

# Biblical Interpretation

by  
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With questions by A. R. Gallaher

## Preface

This study originally began as notes I used to teach a Bible class. At first, I relied largely on D. R. Dungan's book on hermeneutics. Later, I read Clinton Lockhart's work and added in a number of notes from him. I was careful to give credit to a particular author whenever I quoted directly from them. However, I may not have always given credit after I had studied and synthesized the writings of one or more authors.

Then, I enlisted the aid of A. R. Gallaher, a dear friend and teacher of English. He took the time to read each lesson and formulate questions designed to help the student review the material and retain as much of it as possible. Many thanks to this dear brother in Christ. I treasure his friendship.

During 2005, I was blessed to get to go on mission trips to Nicaragua and Scotland. In both cases, I was asked to teach on hermeneutics. Brother J. C. Choate learned of these trips and the lessons used. He approached me and asked if we could put the lessons into book form for others to use. I told him that I would see what I could do.

My prayer is that readers of this work will learn how to read the Bible and discover its meaning for themselves. I have no desire for anyone to think like I think. Instead, my goal was, and is, to help others learn how to rightly divide the word of truth and better understand God's will for our lives.

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# The Importance of Our Study

## The Problem

The Bible is currently being attacked from numerous directions. It is relatively easy for most Christians to identify the fallacies in the arguments set forth by atheists. Few will find their faith overwhelmed because of them. However, a much larger number will not even recognize the danger in statements made by some who profess to believe in God and wish to express a desire to pursue his will. For instance, there are those who would try to explain the role of women in the leadership and public worship of the church by saying Paul's words were directed to people living in a different culture and cannot be applied in the same way in our culture.

At first glance, there seems to be some validity to such a point. After all, the customs of a first century city containing a temple to the goddess Aphrodite would be quite different from the towns and cities in which most of us live. Surely, we might say, God would expect us to recognize those old rules were not meant for our time. However, a closer examination of Paul's statements will reveal that he is arguing from principles God laid down in the very creation of the world!

Additionally, there are those who are proposing that we need a new hermeneutic to properly understand God's word. "The main interest of those espousing the new hermeneutic within the churches of Christ is destroying the effectiveness of the old hermeneutic. There is special interest in attacking the use of command, example and necessary inference" (Dave Miller, *Piloting the Strait*, Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996, p. 114). Specific attacks on the old hermeneutic often begin with the charge that it relies too heavily upon human reasoning. Of course, even those following the new hermeneutic use reason to help them understand the Bible. As Miller observes, the most important thing is to be sure such reasoning is sound, or correct (p. 115).

Further, "The 'new hermeneutic' is rooted in subjectivity and relativism in its approach to Scripture. It seeks to give man more say in his religious pursuits, while attributing such subjective inclination to the Holy Spirit" (p. 117). The birth of these types of ideas may have come because of a number of different factors. Among them is the fact that the majority of institutions of higher education do not believe there is any such thing as logically certain truth. Instead, truth is viewed as being in a constant state of flux (p. 124). The weakness within such thinking can be found in numbers of passages which demonstrate that God delivered a law and expected man to keep it. For instance, our Lord said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15 Note: This and all future quotations from scripture will be from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.). John told early Christians, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). Other passages clearly underscore God's expectation that man would obey him (1 Samuel 15:22; Ecclesiastes 12:13; Romans 6:16; Hebrews 5:9).

Obviously, we need to spend some time learning how to view the various passages of God's word with the ultimate goal of discovering more fully his will for our lives. For this

reason, we will spend the next several lessons in the study of Biblical interpretation, or hermeneutics.

### **Some Important Definitions**

D. R. Dungan, in his book *Hermeneutics*, defines his subject as "the science of interpretation." Unfortunately, many today are proposing each should read scripture and ask only, "What does this mean to me in my circumstances at this moment in time." They would even suggest the answer to such a question is provided by the Holy Spirit without any further effort on our part to delve more deeply into the words God used and message he set forth. The truth of the matter is that God used his Spirit to reveal the mind of God to man and guide him into all truth.

But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:9-11).

Jesus told his disciples they were not ready to receive all of his instructions at the time he walked on the earth. "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come" (John 16:12-13).

So, those who would actively seek out God's will for their lives must become interested in philology and exegesis. This is true because one who is interested in philology is a lover of words and is dedicated to the study of them. An exegete is one who tries to draw out of a text all that the writer put into it. Our purpose will be to learn to effectively practice the science of interpretation, the study of the words God used and learn to draw everything out of a given passage that God placed there for us.

### **Our Purpose Expressed By Other Truth Lovers**

We live in a time when it seems many have turned their backs on the will of God. Like ancient Jerusalem, it seems the protective walls have been torn down and God's people stand in jeopardy. We can take a lesson from Ezra, who, along with Nehemiah, sought to restore the walls of the city and return to a proper worship of the true God. It is time for those who would truly be God's people to, like Ezra, prepare their hearts to seek his law, do it and teach others to do the same (Ezra 7:10).

Some things remain hidden, or secret; but those things which are revealed are uncovered so that man can do God's will (Deuteronomy 29:29). Scripture is not the product of man's imagination, but is God's spoken word as revealed by the Holy Ghost (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). To understand this revealed will, man must "be diligent to present yourself approve to God," which would involve much more than sitting down to a desk (2 Timothy 2:15). We

should especially notice the careful, respectful attention given to the study of God's word during Nehemiah's and Ezra's day (Nehemiah 8:1-8). David describes (Psalm 1:1-2) the blessed man as one who meditates on the law of God day and night.

### **The Importance of Knowing and Obeying God's Will**

The importance of knowing and obeying God's will is vividly portrayed in Abraham's conversation with the rich man in Luke 16. After realizing there was nothing that could be done to ease his own torment, the rich man asked that Lazarus be sent back to earth to warn his five brothers lest they join him in torment. Abraham told him, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them". The rich man evidently did not think they would pay attention to the written word, but did think they would heed the words of one returned from the dead. Abraham said, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead" (Luke 16:19-31, esp. 27-31). Friends, we must learn to get out of a passage all that God put into it so that we do not join the rich man in eternal suffering. God speaks to us only through his word.

A proper interpretation of the Bible could heal the divisions in the religious world. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. They tried to place Jesus on the horns of a dilemma by telling of a woman who had married a man and then each of his six brethren, after her previous husband died. They asked Jesus whose wife she would be after the resurrection. Jesus answered by saying, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:23-29). The ridiculous nature of their question would have been obvious to them had they been better Bible students.

Of course, a proper understanding of the Bible is absolutely necessary for my salvation. "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). It is the truth that must be known if a man would be set free (John 8:32). Truth is found in God's word (John 17:17). Writers like John wrote that we might know we have eternal life, and Peter assured his readers that if they developed the virtues he had listed they would never fall (1 John 5:13; 2 Peter 1:10). Plainly, we need to learn how to better understand God's word.

## Questions

I. FILL IN THE BLANK: Write the correct answer in the blank to the left that most nearly fits the statement or question.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Who set his heart on seeking the law of the Lord?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. What is one called who loves the study of words?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Abraham told the rich man that his brethren would not hear one risen from the \_\_\_\_\_ if they would not hear Moses and the prophets.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Jesus accused the Sadducees of not knowing the scriptures nor the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. A \_\_\_\_\_ of the Bible is necessary for my salvation.

II. TRUE-FALSE: If the statement is true circle "T"; if the statement is false circle "F".

- T F 1. An exegete is one who tries to understand words.
- T F 2. Truth is found in God's word.
- T F 3. The Sadducees believed in the resurrection.
- T F 4. Most scripture is the product of man's imagination.
- T F 5. The importance of knowing and obeying God's will can be seen in Luke 16.
- T F 6. God speaks to man only through his word.
- T F 7. John wrote that we might know we have eternal life.
- T F 8. Peter told his readers that virtues were not important to man's salvation.
- T F 9. If things are revealed, then we do not have to study.
- T F 10. Moses said, "They have Abraham and the prophets."

III. MATCHING: Match the verse with correct statement.

- |  |              |
|--|--------------|
| _____ 1. We cannot please God without faith.                             | Romans 10:17 |
| _____ 2. Truth is in God's word.   | John 17:17   |
| _____ 3. Hearing the word comes before faith.                            | Psalms 1:1-2 |
| _____ 4. Truth will set man free.  | Hebrews 11:6 |
| _____ 5. A man is blessed who meditates on the law of God day and night. | John 8:32    |

IV. CHALLENGE QUESTIONS: Answer these if you would like. These are bonus and will not count against your graded section. They are provided for you in order to help you make conclusions on the lesson material.

1. If the Bible came from God, and only in the Bible will one find the truth and freedom, what is my responsibility to God's word?

2. If the Bible has all of God's revealed word, what should be my attitude toward so-called creeds, manuals, and other religious writings that seek to impose standards contrary to God's word?

# Things That Help Us Understand the Bible

## **Recognize the Bible As God's Word**

There are actually people who will say, "So what if the Bible says it. We are living in a different day and time than that." Such an attitude will put blinders on the individual and prevent him from seeing the significance of the passage being considered. Believing the Bible is truly the word of God helps in understanding it by causing one to be reverent and more serious in study.

There is ample evidence to prove the Bible is the word of God. For instance, numerous prophecies made years in advance portray with complete accuracy the event as it later would occur. Jesus' birth in Bethlehem is remarkable because he was to be a king and Jerusalem was the capitol city at the time of his birth. Yet, Micah hundreds of years before had told God's people that is where the Messiah would be born (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1). Who would have thought Israelites who had longed for the Savior for generations would despise and reject him when he came to earth, but, nearly seven hundred years before his birth, Isaiah foretold the rejection of God's anointed (Isaiah 53).

Too, the unity of the Bible stakes a claim to its inspiration. The Bible is comprised of sixty-six books written by approximately forty writers over a period of some sixteen hundred years. Included in the group who wrote are common fishermen, a doctor, a lawyer and a man who received the highest education possible in view of his becoming a potential world leader. Still, they write in a way that points the reader to man's struggle with sin, God's redeeming love and the Savior who has overcome the grave. Even books written by a single author are not as focussed!

## **Use Common Sense**

To many people, the Bible is a mysterious book which is hard to understand. They may have been taught or felt that only priests or those specially trained can understand its teachings. Therefore they will answer questions by saying that they will have to ask their preacher and get back to the one doing the asking. However, it is clear the Bible was delivered to the common man.

In fact, Paul said God had an eternal purpose to save those who would be in Christ. That choosing was accomplished in the mind of God even before he created the world (Ephesians 1:4). Though he had planned it before the world was created, God did not send his Son until the time was fully ready, like a fruit ripe and ready for picking (1:10). Among the things we can see which might have been included in the world's being ready was the general peace brought on by the domination of the Roman Empire, ease of travel and the almost universal usage of Koine Greek. Koine, unlike classical Greek, was the language of the common man. The writers of the New Testament used it to communicate with people all over the world.

Knowing the Bible was written to the common man should encourage more people to study with the hope of understanding. Each should use his common sense to help him discern what it was God was saying in the particular passage under consideration. Some illustrations are clearly figurative in meaning. For example, when Jesus says he is the door of the sheepfold, we know he is not a literal door. Other verses obviously refer to literal events, such as, "Jesus wept." Common sense will often help us to know which one we are reading at a given time. The Bible was not written in complex intellectual language, but in simple terms so that all could understand.

### **An Open Mind And Willingness To Work**

The Ethiopian Eunuch gained a fuller understanding of God's will for his life through one simple question. When Philip asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He responded by asking a question of his own. "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:30-31). Obviously, he had an open mind. Lessons can be learned from those who would seem least likely to know, if we will only listen with an open mind. Remember, Naaman learned the secret to being cured of leprosy from a captive servant girl (2 Kings 5:1-3).

One must also be willing to work to understand the Bible. Timothy had known the scripture from the time of early childhood, yet Paul instructed him to study to be approved of God (2 Timothy 3:15; 2:15). This suggests work that is ongoing throughout one's lifetime, instead of one-time study. The Bereans searched the scriptures "daily" to see if the word preached was God's word (Acts 17:11-12). Mary recognized the importance of hearing the Master and chose it over other things of lesser import (Luke 10:38-42).

### **Cultivate A Sincere Desire To Know The Truth**

At the outset, it should be noted that liberal theologians speak of the Bible as the word of God, but mean it in some way most of us could never comprehend. As Ernest Fuchs demonstrates when he writes, "The problem applies to the mythical statements in the New Testament. No one can deny that there are such statements: Jesus is conceived of as a pre-existent heavenly being. After his resurrection he rules together with God at God's right hand. During his lifetime he can walk on water like a spirit. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit without male participation. And so forth" ("The New Testament and the Hermeneutical Problem." John M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr., editors. *The New Hermeneutic*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964, pp. 115-116). Obviously, such a view would cause one to look at the word of God as something requiring a lot of help to understand. For our purposes, we view the Bible as the totally true word of God with no mythology included. We will approach its study with the firm belief that the truth is clearly stated in the Bible and we can know and obey it.

Our understanding can be helped by a sincere desire to know the truth and obey its commands. In Matthew 13:10-17, Jesus' disciples asked Jesus why he spoke in parables. Jesus told them it was God's will that they should know these mysteries (verse 11). Remember, the gospel was a "mystery" in the Old Testament because it was not yet made known (compare verse 17; Romans 16:25; 1 Peter 1:10-12).

