

# Principles of Bible Study/Interpretation\*\*

(Hermeneutics<sup>1</sup>)

## Three Basic Principles of Bible Study

- 1) The Bible alone and in its entirety is the Word of God - *Sola Scriptura* (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:5-6; Isaiah 40:8; Romans 15:4; II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20-21; Revelation 22:18-19).
- 2) **The Bible may appear to display more than one meaning, but the Bible intends only one meaning.** Scripture's **intended meaning** is the object of Biblical interpretation (Deuteronomy 4:29, 29:29; Proverbs 25:2; I Peter 1:10-12).
- 3) The Bible is its own interpreter. "Compare spiritual things with spiritual" (I Corinthians 2:13).

## Biblical Interpretation

(Exegesis<sup>2</sup>)

A) Pray to the Lord that understanding and insight be revealed (Psalms 119:125 and 169, Proverbs 2:1-6; Jeremiah 29:13; Mark 4:22; Luke 12:2).

B) **There is only one intended meaning or message for the text**, but God can present His message through the Scriptures in many ways.

BI) The foundation for beginning to understand Scripture, is to determine how the text/message is being presented;

a) God can speak:

**literally\***

e.g.; The Creation (Genesis, chapters 1 & 2).

The Great Flood (Genesis 7:1 - 8:19).

The Resurrection of Christ (Matthew 28:5-7; ff., John 20:19-20).

**figuratively\***

e.g.; The Lord's Supper - Christ's body depicted as "bread": His blood depicted as "wine" (Matthew 26:26-29).

Christ depicted as the "light" (John 3:19-21).

The gift of salvation depicted as the "living water" (John 4:10, 13 and 14).

**prophetically\***

e.g.; The Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; cf., Galatians 3:8).

The birth of the Messiah, to be born of a Virgin (Isaiah 7:14; ff., Isaiah 9:6; cf., Matthew 1:22-23).

The crucifixion of the Messiah (Psalm 22:1, 7-8, 16-18 and 22; cf., Matthew 27:46; ff., Mark 15:34, cf., John 19:37).

Christ's resurrection and ascension (Psalms 16:10; 49:15; 68:18; cf., Acts 13:34-35, ff., John 6:62; cf., Ephesians 4:8-10; cf., Luke 9:51, John 20:17).

b) God can use a

**metaphor\***;

e.g.; The apostacy of Israel: Israel the "harlot" (Jeremiah 3:6).

Not to plow with an ox and a donkey together (Deuteronomy 22:10; cf.,

<sup>1</sup> "Hermeneutics is the science that teaches us the principles, laws, and methods of interpretation." L. Berkhof, B.D., c.1950

<sup>2</sup> "Exegesis is the practice of hermeneutics in studying Scriptures." V.J. Steiner, Ph.D. c.1998

II Corinthians 6:14-17)  
Eternal salvation through Jesus Christ (John 6:47-48, 14:6).  
The humbleness of Christ (II Corinthians 8:9).

**parable\***; Jesus taught using parables. On the surface, a parable looks like a short simple little story, but its intended meaning or message is always something much deeper. Additional references to the use of parables (Proverbs 1:1-6; Mark 4:11-12).

e.g.; The Parable of the Seeds (Matthew 13:3-9; Luke 8:4-8). Why Christ spoke in parables (Matthew 13:10-17, 34-35). Christ's explanation of the parable (Matthew 13:18-30).

The Parable of the Woman & the Judge (Luke 18:2-8). The object of the parable explained (Luke 18:1).

**allegory\***;

e.g.; The narratives of Sarah & Isaac and Hagar & Ishmael - spiritual freedom vs spiritual bondage (Genesis 21:9-14; cf., Galations 4:21-31).

Moses and the serpents<sup>3</sup> - salvation through the coming Christ (Numbers 21:6-9; cf., John 3:14-15).

c) Biblical characters can be portrayed figuratively as well as historically.

**paradigm\***;

e.g.; King David, the model for all the future kings of Israel: see the "Davidic Covenant," (II Samuel 7:8-17).

John the Baptist, a model of the Prophet Elijah, as prophesied (Malachi 3:1, 4:5); fulfilled in in the Gospels, cf., (Matthew 3:3, 11:10, 17:10-13; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 1:17, 3:4; John 1:19-23).

d) God can also use an individual as a portrait (type) of Christ;

**typological\***;

e.g.; The Priest, Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18; ff., Psalm 110:4; cf., Hebrews 7:1-10, 15-17). Christ as a "priest forever" in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:5-6; 6:20; 7:17),

Cyrus, king of Persia, referred to as the "Anointed One" of God (II Chronicles 36:23; Ezra 1:1-2; Isaiah 45:1,13).

