates a virgin. By compenetration Matthew provides a legitimate literary allusion for Isaiah's prophetic utterance that was not evident to the original participants in the historical non-messianic situation. It is incorrect to call it a "double reference prophecy," which smacks of abnormal interpretation.

4. *Sometimes a prediction is conditional (the principle of contingency) and will only occur if the subject of the prophecy meets the condition.*

- a. Jeremiah 18:7-10 The principle of contingency is clearly evident in this passage. God's acceptance of a nation is contingent on their turning "from evil." If this turning does not happen, God will "repent of the good" that He would have provided for that nation.
- b) Malachi 3:1; 4:5,6 - Was this prediction fulfilled in John the Baptist? When the religious leaders asked John if he were Elijah he told them that he was not (John 1:21). However, according to Jesus, John had the potential to fulfill the prediction. Matthew 11:14-15 indicates that Israel must meet a condition before John could fulfill this prophecy. Jesus is speaking to the multitude (vs. 7) and indicates that they must be willing to receive the Kingdom before John could be the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy. John the Baptist did not fulfill Elijah's prophecy because of the rejection of the ministry of Jesus as Messiah. The nation, represented here by the multitudes, would have entered the day of the Lord had they accepted Christ as Messiah. They did not accept Him, the Day of the Lord did not follow immediately, and John the Baptist did not fulfill the prophecy concerning Elijah.

Stanley Toussaint says, "He (Jesus) goes on to show the potential of the coming of the kingdom. The kingdom would come if they would receive it. The conditional particle 'if' (*ei*) makes the condition one of assumed reality. It is certain that if they should receive it John would be the fulfillment of Malachi 4. There is scarcely a passage in Scripture which shows more clearly that the kingdom was being offered to Israel at this time. Its coming was contingent upon one thing: Israel's receiving it by genuine repentance. Because of this John is not here said to be Elijah. He fulfilled Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1, but not Malachi 4:5-6 because the latter passage is dependent upon the response of the people. Malachi 4:6 says that he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers; John did not do this. John is the forerunner of the King. He could be Elijah if Israel would but respond correctly. If John were Elijah the kingdom would be Israel's."

See also in this regard Matthew 17:9-12. Israel rejected John the Baptist and similarly the Messiah suffered. Clearly John could have fulfilled the kingdom aspects of Elijah's ministry, but his audience rejected him.

5. *Prophecies predicting elements of the second coming of Christ are just as literal as prophecies concerning His first coming.*

Luke 1:30-33 - The prophecy given to Mary has two parts. The first part happened literally. The interpreter cannot allegorize events of vs. 31. However, many reject the literal interpretation of the second part of the prophecy found in vss. 32-33. The same child will reign on the earthly



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throne of David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His Kingdom cannot end. This prophecy cannot refer to the Church, of which Mary knew nothing. Mary would have understood this as referring to the literal reign of the Messianic king as predicted in the Old Testament. If one takes each word of the prophecy in its normal sense, clearly the kingdom of which the angel spoke has not yet come to pass. In no sense does the Church literally fulfill this prophecy. Therefore, in order to apply this statement to the Church, the interpreter must allegorize the text.

6. *A New Testament author may refer to a specific element in a predictive prophecy without implying either a realization of that prophecy, or implying that the Old Testament prophecy has any other relationship to the New Testament event.*
  - a. Acts 2:16; Joel 2:28-32 - Luke is not saying that the events predicted in Joel are taking place at the time of Acts 2. He is saying that the Person discussed in Joel 2, the Holy Spirit, is the same Person who is manifesting His presence at Pentecost.
  - b. None of the heavenly and earthly events predicted by Joel and mentioned in vss. 19-20 actually happened on Pentecost. Joel is referring to a future event that has no direct bearing on the events of Acts 2.
  - c. The single point of correspondence mentioned in Acts 2:16 is the Holy Spirit. Verse 16 states, “this is *that One* spoken of by the prophet Joel.” The one spoken of by Joel was the Holy Spirit. Peter is indicating a single point of correspondence, which helped his Jewish listeners to understand his reference to the Holy Spirit, who is mentioned in the Old Testament quote.
7. *Most Old Testament quotes in the New Testament are not predictive in any sense.* For instance, Hebrews refers to the new covenant to explain a point given in the Old Testament, and to support a point being made in the New Testament (see Zuck’s list above).

The author of Hebrews does not say that the Church is in any way related to the new covenant when he quotes from Jeremiah 31. He is not saying that the Jeremiah 31 covenant predicts anything about the Church, or any New Testament doctrine. He is simply saying that the Mosaic covenant was inferior in that it did not perform the needed spiritual task. Therefore, a new covenant for Israel, revealed in Jeremiah 31, was necessary. By simply saying “new” covenant the Lord was showing that the “old” covenant was not adequate.

  - a. One area of great confusion today is in the identity of the two different new covenants expressed in Scripture. Many believers misinterpret the Epistle to the Hebrews and apply the Jeremiah 31 new covenant to the Church. The Jeremiah 31 covenant, quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12 and mentioned again in Hebrews 10:16, 17, is not the “new covenant by my blood” of which Jesus spoke.
  - b. The Jeremiah 31 new covenant is with Israel exclusively, “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...” (Jeremiah 31:31). “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel...” (Jeremiah 31:33). Note the following distinctions:
    - i. The Jeremiah 31 new covenant is “after those days,” that is, after the captivity of Israel is complete (Jeremiah 31:33; cf 31:23).

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- ii. The Jeremiah 31 new covenant writes laws on the mind and heart. It is an internalized legal covenant. "...I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts..." (Jeremiah 31:33).
  - iii. The "new covenant by my blood" is for the Church. Note that in the following passage the word *you* refers to Gentiles, namely the Corinthian believers who were never part of Israel, "This cup is the new covenant in (by) My blood. This do, as often *as you* drink it, in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:25).
  - iv. The Apostle Paul, the steward of the dispensation of grace, is a minister of the "new covenant by my blood...who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant..." (2 Corinthians 3:6).
  - v. The "new covenant by my blood" requires the death of Christ, whereas the new covenant for Israel does not. See Hebrews 9:15-26. Note the distinction between the blood of the legal covenant which was insufficient to satisfy the requirements of the new covenant, and the death of Christ which was necessary for the inauguration of the new covenant. The author distinguishes Christ from the Jewish High Priest who entered the Holy Place with another's blood (vs. 25). The Lord Jesus Christ entered heaven itself in order to "put away sins by the sacrifice of Himself" (vs. 26). This act of putting away sins refers not to initial salvation, but to dealing with the sin problem in the daily life of the believer.
8. *The "new covenant by my blood" is eternal.* See Hebrews 13:20, 21, "Now may the God of peace...through the blood of the *eternal covenant* make you complete in every good work to do His will..." Israel's new covenant is never said to be eternal, and has a future establishment.

