

Scripture Revealed by Scripture: A Narrative Bible Study

How the Bible interprets, fulfills, and explains itself through cross-references

Introduction

The Bible often reveals the meaning of one passage through another. This principle is sometimes called “Scripture interprets Scripture.” Rather than treating verses as isolated sayings, this study follows the internal conversation of the Bible: promises are fulfilled, symbols are explained, patterns are completed, and mysteries become clearer as later passages illuminate earlier ones.

This narrative Bible study focuses on selected examples where one scripture’s meaning is clarified by another scripture. Each section identifies an original passage, an associated cross-reference, and the meaning revealed through the relationship between them.

Body: Scriptures Whose Meaning Is Revealed by Other Scriptures

1. The Seed of the Woman and the Defeat of the Serpent

Original scripture: Genesis 3:15 announces that the seed of the woman will bruise the serpent’s head, while the serpent will bruise his heel.

Revealing scripture: Romans 16:20 says that “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet,” and Galatians 4:4 teaches that God sent His Son, born of a woman.

Meaning revealed: Genesis 3:15 is more than a statement of conflict between humanity and evil. Later scripture reveals it as the first promise of victory over Satan. The wounded heel points to suffering, while the crushed head points to final triumph. In the broader biblical story, Christ is the promised seed who defeats the serpent through His death and resurrection.

2. Abraham's Faith Counted as Righteousness

Original scripture: Genesis 15:6 says that Abraham believed the Lord, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

Revealing scripture: Romans 4:3–5 and Galatians 3:6–9 explain that Abraham was justified by faith before the giving of the law.

Meaning revealed: Genesis records Abraham's trust, but Paul reveals its doctrinal meaning: righteousness is received by faith, not earned by works. Abraham becomes the pattern for all who are counted righteous because they believe God's promise.

3. The Passover Lamb and Christ's Sacrifice

Original scripture: Exodus 12 describes the Passover lamb, whose blood marked the houses of Israel so judgment would pass over them.

Revealing scripture: John 1:29 identifies Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," and 1 Corinthians 5:7 says, "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."

Meaning revealed: The Passover was a historical deliverance from Egypt, but the New Testament reveals its deeper meaning. The lamb's blood points to the saving blood of Christ. Just as Israel was sheltered from judgment by the blood of the lamb, believers are redeemed through Christ's sacrifice.

4. The Bronze Serpent and the Crucifixion

Original scripture: Numbers 21:8–9 records that Moses lifted up a bronze serpent in the wilderness, and those who looked at it lived.

Revealing scripture: John 3:14–15 says, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up," so that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.

Meaning revealed: Numbers describes a moment of physical healing, but Jesus reveals its greater meaning. The lifted serpent becomes a picture of the crucified Christ. Looking in faith brought life in the wilderness; believing in the lifted-up Son brings eternal life.

5. David's Cry of Abandonment and the Suffering Messiah

Original scripture: Psalm 22 opens with the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and describes suffering, mockery, pierced hands and feet, and divided garments.

Revealing scripture: Matthew 27:46 records Jesus speaking the opening words of Psalm 22 from the cross. John 19:23–24 connects the soldiers dividing His garments with the psalm’s description.

Meaning revealed: Psalm 22 is David’s lament, yet the Gospels reveal its messianic depth. Jesus’ quotation draws attention to the whole psalm, showing that His suffering was not accidental but part of the scriptural pattern of the righteous sufferer who is ultimately vindicated by God.

6. The Servant Wounded for Others

Original scripture: Isaiah 53:5 says the Servant was wounded for transgressions, bruised for iniquities, and that by His stripes people are healed.

Revealing scripture: 1 Peter 2:24 applies this passage to Jesus, saying He bore sins in His own body on the tree, and Matthew 8:16–17 connects Jesus’ healing ministry with Isaiah’s prophecy.

Meaning revealed: Isaiah’s Servant is revealed in the New Testament as Jesus Christ. His suffering is substitutionary: He suffers not for His own sin, but for the sins of others. The healing includes both restoration from sin and the sign of God’s kingdom breaking into human brokenness.

7. Jonah and the Sign of the Resurrection

Original scripture: Jonah 1:17 says Jonah was in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights.

Revealing scripture: Matthew 12:40 says that just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so the Son of Man would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Meaning revealed: Jonah’s deliverance becomes a sign pointing beyond itself. Jesus reveals that Jonah’s experience foreshadows His death, burial, and resurrection. The sign is not merely survival; it is God’s power to bring life out of apparent judgment and defeat.

8. The New Covenant Written on the Heart

Original scripture: Jeremiah 31:31–34 promises a new covenant in which God writes His law on the hearts of His people and forgives their sins.

Revealing scripture: Hebrews 8:6–13 quotes Jeremiah and explains that Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant established on better promises.

Meaning revealed: Jeremiah's promise is revealed as fulfilled through Christ. The new covenant is not merely external religion; it is inward transformation, personal knowledge of God, and complete forgiveness grounded in the priestly work of Jesus.

9. The Stone Rejected Becomes the Cornerstone

Original scripture: Psalm 118:22 says, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone."

Revealing scripture: Matthew 21:42 and Acts 4:11 apply this scripture to Jesus, who was rejected by leaders but exalted by God.

Meaning revealed: The rejected stone is revealed as Christ. Human rejection does not cancel divine purpose. The cross appears to be rejection and defeat, but God makes the rejected Christ the foundation of salvation and the cornerstone of His people.