Both the unbelieving Jews and Christ's disciples had been given the opportunity to see Christ's miracles and hear Christ's teaching. The unbelieving Jews saw the miracles, but refused to see the truth that Jesus is God's Son. They thus wasted their opportunities and caused God to take away even the opportunities they had. The disciples believed, because of their opportunities, and God gave them a greater opportunity for understanding in the great teaching of the parables (verses 12-14). Because they refused truth plainly set before them, the unbelieving found their hearts filled with earthly desires (waxed gross) and their ears unreceptive to the truth (verse 15). To be sure that they received no light of truth, they actually closed their eyes lest they should see. We must beware lest we go to the scriptures with minds made up and refuse to understand the truth we may read there (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

### **Good Tools**

As with any task, the proper tools can help us do a better job. In the case of Bible study, our understanding can be increased if we gain access to the right tools. Having several different versions for comparison can be helpful. Use the standard translations which were done by committees (King James, American Standard, Revised Standard, et al). Avoid paraphrases, and one-man translations (like the Living Bible Paraphrased, Today's English Version {which is also called Good News for Modern Man}). Also, avoid Bibles translated by a single group to support their doctrine, such as the New World Translation. Read the passage under consideration from all of them. Use a dictionary to discover the meaning of words you do not recognize or which seem odd in the context. While some have criticized the King James Version for its use of "outdated words," it has a greater poetic beauty than many of the modern translations. Additionally, it should be noted that a good collegiate dictionary reveals the meaning of each word used. So, reading from the King James Version can help one develop a greater appreciation of poetry and a better understanding of the English language.

A good concordance can be used to look up key words. Sometimes looking up other passages where a word is used can help. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* has a Hebrew and Greek dictionary in the back so the Bible definition can be readily looked up. For those able to use more advanced tools, Greek and Hebrew lexicons prove very useful. A Bible dictionary can help us discover the meaning of a word, historical background, habits and customs of the people involved, descriptions of animals or plants, and laws of that day and nation. *Baker's Bible Atlas*, or some other geography book, can assist us in understanding the terrain involved, and give pertinent data on the people. Commentaries can help if one keeps in mind that they are written by men and were influenced by the author's thinking. Also, we need to learn to use the center column references and footnotes that appear in most good Bibles. Often an alternate word is given that could help us understand an entire passage.

### **Prayer**

Finally, all Bible study should be accompanied by prayer for wisdom from God that we might understand what we read and apply it to our lives. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). Such a positive promise should spur us to pray anytime we approach the Bible.

## Questions

I. LISTING: Six things were mentioned in the lesson that will help us understand the Bible. Please list those six things mentioned.

First: \_\_\_\_\_ Second:

Third: \_\_\_\_\_ Fourth:

Fifth: \_\_\_\_\_ Sixth:

II. TRUE-FALSE: If the statement is true circle "T", if false circle "F".

- T F 1. We should ask God for knowledge.
- T F 2. When we would like to look up key words, we should use a concordance.
- T F 3. The main body of Jews believed Jesus' message when he performed miracles.
- T F 4. We should always use one-man Bible translations or paraphrases when we study God's word.
- T F 5. We should not study the word with our minds made up and refuse to understand.
- T F 6. The Bible was written in Latin because that was the language everyone was speaking at that time.
- T F 7. The Bereans searched the scriptures daily to see if the word preached was God's word.
- T F 8. The New Testament reveals the mystery because it contains the gospel.

III. MATCHING: Match the statement with the correct answer.

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|---|-----------------------|
| _____ 1. Ask God for wisdom.  | American Standard     |
| _____ 2. Study to show thyself approved of God.   | Commentaries          |
| _____ 3. Unbelieving had hearts filled with earthly desires.  | James 1:5             |
| _____ 4. Avoid this version of the Bible because it was translated by a single group to support their doctrine. | 2 Timothy 2:15        |
| _____ 5. Good version to use in Bible study.  | Matthew 13:15         |
| _____ 6. Written by men but good for study help.  | New World Translation |

IV. CHALLENGE QUESTIONS: These questions are provided for your study. They will not count against your grade.

1. See if you can find Jerusalem on a map in your Bible. Locate and look up an encyclopedia entry of Jerusalem. Now pick a city in the Bible that you might be interested in finding out more about (ex. Corinth, Ephesus, Rome). List some interesting facts you discovered about that city.

2. Consider a word that you find in the Holy Scriptures a number of times. Look up that word in a concordance and examine how it is used in each instance.

# Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth, Part 1

The singer of Israel wrote a lengthy song praising God's word through the entire Hebrew alphabet. Among other things, he said, "Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). Paul told Timothy to "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). This verse clearly points out our need to study. Study will help us know what to do to be approved of God through obedience to his will. Paul's words to the young preacher also let us know there is a right and a wrong way to divide scripture. We must carefully study the truth so that we may rightly divide its teachings and be acceptable in God's sight.

## Basic Bible Facts

In a sermon on the Bible, N. B. Hardeman observed, "The Bible, unlike all books written by man, does not become obsolete with the passing of years....It is ever fresh, like unto a mountain spring from which all our fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers slaked their thirst in generations gone by; and still, to us, the same spring offers that drink afresh, and it will continue to offer it to those yet unborn." He went on to note that, "unlike most, if not all, of the books written by man, it can be translated into different languages and lose none of its power" (*Hardeman's Tabernacle Sermons*, Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1922, pp. 19-20).

Anyone who first begins to look at the Bible needs to understand some basic facts. The Bible could be described as a library containing 66 books written by some 40 authors over a period of approximately 1,600 years. Those authors include kings, a farmer, fishermen, a lawyer, a doctor and a cowboy, just to name a few. Despite their varied backgrounds and the years that separated their writings, these authors' works flow with a perfect harmony. Though they were not striving to write a science textbook, there is not one word of scripture that is contradicted by a proven fact of science. Further, as archeologists unearth new data, the Bible has proven to be completely accurate in its historical details as well. Yet, the underlying theme of the Bible is not to present a thorough history, but to describe man's creation, his fall into sin and God's plan to restore man to fellowship with his Creator.

There are two main divisions of the Bible, the Old Testament and New Testament. The Old Testament contains 39 books. These books easily divide into 5 books of law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), 12 books of history (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther), 5 books of poetry (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon), 5 major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel) and 12 minor prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). The New Testament contains 27 books, including 4 gospel records (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), 1 book of history (Acts), 21 letters (Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John, Jude) and 1 book of prophecy (Revelation).

## **Before the World Was Formed**

God planned his creation before he began to create. His plan included the free moral agency of man, which meant that man could sin and fall away from God. Thus, God prepared for the eventuality of man's fall before he framed the world. In speaking of our redemption by the precious blood of the Savior, Peter says: "Who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (I Peter 1:18-20). Paul agrees with Peter and says God chose that the saved would be in Christ all along, but did not send him until the time was right.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love...that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him (Ephesians 1:3-4,10).

## **Creation and the Fall**

Man was formed by God out of the dust of the ground and created in the image of God. God made a special garden and placed man in it to "tend and keep it" (Genesis 1:26; 2:7-15). Besides these assigned tasks, God set forth only one law, so far as the written record is concerned. Man was not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (2:16-17). Woman was created to be a suitable helper for man (2:18).

Satan became the father of liars by adding just one word to that which God had said (Genesis 3:4; John 8:44). He told a partial truth that made sin seem attractive (Genesis 3:5,7,22). He appealed to fleshly desire by telling Eve that the fruit was good for food. He aroused her desire through sight, as she saw that it was "pleasant to the eyes." He took advantage of wrongful pride through causing her to think it was "to be desired to make one wise" (3:6; 1 John 2:15-17). In God's words to the serpent, after man's fall, God presented the first great foreshadowing of his plan to send Christ; "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (3:15). In his death on the cross, Jesus suffered a painful bruise like one we might get on the heel, but in his resurrection he dealt a mortal, or head, wound to Satan.

While in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve enjoyed a close relationship with God (Genesis 3:8). Man's sin placed a barrier between him and his creation (Isaiah 59:1-2). The long road to the restoration of that relationship, or fellowship, began with the Patriarchal Age. During that age, God spoke to the head of the house, or Patriarch.

## Questions

I. FILL IN THE BLANK: Write the correct words that complete the statement.

1. "Be diligent to present yourself \_\_\_\_\_ to God."
2. God's plan included the \_\_\_\_\_ of man.
3. Man was \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.
4. Satan became the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ by adding just one word.
5. Satan took advantage of Eve's pride because the fruit was "to be desired to make one \_\_\_\_\_."
6. God would put \_\_\_\_\_ between Satan and the woman.
7. The \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ dealt a mortal, or head, wound to Satan.
8. Man's \_\_\_\_\_ placed a \_\_\_\_\_ between him and God.
9. The road to restoration began with the \_\_\_\_\_ age.
10. Our redemption is by the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

II. MATCHING: Match the statement with the correct verse by placing the letter in the blank.

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| ___ 1. Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat of the tree. | A. Isaiah 59:1,2   |
| ___ 2. Satan would bruise Christ's heel.               | B. I Peter 1:18-20 |
| ___ 3. Christ was foreordained to save man in himself  | C. Genesis 3:15    |
| ___ 4. Study   | D. Gen. 2:16-17    |
| ___ 5. Woman was created to be a suitable help meet.   | E. 2 Tim. 2:15     |
| ___ 6. Sin came between God and man.                   | F. Gen. 2:18       |

### III. CHALLENGE QUESTIONS: Bonus

1. Examine the lesson carefully and explain why it is correct to say that God did not cause man to sin or fall from his favor.

2. Name the three categories of sin and name or list some modern sins that fit in those areas.

## Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth, Part 2

### When God Spoke To The Fathers

Once man had sinned, God had to put into action his plan to bring him back. We call the first step in that plan the Patriarchal Age. In that age, the head of a household would direct his family as God directed him. For example, God spoke to Noah and instructed him to build an ark of gopher wood (Genesis 6:12-14). Notice that other families were destroyed for their disobedience, but Noah's was saved because he led them in the way of obedience. The writer of Genesis says, "Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did" (Genesis 6:22). As the writer of Hebrews reports, "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7). As Noah and his family come forth out of the ark, we can see that great patriarch leading his family in worship to God (Genesis 8:15-20). His righteousness caused God to bless his family and to promise never to destroy the world by water again (8:21-9:1).

Abraham was another of the Patriarchs to whom God spoke (Genesis 12:1-4). We should notice again that certain blessings accompany obedience. Further, God knew Abraham would be a good spiritual leader for all those in his house, both servants and children (18:18-19). He obeyed even in the most difficult of circumstances, thus teaching his son, Isaac, the way of obedience (22:1-13, especially 7-8; Hebrews 11:17-19; Genesis 26:1-3,6).

### The Law Delivered On Sinai

After the Patriarchal Age, God dealt with man through the written law of Moses (John 1:17). This law was specifically delivered only to Israel, causing some to believe the Gentiles continued to worship God at the direction of their fathers (Exodus 19:3-6; Acts 10:1-4). Just as the people of the Patriarchal Age died in the flood because of disobedience, the disobedient under Moses' law were punished (Leviticus 10:1-2; 1 Corinthians 10:1-10; Judges 2:10-14). The law showed man that he could not live a perfect life, and pointed out the great need for a means of overcoming sin, but it did not make such a means available to the people (Hebrews 10:1-4). That law fulfilled its purpose when it showed man his need for a perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ. "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor" (Galatians 3:19-25). Its stories serve as an example to us of how God will deal with disobedient man. "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

### Fellowship With God Is Restored In Christ

Jesus came to fulfill the law and its many promises of a Savior. Our Lord told his disciples, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 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" (Matthew 5:17-18). Just as the prophets had said, Jesus was born of a virgin in the little town of Bethlehem. He was crucified between

two thieves, but buried in a rich man's tomb. He carried man's sins to the cross despite the fact that he had been rejected by the very ones he came to save (Isaiah 7:14; 53:1-12; Micah 5:2-3). In his death, Jesus took the old law out of the way and put his law into force. Paul told the Christians at Colosse, "Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 9:11-17). Christ's resurrection was the final great proof that he is God's anointed (Acts 2:22-36). He ascended to heaven and took his rightful seat on the throne of power.

In taking away the law at the cross, Jesus tore down the barrier between Jew and Gentile, or man and man. The blood shed on that cross also gave man the means of over-coming sin, which for centuries had stood as a barrier between man and God (Ephesians 2:11-16; Hebrews 9:22). The Gentiles, as well as the Jews, were granted repentance unto life (Acts 10:34-36, 40, 42-43; 11:15-18). In fact, it can be said that all are one in the church, or in Christ, since it is his body (Ephesians 2:16; Galatians 3:26-28). Thus, peace can be preached to all (Ephesians 2:17-19). We are built upon the foundation of Christ, and are a temple in which God can live (2:20-22; 1 Corinthians 3:9,16). Man had walked with God in the Garden of Eden. Now, in Christ, we can be in fellowship with him again through the blood of his glorious Son (1 John 1:3-7).

### Questions

I. IDENTIFY: Identify the correct word which will complete the statement.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Noah and his family were saved because of this.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. What the head of the household was called.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Book in the New Testament that tells about Abram's faithfulness.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The Law of Moses was given only to this people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The law fulfilled its purpose by showing man that this certain type of sacrifice must be given.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. This is the final proof that Christ is God's anointed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. In Christ, we can have this type of relationship.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. This substance gives us the power to live in Christ.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. All are this in the Church.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The Old Law could not take this away.