## The Use of the Mosaic Code in the New Testament

In light of the fact that the New Testament clearly teaches that the Old Testament law code is not applicable to the believer today, the question remains, why was that code quoted in various places in the New Testament writings? Specifically, the Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue, are given in various places to support the discussion of the author in particular contexts. Consider the following:

1. The moral basis for the Decalogue is the same as the moral basis for God's requirement for the saint today. The same God, exhibiting the same character, produces both sets of requirements.
2. The New Testament presents only grace principles for Christian living. Not only is the individual saved by grace, but is also to live under New Testament grace provisions. The system represented by the Decalogue has been abolished, and no longer governs a godly life.
3. As obedient children, believers are not to live according to the former strong desires consistent with unsaved mankind, but are to live a holy life (1 Peter 2:13-16).<sup>5</sup> As stated above, the moral

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5 The concept of a holy life is not primarily viewing a life apart from sin, though there is a moral character to the holy lifestyle. Rather, a holy life is separated to God and His program. It is a moral lifestyle applied by the program requirements of the household with which the believer is associated. Holiness in the Old Testament was based on legalities required of the household of Israel, and not on the provision of the grace life as provided to the household of the faith in the current age. In the present household, God separates the believer out (initial sanctification) so that he may lead a holy life (progressive sanctification) by applying the new grace program. But the Christian life carries the concept of being separated out to serve God, which includes the service which God has prepared for each saint (holy one).

## Old Testament Quotes in the New Testament

basis for this life is the character of God. That character was expressed in the Ten Commandments, as well as in the requirements for grace living.

4. The only truly successful Christian life is the grace life. For the sincere believer, the mere appearance of the avoidance of wrongdoing is not sufficient. The inner control of the Holy Spirit is necessary in order for the believer to be successful in overcoming the sin problem. Avoidance of the “works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19-21) can only be accomplished in a God honoring way by walking by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). Likewise, overcoming Satanic attacks in areas such as lying and stealing (Ephesians 4:25-28) can only be accomplished consistently by applying the grace provision of the “whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:10-17).
5. The Bible teaches that the Christian is not under any quality of law. Paul writes in Galatians 5:16-18, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.” (NKJV) A closer look at the phrase “you are not under the law” shows that in the original Greek the word law does not have the article. According to Greek syntax, the quality of law is being emphasized. Paul is not saying that a believer is not under the Mosaic code; he is saying that the believer is under no legal code at all. Not being “under law” is different than saying that the Christian has no law. Such an accusation does not understand the scriptural phrase “not under law, but under grace.” See below.
6. It is the unfortunate tendency of the natural mind to attempt to place oneself under law as a means of living the Christian life. Rather than rely on the Spirit's ministry, the individual tends to self-effort in fulfilling God's requirements. As a result, the struggle to do the right thing continues. Sometimes the individual may even appear to be winning the struggle. He may be successful in overcoming the "big ones" such as avoiding sexual immorality, drunkenness, and the like. However, the struggle continues until grace principles are applied.  
  
For this reason Paul writes in Romans 6:14, “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” Again, the believer is not under any quality or principle of law, but is under the principle of grace. In Romans chapters 6-8 Paul explains in detail the method for overcoming sin in the life of the believer. Romans 6 teaches the application of grace methods. Romans 7 describes the believer who attempts to live under law principles. And Romans 8 presents the successful condition of the believer who applies grace principles to the sin problem.
7. Paul makes it clear that the law is “weak through the flesh.” (Romans 8:3) The righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us (not by us) when a person walks according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh (Romans 8:4).
8. The rejection of the Ten Commandments as a means of daily living does not mean that the grace believer is free from requirements to maintain a holy Christian lifestyle. A common charge against the doctrine of grace is that it teaches antinomianism. Antinomianism is the idea that since Christians are under grace they have no requirements to live right. The accusation has been made that those who teach grace principles believe and teach that Christians may do anything they desire. Such an accusation is false, and made in ignorance of what it means not to be under law, but under grace.

## Old Testament Quotes in the New Testament

The phrase *under law* means, in its context, to use law as a manner of pleasing God. Likewise, the phrase *under grace* means, in its context, to use grace principles as the manner of pleasing God. There are requirements under both law and grace. The difference is between the *methods* of meeting those requirements.

Law, whether Old Testament Mosaic requirements, or requirements indicated by the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels, carry no ability or provision to perform them. They carry penalty, to be sure, but that penalty is an external rather than internal force. Its basic motivation is fear.

Grace, on the other hand, has many (though not all) of the same requirements as the Mosaic Law. The major difference is that under grace an internal provision is made to meet the requirement. The law was “weak through the flesh.” That is, the law provided no provision for overcoming the flesh. But grace is based on the provision of the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which was not true for the Old Testament believer.

9. Biblical Christians apply no kind of *law requirements* to themselves today. *Grace requirements* are requirements with provisions to perform them. Under the dispensation of grace, God requires nothing of an individual unless He supplies the ability to perform the requirement. When a believer reverts to the Old Testament legal system, or, for that matter, the legal system taught in the Gospels, which looks forward to the earthly kingdom, he is forsaking grace for law. He is truly fallen from grace.
10. Law has no power to enable Christian living. Law only promises punishment for wrongdoing. James 2:10 says “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.” It is the nature of law to condemn the transgressor. In the Old Testament, when one committed adultery the punishment was death. Likewise, if a child cursed his father and mother, the penalty was death. There was no distinction between levels of wrongdoing. For this reason in 2 Corinthians 3:7 Paul calls the Mosaic code a “ministry of death.” Here then we have the basic distinction between law and grace. Law says “do this or die.” Grace says, “do this, and here is the ability.” Law is a ministry of fear and death. Grace is a ministry of the Spirit and life.
11. It is often taught that the New Testament quotes the Old Testament law to reinforce the morality that is required for the believer today. While this has the appearance of spirituality, it is actually a misunderstanding of the purpose for such quotations. Paul makes it clear that Christ has “abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances” (Ephesians 2:15). Law, which was never intended as a spiritual basis for Christian living, has been abolished. But does this mean that requirement, per se, has been abolished?