Abraham, Obed, Moses, Joseph, Joshua, Isaiah, David, et al., - all typified some aspects of the future Messiah.

BII) Determine what the intended message is about; what is God's meaning of the Scriptures in light of the book in which they are included:

a) is the message historical\* in context (genealogies, etc.)?

e.g.; Genesis 5:1-21; Matthew 1:1-17, etc..

b) is it a moral or spiritual teaching?

e.g.; Ecclesiastes 3:1-15; Matthew 5:1-48 (Beatitudes); II Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

c) is it an example of an application of God's laws?

e.g.; Proverbs 5:1-23; John 13:34-35, etc.

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<sup>3</sup>An extremely interesting and intriguing story. If one were to interpret this literally, the bronze fiery serpent set on a standard would be in direct conflict with Exodus 20:4, and also verse 3, concerning the worship of idols as this symbol becomes in later generations (II Kings 18:4). If understood allegorically, there would be no conflict as a representation of Jesus Christ and salvation through Him (Rom 8:1-4). Also, there is a view point by some Bible expositors that there would have to be a cross piece on the standard to support the serpent, which they then take the standard to be an allegorical cross. Christ compares His being lifted up to Moses lifting up the serpent (John 3:14; cf., Jn 12:32-34). JH

- d) does it relate to Messianic Prophecy, point to Christ, or concern the Gospel of Salvation?  
e.g.; Isaiah 7:14, 9:6; Matthew 12:17-21; John 3:16-17.
- e) Don't get enmeshed in the event or in the details, concentrate on the message of the text. How does it fit with the other messages in the section?  
e.g.; John 3:1-21, which has a variety of different thoughts but only one exegetical message.

C) Test for validity.

- CI) Test **conclusions** against everything else the Bible offers concerning the theological/exegetical idea.
- CII) Scriptura Scripturae interpres (Scripture interprets Scripture). The Bible is its own dictionary/interpreter. "Compare spiritual things with spiritual" (I Corinthians 2:13).

D) Any valid conclusion must be in harmony with the rest of Scripture<sup>4</sup>.

**\*\* Please note:** This document is about some basic "**principles**" needed to begin understanding Scriptures. This is not a "**process**" of interpreting Scriptures, but defines the process. The process of interpretation is another subject and study in itself.

Also, this is not a static document, but one that is and will continue to be in state of flux. As wisdom, insight and knowledge are gained through the Holy Spirit, and combined with those things which are revealed by the Holy Spirit through others, this document will continually strive to reflect those insights as they are revealed to us. JH

### Definitions

- \***historical** - associated with biblical history; based on biblical history.
- \***literal**- representing the **exact** biblical meaning.
- \***figurative** - representing one biblical concept in terms of another, that it may be thought of analogous of it; not literal or direct: representing by means of a figure, symbol, or likeness; typical or emblematic.
- \***prophecy** - the prediction of future events under the influence of Divine guidance.
- \***metaphor** - implied comparison, in which a word or phrase ordinarily and primarily used of one thing is applied to another; a phrase literally indicating an idea in place of another by suggesting a likeness or analogy between them.
- \***allegory** - a veiled presentation of a biblical idea or story; a description of one idea under the guise of another; a figurative use and application based on some supposable fact or history; an extended metaphor.

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<sup>4</sup> Yes, so long as we do try not to force harmonization where Scriptures intend tensions (e.g., Prov 26:4-5; or divine sovereignty and human responsibility; etc.), and so long as we let Scripture be the judge and not theological systems (as templates which overlay the scriptures). Harmony with Scripture does not mean the absence of tensions, nor does it mean pushing and shoving the scriptures into theological boxes. Dr. V. J. Steiner, c. July 1998.

**\*parable** - a short, simple little story, from which a moral or spiritual truth is drawn: it is allegorical in nature: it uses words in the literal sense but never goes beyond what would be considered fact. Biblically, it could be called an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

**\*paradigm** - a biblical model or pattern; something set up as a biblical example.

**\*typological** - a symbolic meaning or representation: Biblically, usually of past Prophets and Servants of the Lord taking on some of the characteristics of the coming Christ.

### **Abbreviations**

**cf.,** compare

**e.g.,** for example

**et al.,** and others

**ff.,** following

**i.e.,** that is

### **Bibliography**

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