II. MATCHING VERSES: Match the verse that goes along with the statement. Place the letter in the blank.

- \_\_\_ 1. God dealt with man through the Law of Moses.
- \_\_\_ 2. The Gentiles are offered the repentance.
- \_\_\_ 3. Man could not live a perfect life but needed to overcome sin.
- \_\_\_ 4. We can be in fellowship with Christ through his blood.
- \_\_\_ 5. Noah is told to build an ark of gopher wood.
- \_\_\_ 6. Abraham obeys a very difficult command.
- \_\_\_ 7. Jesus came to fulfill the law.
- \_\_\_ 8. The world will not be destroyed by water again.
- \_\_\_ 9. Christ has ascended to heaven and taken his rightful place on the throne of power.
- \_\_\_ 10. The blood of Christ allows man to overcome sin.

**A.** Genesis 6:12-14

**B.** Genesis 8:21 - 9:1

**C.** Genesis 22:7-8

**D.** John 1:17

**E.** Hebrews 10:1-4

**F.** Matthew 5:17-18

**G.** Acts 2:22-36

**H.** Acts 10

**I.** 1 John 1:3-7

**J.** Ephesians 2:11-16

III. CHALLENGE QUESTIONS:

1. What was the key ingredient in the Old Testament for man to be acceptable to God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How does a person take advantage of the blood of Christ?

# Methods of Interpretation, Part 1

It is obvious that serious Bible students must have an overall plan for their approach to the study of scripture. Various methods have been employed and each affects one's whole process of thought about God's word. One definition of the word "method" (as found in *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*) is: "a systematic procedure, technique, or mode of inquiry employed by or proper to a particular discipline or art." With that definition in mind, let's observe some of the methods of interpretation which have been employed.

## **The Mystical and Hierarchical Methods**

Dungan suggests that some have used the mystical method. This method originated during the time of the Greek and Roman "gods". It was thought that the gods spoke through an oracle, usually a priest or priestess. As the church went into apostasy, it adopted as much of the ritual of heathenism as possible so as to attract heathen worshipers. The priests, or clergy, come to be looked upon as the official spokesmen for God. The Bible was taken out of the hands of the people. In this way, the word of God became what the priests said the Bible said. The reformation took this power out of the hands of the priests and placed it into the hands of the creed-makers, which is no better. Others have avoided placing their trust in the creed and priest, only to give it to men with great names. Before they will commit to their understanding of a particular passage, they will have to refer to a man they trust to discover the meaning as he sees it.

The hierarchical method is a modified form of the mystical. This says the church is empowered with the knowledge of God's will. If the priests disagree as to interpretation, then the bishop is consulted. If the bishops disagree, the archbishop is called upon; and so on up the ladder of their earthly chain of command.

## **Spiritual and Allegorical Methods**

Closely akin to the mystical method is the spiritual method. Those who hold to this view do not limit knowledge of God's will to a small group but claim it is within the power of all of us. Dungan says, "Piety and a possession of the light of God in the soul, will enable everyone to understand the Scriptures in this spiritual way." He goes on to explain, "Many plain passages of the word of God will, to them, have the meaning of something very different from what has been said. For, with them, it is not so much what the Lord has said, as what he revealed to them as the meaning of that language." While there is a large number of people currently holding this view, it is ironic that they do not interpret the Bible the same way.

The allegorical method is similar to the spiritual. Those who take this approach believe everything in the Bible is a metaphor. That is, everything that is said means something besides what it says. This is really "eisegesis", instead of exegesis, and allows one to read into the text what he wants to be there.

## **The Rationalistic Method**

The rationalistic method rejects any interpretation that cannot be explained with human reason. If human reason says there is no such thing as a miracle, then Bible miracles must be explained away. Similarly, if one cannot use his reason to understand how a particular prophesy could have been made hundreds of years before the actual event took place, then there is no such thing as predictive prophesy. If it is said that the world came about through evolution, then perhaps they would say it was theistic evolution. Jeremiah said, "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (10:23). His inspired statement makes the rationalistic method clearly unacceptable.

## **The Apologetic Method**

The apologetic method makes all statements in the Bible absolutely true no matter who spoke them. In this way, words of the devil, the witch of Endor, Cain, and others, become truth. Of course, the record of their statements is inspired, and it is true they made them, but what they said could be in error. When Jesus healed the man who had a demon that had made him blind and mute, the Pharisees said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons" (Matthew 12:22-24). Their statements about Jesus were false, though the Pharisees surely made them just as Matthew reported.

## **The Dogmatic Method**

Some take a stand or set forth a doctrine, and then go to the Bible to prove it is true. This approach is used by those who accept the dogmatic method. Often those who take a position in a public way will resort to this method to prove their point. Truth may be found in this manner, however, in general it slows one down in his search for the truth. Those who use this method will also, at times, point to the results of a practice, writings of the early "church fathers," or the practice of a church, to enhance their view when they fail to find a Bible verse they can use for proof. It appears the devil used this method in his temptations of our Lord. When he wanted Jesus to throw himself down from the temple to see if the angels would save him and prove he was the Son of God, the devil quoted from Psalm 91:11-12. Jesus pointed to a truth about man's relationship with God, found in Deuteronomy 6:16, which made it clear the devil had abused the scripture to support his position (Matthew 4:5-7).

## Questions

I. MATCHING: Give the type of interpretation that corresponds with the statement.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. All statements are true no matter who spoke them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. It is not so much what the Lord has said, as what He revealed to us as the meaning of that language.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Man will set forth a doctrine and then prove it by the Bible.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The word becomes what the clergy says the Bible says.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Human reason is the only basis for interpreting the Bible.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. This eisegesis, not exegesis.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The earthly chain of command is empowered with the knowledge of God's will.

II. FILL IN THE BLANK: Write the correct words that complete the statements.

- 1. If human reason says there is no such thing as a \_\_\_\_\_, then the rationalistic method explains them away.
- 2. The dogmatic method tends to slow the process of searching for the \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3. "A systematic procedure, technique, or \_\_\_\_\_ of inquiry employed by or proper to particular discipline or art" is the definition of the word \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4. The mystical method originated during the time of the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ gods.
- 5. People who use the allegorical method believe everything in the Bible is a \_\_\_\_\_.
- 6. Some groups hold to the spiritual method but it is \_\_\_\_\_ that they do not interpret the Bible the same way.
- 7. The record of their statements is inspired and it is true they made them but what they said could be in \_\_\_\_\_.
- 8. The \_\_\_\_\_ method is a modified form of the \_\_\_\_\_.

III. TRUE - FALSE: If the statement is true, circle "T", if false circle "F".

- T F 1. Any method of interpretation is acceptable.
- T F 2. The method which questions God's power over nature is the dogmatic method.
- T F 3. The method which tends to make the minister or preacher a better interpreter is the apologetic method.
- T F 4. The allegorical method of interpretation is the best way to approach God's word.
- T F 5. None of these methods of approaching God's word is wholly acceptable.

IV. CHALLENGE QUESTIONS: Bonus

1. Write down why you realize in your study that these types of interpretation methods cannot be right in light of the scriptures.

## Methods of Interpretation, Part 2

In the last lesson, we learned that a “method” is a systematic approach to Bible study. It should have become clear to us that the method used by an individual in his approach to scripture will directly impact his understanding of God's word. For instance, one who thinks the Bible can be understood only by the priests or clergy might refuse to read a passage and give his understanding of it because he has not been specially trained. Others may recite the position of their church without trying to consider whether or not the Bible really says what their church says it does.

Others, who rely on what they feel the Holy Spirit is saying to them, will brush aside plain teachings of scripture by saying that is not what God has revealed to them. Still other individuals approach the entire Bible as if it is a metaphor. Such individuals are constantly looking for the true meaning behind the incidents related in the inspired record. Those using the rationalistic method refuse to accept any teaching of scripture which they cannot explain using their own reasoning powers. In this manner, anything which human minds cannot comprehend must be rejected, despite the fact that God's ways are above man's ways and his thoughts higher than man's thoughts (Isaiah 55:9). Another very dangerous method of interpretation is the dogmatic method which was used by the devil. The individual using this approach decides what he wants God to say and goes in search of passages to support his position.

### **The Literal Method**

One other potentially dangerous method of interpretation may at first sound like the one we would all like to use. In the literal method, every word is taken literally. Those who use this method refuse to allow for the use of metaphors, poetic descriptions, or any other use of figurative language. Ironically, they will generally not try to literalize verses like Psalm 22:14, which says, "I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me." Instead, like those of the dogmatic method, they will literalize only those verses that would support their position when literalized.

### **The Inductive Method**

The inductive method is described by Dungan as "A leading or drawing off a general fact from a number of observations and experiments." One using this method must seek out all available facts and then draw a conclusion based upon them. No interpretation can be true which does not harmonize with known facts. We must make sure that we gather as many parts as possible so that we can clearly identify the whole. However, we do not have to see every part before we recognize the whole. Obviously, we do not know everything Jesus ever did or said, but we do have sufficient evidence to prove he is the Christ (John 20:30-31).

The inductive method is the one used in courtrooms in the United States. None of us would want to have evidence hastily gathered against an innocent man. Instead we want a careful search for all the facts that can be found before the trial begins. Similarly, most of us do not want a doctor to operate on us based solely on the evidence from one inconclusive test.

Certainly, with our souls at stake (John 8:32), we do not want to formulate our understanding of doctrine based on only a few verses read without proper consideration of other facts.

### **Bible Examples of Using the Inductive Method**

The Bible approves of the inductive method. On the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), Jesus expounded to the two disciples all that Moses and the prophets had said concerning him. When the apostles and elders came together in Jerusalem to consider whether or not Gentile converts should have to be circumcised and keep the law, they heard testimony from Peter on the conversion of Cornelius and his household; Paul and Barnabas on the miracles and wonders wrought among the Gentiles; and the Old Testament prophets, as recited by James (Acts 15; Amos 9:11-12). Philip began at the very scripture the Ethiopian nobleman was reading and preached unto him Jesus (Acts 8:26-40). When the council questioned Stephen as to his teaching about Jesus, he reasoned beginning at the story of Abraham and related much of the Old Testament history (Acts 6:8 - 7:60).

In each of the instances cited, inductive reasoning was used. One using the inductive method may have to use inference to determine facts not specifically stated. For example, Genesis 12:10 tells us Abraham went down into Egypt. No mention is made of Lot's going. However, Genesis 13:1 tells us Lot came up out of Egypt, so we can be sure he went down with Abraham into Egypt. We will explore more uses of this method as we go along in our study.

## Questions

I. MATCHING: Match the type of interpretation that corresponds with the example.

- |   |               |
|---|---------------|
| _____ 1. To sum up the result of observations and experiments.                | A. Literal    |
| _____ 2. Determining facts not specifically stated.                           | B. Figurative |
| _____ 3. Metaphors, poetic descriptions                                       | C. Infer      |
| _____ 4. Every word must be taken at face value with no other interpretation. | D. Inductive  |
| _____ 5. Stephen used this method.  |               |

II. FILL IN THE BLANK: Write the correct word that completes the statement.

1. Some will \_\_\_\_\_ only those verses that would support their position.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ method is the one used in our courtroom.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ gave testimony on the miracles and wonders wrought among the Gentles.
4. We can use \_\_\_\_\_ to determine facts not specifically stated.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ is a verse the literalists will not want to literalize.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ is a verse that tells us that the truth will set us free.
7. John 20:30-31 teaches us that we have sufficient evidence to \_\_\_\_\_ he is the Christ.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ can be true which does not harmonize with known facts.
9. Philip began at the very scripture the \_\_\_\_\_ was reading.
10. Jesus expounded unto two disciples all that Moses and the prophets had said concerning \_\_\_\_\_. ( \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_)

III. TRUE - FALSE: If the statement is true, circle "T", if false, circle "F".

- T F 1. Peter used the literal method to convince the disciples.  
T F 2. The inductive method is reasoning from particular facts to general conclusions.



# The Interpretation Method of Christ and His Disciples

## The Inductive Method

There is considerable discussion over whether modern man can, or was ever intended to, understand God's will for his life by reading scripture. Some have gone so far as to say the Holy Spirit speaks to each through the Bible in a unique way. Thus, they would conclude it is not surprising that we do not all understand the Bible alike or worship in the same way. They also believe, therefore, that we are all on the way to heaven, though we use different paths. However, a careful study of scripture will reveal Christ and his apostles had a quite different view of scriptural authority.

### Life After Death

The Sadducees did not believe in the spirit world or life after death. They attempted to trap Jesus by asking a hypothetical question about a woman who married a man who was one of seven brothers. No children blessed that marriage, so, by the law of Levirate marriage (Genesis 38:6-11; Deuteronomy 25:5-10), her husband's death resulted in the second brother marrying her. This continued until all seven had married her and died without a single child being born. "Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her" (Matthew 22:23-28).

McGarvey says this was a favorite argument for the Sadducees in their ongoing battle with the Pharisees over the resurrection. Since the Pharisees assumed marriage continued in the resurrection, they could not answer the dilemma presented here. However, the Lord refuted it based on his own authority, stating that those in the resurrection are neither married nor given in marriage. Instead, those in the resurrection will be like the angels of God, whose existence the Sadducees also denied (Matthew 22:29-30; Acts 23:8). McGarvey also noted,

...the basal principle of their infidelity was the denial of spirits. It was, as it were, the tree trunk from which their other errors sprang as branches. If there were such things as spirits, it was not worth while to deny there was an order of them known as angels. If man had a spirit which could survive the body, it was reasonable to believe that God, having so fashioned him that a body is essential to his activity and happiness, would in some manner restore a body to him (J. W. McGarvey, *The Fourfold Gospel*, Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, pp. 600-602).