The answer is an emphatic “no.” Many of the same requirements exist today that existed under the law. Paul quotes some of those requirements, not to place the believer under law, which has been abolished, but to show that the morality of grace requirements is in general agreement with the morality of law requirements. However, the law requirements are no longer in force. If they were, once an individual violated one of them, he should be put to death. Thus, when in Ephesians 6:2, 3, Paul quotes the “commandment with promise” from the Ten Commandments he is not putting Christian children under law. If he were, the penalty of death would be imposed on those children who did not honor their father and mother. He is simply saying that the law had the same requirements as grace in this area.

## Old Testament Quotes in the New Testament

Likewise, the promises which are associated with the legal requirements would still be in effect. In discussing this very passage, Lewis Sperry Chafer says in his book *Grace*,

The fact that the law presented a promise to obedient children is pointed out in the New Testament (Eph. 6:1), with no inference that the promise is in effect now; but as a reminder of that which obtained under the law. It would be difficult for any individual, or child, in the Church to establish a claim to a God-given land, or to demonstrate that any law now obtains by which long life is guaranteed to those who are now obedient to parents. (Page 155)

12. It is sometimes urged that a list of things that a Christian should avoid be included in a “code of conduct” of some kind. After all, one cannot obey the spirit of the law unless he has the letter of the law to consult. It appears to be the desire of the human mind to have a law book available to guarantee Christian conduct.

Such thinking is specious and clearly contrary to the grace teaching of Scripture. Scripture teaches that rather than attending to the requirement the believer should attend to the grace provision. When one is consulting the law book one is not paying attention to the solution. Both Romans 6 and Colossians 3 teach that the believer should place his attention on God rather than the legal requirement. One cannot put to death “the members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry,” unless he has previously set his mind on things above (Colossians 3:2). The believer is to present himself to God the Father as alive from the dead (Romans 6:13). As a result of this act of presentation, the believer is said *not* to be under law, but under grace (Romans 6:14).

One cannot have it both ways. One either lives according to law, which is to say by self-effort without God’s grace provision, or one lives according to God’s grace provision. If one is walking by the Spirit, grace abilities are being provided to overcome all the enemies. We do not need to check the law book to make sure we are pleasing God.

When the works of the flesh are listed in Scripture, as in Galatians 5:19-21, they are not provided as a legal document that the believer should sign, and therefore agree to keep. These various lists are provided not as a method of overcoming the enemy, but of recognizing the nature of the temptation. These are truly works of the flesh as distinguished from unrighteous acts resulting from the temptation of Satan or the world system. And the flesh can only be consistently controlled by grace principles.

The basic fallacy of the “laundry list” approach is simple. It lists a few of the “big sins” and implies that if we do not perform these “nasty nine” we must be spiritual. The danger in this approach is obvious. It does not take into account the real nature of the problem as stated above. It treats the symptoms, rather than the source. When the sinful human nature, which is the source of the problem, is not under the control of the Spirit, it will find a way to express itself, no matter how strong the legalistic effort to suppress it.

In addition, in Galatians 5:19-21 seventeen works of the flesh are mentioned. And the final statement in verse 21 indicates that there are many more. In fact Scripture names at least 57 different works of the flesh. Add to this the various satanic attacks and the problem of the world system, and it can be seen that listing a few “big ones” is clearly inadequate. It tends to a false view of spirituality, and a false confidence that one is being successful spiritually.

## Old Testament Quotes in the New Testament

13. We can do no better than to again quote Lewis Sperry Chafer:

The teachings of grace are not only gracious in character and of the very nature of heaven itself, but they are extended to cover the entire range of the new issues of the life and service of the Christian. The Ten Commandments require no life of prayer, no Christian service, no evangelism, no missionary effort, no gospel preaching, no life and walk in the Spirit, no Fatherhood of God, no union with Christ, no fellowship of saints, no hope of salvation, and no hope of heaven. If it is asserted that we have all these because we have both the law and grace, it is replied that the law adds nothing to grace but confusion and contradiction, and that there is the most faithful warning in Scriptures against this admixture. (*Grace*, page 156)

14. The quotations from the Decalogue found in the New Testament writings are generally illustrative of the correct morality that is in force under specific conditions. We quote from Chafer one final time:

A few times the teachings of the law are referred to by the writers of the Epistles by way of illustration. Having stated the obligation under grace, they cite the fact that this same principle obtained under the law. There is, however, no basis here for a co-mingling of these two governing systems. The law of Moses presents a covenant of works to be wrought in the energy of the flesh; the teachings of grace present a covenant of faith to be wrought in the energy of the Spirit. (*Grace*, page 157)

Dear believer, do not be deceived. You need no law requirements to live the life that God requires. You have not only grace requirements, but the ability to keep those requirements through the consistent application of grace teachings of the New Testament. Let no one attempt to put you under law, for they cannot do so. Paul did not say, “you *may* not be under law.” Rather he affirmed, “you *are* not under law.” No one can put you there, so do not act as though you are there. You are affirmed in the strongest way possible to the opposite. “For sin shall not have lordship over you: for you are not under law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14).

Espouse the grace teaching of the New Testament and faithfully maintain the attitudes required of the grace believer.



# ***Principles of Biblical Interpretation***

## **Presupposition 1: The Bible is the Word of God**

2 Corinthians 2:17

For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

### **I. The Meaning of the Phrase “Word of God”**

#### **A. The Meaning of “Word”**

1. The Greek word *logos* always carries some concept of communication. It may refer to a single word, such as house or farm, but in the New Testament it is always used in the broader sense of a communication. Even when used of the Lord in John 1:1, *logos* implies that Christ is one who communicates.
2. The very use of *logos* in the phrase “word of God” implies that the original recipients were receiving a communication which they were expected to understand. This is not to say that they always understood it. We know that sometimes God’s statements were misunderstood, because the recipients did not take the communication as normally understood nor intended (John 2:19- 21).
3. Given that the original recipients could have understood the communication of the word, the basic assumption must be that the application of normal principles of interpretation could render that understanding.

#### **B. The Meaning of “of”**

1. “Of” is a translation of the Greek grammatical construction known as a genitive. There are a variety of ways it is used. It can mean “belonging to,” it can mean “made up of,” it can mean “related to.” In fact, Dana and Mantey list eleven regular uses of the genitive and state that there are a good many more.
2. In the phrase the “the word of God” the best understanding is “produced by.” We understand the word “logos” to be a noun naming the action of communication, and the genitive construction indicating who is doing the communication. In other words, the phrase means that God is doing the communicating.