Prophetic Symbols Explained by Scripture

The prophets often received visions filled with symbols. These symbols were not meant to invite speculation; they were intended to be interpreted by comparing scripture with scripture. Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Revelation repeatedly show that God gives both the vision and the interpretive key.

10. Beasts as Kingdoms and Political Powers

Symbol described by the prophets: Daniel saw four great beasts rising from the sea in Daniel 7:3, each different from the others.

Scripture revealing the meaning: Daniel 7:17 explains that the four beasts are four kings, and Daniel 7:23 explains that the fourth beast is a fourth kingdom on the earth. Revelation 13:1 continues the imagery of a beast rising from the sea, connecting later prophecy with Daniel's symbolic language.

Meaning revealed: In prophetic scripture, a beast can represent a kingdom, empire, or governing power. The image is vivid because earthly kingdoms often appear powerful, aggressive, and devouring. Scripture itself provides the interpretive key: the beasts are not literal animals, but political powers in the unfolding conflict between human empires and God's kingdom.

11. Horns as Kings, Rulers, and Centers of Authority

Symbol described by the prophets: Daniel saw horns on the beasts, including ten horns and a smaller horn that arose among them in Daniel 7:7–8.

Scripture revealing the meaning: Daniel 7:24 states that the ten horns are ten kings who arise from the kingdom. Revelation 17:12 gives the same interpretive pattern, saying that the ten horns are ten kings.

Meaning revealed: Horns symbolize power, authority, and rulership. Because a horn is the visible strength of an animal, prophecy uses the image to describe ruling powers. The meaning is revealed not by guesswork but by direct explanation within Daniel and Revelation.

12. Waters as Peoples, Multitudes, Nations, and Languages

Symbol described by the prophets: Daniel 7:2–3 describes the winds stirring the great sea and beasts rising from it. Revelation 17:1 shows judgment upon a woman seated on many waters.

Scripture revealing the meaning: Revelation 17:15 explains that the waters are peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages.

Meaning revealed: Waters can symbolize the restless mass of humanity from which political powers arise and over which corrupt systems exert influence. The symbol shows that prophecy often deals not only with individual rulers, but with nations, populations, and broad movements of history.

13. Stars and Lampstands as Messengers and Churches

Symbol described by the prophet: John saw the risen Christ holding seven stars in His right hand and walking among seven golden lampstands in Revelation 1:12–16.

Scripture revealing the meaning: Revelation 1:20 gives the direct explanation: the seven stars are the angels or messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Meaning revealed: This passage is a clear example of Scripture interpreting its own symbolism. The lampstand image suggests witness, light, and spiritual responsibility, while the stars represent the heavenly or messenger aspect of the churches. Christ stands in the midst of them, showing His authority, care, and inspection of His people.

14. The Dragon as Satan

Symbol described by the prophet: Revelation 12 portrays a great red dragon opposing the woman and seeking to devour her child.

Scripture revealing the meaning: Revelation 12:9 identifies the dragon as “that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan.” Revelation 20:2 repeats the same identification.

Meaning revealed: The dragon gathers together imagery of serpent, monster, destroyer, and accuser. Scripture removes uncertainty by naming the dragon as Satan. The symbol connects the serpent of Genesis with the final conflict in Revelation, showing that the enemy who deceived in the beginning continues to oppose God's redemptive purpose until his defeat.

15. The Lamb as Christ the Sacrifice and Victor

Symbol described by the prophet: Revelation 5:6 shows a Lamb standing as though slain, worthy to open the scroll.

Scripture revealing the meaning: John 1:29 identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. First Corinthians 5:7 identifies Christ as our Passover sacrifice.

Meaning revealed: The Lamb symbolizes both sacrifice and victory. He is slain, yet He stands. The prophetic symbol reveals that God conquers not by worldly force but through the self-giving sacrifice of Christ, who redeems and reigns.

Summary

These examples show that the Bible contains an internal network of meaning. Genesis 3:15 is clarified by the New Testament promise of Satan's defeat. Genesis 15:6 becomes a foundation for justification by faith. Exodus 12 points forward to Christ as the Passover Lamb. Numbers 21 is interpreted by Jesus as a picture of His crucifixion. Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 are revealed through the suffering of Christ. Jonah's deliverance foreshadows resurrection, Jeremiah's new covenant is fulfilled through Christ's mediation, and Psalm 118 identifies the rejected Messiah as the cornerstone. The prophetic symbols add another layer: beasts represent kingdoms, horns represent rulers, waters represent peoples and nations, lampstands represent churches, stars represent messengers, the dragon is Satan, and the Lamb is Christ.

The common pattern is that earlier scriptures often contain promises, shadows, symbols, or partial revelations, while later scriptures disclose their fuller meaning. Sometimes the Bible gives the interpretation immediately, as in Revelation 1:20. At other times, it provides the key in another book, as Daniel and Revelation do with beasts and horns. The same God who inspired the symbols also supplies their meaning.

Conclusion

A faithful Bible study does not isolate verses from the whole counsel of Scripture or allow prophetic imagery to become guesswork. Instead, it asks how one passage is explained, expanded, fulfilled, or completed by another. When Scripture interprets Scripture, the unity of the Bible becomes clear: God's redemptive plan unfolds across time, reaches its center in Jesus Christ, and calls readers to trust the reliability and coherence of God's Word.

For further study, readers may follow each cross-reference in context, compare the surrounding passages, and observe how the Bible's themes of promise, covenant, sacrifice, suffering, resurrection, kingdom, judgment, and prophetic symbolism are woven together from Genesis to Revelation.