The Lord then went on to prove man has a spirit by using the tense of one word found in the Pentateuch, which was the part of scripture the Sadducees accepted as being delivered by God through Moses. In fact, God spoke to Moses, from the burning bush, of those who, from an earthly standpoint had been dead for a considerable period of time. Yet, Jesus asked, "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God,

saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:31-32; Exodus 3:6, 15). “But the Sadducees held that a dead man had ceased to exist, that he had vanished to nothingness. According to their view, therefore, God had styled himself the God of nothing, which is absurd” (McGarvey). Such a powerful argument based upon the tense of one word could be made only by one who believed in the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible. Further, it is evident the Lord believed God revealed his will in such a way that man can understand it, and use it to reason precisely the meaning and application in his daily pursuits.

### **The Road to Emmaus**

There was great confusion among the disciples following the resurrection of Jesus. Luke reports that two of them were on a walk to Emmaus when the Lord joined them. They were talking about the reports of Jesus’ resurrection. He, unrecognized by them, asked what they were talking about and why they were sad. They marveled at his ignorance of the happenings in Jerusalem, briefly reporting the details of Jesus’ crucifixion, the women finding the empty tomb and the angels’ report that he was alive (Luke 24:13-24).

When Luke reports the Lord’s response, he gives us insight into the method of interpretation he used to help the disciples understand God’s plan. “Then He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

Having arrived in Emmaus, they invited Jesus to come into the house with them. After breaking bread, they recognized Jesus because their eyes were opened. When he vanished, they were amazed and went back to the eleven and those assembled with them. They reported the Lord was risen and had appeared to Simon. Further, they reported how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread. At that point, Jesus appeared, pronounced peace upon them and told them to handle his feet and hands to confirm he was flesh, not spirit. He also ate some food with them.

For the second time, our Savior demonstrated how to understand God’s will by going through scripture examining all that had been revealed about a particular subject, which in this case was the coming of the Messiah. Notice, “He then said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (Luke 24:36-45).

### **Choosing Matthias**

Following the death of Judas, the decision about what to do concerning his vacated office was made based upon an argument Peter drew from scripture. Standing in the middle of about 120 disciples, he presented two verses from Psalms, which he said had to be fulfilled (Acts 1:15-26; Psalm 69:25; 109:8). From those verses, he reasoned that another should be chosen to take the place of Judas. The entire group must have agreed with his reasoning since they proceeded to

propose two who were qualified to fill Judas' office, "Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias." They prayed the Lord would help them and then chose Matthias. All that could be found in God's word concerning the matter was examined and a reasoned conclusion drawn that demanded the selection of another apostle.

### **Peter's Pentecost Presentation**

Sometime before nine o'clock on Pentecost morning, the twelve were assembled in one place when a sound like a powerful wind came from heaven and filled the house where they were sitting. Each was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in languages they had never studied, as the Spirit empowered them. A large crowd of Jews, who were apparently in the city for the day of Pentecost, were confused because each man heard them speak in his native tongue. Some asked, "Whatever could this mean?" Others mocked the apostles, saying, "They are full of new wine" (Acts 2:1-13).

Peter began his answer by telling the multitude that they were seeing the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel concerning the last days (Acts 2:16-21; Joel 2:28-32). He then proceeded to show that God, through the words of David, foretold of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2:25-32; Psalm 16:8-11). Finally, he noted David also prophesied that the Father would make Jesus the Christ, Messiah, King or Anointed (Acts 2:33-36; Psalm 110:1). Once again, we see an inspired man reasoning from several passages to demonstrate the easily understood nature of God's plan.

It is likely that the crowd that day included all sorts of people. One would suspect there were young and old, those who were conservative and others who were liberal, zealots, Herodians, Pharisees and Sadducees. It is clear that many understood precisely Peter's scriptural reasoning, since a large number were cut to the heart and asked what they should do. His answer was understood exactly the same by some 3,000 who were saved because they repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of their sins. Then, God added them to the church (Acts 2:37-41).

### **Stephen's Sermon: Abraham**

Stephen's sermon is filled with references to scripture, beginning with the story of Abraham. He told of Abraham's call in Ur and the second call in Haran (Acts 7:2-3; Genesis 11:31-32; 12:1). Then, he told of the move to Canaan, the promised land and the son of promise, Isaac (Acts 7:4-5; Genesis 12:5-7; 13:15; 15:4, 18; 17:8; 26:3). Next, he told of God's prophecy of the coming bondage in Egypt and the command to be circumcised (Acts 7:6-8; Genesis 15:13-14; 17:9-14; 21:1-5). Each of the stories he told was taken directly from the Biblical text and used by Stephen to demonstrate God's care for his people.

### **Stephen's Sermon: Joseph**

Stephen went on to tell how Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, but God was with him whether he was in Potiphar's house or an Egyptian prison (Acts 7:9-10a; Genesis 37:26-28; 39:5, 21-23). In fact, God used all these things to bring Joseph before Pharaoh, where he showed his wisdom. This resulted in him being made governor over the land of Egypt, even ruling over all

of Pharaoh's house (Acts 7:10b; Genesis 40:6-23; 41:1-43).

Through the hand of Joseph, Egypt was prepared for the famine and people from all over the world came to buy grain there. He met his brothers and father through that very means and God delivered them from the famine. Yet, both Jacob and his sons were buried in Canaan (Acts 7:11-16; Genesis 41:46-47:12; 47:13-50:14).

### **Stephen's Sermon: Moses' Birth and Call to be a Deliverer**

Stephen noted that a Pharaoh came to power who did not know Joseph, so Israel came under bondage. He reported the simple facts surrounding Moses' birth, hiding and adoption by Pharaoh's daughter, which led to him being educated in all the wisdom of Egypt (Acts 7:17-22; Exodus 1:1-22; 2:1-10).

Stephen continued with the story of Moses who, at the age of 40, striking down the Egyptian, believing the Israelites would understand God planned to deliver them through his hand. However, he saw that he was mistaken when he tried to stop two Israelites from fighting, so he fled to the land of Midian (Acts 7:23-29; Exodus 2:11-22). After 40 more years, Stephen reminded his listeners that the Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses from a bush that burned but was not consumed by the flame. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob commanded him to take off his sandals because he was on holy ground. He went on to tell Moses he had seen the oppression of his people in Egypt and had selected him to be the one who would deliver them. Stephen took care to note that the one they had rejected as a ruler and judge had been sent by God to be a ruler and deliverer (Acts 7:30-35; Exodus 3:1-4:31).

### **Stephen's Sermon: God's Deliverance and Deliverer**

Stephen went on to tell the story of God's powerful deliverance from Egyptian bondage. He noted how God showed signs and wonders both in Egypt and in the crossing of the Red Sea. He showed further wonders in the wilderness, constantly demonstrating his tender care for his people (Acts 7:36; Exodus 13:17-14:31; 16:1-17:16; Leviticus 10:1-7; Numbers 11:1-2).

This inspired deacon then reminded them of Moses' promise that God would raise up a deliverer like him from among his brethren. He told the council Moses had received God's word, yet the people would not follow God but asked Aaron to build an idol, which they worshiped (Acts 7:37-41; Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19; Exodus 19:3; 32:1-6).

### **Stephen's Sermon: The Tabernacle of Witness**

Because Israel had given up God in idolatrous worship, God turned from his people and gave them up to worship idols devoted to all the heavenly host. Yet, they continually had the tabernacle, which was made according to the pattern, witnessing to the true God (Acts 7:42-44a; Amos 5:25-27; Exodus 25:40). Israel had received the tabernacle and taken it with them into the land of promise and God drove the Gentiles out before them. Stephen recalled how David asked to build a temple for God, but Solomon was allowed carry out the building (Acts 7:45b-47; Joshua 3:14; 18:1; 23:9; 2 Samuel 6:1-7:13; 1 Kings 6:1-38).

### **Stephen's Sermon: The Jews Had Always Rejected God**

As he drew toward what would be the end of his lesson, Stephen told his audience that God Most High does not dwell in manmade temples (Acts 7:48-50; 1 Kings 8:27; Isaiah 66:1-2; Psalm 102:25). He concluded that the Jews had always rejected God and his Spirit. They persecuted the prophets. They killed John the immerser. They betrayed and murdered the Just One, having received the law through angels, but refusing to keep the same (Acts 7:51-53).

Stephen may have had more to say, but we will never know. His audience perfectly understood the conclusions he was drawing from a careful review of scripture and they reacted violently. His stoning is undeniable evidence that the inductive method can be used by all people to understand God's will alike. It is further evidence that some will reject it, even responding with violence. However, such rebellion does not prove the method is erroneous. Instead, it shows that man continues to read God's word and go his own way.

## Questions

I. FILL IN THE BLANK: Write the correct word/s that complete the statement.

1. “There is considerable discussion over whether modern man can, or was intended to, \_\_\_\_\_ God’s \_\_\_\_\_ for his life by reading \_\_\_\_\_.”
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ did not believe in the spirit world or life after death.
3. The Sadducees attempted to trap Jesus concerning the subject of \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Jesus said the God is the God of the \_\_\_\_\_, not the \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Jesus used \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ to show the men from Emmaus that the Christ was to suffer and “enter into His glory.”
6. Peter referred to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to prove that another apostle should be selected into the vacated office of Judas.
7. Many Jews on the day of Pentecost \_\_\_\_\_ and were \_\_\_\_\_ because they recognized the force of the scriptures Peter used to support his argument about Jesus’ death and resurrection.
8. Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7 begins with \_\_\_\_\_ and ends with \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Stephen told his audience that God “does not \_\_\_\_\_ in man made \_\_\_\_\_.”
10. The people proved that Stephen’s method of teaching was valid and true because they too were pricked to the heart and \_\_\_\_\_ him.

II. MATCHING: Match the statement with the correct verse by placing the letter in the blank.

- \_\_\_ 1. There is no marriage or giving in marriage in heaven.      A. Acts 1:15-26
- \_\_\_ 2. The record of the choosing of Matthias as an apostle.      B. John 8:32
- \_\_\_ 3. Old Testament verse showing that Jesus was the Christ,      C. Acts 7:51-53  
the Anointed.      D. Psalms 110:1
- \_\_\_ 4. The Jews' refusal to accept God's chosen, according to      E. Matthew 22:29, 30  
Stephen.
- \_\_\_ 5. Passage stated by Jesus which implies that man can  
understand and obey him.

A. CHALLENGE QUESTIONS: Bonus

1. If Christ and his Disciples used Old Testament scripture to support what they **did** and **taught**, what should be our view of scripture, especially that of the New Testament. (In answering this question, remember that these mentioned showed that what they were teaching or doing was in accordance with the law under which they lived.)

2. The verses used in this lesson show clearly that God never left himself without a witness to His Will, and that Jesus and his disciples believed that His Will was clear enough for man to understand and act in accordance with it. In your own personal study, find verses in the New Testament that assume that the reader can understand clearly what is desired or commanded and act in harmony with these verses.

# Consider the Context

## Context, The Key To Understanding

To truly understand any statement, it must be considered in light of the context. For instance, in Luke 10:37, Jesus said, "Go and do likewise." Without viewing the surrounding verses, what would you do to obey Jesus? We do not know and cannot know without further information being supplied. It is only by going to Luke 10 and reading the verses before and after that we come to realize that Jesus wants us to love our neighbor by being merciful to him when we see him in need. Clearly, the context of a statement plays a vital role in our understanding. Additionally, Jesus' understanding of "neighbor" is found in his answer to the lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbor?" It includes even one's enemies and involves all those who are in need.

The context is made up of three parts: the specific statement itself; the immediate context, which includes the verses immediately before and after; and the remote context, which would include all that is said in the whole Bible about the thing being considered. To fully understand a passage within its context, it is good to ask a series of questions, which will be briefly stated here and then discussed in more detail later in our study.

1. One needs to ask who is writing the passage.
2. It must be determined to whom the passage is being written. Not every word in the Bible is intended for every person. For instance, the command to build an ark of gopher wood was given exclusively to Noah. Thus, we should seek to realize what the message meant to the one to whom it was first directed.
3. It is good to find out when a passage was written.
4. The author's purpose in writing will often help in one's understanding.
5. It is good to discover the circumstances at the time of the writing, or that led to the writing. There may be historical and cultural influences that would lead to a fuller comprehension.
6. One needs to note the type of literature which is being used to convey the thought. Poetry is not the same as prose.

It has been truly said, "A text out of its context is simply a pretext." Let us study a few examples and try to understand some statements by letting the context speak.

## The Context Of "Let Your Women Keep Silent"

In 1 Corinthians 14:34 Paul wrote: "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they

are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says." By reading verses 19, 23 and 25, we learn that "the churches" would be the assemblies. After reading the entire chapter, one reaches the conclusion that these instructions involved the use of spiritual gifts in the assembly. Women are not permitted to lead in public worship (1 Timothy 2:8-12). Paul thus suggests that they should remain silent while the spiritual gifts were being used.

Verse 35 causes us to think that some women were interrupting their husbands as they prophesied, and were disrupting the peace of the assembly by asking them questions about their prophecy before it was completed. Thus women, and particularly wives, were forbidden to interrupt a prophecy in progress. Note the other men who also had a prophecy had to wait to speak too (verse 30).