#### **C. The Meaning of “God”**

1. The word “God” clearly means the supernatural being revealed in the Bible. But even that word has a variety of uses. Sometimes it refers to the Godhead, and implies the various persons. Other times it is used exclusively of one person, and when standing alone with the article “the” usually refers to God the Father.



## ***Principles of Biblical Interpretation***

2. The majority of the uses of the phrase “the word of God” is written *ho logos tou theou*. The words *ho* and *tou* are both articles. Hence, the normal meaning of *tou theou* would undoubtedly refer to God the Father, unless something in the immediate context would indicate otherwise.
3. Many Christians know little of the doctrine of God, especially the doctrine of the Father. A thorough study of such will enhance the believer’s understanding of the phrase “the word of God.”

### II. A Definition of the Phrase “the word of God”

- A. **From the human author’s point of view:** The word of God is an oral or written communication to or through the human author of the words, phrases, and grammatical construction that God wanted spoken or written by the human author.
- B. **From the modern reader’s point of view:** The word of God is the inscripturation which says in written words, phrases, and grammatical constructions, which God produced, what God wanted said in whatever language you find it. This inscripturation is found exclusively in the 66 books of the Bible.

### III. The Responsibility of the Individual Christian

#### A. The Affirmation

1. Many affirm that the Bible is the Word of God without acting as though they understand the phrase. However, such an affirmation is insufficient. If one affirms this truth it places them in a specific position with a specific responsibility.
2. If a person affirms that the Bible is the Word of God, and yet deals with it as though it were something else, he is placing himself in a terrible position. At the least, he can be viewed as lazy. Potentially, he can be viewed as hypocritical. He is claiming that he believes the Bible is the Word of God, yet does nothing about it. He can be viewed as making a false claim, since the Bible is not important enough to actually study.

#### B. The Responsibility

1. A Christian who claims the Bible is the Word of God has taken on the responsibility to find out what the Bible teaches. First, he has committed himself to consistent study. Second, he has committed himself to determine how to study. Third, he has committed himself to decide how to determine meaning.
2. The responsible Christian will make time to study on a regular basis. The allocation of sufficient time may mean giving up other activities, some of which may simply be for pleasure or relaxation.
3. The responsible Christian will learn how to study, including the three major Bible study techniques, 1) synthesis, 2) analysis, and 3) categorization. How far into depth the believer decides to go is left to the individual. However, those who desire to teach others need to go as deep into the word as they can, even to the point of studying the languages of Scriptures. Not all believers are required to go that far, but serious Christian should make an effort to go into depth as far as his situation allows.

# ***Principles of Biblical Interpretation***

## **Presupposition 2: The Bible is Inspired**

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

### I. The Meaning of the Phrase “Given by Inspiration of God”

#### A. The Greek Statement is Only One Word

1. *Theopneustos* means “God breathed.” It is derived from the word God (*theos*) and the word to breathe (*pneo*).
2. The ending of the word *-tos*, is special. Grammatically, it makes the word *theopneustos* an adjective describing the word Scripture. In fact, it is a special adjective which refers to a resultant quality applied to the Scripture. In other words, the Scripture, the written form of the Word of God, has a quality of being God breathed.
3. The translation “given by inspiration” is misleading, as though the idea were that the Scriptures were given by God inspiring the human authors. This is a serious error.
4. It is the Scripture that is “inspired,” not the human authors. Inspiration has nothing to do with how the Scripture came into existence. Rather it has to do with a quality of the written Word of God ascribed to it by God Himself.

#### B. The Quality of Inspiration

1. Inspiration answers the question, “What is the quality of the written Word of God?” Inspiration does not deal with the oral word that was not written down, but exclusively with Scripture. We know that there were things that Jesus said that were not written. Also some Old Testament prophets, (Nathan comes to mind) did not write.
2. Paul’s statement to Timothy is a way of saying that God put His stamp of approval on the Bible. Dr. H. LaVerne Schafer once said, “Inspiration says that if God had breathed out a book (which He did not do), this is exactly the kind of book He would have breathed out.” In other words, Scripture has the quality of having its source in God, and God states it to be so.
3. Think of inspiration of Scripture as God’s stamp of approval on the product of written communication. It does not deal with how the product actually came into existence, but the quality of the product once it was produced.
4. As an analogy, think of the inspection of meat. The meat inspector has nothing to do with the production of the meat. He does not raise the cattle, he does not drive it to market, he does not even butcher it. But once all that is done, he inspects it, and stamps it with an approval code. Inspiration is similar. God has stamped the Scriptures “God breathed.” There’s nothing better.

#### C. The Implication of Inspiration

## ***Principles of Biblical Interpretation***

1. Inspiration is what gives Scripture its authority. By authority, we mean that the Bible has the right to communicate a body of faith to its readers, and to expect compliance to its statements.
2. The authority of Scripture applies in two ways:
  - a) Scripture has the right to tell us what to believe. This is of universal application. We must believe everything it affirms as truth.
  - b) Scripture has the right to tell us how to act. This is not, however, of universal application. Some things were written for the action of certain individuals or groups, and is limited to them. Others were written for different individuals or groups. One may not cross apply something to his practice that was not intended for him. If he has the same relationship to God as the original recipients of the communication, he may apply it to his practice, but not otherwise.

### II. A Definition of Inspiration

***Inspiration*** is the *quality* of *Scripture* by which God places His authoritative stamp of approval on the *written* word of God, so that the written word carries the very authority of God and is therefore sufficient to meet all the needs of the believer with reference to maturity and good works.

# *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*

## **Basic Sentence Analysis**

### **Introduction**

Every student should be able to analyze a biblical sentence in English using this information. Sentence analysis has three parts: 1) determining the type of sentence, and 2) determining the structure of the sentence, and 3) analyzing the grammatical elements of the sentence.

Most committed students of Scripture get somewhat nervous when approaching grammatical study. This is understandable, as many have not thought grammatically since school days, and then perhaps not as successfully as they would have liked. However, the simple grammatical functions taught in this chapter can be mastered by virtually every dedicated reader of the English text of Scripture. It may take some time and effort, BUT YOU CAN DO IT!

### **Introducing the Parts of Speech**

Do you remember studying parts of speech in school? We will be using these terms throughout the discussion of sentence analysis. There are eight parts of speech in English:

1. **Noun** – a noun indicates a person, a place, or a thing. Proper nouns are capitalized, common nouns are not. Abstract nouns usually name things such as ideas. Words that end in -ness are almost always abstract nouns. There are other abstract noun endings that can be learned through a thorough study of English.
2. **Pronoun** – a pronoun is a word that stands for a noun. The noun for which it stands is called its antecedent.
3. **Verb** – a verb is a word that affirms an action, or a state-of-being. Sometimes a verb can be used as a helping or auxiliary verb in a verb phrase. Sometimes verbs can be used as other parts of speech, as we will see.
4. **Adjective** – an adjective is a word that modifies (describes) a noun (or sometimes a pronoun). Sometimes nouns or verbs can also be used as adjectives.
5. **Adverb** – an adverb modifies (describes) a verb, an adjective, or even another adverb. Many adverbs end in -ly, but that ending can be used for other parts of speech. Words of negation are usually adverbs, such as not, never, etc. However, “no” is generally an adjective. The word “very” is an adverb and is never a verb.
6. **Preposition** – a preposition shows a relationship between two words in a clause. The word following the preposition is called its object, and is always a noun or nouns. The preposition, its object, and the words modifying its object (adjectives) are called a prepositional phrase. The word to which the preposition refers can either be a noun or a verb.  
*Example:* The Word of God... The prepositional phrase “of God” refers to the noun “Word.” Since it refers to a noun, it is called an adjective prepositional phrase.  
*Example:* He swam in the ocean. The prepositional phrase “in the ocean” refers to the verb “swam.” Since it refers to a verb, it is called an adverbial prepositional phrase.
7. **Interjection** – an interjection is a word grammatically unrelated to its clause. Another word for an interjection is an expletive. In vulgar speech, curse words are expletives. But so are words that show pain or emotion, such as “ouch!” Another form of interjection is a word of direct address,

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such as a name. Note the example that follows:

**Example:** Don, please come to my office as soon as possible. The proper noun “Don” is actually an interjection or expletive, because it has no direct grammatical function. It is related to its clause logically, but not grammatically.

8. **Conjunction** – A conjunction is a word which joins two grammatical elements. A coordinate conjunction connects two things of equal grammatical weight, such as nouns, verbs, prepositional phrases, or even entire independent clauses. A special kind of coordinate conjunction, called a correlative conjunction, also connects things of equal grammatical weight. A subordinate conjunction connects a subordinate (dependent) clause to a main (independent) clause in a sentence.

### **Sentence Types**

#### **The Types of Sentences**

Sentences are of the following types:

1. **Simple declarative.** Declarative sentences make one or more affirmations or declarations. Most sentences are of this type.

**Example:** “But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs” – Matthew 24:8

2. **Interrogative.** Interrogative sentences ask questions. Often in the biblical text, interrogative sentences ask only rhetorical questions, which expect no answer.

**Example:** “And when did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or naked and clothe you?” – Matthew 25:38

3. **Imperative.** Imperative sentences make simple commands.

**Example:** “Therefore, be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.” – Matthew 24:42

4. **Conditional.**<sup>1</sup> Most conditional sentences have two clauses, an “if” clause, and a “then” clause. Others have a helping verb such as “may” or “might” without a separate clause indicating the condition.

**Example:** “But if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time, and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect *him* and at an hour which he does not know, and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth. – Matthew 24:48-51

In the above sentence the “if” clause consists of the words, “But if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time, and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards...’” The “then” clause is the rest of the sentence, “...the master of that slave will come on a day

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<sup>1</sup> In the Greek language of the New Testament 3 kinds of conditions are regularly found. The “first class” condition affirms the reality of the condition from the viewpoint of the speaker. The condition should be understood “if, and it is so”. The “second class” condition denies the reality of the condition. It should be understood, “if, but it is not so”. The “third class” condition is the same as the typical condition in English and expresses the possibility that the condition is either so or not so. It should be understood “if, and maybe it is and maybe it isn’t”. Which condition is actually represented by the translated word “if” can only be discerned by examining carefully the Greek sentence. The English reader is left to commentaries to discover which condition is being expressed.

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when he does not expect *him* and at an hour which he does not know, and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth.”

### **Sentence Structure**

#### **The Difference Between a Clause and a Phrase**

A clause is a set of words that has a subject and a predicate. Every sentence must have at least one clause. Such clauses are called independent, because they can stand as a sentence. A dependent clause cannot stand alone, and is therefore called a “subordinate clause.” Three kinds of subordinate clauses exist: 1) the noun clause, which stands as a noun in its sentence, 2) an adjective clause, which modifies a noun, and 3) an adverbial clause, which modifies a verb.

A phrase is a set of words that has no subject or predicate. Several kinds of phrases exist in English, the three most common of which are as follows:

- 1) The noun phrase (the subject of a clause and its modifiers, the object of a clause and its modifiers, or even the object of a preposition and its modifiers),
- 2) The verb phrase (the verb of the clause, and its helping or auxiliary verbs, along with any single-word adverbs associated with it),
- 3) The prepositional phrase (a preposition with its object and any modifiers of its object).

#### **Determining the Sentence Structure**

The first step in determining the structure of the sentence is to observe the individual clauses.

Clauses are of two types, dependent and independent. The independent clause or clauses of a sentence are the basic structure for which the student is searching. Every sentence has at least one independent clause. The dependent clauses are subordinate clauses and they modify somehow the independent clause or clauses, or even other dependent clauses.

### **The Three Sentence Structures**

The *simple sentence* has one independent clause and therefore has a single subject and a single predicate. The subject and predicate may be compound.

The *compound sentence* has two or more independent clauses, each with its own single or compound subject and predicate.

The *complex sentence* has at least one independent clause and at least one dependent clause.

Determining the basic sentence structure is very important. If a sentence is compound, each clause is important equally in the author’s expression of truth. If a sentence is complex, the relationship between clauses tells the student the emphasis of the sentence. If the student does not analyze the basic sentence structure correctly, he can inadvertently make a secondary thought the main idea, and thereby miss the point of the sentence, and perhaps the paragraph in which it resides.

#### **THE SIMPLE SENTENCE**

The following simple sentence has only one independent clause. It has only one subject (This) and one predicate (is).

**Example:** “This is the great and foremost commandment.” – Matthew 22:38

However, a simple sentence can have a compound subject, and still be simple.

**Example:** Roger and Joy are young children.

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In the above example the words “Roger” and “Joy” are subjects of the predicate “are.”

A simple sentence can also have a compound predicate, and still be simple.

**Example:** The pilot flew over the building and photographed it.

The subject “pilot” performed two acts: he “flew” and he “photographed.”