### **What Does "Believe On The Lord Jesus Christ" Involve?**

After the Philippian jailer asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?", Paul and Silas said: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:30-31). The context reveals that they taught him the word of the Lord, he washed their stripes (which is an evident sign of repentance), and he was baptized immediately, along with his family. In verse 34, the American Standard Version correctly records, "And he brought them up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God." Clearly, "belief" in God involves hearing the truth and being baptized. That is further proven by Galatians 3:26-27. The faith of verse 26 was necessary for one to remain in a proper relationship as a child of God. However, that faithful relationship began in the fashion described in verse 27. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

### **The Sin Unto Death**

"If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it" (1 John 5:16). One might well ask what this passage means. In verses 13-15, John had been talking about the obedient Christian and the great confidence he should have in the power of prayer. If we ask in accord with the Lord's will we are sure to receive a good answer to our request. Verse 16 is first an example of a prayer that will be answered. If we see a brother sin a sin not unto death, we can pray for him and he will receive eternal life through forgiveness.

However, there is a sin unto death that will not be forgiven if prayed for by another brother who has seen it. In 1:8, John had said that all Christians sin. In 1:9, he indicated God is ready to forgive our sins when we confess them. Denial of our sins causes us to call God a liar and his word not be in us (1:10). Evidently, the sin which is unto death is one we will not confess. We can—in fact, we must (James 5:16)—pray for our brothers who confess their sins. We may pray for the brother who has sinned and will not confess; but God will not forgive him unless he confesses.

### **The Resurrection of the Dead**

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 particularly describes the resurrection of the righteous. It tells us the dead in Christ will first be raised, and then the living will be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air. Premillennialists would suggest these resurrections are separated by from 3 to 7 1/2 years. Further, they would say the resurrection of the good and evil dead is at different times. The remote context will not allow such a position. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 tells us the wicked will be punished at the Lord's return when the Lord is glorified in his saints. John 5:28-29 says both good and bad will come forth in the same hour.

### **"Do You Love Me More Than These?"**

In John 21:15 Jesus asks: "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" In the immediate context, we have both a large catch of fish provided by a miracle of Jesus after a long unfruitful night of fishing, and we also have Peter's fellow disciples (1-14). Which of "these" does the Lord intend to refer to? Why not both? It may have reminded Peter of another time when the Lord had him cast out his nets after a fruitless night, and how the Lord said he would be a fisher of men (Luke 5:1-11). Jesus may have been asking if Peter would continue to forsake his nets for him. Likely it would also remind him of his confident boast, and his denial that followed (Matthew 26:31-33, 69-75). Now, he does not brag with such confidence but expresses a genuine love.

## Questions

I. Fill in the blank: Write the correct verses in the blank that go with the examples of context.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Belief involves obedience in baptism.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Unconfessed sin will be a sin unto death.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. The use of spiritual gifts in the assembly were not to be interrupted by the Christian women or men.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Simon Peter was asked if he loved the Lord.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. The good and bad will be raised at the same time.

II. Brief Answer: Answer these questions with short brief statements.

1. Name the three different parts of the context.

2. What did belief involve for the jailor and his household?

3. What sins does a Christian pray for when praying for a brother?

4. What sins can we pray for but not receive a positive response from the Lord?

5. What part of context would be used to show that the wicked will be raised at the same time

as the faithful?

6. What could Jesus have meant when he asked Peter if he loved him more than "these"?

7. What verse states that baptism is an expression of faith by putting on the Lord?

8. 1 Timothy 2:8-14 states what?

9. What does the immediate context involve?

10. What does the remote context involve?

III. Challenge: Try to answer this question for your own study.

Explain Ezekiel 37:15-17

## **Consider the Background**

"To approach the study of any one of the books of the Bible without knowing something of its purpose or its principle theme would be like reading a newspaper without knowing anything about its date or its place of printing. In both cases the reader would not know whether he was reading of incidents or characters of his own time, or of things that happened thousands of years ago. There can be but little profit in this kind of Bible study. In fact, it is not Bible study at all -- it is no more than just Bible reading." (Harvey Scott, *Bible Study Guidance: "A Study In Right Living,"* Oklahoma City: Telegram Book Company, 1960, p. 57.)

### **Become Acquainted With The Author**

Bible study is made more interesting and profitable if one knows who wrote the book he is reading. Of course, every author wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21), so we could say God is the author. However, each writer wrote under circumstances peculiar to him and used vocabulary that would fit his occupation and education, thus giving it a personal touch. The Holy Spirit would select words that exactly conveyed the message he wanted, but from the writer's own background. A good Bible dictionary helps one in regard to the author's identity.

David was a shepherd as a young man. Many of his Psalms, especially 23, refer to various aspects of taking care of sheep and the role of a shepherd. Luke was a physician, which may explain why he went to such pains to say the woman with an issue of blood had spent all her money on doctors, yet none could heal her (Luke 8:43-44). Paul identifies himself as the author of thirteen of the New Testament books. When reading any of those books, it helps to remember Paul was a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin, taught at the feet of Gamaliel, a Pharisee and a former persecutor of the church (Acts 22:1-5; Philippians 3:4-6). That helps us to better understand his repeated references to the writings of the prophets as well as his feeling that he owed God a great debt because of the mercy he had been shown.

### **Identify the Speaker**

It may be necessary at times to note who is doing the speaking in a particular scripture. This may or may not be the same as the author. For example, Matthew records the words of Jesus, Satan, the angry mob, and Pilate, to name a few. The record of the words is correct, but, as in the case of Satan (Genesis 3:4), their message may not always be filled with the truth which will make one free. The speeches of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (as found in Job 4, 8, and 11), are uninspired men's answers to the reason for Job's suffering. If we take one of their explanations as true, we may be deceived as to the reason for our own suffering.

Gamaliel's speech to the counsel contains some interesting observations about occurrences during his day. His conclusion is found in Acts 5:38-39. "And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it--lest you even be found to fight against God." Ultimately, his advice was correct, but in the short run it may cause us to fail to oppose error in a timely manner. In judgment, no enterprise started by man for his own purposes will succeed, yet some false religions have endured for centuries!

### **The Purpose**

We should ask what the author's purpose was in writing. The Preacher gives his in Ecclesiastes 2:3. He informs his readers that he is going to write about his search for something that was good for man. Much folly is recorded as he tells us what he told himself and how the experiment proceeded (1:16; 2:1, 15; 3:17-18; etc.). Using man's wisdom and approach, the Preacher pursued courses that would not result in a good end for man (2:17). His conclusion is that the key to man's happiness does not lie in man's pursuit of what he thinks is good, but in fearing God and keeping his commandments (12:13).

### **The Date Of Writing**

It is important for any reader to know when the book was written, or when the words were spoken. In past lessons, we have seen that God has dealt with man in three distinct Ages. The instructions within an Age would not always apply to other men within that same Age. For example, Noah was told to build an ark, and Abraham was told to leave his father's country and go to one that God would show him. Abraham did not have to build an ark, and Noah did not have to leave his father's country. Similarly, the law of the Sabbath day was between God and the children of Israel (Exodus 31:12-17). Because of a failure to understand the importance of the time of speaking, some have been confused by Jesus' promise to the thief on the cross that, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Any points drawn from that story would have to apply under Moses' law since Jesus was not yet dead and his testament not in force (Hebrews 9:16-17).

To fully understand the significance of Jesus' instructions to his disciples in Mark 14:13, one has to know that in Jesus' day carrying water was the work of women. So, when the disciples were directed to follow a man carrying water, they did not have to ask, "Which man carrying water should we follow?"

### **The Addressees**

It is also helpful to know who is addressed in the letter or book. What city did they live in? Did they serve the true God? If not, what false gods did they serve? Are there peculiar customs that go with such service? Are there any other unique customs in that city to which the writer might refer? What occupations were common in the place addressed? What is the racial mixture? Jews might be addressed with Old Testament language or figures. Gentiles would be

more familiar with poets and philosophers. The Hebrew writer constantly referred to incidents in the history of Israel and quotations from the prophets. Paul quoted a poet whose work would have been familiar to the people assembled on Mars Hill (Acts 17:28). In writing Titus, he said, "One of them, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons'" (1:12)).

In conjunction with that, we need to ask ourselves of whom the writer is speaking. For example, which "Herod" are we reading about? Which Pharaoh? It also helps to know the nature and position of the man of whom the writer is speaking. All of these things would have been taken into account by the people to whom the letter, or book, was addressed and we must also take them into account if we would truly gain a complete understanding.

### **The Nature of the Writing**

Before anyone can fully comprehend the message being presented, he must determine the nature of the writing. Is it biography, history, law, poetry, or prophecy? Poetry and prophecy often contain figurative language, whereas law and history seldom do. In speaking of poetry, Lockhart notes it uses, "Much more figurative speech, and the figures more bold and imaginative" (Clinton Lockhart, *Principles of Interpretation*, Delight, Arkansas: Gospel Light Publishing Company, 1915, p. 51). He goes on to illustrate by citing Psalm 80:4, which reads, "O Lord God of hosts, How long will You be angry Against the prayer of Your people?" That seems simple enough. However, the word translated "angry" literally means, "to smoke." So, the literal translations would be, "O Lord God of hosts, how long will you smoke against the prayer of your people?" The translators recognized that smoke was a figure of speech describing God's anger with Israel and supplied the ultimate meaning.

Sometimes figurative words are recognized only by careful examination of the context. For instance, the thousand years of Revelation 20 are mentioned along with a bottomless pit and a physical chain being used to bind Satan, a spiritual being. Obviously, the whole passage is figurative.

## Questions

I. LISTING: List the seven questions we should ask to consider the background of a book.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

II. SHORT ANSWER: Answer the questions below with one or a few words.

1. Who guided all the authors?
2. What law was strictly between God and Israel?
3. In what Age did Jesus live?
4. What books might have figurative language?
5. What does the Preacher conclude in Ecclesiastes?

6. Give some specific concerns the reader would want to know about the addressee?
7. What tool might be used to find an author?
8. What most clearly reveals an author's occupational and educational background?
9. What is study without knowledge of the background?
10. Which Herod had John the baptizer killed?

### III. CHALLENGE:

1. Give the four divisions of the Old Testament and number of books.
2. Give the four divisions of the New Testament and the number of books.
3. Answer the seven questions concerning the book of Romans.

## Consider the Words

### The Same Word, Different Meanings

We must understand the meaning of the words used in a passage to correctly interpret the meaning of the passage. Some words have more than one meaning. For example, Paul tells of a man caught up into the "third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2). The birds fly in the first heaven, stars shine in the second, and God abides in the third. It certainly helps our understanding of any passage that uses the word "heaven" to know which of the three the writer means. References to "death" may involve physical death, death in sin, or death to sin (Genesis 24:67; Ephesians 2:1; Galatians 2:20). The word "world" can refer to that which God created, or material possessions, or sinful desire (Acts 17:24; Matthew 16:26; 1 John 2:15-17). "Works" can be used to describe works of merit (Ephesians 2:8-9), or works of faith (2:10; James 2:14-17).

A similar problem with translation can be found in the word "faith." In Matthew 8:10, Jesus describes the actions of a centurion by saying, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" Lockhart notes, "Here confidence is meant, as the adjuncts 'found' and 'great' clearly imply" (p. 108). Whereas, in Jude 3, "faith" is something to be contended for and which could be delivered. Thus, Lockhart says it is "the system of Christian truth which was to be believed" (p. 109).

### Consider the Literal Meaning First

Generally, the language of the Bible is literal, thus we should consider the literal meaning first. The rule followed in interpreting even the works of men is to take the literal meaning first unless it contradicts some other clear teaching. Only then can we consider the figurative meaning. We should be careful, however, not to confuse our own speculations with what the Bible actually teaches. If a literal understanding contradicts my speculation, it is the speculation that must be thrown out. For example, in Genesis 1:3, "God said, Let there be light; and there was light." Since verse 2 speaks of the darkness, we may feel confident that God literally created light. Yet, some refer us to John 1:1-9 and suggest this is the same light. Obviously the text will not allow us to take such a position, for the word "light" in John 1 is used figuratively to speak of Jesus. We know it is figurative because Jesus became flesh and dwelt among men, as verse 14 tells us.

"Commands generally, and ordinances always, are to be understood in a literal sense" (Dungan). For example, Jesus decreed that belief and baptism are necessary to save a man (Mark 16:16). Both belief and baptism are literally required, with no hidden figurative meaning. One command that is stated in figurative language is found in Matthew 5:16. However, it is clear the Lord is using light to represent the example each Christian sets in the way he conducts his daily affairs.

### **Look At The Meaning At the Time of Writing**

A word must be understood to mean what it would have meant to those being addressed. In Matthew 24:34, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled." The Greek word is "genea," which is translated "generation," means 30 to 40 years. Premillennialists try to suggest it means the end of the world or race, but other words in the Greek carry those meanings.

In Genesis 22:1, the King James Version says, "God did tempt Abraham." As Dungan notes, "The word tempt, many times, occurs in the sense to do wrong; but generally it has the meaning of to try, or prove." Thus, we conclude God tested or proved Abraham.

### **The Author May Give the Meaning**

Sometimes the author defines his own meaning. This will never go against the generally-understood meaning, but may specialize its usage. For example, the word "elder" was used by the Jews to describe an older man. Often in the New Testament it refers to a special office (1 Peter 5:1-2; Acts 20:17,28; Titus 3:5-6; 1 Timothy 3:1-8; 5:17). That is the office of an overseer or bishop in the church. In John 2:18-21, John tells us Jesus was not speaking of destroying the temple in which the Jews worshiped, but his own body. John (7:38-39) lets us know that Jesus is using "rivers of living water" to describe the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which would come after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Matthew quotes Isaiah's prophecy and tells us "Emmanuel" means "God with us" (1:23).

Words describing a definite action (like jump, run, sprinkle, etc.) have but one meaning. Action ordered by such a word can be accomplished only by obeying the strict meaning. One cannot, for example, sprinkle or pour to "baptize," since baptism is a burial. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4). The word used in the original is *baptidzo*, which Thayer says meant, "to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water." He says it was used metaphorically to mean "to overwhelm." Vine agrees when he defines it by saying, "to baptize, primarily a frequentative form of *bapto*, to dip, was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another, etc."

### **The Context May Give the Meaning**

In John 8:47, “The word ‘hear’ cannot be literal in the sense of receiving sound by ear, for any one who was not deaf could do that; and the reason, ‘ye are not of God,’ would not apply in every case. But ‘hear’ clearly means ‘heed;’ and hence their being ‘not of God,’ but disposed against God, furnishes a good reason” (Lockhart, p. 109). Similarly, in Romans 2:13, “the contrast between ‘hearers’ and ‘doers,’ shows that ‘hearers’ are not those who heed, for they would be doers. The ‘hearers’ are those who have opportunity to know the law, but do it not” (pp. 110-111).

To understand the meaning of the word “simple” in Romans 16, one has to view the contrast, or antithesis, Paul uses. Paul wanted the brethren to “be wise in what is good,” which “is to know much of the good by experience. The opposite of this is to be inexperienced; and this is the meaning of ‘simple’ in the passage. This agrees well with the etymology of the Greek word ‘simple’ in this passage—akeraios, not mixed, innocent” (Lockhart, p. 110).

### **The Rules of Grammar**

To understand the meaning of some words, we must be acquainted with the rules of grammar. For example, some read 1 Corinthians 11:27 and conclude they should not partake of the Lord's supper because they do not think themselves worthy. Once we realize that the word "unworthily" is an adverb (not an adjective), we can see that Paul is not speaking of an unworthy person, but an unworthy action. The apostle was warning the Corinthians against unworthily partaking, an action which comes by thoughtless hurrying and refusing to contemplate the great sacrificial act of God's Son on the cross of Calvary.

## Questions

I. MATCHING: Match the statement with the letter of the word that completes it.

- |   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| ___ 1. God abides in the _____.                       | A. Light            |
| ___ 2. Always taken literally.                        | B. Definite action  |
| ___ 3. Have only one meaning.                         | C. Author           |
| ___ 4. The majority of the Bible writing.             | D. Pastor           |
| ___ 5. Understanding these will help in word meaning. | E. Literal          |
| ___ 6. Sometimes defines word meaning.                | F. Figurative       |
| ___ 7. <u>TEMPT</u> - general meaning.                | G. Prove            |
| ___ 8. When literal meaning contradicts scriptures.   | H. Rules of Grammar |
| ___ 9. Another name for elder.                        | I. Third Heaven     |
| ___ 10. Jesus became flesh and dwelt among men.       | J. Ordinance        |

II. TRUE-FALSE: Place T in the blank if the statement is true, F if false.

- \_\_\_ 1. Some words have more than one meaning.
- \_\_\_ 2. All words are to be understood in their literal sense.
- \_\_\_ 3. Commands always are to be understood in a literal sense.
- \_\_\_ 4. God tempted Abraham.



# Figurative Language, Part 1

Most of us use figurative language without giving it a second thought. We may say, "She is as pretty as a picture." Or, "I'm caught between a rock and a hard place." When many good things have been coming our way, we may say, "My cup is running over." Seldom does anyone have difficulty understanding our meaning. However, when a child hears a figure of speech used and takes it literally, the result can be very disturbing. For instance: "If you do that one more time, you are going to be in hot water." Similarly, all must be careful to understand the figurative language of the Bible lest we become confused as to the Lord's intent.

## A Simile

A simile is an explicitly stated comparison using the words "like" or "as." The Psalmist says the blessed man who delights in God's law is "like a tree planted by the rivers of water" (Psalm 1:3). In Luke 10:3 Jesus says: "Behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves." In the parable of the judgment day, Jesus said, "He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:32). God promised Abraham, "I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the sea shore" (Genesis 22:17).

## Metaphor

A metaphor is much like a simile. It uses comparison by direct assertion in which one thing is described in terms of another. God told Jeremiah that he had made him "a fortified city, and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land" (Jeremiah 1:18). God is simply describing how he had made Jeremiah strong, using terms that would describe a secure city. The Psalmist said, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (23:1). In describing the bread partaken in the Lord's supper, Jesus said, "Take, eat; this is My body" (Matthew 26:26). Since Jesus was bodily present at the time of that statement, we know he meant that the bread metaphorically represented his body.

## Metonymy

When the name of one thing is used for another because the two are frequently associated (or one calls the other to our mind), it is called metonymy. Bullinger says, "*Metonymy* is not founded on resemblance, but on *relation*." He goes on to note, "When we say that a person writes a 'bad hand,' we do not mean a hand, but we use the noun 'hand' for the characters which it writes" (p. 538). As he notes, when Jesus tells us the words of Abraham to the rich man, he says, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (Luke 16:29). Clearly, the name of Moses is used to stand for his writings, just as the prophets are mentioned in place of their writings. When Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20), he was obviously talking about the contents of the cup, not the cup itself. When Abraham told the rich man, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (Luke 16:29), he was referring to their writings. In Deuteronomy 17:6, the King James Version speaks of a man's being put to death "at the mouth of" two or three witnesses. The "mouth" stands for the words, or testimony, which came out of the mouth.

## Synecdoche

A synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part is used to stand for the whole, or a whole for a part. It is similar to metonymy. Bullinger says, "The difference between *Metonymy* and *Synecdoche* lies in this; that in *Metonymy*, the exchange is made between *two related nouns*; while in *Synecdoche*, the exchange is made between *two associated ideas*" (p. 613). For instance, when God looked on the earth in the days of Noah, he saw "all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth" (Genesis 6:12). It is evident the word "flesh" in this verse stands for man, or mankind.

Jesus says, "For God so loved the world" (John 3:16), but we know he was particularly concerned here with all men in the world. In Genesis 46:27, the word "soul" is used in the King James Version to stand for the person. One condition of salvation may be mentioned in place of all conditions (Acts 16:31; 1 Peter 3:21). The plural is put for the singular in some instances. Genesis 19:29 talks about destroying the "cities" in which Lot dwelt. Sarah asks, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children?" (Genesis 21:7). Genesis 46:7 speaks of Jacob's "daughters;" but we know Dinah was his only daughter. A definite number or time may be put for the indefinite. Paul said he would rather speak five words with understanding than ten thousand in a language the hearers did not know (1 Corinthians 14:19). We understand him to mean that he would rather speak very few words that people understand and learn from, than a large number of words they could not understand. When the Psalmist says, "the cattle on a thousand hills" are the Lord's, he means on all the many hills worldwide (50:10).

## Allegory

In an allegory, the main subject is dropped out and one similar in qualities and circumstances is put in its place. The Psalmist sings, "Thou has brought a vine out of Egypt:

thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land" (Psalm 80:8-9). These verses, and those that follow, perfectly describe Israel, but a vine is put in her stead. Thus, we have an allegory. Paul uses a soldier's armor to describe the Christian's means of defense against the enemy, Satan (Ephesians 6:11-17). In Galatians 4:21-5:1, Paul compares Moses' law to Ishmael, the son of the handmaid, and the law of Christ to Isaac, the son of Abraham's wife, who was a free woman.

### Questions

I. LISTING: List the five figures of speech dealt with in this lesson.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

II. MATCHING: Match the reference below to the correct figure of speech above.

1. Jacob's "Daughters".
2. The cup of the New Testament.
3. Cattle on ten thousand hills.
4. Man like a tree planted by rivers of water.
5. Christian's defense is soldier's armor.
6. "The Lord is my shepherd".
7. "Mouth of two or three witnesses".
8. Soul is a person.
9. Abram's seed as the stars of the heaven.
10. "Send you forth as lambs among wolves."



crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head. Then when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified" (Matthew 27:29-31). "Likewise the chief priests also, together with the scribes, mocked and said among themselves, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe'" (Mark 15:31-32).

## **Hyperbole**

When one uses a deliberate exaggeration for emphasis, he is using a hyperbole. The ten spies said they were as grasshoppers in their own eyes when compared to the sons of Anak (Numbers 13:33; also Deuteronomy 1:28). The writer of Judges described the remarkable accuracy of the left-handed men of Benjamin every one of whom "could sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss" (20:16). When the Pharisees described the great multitudes following Jesus, they said, "Look, the world has gone after Him" (John 12:19)! John closed his book by saying there were many other things Jesus did, "which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). In Ephesians 3:8, Paul describes himself as "less than the least of all saints." He tells Timothy that he was the chief, or greatest, of sinners (I Timothy 1:15).

## **Apostrophe**

An apostrophe is an address to an absent person as though he were present, or an address to inanimate things. In a reference to 2 Samuel 1, Bullinger states, "In David's lament over Saul and Jonathan, he suddenly turns, and, (in verse 24), addresses the daughters of Israel" (p. 902). Then, in verse 26, David speaks to his dead friend, Jonathan, as if he were present. After hearing of Absalom's death, David cried out in his chambers and spoke as if his son were there (2 Samuel 18:32-33). Toward the end of the resurrection chapter, Paul speaks to death as if it were a person (1 Corinthians 15:55). The Psalmist describes God's miracles at the Jordan and the Red Sea and then asks those two waters some questions (Psalm 114:5-6).

## **Personification**

Bullinger defined personification as "A figure by which things are represented or spoken of as persons; or, by which we attribute intelligence, by words or actions, to inanimate objects or abstract ideas" (p. 861). It is being used when an inanimate object is described as if it were alive, or animals are given the feelings of men. For instance, the blood of Abel is described as having a voice that cries out (Genesis 4:10). When Job answered his critics, he said, "But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; And the birds of the air, and they will tell you" (Job 12:7). The Psalmist did that in his description of the miracles God used to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage and into the land of promise. "The sea saw it and fled; Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, the little hills like lambs" (Psalm 114:3-4). Moses tells of the earth's opening her mouth and swallowing up the people of Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16:31-32). Habakkuk depicts the mountains with human emotions and the deep has having a voice (3:10-11). Isaiah (14:7-8) describes the rejoicing at the over-throw of the king of Babylon as

extending to the trees.

### **Interrogation**

Interrogation is a figure of speech using questions to plainly declare for, or against, a certain point. In other words, no real answer is desired. Out of the 1,189 chapters of the Bible there are only 453 which are without a question” (Bullinger, p. 944). In Genesis 13:9, Abram asked Lot, “Is not the whole land before you?” The obvious answer was yes. There was no need for their herdsmen to fight, they could each go to a new area apart from one another. When Sarah laughed at the thought of having a child in her old age (Genesis 18:9-14), the Lord asked, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” In Exodus 4:14, God asked Moses, “Is not Aaron the Levite your brother?” Of course, God knew that he was and went on to say he could speak well, so Moses’ excuse was removed. In John 7:50-51, Nicodemus used it to point out that the law did not allow a man to be condemned without a hearing. Paul likewise used it to declare himself a free man, an apostle, one who had seen Jesus and one of the teachers who started the work at Corinth. "Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?" (1 Corinthians 9:1). He also used it to show that Jesus' name is the only one we should wear and the only man we should follow. "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1:13).

### **Euphemism**

A euphemism is an agreeable expression which is substituted for something delicate, offensive, or unpleasant. For example, Genesis 4:1 says, Adam "knew" his wife, and she bore a son. God told Abram, “Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age” (Genesis 15:15). He was saying Abram would die. Rather than tell the Jews that Gentiles would be accepted into his kingdom, the Lord said, “And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11). Acts 7:60 says Stephen "fell asleep," instead of saying he died. Paul used a similar approach when he wrote to the Thessalonian brethren. "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

### Questions

I. LISTING: List the seven examples of figurative language found in this lesson.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_

II. TRUE - FALSE: Place T in the blank if the statement is true, F if it is false.

1. \_\_\_ An apostrophe is stronger and more hateful than irony.
2. \_\_\_ When one writer gives inanimate objects human qualities, the figure of speech is called a euphemism.
3. \_\_\_ Micaiah used irony when he told Ahab to fight against Syria.
4. \_\_\_ Interrogation is like a rhetorical question.
5. \_\_\_ When the Bible says Adam knew his wife, it means that he recognized her when he

was naming the animals.

6. \_\_\_ When Paul tells Timothy that he was the chief of sinners, he was using hyperbole.
7. \_\_\_ Mocking Jesus on the cross might be called a euphemism.
8. \_\_\_ Mountains that have human emotions is an example of personification.
9. \_\_\_ Irony shows a form of ridicule by saying one thing but really meaning the opposite.
10. \_\_\_ The psalmist describes God's miracles and asks questions to the rivers is an example of apostrophe.

### III. CHALLENGE:

1. Give one example other than in the lesson for each figure of speech in the lesson.

## Figurative Language, Part 3

### Parable

A parable is a story with facts that are true to life which is used to illustrate spiritual truths. In the Greek, *para* means beside, and *ballein* means to throw; hence, to throw along beside. The purpose for such is comparison. As Dungan observed, parables have four basic purposes: (1) to conceal the truth; (2) to reveal the truth; (3) to embalm the truth; and (4) to cause men to assent to the truth before they realize such truth will expose their guilt. Matthew 13:10-17 shows the first two purposes. Any story from common human experience has a way of becoming etched in our memories, thus the truth is embalmed. King David was one man who was enraged at the telling of a parable only to discover that the illustration applied to him (2 Samuel 12:1-14).