### **THE COMPOUND SENTENCE**

A compound sentence is a sentence with two or more independent clauses, each with its own subject and predicate. The following compound sentence has only two clauses. It is taken from Matthew 24:31 in the New American Standard Bible:

And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

The above sentence has two clauses, each with its own subject and own verb. Note the coordinate conjunction “and” between the two independent clauses:

1. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET...
2. ...and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

The subject of the first clause is “He” and the predicate (verb) is “will send”. The subject of the second clause is “they” and its predicate is “will gather.”

### **THE COMPLEX SENTENCE**

Any sentence that consists of at least one independent clause, but one or more dependent clauses is considered complex. These dependent clauses are called subordinate because they cannot stand as the main clause. They somehow modify a word in the clause or are, in the case of a noun clause, a part of the main clause such as its subject or direct object. Three types of subordinate clauses exist: 1) the adverbial subordinate clause, 2) an adjectival subordinate clause, and 3) a noun subordinate clause.

#### ***The Adverbial Subordinate Clause***

Hebrews 13:2 is a complex sentence with an adverbial subordinate clause:

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

The independent clause comes first, followed by the dependent clause:

1. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers...
2. ...for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Note that the dependent clause begins with the word “for.” When “for” is used to introduce a subordinate clause it is called a *subordinate conjunction*. The following is a list of the most common subordinate conjunctions in English:

after	inasmuch as	supposing that
although	in case that	than
as (far/soon) as	in order that	then
as, as if	insofar as	though
as though	in that	till
because	lest	unless

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before	no matter how	until
even if	now that	when, whenever
even though	once	where, wherever
for	provided (that)	whether
how	since	while
if	so that	why

Some of the words in the list can also be used for other things, so be careful. They are only subordinate conjunctions when they actually stand at the beginning of a subordinate clause.

### ***The Adjectival Subordinate Clause***

The adjectival subordinate clause is also called the relative clause. It is called a relative clause because it is introduced by a pronoun rather than a conjunction. Acts 11:1 contains a relative clause:

NOW the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

The two clauses of this sentence are:

1. Now the apostles and the brethren...heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.
2. ...who were throughout Judea...

The subordinate relative clause tells which brethren heard that the Gentiles had received the word of God. When the word “who” does not ask a question, but points out an individual or a group of individuals it is called a *relative pronoun* because it relates the clause back to a specific person, place or thing, either singular or plural.

Following is a list of all the relative pronouns in English:

that	which	whom, whomever
what	who, whoever	whose

Again notice that the above words are not always relative pronouns. They are only relative pronouns when they introduce a clause that further describes an individual person, place or thing, or a group of persons, places, or things.

### ***The Noun Subordinate Clause***

The first sentence in Matthew 10:34 contains a noun clause:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth.

The two clauses are:

1. “Do not think...”
2. “...that I came to bring peace on the earth.”

In the Bible, it is common to see noun clauses beginning with the word “that.” “That” is another subordinate conjunction when it introduces a noun clause. It can also introduce an adjective clause, especially when it means the same as “which.”

**Example:** The bird that the man caught was a jay. Here the clause “that the man caught” tells which bird, and is, therefore, an adjective clause.

However, the English word “that” can also indicate a clause of purpose, which is an adverb rather than a noun clause.



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**Example:** The stadium was enlarged *that* it might hold an extra ten thousand fans. (In modern English “so that” is overtaking the simple “that” as an indicator of purpose.)

Also, especially in normal English, but not so much in the Bible, noun clauses can exist without any single word conjunction. Notice the italicized portions of the following English sentences. Each is a noun clause. In some cases (as in number 4 below) one could insert “that” before the noun clause, but not always.

1. *What the newspapers say* is probably false.
2. I do not know *where the book is*.
3. Give the books to *whomever can use them best*.
4. I know *he is correct*.

If the student is able to analyze a sentence using the material in this chapter, he is likely to have a better understanding of the meaning of the sentence in context than otherwise. Attempt to analyze the sentences in the following passage by first determining the type of sentence and second by determining the structure of the sentence. Follow these directions:

### **Directions:**

1. Underline the type of each sentence (declarative, interrogative, imperative, conditional).
2. Underline the structure of each sentence (simple, compound, complex).
3. Find and underline the main independent clause or clauses for each sentence. Use a single underline for this step.
4. Underline each subordinate dependent clause with a double underline.
5. Circle each subordinate conjunction. Refer to the list above.
6. Place a box around each relative pronoun.

### **Sentence One**

And this is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

<b>Type of Sentence</b>	<b>Structure of Sentence</b>
Declarative	Simple
Interrogative	Compound
Imperative	Complex
Conditional	

### **Sentence Two**

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

<b>Type of Sentence</b>	<b>Structure of Sentence</b>
Declarative	Simple
Interrogative	Compound
Imperative	Complex
Conditional	

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### **Sentence Three**

But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

<b>Type of Sentence</b>	<b>Structure of Sentence</b>
Declarative	Simple
Interrogative	Compound
Imperative	Complex
Conditional	

### **Sentence Four**

And this is the promise that he hath promised us, *even* eternal life.

<b>Type of Sentence</b>	<b>Structure of Sentence</b>
Declarative	Simple
Interrogative	Compound
Imperative	Complex
Conditional	

## **Grammatical Analysis**

Grammatical interpretation means grammatical analysis. The minimum analysis that ought to be done will be presented in this supplement.

### **The Internal Structure of a Clause**

As stated, every clause must have a subject and a predicate. The subject is the noun or nouns about which the sentence is making an affirmation. The predicate is the verb or verbs which are making the affirmation about the subject. Note the following examples:

1. All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable.  
The simple subject is "Scripture." The complete subject is "All Scripture."  
The simple predicate is "is." The complete predicate is "is God-breathed and profitable."
2. The Apostle Paul wrote thirteen epistles of the New Testament.  
The simple subject is "Paul." The complete subject is "The Apostle Paul."  
The simple predicate is "wrote." The complete predicate is, "wrote thirteen epistles of the New Testament."

Every clause has the potential to have other parts besides the subject and predicate. Depending on the kind of verb found in the clause, the clause can contain either a direct object or a subject complement. Note the following examples:

1. All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable.  
The verb "is" is a "linking" or "state-of-being" verb. The words "God-breathed" and "profitable" are adjectives which describe the subject "Scripture." Since they refer back to the subject they are called "subject complements." Such adjective complements are often called "predicate adjectives."
2. The Apostle Paul was a Roman citizen.  
The verb "was" is a past tense of "is" and is therefore also a "state-of-being" verb. The noun "citizen" also refers back to the subject, in this case "Paul." It is also, therefore, a subject

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complement. Such noun complements are often called “predicate nominatives,” or simply “predicate nouns.”