### Typology

Typology is also an instrument used by inspired penmen. A type is an Old Testament person, event, or thing that foreshadows a New Testament person, event, or thing. Both the type and anti-type must be actual things in history. The anti-type is always superior to the type. The two will not be exactly the same, but one main item of correspondence will usually be found. Melchisedec was a type of Christ, in that he was priest and king (Genesis 14:18-30; Hebrews 5:6; 6:20-7:2). The brass serpent was lifted up in the wilderness to remove the effect of the sting of the serpent, just as Christ was lifted up on the cross to remove the effects of sin and the sting

of death (Numbers 21:9; John 3:14-15).

## **Symbol**

A symbol is a sign which, when seen, reminds one of something else. The rainbow is the symbol with which we are probably most familiar. It is a token of God's promise never to destroy the world again by water (Genesis 9:8-17). Jeremiah (1:13-14) describes a seething pot, or caldron. As Dungan notes, for a man to be able to see into such would indicate it was tilted so much as to endanger him with a scalding. It was a symbol of the punishment coming upon Jerusalem and Judea.

## **Interpreting Figurative Language**

To interpret figurative language, one must follow several basic rules. First, whenever possible, let the author interpret it for you. Jesus does this at the end of the parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-15). Ezekiel 37: 1-10 tells of a valley full of dry bones. Each of us would likely have had a different idea as to the meaning of this passage if it were not for verses 11-14. They explain that the valley of dry bones represented Israel and her lost hope. God was going to restore her and put life back into her scattered "bones."

Second, look for the meaning as it is explained by other inspired penmen. In Isaiah 7:14, we find, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name, Immanuel." Matthew 1:18-23 explains this foretold the virgin birth of our Lord. Similarly, Peter explains the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:14-21.

Third, we should let clear teaching on the same subject guide us in our understanding of the less clear. Psalm 41:9 says, "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." Peter helps us see this as a reference to Judas (Acts 1:15-18).

Fourth, we must be careful not to make an analogy say too much. Our heavenly Father should not be considered to be an "unjust" judge because of the parable that is meant to teach us persistence in prayer (Luke 18:1-8). We also must realize that figures can be used to represent different things. Jesus is called the Word (John 1), but not every use of "word" refers to him.

## Questions

I. LISTING: List the three types of figurative language given in this lesson.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_

II. MATCHING: Match the verse with the appropriate statement or example.

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| ___ 1. Jesus gives and then explains the parable of the sower.   | A. 2 Samuel 12:1-14      |
| ___ 2. The brass serpent lifted up just as Christ was lifted up. | B. Psalm 41:9            |
| ___ 3. God is not an unjust judge.                               | C. Joel 2:28-32          |
| ___ 4. David was told by Nathan he was guilty.                   | D. Hebrews 5:6           |
| ___ 5. Peter explains in Acts 2 the fulfillment of this verse.   | E. Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 |
| ___ 6. The rainbow   | F. Ezekiel 37:1-10       |

- |   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| ___ 7. A friend raises up his heel against the one who trusted him. | G. John 1         |
| ___ 8. Jesus is "the word".   | H. Numbers 21:9   |
| ___ 9. Melchisedec is a type of Christ.                             | I. Genesis 9:8-17 |
| ___ 10. Valley of dry bones.  | J. Luke 18:1-8    |

II. TRUE - FALSE: Put T in the blank if statement is true, F if false.

- \_\_\_ 1. Typology deals with anti-types.
- \_\_\_ 2. We should let the translation give us the meaning.
- \_\_\_ 3. A symbol shows something that foreshadows something else.
- \_\_\_ 4. "Para" means "to throw."
- \_\_\_ 5. Don't make an analogy say too much.
- \_\_\_ 6. A seething pot was a symbol for Christ's death.
- \_\_\_ 7. Let the author interpret.
- \_\_\_ 8. A symbol is a sign.
- \_\_\_ 9. Parables concealed the truth.
- \_\_\_ 10. "ballein" means beside.

III. CHALLENGE:

- 1. Give one example of each figure of speech. Try not to use any of the examples given in the lesson.

# Understanding How the Bible Authorizes

(This was originally printed in the *Gospel Advocate* April, 2006)

Many people think the study of Biblical interpretation, or hermeneutics, is mysterious and beyond their comprehension. Yet, the same people expect their children to practice the science of interpretation daily. For instance, a mother might tell her child to, “Walk down the hall and put those scissors in the drawer.” Because the mother specifically designated an action, walking, all other possible actions, like running, hopping, skipping, etc., were eliminated as acceptable possibilities. Similarly, her direction to put the scissors in the drawer eliminated other choices, like placing them on the counter or on the top of the desk.

## **Specific Commands Authorize Only the Specific Action**

Thus, the first principle of interpreting language is that specific directions, or commands, authorize only the action specified. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews knew the law of Moses directed that sacrifices were to be offered by the sons of Aaron the priest, who was of the tribe of Levi (Leviticus 1; Numbers 18:21-26). He also knew Jesus was of the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:2). He concluded Jesus could not offer sacrifices under the law of Moses, “For it is

evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood” (Hebrews 7:14; 8:4). This is true because Jesus, as a member of the tribe of Judah, was not authorized to serve as a priest. Only those from the tribe of Levi were authorized to serve as priests.

The sin of Nadab and Abihu arose because “each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them” (Leviticus 10:1 ESV, see also Exodus 30:9; Numbers 3:3; 26:61). In the KJV, the word “strange” is used and is equal to the word prohibited, or illegitimate according to Koehler and Baumgartner (*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* Vol. 1: Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001, page 279). When God specified the type of fire and incense to offer, he authorized only that which he specifically mentioned. Anything else would be disallowed because it would not be authorized.

The Judaizing teachers went out from Judea “and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). Yet, in their letter, the apostles and elders in Jerusalem wrote, “Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law’—to whom we gave no such commandment” (Acts 15:24). Notice, their silence on the matter of circumcision being essential to one’s salvation made it inappropriate for others to teach such as a necessity.

### **General Commands Leave Open All Possibilities**

The second principle is that general instructions, or commands, leave open all otherwise legitimate options. When a doctor says one needs to get at least thirty minutes of exercise three days a week, his instructions could be carried out by walking, running, riding a bike, etc., because no single action was specified. The days for exercise could be any three of the seven days of the week, because the doctor did not dictate particular days.

Just as he had told the churches of Galatia, Paul commanded the Corinthian brethren to give on the first day of the week. “On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Each is commanded to give, but the amount to be given is left up to the individual, based upon how God has prospered him. It would be good to notice God’s people in Old Testament times never gave less than one-tenth. Further, God has provided something better for us (Hebrews 11:39-40), so we might want to set our giving level higher than one-tenth. Yet, the exact amount or percentage is left to the individual because God has not given explicit instructions.

Our Lord gave clear instructions for the church to eat the bread and drink the cup in remembrance of his broken body and shed blood (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Luke lets us know that early disciples assembled to break the bread on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). However, the time and place for assembling and partaking of the supper are left to the choosing of the churches.

## **An Article by Stafford North**

I am indebted to a number of writers and speakers for helping me come to a clearer understanding of these important principles in regard to how God authorizes. For instance, Stafford North wrote an article in November, 2002 for the *Christian Chronicle* entitled: "Making the 'sound of silence' in Scripture audible by applying language principles." He concluded with the following words.

In ordinary language, then, silence prohibits using unspecified options when particular options in a category are specified. Silence allows, however, when no options in a category are specified. Since God has revealed his will in the ordinary language of the people, and since the Scriptures give us samples of both of these uses of silence, He expects us to exercise these same uses of silence in understanding His message.

## **The Great Commission Illustrates Both Principles**

Interestingly, the same great commission requires one to use both principles to fully comprehend its meaning. Matthew reports, "And Jesus came and spake to them saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen"(28:18-20).

Jesus said to go, but did not authorize only one means of going. It would, therefore, be acceptable to go on foot, in a car, on a horse, in a plane, etc. Those who are made disciples would be so made by being baptized in the name, or authority, of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. By specifically authorizing baptism under the authority of these three, Jesus made unacceptable any baptism under the authority of any man, institution or church. Baptizing, for instance, in the name of a church would be a violation of the Lord's will.

Further, those disciples were, by the Lord's command, to be taught to observe all the things the Lord had commanded his disciples. When he failed to authorize teaching the commands of conventions, councils, manuals or creeds, Jesus plainly made such teaching a violation of his will. The Lord did not authorize a single method of teaching. Thus, it would be acceptable to use books, notes, charts, visual aids or projected images to do the teaching. Teaching can be done one on one, in a Bible class, over the radio or by means of television.

## **Hebrews 10:24-25**

The writer of Hebrews said, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (10:24-25). By specifically setting the goal of stirring up one's brethren to love and good works, the writer failed

to authorize stirring up anger, strife and jealousy. While each is required to assemble, the place of the assembling is not designated. The church could, then, gather under a tree, in a house, in a rented hall, in a tent, in a building of its own, in an upper room or in a basement. No one hour was given in the writer's instructions, so that is left up to the church.

### **Ephesians 5:19**

In his instructions to the church in Ephesus, Paul wrote, "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (5:19). It would be outside the authority of the command to "speak to one another" for one who is capable of singing to fail to sing. When Paul specified psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, he omitted authority for worldly and unscriptural songs. By commanding that they sing, the apostle made it plain that they were not to hum or whistle, which would be outside the instruction to speak.

Paul authorized making melody, or plucking the strings, in your heart, which would omit authority for playing any mechanical instruments of music. It should be noted that the number of songs, tempo, posture, singing in unison or with four part harmony are all left to the individual churches.

### **Conclusion**

Many other passages could be examined, but perhaps these will suffice to demonstrate that God used language to convey his meaning, just as man does. Each statement must be examined to determine whether it is specific in authorizing a particular action, or generic, thereby leaving the means of carrying it out to the individual's, or church's, choice. God does use specific commands to authorize specific actions. He also uses generic commands to leave open the actions which might be used to carry out the command. Rather than looking for an area where God has been silent so that men can slip in whatever practices they desire, each should read the Bible to ascertain what God has authorized and therefore desires.

### **Questions**

I. TRUE/FALSE: Place a **T** for true and **F** for false beside the statement.

- \_\_\_ 1. Specific directions or commands authorize only the action specified.
- \_\_\_ 2. Nadab and Abihu were not given specific instructions for the fire that they used.
- \_\_\_ 3. According to Acts 15, the Jews who had become Christians were correct in requiring circumcision of the Gentile converts.
- \_\_\_ 4. The second principal of Bible interpretation is that general instructions, or commands, leave no room for different possibilities

- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Jesus gave us specific instructions on how to “go into all the world.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Jesus gave us specific instructions on what to teach.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Elders do not have the authority to change the time or meeting place of a local congregation of God’s people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. We may invent and use manuals and creeds as long as the leaders of the local church appear to be faithful.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. God specified singing, therefore, excluding any other form of verbal or mechanical sound.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Any type of singing is acceptable, including secular songs.

II. SHORT ANSWER: Provide a short answer for each question.

- 1. Why did God strike down Nadab and Abihu? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Explain what is general and specific in the command to give. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Explain what is general and specific in the Lord’s command to the disciples to go and make disciples. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

III. CHALLENGE QUESTIONS: Bonus

- 1. From this study of how the Bible authorizes, tell how a Christian is to determine what he/she should do in reference to an instruction.

2. From Old and New Testament examples, show where man has been more concerned to do what God did not authorize than what he did authorize. (Do not forget the condemnation of the Jews by our Lord.)

## **What about Pitch Pipes and Other Aids?**

(This was originally written for the 2008 Cold Harbor Lectures. It expands on some of the principles set forth in the previous lesson.)

On November 13-18, 1950, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Burton W. Barber debated G. K. Wallace on the question of instrumental music in worship. Wallace affirmed on the first night, "That I can use song books, communion sets, tuning fork, and collection plates as aids in Christian worship with authority, and that the same authority excludes the use of instrumental music in said Christian worship." In his first negative, Barber said, "I believe with all my heart, as much as that Mr. Wallace sits here, that he has not one single passage to authorize him in the use of the tuning fork or the song book or anything else he might want to bring forth" (pp. 10-11). In other words, Barber was saying instrumental music is merely an aid to worship comparable to tuning forks, pitch pipes and songbooks.

Our first task will be to come to a fuller understanding of the difference between specifics God has commanded and those that are optional. This will require an appreciation of the impact of “silence” in Scripture. It will be important to see silence can be both permissive and prohibitive, depending on the nature of the command under consideration. Then, we will set forth principles which can be used to differentiate between things which could lawfully be used to expedite carrying out God’s commands versus things which would be unlawful additions to the Father’s will.

### **Silence in Specific Instructions Is Prohibitive**

Anyone receiving instructions understands specific directions authorize only the action specified. For instance, some trucks have a written instruction to use diesel fuel. I heard of a man who put in gasoline instead. The resulting damage was very expensive to correct. Similarly, a driver who does not come to a full stop at a stop sign can anticipate receiving a ticket if a policeman observes his actions. Clearly, specific directions, or commands, authorize only the action specified.

The writer of Hebrews bases a critical argument on that very rule of interpretation when he says Jesus could not offer sacrifices in the tabernacle or temple under the Law of Moses. He understood Moses’ Law directed sacrifices be offered only by the sons of Aaron the High Priest, who was of the tribe of Levi (Leviticus 1; Numbers 18:21-26). Since Jesus was born of the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:2), the writer concluded He could not offer sacrifices under the Law of Moses, “For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood” (Hebrews 7:14; 8:4 NKJV). The specific instructions regarding offerings being made by those of the tribe of Levi made it unlawful for one of any other tribe to serve as a priest.

The church at Antioch was troubled by certain teachers who had come from Judea teaching one must be circumcised according to the “custom of Moses” to be saved (Acts 15:1). Paul and Barnabas strongly disagreed with them. Therefore, the brethren sent Paul, Barnabas and some others to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders to resolve the question. In complete agreement with the teachings of Paul and Barnabas, the apostles and elders wrote, “Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law’—to whom we gave no such commandment” (Acts 15:24). Notice, their silence on the matter of circumcision being essential to one’s salvation made it inappropriate for others to teach such as a necessity.

Instruction/Command	Authorized/Included	Unauthorized/Excluded
Use diesel fuel	Using diesel fuel	Using gasoline, oil, kerosene
Levites shall perform the work of the tabernacle (Numbers 18:21-26)	Those of the tribe of Levi serving in the tabernacle	Those of Judah, Benjamin, etc. (Hebrews 7:14; 8:4).
Preach the gospel as you go into	Preaching the gospel,	Preach something in addition

all the world and teach them to observe all Jesus commanded the apostles (Mark 16:15-16; Matthew 28:18-20)	baptizing those who believe and teaching them to observe all Jesus commanded	to the gospel, like requiring circumcision (Acts 15:24)
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### Silence in Generic Instructions Is Permissive

When someone is given a general instruction, or command, he understands such leaves open to him all the various means of accomplishing the task. For instance, someone who is told by his doctor to participate in twenty minutes of physical activity three days a week could choose from many different activities, such as, running, walking, swimming, riding a bicycle, etc. Silence on the particular type of exercise permits one to choose whatever pleases him.

Paul’s instruction to the Corinthian church is a good example. “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Notice, the apostle instructed each to give “as he may prosper.” The amount, or percentage, to be given is left to the individual to decide because God has not given specific instruction. According to Luke’s record, the church in Antioch gave in precisely that manner. “Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:29-30).

The writer of Hebrews said, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (10:24-25). The specific purpose of stirring the brethren to love and good works eliminates stirring them up to anger, jealousy or strife. However, the writer did not designate the place or time of assembly. Any place, such as under a tree, in a house, in a rented hall, or in a building owned by the brethren, would be acceptable. Any time from morning to evening would likewise be acceptable.

Instruction/Command	Authorized/Included	Unauthorized/Excluded
Participate in twenty minutes of physical activity three days a week	Running, walking, swimming, riding a bicycle, etc.	Failing to participate in physical activity Less than three days per week Less than twenty minutes
Give on the first day of the week as one may prosper (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)	Giving on the first day of the week \$5, \$10, \$1,000, etc. based on the way one is prospered	Fail to give on the first day of the week Giving without regard to the way God has prospered
Provoke the brethren to love and good works by assembling	Assembling Under a tree, in a house,	Failing to assemble Provoking brethren to anger,

(Hebrews 10:24-25)	rented hall, or building owned by the brethren At 9 a.m., 12 p.m., etc. Provoking the brethren to love and good works	jealousy or strife
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### Understanding Expedients

If a father tells a son to cut the grass, it is understood he will need a tool, or tools, to complete the task. The necessary tools to carry out the father’s instruction are clearly a part of doing as he directs. A lawnmower and edger are “expedient” to the son doing as he has been told. The word “expedient” is “used of either an aid or a method, to signify that which is advantageous, sensible or wise” (Thomas, p. 250). The son could use a pair of scissors, but such would not very sensible, particularly on a large lawn.

Franklin Camp wrote,

Most of our problems have arisen from a misunderstanding and a misapplication of matters of expediency. Matters of expediency may vary from one generation to another and even from one congregation to another. This, in itself, distinguishes them from matters of faith. Matters of faith do not change from generation to generation, nor do they vary among congregations. Matters of expediency have to do with methods. Methods of expediting a general command may change from one generation to another. If this were not true, the church would be bound to the methods that were used in the first century and would be unable to use the tools of the present day in carrying out its work. Unless various methods in carrying out general commands in the Scriptures may be used, the church would be hindered in its work of preaching the gospel (p. 38).

To display love for God, one must keep His commandments. John wrote, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). Obviously, some things are included within the keeping of God’s commands. For instance, eating the Lord’s supper requires bread and the fruit of the vine (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine requires containers to put them in, like plates and cups. The plates and cups are “expedient” to carrying out the Lord’s command and are thus authorized. Similarly, Christ’s command to preach the gospel (Mark 16:15) can be expedited using microphones, PowerPoint, radio, television, internet, etc. While preaching might be done in a large auditorium without using a microphone, it might not be expedient since not all might be able to hear. Similarly, some listeners could benefit from the use of PowerPoint to project an outline, or significant quotations on a screen while they are listening to the speaker.

Instruction/Command	Authorized/Included	Unauthorized/Excluded
Cut the grass	Cutting the lawn, lawnmower, weed eater, edger	Not cutting the grass

Eat this bread and drink this cup (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)	Eating the bread and drinking the cup Bread, fruit of the vine, plates, cups	Not eating Peanut butter, jelly, meat, buttermilk
Preach the gospel (Mark 16:15)	Preaching the gospel Microphones, PowerPoint, radio, television, internet	Not preaching the gospel Preaching something other than the gospel

### Properly Identifying Expedients

Franklin Camp identified two important things to remember to make a proper distinction between things that are expedient and things that are not. First, “A matter of expediency, or method, cannot change, or alter, an authorized act... One cannot scripturally expedite an unauthorized practice.” He went on to illustrate with the case of sprinkling. “One could not contend for an expedient way to sprinkle, because the act itself is not authorized” (p. 39).

Second, “An expedient must always be subordinate to the act it expedites. When something is used with an authorized act that is coordinate with or equal to the authorized act, it is an addition not an expedient” (p. 40). Brother Camp illustrated by referring to the Passover (Exodus 12:5). If a man preferred the taste of pork to that of lamb, it would not be acceptable for him to roast a pig along with the lamb. Saying the pork was merely an expedient to make the taste of the lamb more palatable would not make it so since pig is a coordinate to lamb. Instead of being an expedient, it would be an addition, therefore forbidden.

### Applying the Principles to Worship in Song

In His revealed word, God has used specific commands to authorize specific actions. God has also used generic commands to leave open the actions that might be used to carry out His command. Readers who wish to follow the Lord’s desires must examine each command to determine whether it is specific or generic. The former only authorizes the stated action, while the latter leaves the means of completing the command to the individual’s or church’s choice.

To apply specifically these principles to the idea that pianos and other mechanical instruments of music are only aids in worship to God, one must carefully study God’s commands. Paul gave instructions for singing in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. When observed in parallel, some things become readily apparent.

Ephesians 5:18b-19 Be filled with the Spirit Speaking To one another In psalms, hymns and spiritual songs Singing And making melody in your heart To the Lord	Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom Teaching and admonishing One another In psalms and hymns and spiritual songs Singing With grace in your hearts To the Lord
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For one capable of speaking/teaching, Paul’s instructions regarding “speaking” and “teaching and admonishing” clearly make failing to add one’s voice a violation of the Maker’s will, or outside the authority of His command. Since the apostle said, “to one another,” a song sung only by one or less than all the Christians present in an assembly would also be disallowed.

When Paul specified psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, he omitted authority for worldly and unscriptural songs. By commanding that they sing, the apostle made it plain that they were not to hum or whistle, which would be outside the instruction to speak. “Singing with grace in your heart” is obviously parallel to “making melody in your heart,” which describes a plucking of the heartstrings. The heart is, then, God’s designated instrument, which would omit authority for playing any mechanical instruments of music because they are coordinate to the music made in singing and an unauthorized addition.

Instruction/Command	Authorized/Included	Unauthorized/Excluded
Speaking to one another  In psalms, hymns and spiritual songs Singing and Making melody in your heart To the Lord (Ephesians 5:19)	Each speaking in song to the others present for worship Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs Singing  Plucking the strings of your heart To the Lord	Only one or less than every Christian present Worldly songs, unscriptural songs Not singing, humming, whistling Mechanical instruments of music To someone or something other than the Lord

Singing generally requires songs and a pitch. A tuning fork or pitch pipe only helps the leader get the pitch. Further, it makes no competing music while the singing is in progress. Songbooks or PowerPoint projections give each worshiper access to the words and music to be used during the singing of a particular song. It is also left to the song leader and elders of each church to determine the number of songs, tempo, and posture and whether to sing in unison or four-part harmony.

## Conclusion

When God gives a specific instruction in His word, the only act authorized is the one specified in the command. Silence as to other actions prohibits their use. In contrast, a general command is silent in regards to any choice, thereby permitting the use of any method that brings about the fulfillment of the Father’s will. Methods or means that expedite such fulfillment are included within the authority of the command. Methods or means, which are coordinate with God’s specific requirement, are additions, therefore a violation of the Almighty’s instructions.

Pitch pipes, tuning forks and songbooks all expedite the fulfillment of God's command for Christians to sing. Mechanical instruments make music not authorized in the Father's command. The only acceptable accompaniment to the Christian's singing is the plucking of the strings of his heart.

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# The Bible: A Complete Revelation from God

(This was originally printed in the *Gospel Advocate* September 12, 1974)

In the last two hundred years, it has been far from unusual for a new religious body to appear. Most of these new groups have claimed that God has given them some new revelation and it is their purpose to carry it to the world. Events such as these may cause one to question his own faith and wonder if he really does have the complete revelation from God in the Bible. In other words, do we have recorded in scripture the essential ingredients necessary to form a belief which will bring about salvation?

## The New Testament Does Not Speak of a Revelation to Follow

The New Testament does not give any indication that there is a revelation to follow. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). All of man's spiritual needs are provided for in the scriptures (2 Peter 1:3-4). If this were not the case, Peter could not have gone on to say, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (Verse 10). John, by inspiration, says that we have all that is necessary to receive eternal life (John 20:30-31). Paul was convinced that he had preached the gospel and warned against anyone who preached anything contrary to it (Galatians 1:6-9). He also admonished the Corinthians to "stand fast in the faith" (1 Corinthians 16:13). All of these passages point strongly to the belief of the apostles in a complete revelation from God. It is no wonder that Paul warned Timothy against those who would turn away from the truth (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

## The New Testament Claims Completeness

The New Testament does make a claim to completeness. In speaking of Colossians 2:9, James D. Bales says, "Since in him 'dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily' there is no one who could bring a fuller revelation of God."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to pen these words: "Immediately after saying that in Christ 'dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,' the apostle Paul said: 'and in him ye are made full, who is the head of all principality and power.' (Colossians 2:10) Since in Christ there is nothing lacking in God's revelation of himself to man, there is nothing lacking in Christ for man."<sup>2</sup> Further, "Christ did not prophesy that anyone would take his place. Who could supersede the Son of God? He is God's spokesman to us today, and his word has been revealed and confirmed by the Spirit through the inspired men of the first century.

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<sup>1</sup>James D. Bales, *The Finality of the Faith*, (Shreveport: Lambert Book House, 1972), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

(Hebrews 1:2; 2:3-4; John 16:12-14; Matthew 28:20; Acts 2:42.)"<sup>3</sup> The apostle Paul said that the new covenant was to be everlasting (Hebrews 13:20-21).

### **The Faith Was Delivered Once For All Time**

While all of these verses will show the Bible to be God's complete revelation to man, I feel that a proper understanding of Jude 3 is the strongest argument of all. Jude writes, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Vine says of the word here translated *faith*, "by metonymy, what is believed, the contents of belief, faith."<sup>4</sup> Of the word *once* he says, "once for all, of what is perpetual validity, not requiring repetition."<sup>5</sup>

After observing the meaning of these words, one can easily see why Woods makes the following comment: "The 'faith' for which Jude's readers were thus earnestly to contend . . . is the sum of all that which Christians are to believe and obey."<sup>6</sup> Also,

This faith has *once for all (hapax)*, not simply formerly, as the King James Version implies, but for all time, been delivered to the saints. The meaning is that the truth is delivered for all time; it is a permanent deposit, it will never be superseded, amended or modified. As it now stands it is a perfect, adequate, complete and inviolable deposit of truth, providing the means with which to confute the gainsayer, and resist the advocate of false doctrine. This deposit of truth was infallibly delivered through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 1:11; 2 Peter 1:21), and no part of it is superfluous or unnecessary.<sup>7</sup>

While all of these new religions, to my knowledge, claim that the Bible is inspired, they attempt to hold to the inspiration of their new revelation. One can well see that this will not work. There is no mention of a new covenant that is to follow the one delivered by Christ. The gospel is complete and was established to last forever. Finally, the faith was delivered to the saints during the time of Jude and that faith is complete, so there is no need for any addition to it.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>4</sup>W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (Westwood, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1940), p.71.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>6</sup>Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude*, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1955), p. 385.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

## Questions

I. LISTING: List ten verses which directly or indirectly show that the Bible is God's only revelation to man and that it is all he needs.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

II. CHALLENGE:

1. Our study has showed that Bible interpretation should be approached very carefully and with great preparation. Write down some ways that you will prepare for Bible study.

2. Give reasons why/why not to study the Bible if it is not the complete verbally inspired word of God. Defend the answer. (Jude 3)

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