3. The Apostle Paul wrote thirteen epistles of the New Testament.

The verb “wrote” is an action verb. Action verbs cannot take a subject complement. The word “epistles” tells what Paul wrote. It is called a direct object because it indicates the object of Paul’s act of writing.

A clause can have, then, four parts: the subject, the predicate, the subject complement, and the direct object. In English a fifth part is sometimes presented: the indirect object. Note the following example:

1. John gave his wife flowers for her birthday.

The verb “gave” is an action verb. It has a direct object, “flowers.” But it also has an indirect object. To whom did John give the flowers? The answer to that question indicates the indirect object of the verb “gave.” The simple indirect object is “wife.” The complete indirect object is “his wife.”

### **Analyzing the Verb**

Each clause has a predicate, which contains a verb or verb phrase. A verb is a word in a clause that affirms the action or state of being.

The student must be able to identify the verb and determine the following.

1. ***The nature of the verb.*** The nature of the verb is determined by telling whether the simple verb is 1) an action verb or 2) a state-of-being verb. The most common state-of-being verbs in English are forms of the verb *to be*: *am, are, is, was, were, be, being, and been.*

These forms of *to be* are only state-of-being verbs when they stand alone as the main verb of their clause. They are not state-of-being verbs when they precede an action verb. They are then called *helping verbs* or *auxiliary verbs*.

Another regular state-of-being verb is *to become*. Unlike *to be*, however, *to become* is never a helping verb.

The chart below lists other English words that are used sometimes as state-of-being verbs and sometimes as action verbs:

appear	grow	remain	smell	stay
feel	look	seem	sound	taste

Virtually all other verbs are action verbs.

2. ***The parts of the verb.*** The five parts of the verb are as follows:

1. **The Present Form.** The first of the principal parts. In English, this part is the vocabulary form, that is, the form you look up in the dictionary.
2. **The Past Form.** The second of the principal parts.
3. **The Past Participle Form.** The third of the principal parts. When used as a verb, this form will always be accompanied by a helping (auxiliary) verb. It can also be used as an adjective.
4. **The Present Participle Form.** Not a principal part. When used as a verb, this form will always be accompanied by a helping (auxiliary) verb. It can also be used as an adjective.
5. **The Infinitive Form.** Not a principal part. Infinitives are used as nouns.

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The first three of these are called the principal parts because there are both regular and irregular forms based on the present. Regular forms make their past tense and past participle by added -d or -ed to the present form. Irregular forms are just that, irregular. Note the following matrix which indicates the regular way that the past and past participle are formed:

<i>Present</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>	<i>Present Participle</i>	<i>Infinitive</i>
look	looked	looked	looking	to look
jump	jumped	jumped	jumping	to jump

These two verbs, look and jump, are regular. Note that the present participle and infinitive are formed by adding *-ing* and *to*, respectively.

The following matrix represents how irregular verbs may be formed. There are a variety of ways, of which these are two:

<i>Present</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>	<i>Present Participle</i>	<i>Infinitive</i>
eat	ate	eaten	eating	to eat
run	ran	ran	running	to run

As noted, the two verbs *eat* and *run* are irregular. Irregular verbs must be learned individually. However, the present participle and the infinitive are formed the same way for both regular and irregular verbs. Therefore, these two parts of the verb are not *principal parts*. Any good college level English grammar will provide a list of the main irregular verbs current in the language.

3. ***The tense of the verb.*** English has *six verb tenses*: present, past, future, present perfect, past perfect, future perfect.

***The present tense*** is formed in the following ways: 1) the simple present “eat, eats”; 2) the emphatic present “do eat, does eat”; 3) the progressive present “am eating,” “is eating,” “are eating.”

In modern English ***the future tense*** is formed by adding one of the helping verbs *will* or *shall*. Two ways are used to express the future: 1) the simple future “shall/will eat”; 2) the progressive future “will/shall be eating”.

***The past tense*** is formed one of three ways: 1) the simple past “ate”; the emphatic past “did eat”; 3) the progressive past “was/were eating”.

***The simple present perfect*** is formed by using the helping verb *have* or *has* plus the **past participle** of the verb: “have/has eaten.”

***The progressive present perfect*** uses *have* or *has* with *been* plus the **present participle** of the verb: “have/has been eating.”

***The simple past perfect*** is formed by using the helping verb *had* plus the **past participle** of the verb: “had eaten.”

***The progressive past perfect*** is formed by using the helping verb *had* with *been* plus the **present participle** of the verb: “had been eating.”

***The simple future perfect*** is formed by using the helping verbs *will/shall have* plus the **past participle** of the verb: “will/shall have eaten.”

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**The progressive future perfect** is formed by using the helping verbs *will/shall have been* plus the **present participle** of the verb: “will/shall have been eating”.

4. **The voice of the verb.** The voice of the verb tells whether the subject of the verb is acting or being acted upon. Therefore, there are two voices: when the subject is acting, the voice is active. When the subject is being acted upon, the voice is passive. (Since voice deals with action, state-of-being verbs have no voice.)

**The active voice:** “I am eating an apple.” “We ate the apples.”

**The passive voice** always uses some form of the verb “be” plus the **past participle** of the verb: “The steak is being eaten by the father.” “The package will be delivered by the post office.”

**The passive voice** can be used in all tenses:

*Present:* “I am being inundated with work.”

*Past:* “The steak was eaten” (simple). Or “The steak was being eaten” (progressive).

*Future:* “The steak will be eaten.”

*Present perfect:* “The steak has been eaten.”

*Past perfect:* “The steak had been eaten.”

*Future perfect:* “The steak will (or shall) have been eaten.”

### **Determining the Subject**

The importance of determining the subject or subjects of a sentence or clause cannot be overestimated. The subject is that about which the sentence is affirming something. If the student cannot isolate the subject, he cannot understand the sentence.

The easiest way to find the subject is to ask the question “who or what?” immediately followed by the verb or verb phrase.

In 1 John 2:26 first isolate the verb phrase for each clause by underlining each word in it, and then ask the question “who or what?” plus the verb phrase.

These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.

In the first clause, who or what “has written?” The answer “I” is the subject. In the second clause who or what “are trying?” In this case the answer is the relative pronoun “who.”

In the following sentences underline the verb phrase in each clause, and then circle the subject of the clause.

1. And this is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.
2. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.
3. But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.
4. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.
5. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

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## **Determining the Direct Object**

If the verb in the sentence or clause is an action verb it *might* have a direct object. State of being verbs *cannot have a direct object*. To find the direct object of a verb state the subject and the verb and then ask the question “who or what?”

These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.

In the above sentence, the subject and verb phrase is underlined for each clause. State the subject and the verb phrase and ask “who or what?”

The subject/verb construction for the first clause is “I have written”. To find the direct object as “I have written what?” The answer is “things.” The word “these” is a demonstrative pronoun/adjective, and acts as a modifier of “things.”

The subject/verb construction for the second clause is “who are trying.” Ask the question, “Who are trying what?” The answer is “to deceive.” “To deceive” is a special kind of noun derived from a verb called an infinitive. An infinitive can be used as a direct object, as it is here.

## **Determining the Subject Complement**

Instead of a direct object, state-of-being verbs *might* have a subject complement. Subject complements are found just like direct objects. The subject/state-of-being verb is underlined in each of the three clauses in the following sentence. Ask the same question as with the direct object and you should be able to find the subject complement.

And this is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there<sup>2</sup> is no darkness at all.

“This is what?” The answer is “message”. The subject complement is “message.”

“God is what? The answer is “light”.

“Darkness is what?” Oops. No subject complement exists in this clause. Remember, state-of-being verbs *might* have a subject complement, but they are not required to have one.

In the following sentences, find either the direct object of action verbs or the subject complement of state-of-being verbs, and circle the correct word. Write above it either DO for direct object or SC for subject complement.

1. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.
2. But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.
3. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, *even* eternal life.
4. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

## **Identifying the Pronoun's Antecedents**

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun. The antecedent of a pronoun is the noun which the pronoun replaces. Below is a list of the most common pronouns:

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<sup>2</sup> The word “there” which is often used with state-of-being verbs is a nonce word. That is, it has no legitimate grammatical function in the sentence, but is included for stylistic purposes. For some reason, as a matter of style, English does not like the statement “no darkness is in Him at all,” which is the actual grammatical construction.

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I	me	my	mine	myself
you	your	yours	yourself	he
him	his	she	her	hers
it, its	we	us	our	they
them	their	this	these	who
whom	whose	which	that one	someone
anyone	everybody	everyone	somebody	something

In Bible study, it is important, whenever possible, to find the antecedent for each pronoun. Usually the antecedent of a pronoun is easy to find because it will either be in the same sentence as the pronoun, or else in an immediately previous sentence. The rule of thumb is that a pronoun refers back to the first thing to which it can refer. If you can find an antecedent in the immediately preceding sentence or clause, go back no further unless there is a legitimate reason to do so.<sup>3</sup>

Pronouns such as someone, anyone, etc. are considered indefinite. As such they are sometimes used legitimately without an antecedent.<sup>4</sup>

Remember, the antecedent of a pronoun in the Biblical text never refers to you the reader. It might refer to the original readers. But it cannot refer to modern day readers by direct interpretation. To do so is to confuse interpretation with application. Only after we have interpreted the original meaning do we decide whether the pronoun is applicable to the modern day reader. Many times it will not be.

In the following selection from Ephesians 3, find all the pronouns write them in the space provided, and write their antecedents next to them.

<sup>1</sup> FOR this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— <sup>2</sup> if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of God’s grace which was given to me for you; <sup>3</sup> that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. <sup>4</sup> And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ....

	<b>Pronoun</b>	<b>Antecedent</b>
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		

<sup>3</sup> A change in your theology is not sufficient reason to not apply a pronoun to its immediate antecedent. Grammar should drive the meaning of the text. The student’s theological perspective should not drive the grammar.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it is possible, though not terribly common, for any pronoun to be without an antecedent. In that case, the very fact of no antecedent is significant. Several possibilities exist: 1) The statement an idea generally accepted, and any pronoun within it is for stylistic purposes; 2) A pronoun can be incidental to a statement, that is, it is necessary because of the form of the statement but not to the meaning of the statement; 3) A built-in assumption as to the antecedent may exist (this is sometimes true when the antecedent is deity) because it is obvious what is meant.

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## **Some Simple Confusions to Avoid**

Nothing spoils written English as much as using the wrong word in a particular context. The English language has many words that sound alike when spoken, but are spelled differently, yet one often reads one word when another is meant. Here are some prominent examples.

### **Your-You're**

The word “your” is a second person possessive pronoun meaning “belonging to you.” We would speak of “your pencil,” or “your haircut.”

The contraction “you’re” is pronounced very similarly to “your.” But it means “you are.” Never use “your” when you mean “you’re.” It spoils your writing when you say, “I hope your coming to dinner tomorrow,” when you should write, “I hope you’re coming to dinner tomorrow.” An educated person might very well turn off your communication efforts.

### **There-Their-They're**

The word “there” has two distinct uses. The first is as an adverb of place, in which it is contrasted with “here.” Example: “I said to put the table there, not here.” It is also used as an adverb of place in such statements as, “We moved to San Diego and lived there for ten years.”

The other way “there” is used is as a “nonce word.” A nonce word is a word that has a special use that is grammatically unrelated to its clause. In this case, “there” is used as a place holder for stylistic reasons. For instance, the statement, “There are three men in that room” actually means “Three men are in that room.” Technically, “there” as a nonce word has no legitimate function grammatically in the sentence, though some grammarians have attempted to make it a special kind of adverb.

To misuse “Their is...” or “Their are...” for “There is...” or “There are...” is substandard English and should never occur. Occasionally, one even sees “They’re” where “there” should be used.

“Their” is a possessive pronoun meaning “belonging to them.” “Their house is very beautiful.”

“They’re” is a contraction of the words “they are.” “They’re a brother-sister team of acrobats.”

Please do not confuse them.

### **It-It's**

Another confusion is the difference between “it” and “it’s.” The confusion arises because the -’s ending *usually* shows possession. For instance, one might say, “The man’s house...” or “The dog’s bowl...” However, “it’s” does not show possession. “It’s” is a contraction of “it is.” “It’s raining...” means “It is raining...”

Strangely, “its” is the possessive form of “it.” The following sentence is correct, “The maple tree lost its leaves early this year,” or “The dog ran into its yard.”

## **Conclusion**

This basic approach to grammar will provide the student with a sufficient base to understand the force of most clauses in the New Testament. Further in-depth analysis could only be based on an extensive study of the English language, which is beyond the scope of this course.