

THE INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY Studies in the Revelation

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy,
and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.
Revelation 1:3

“And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the
words of the prophecy of this book.”
Revelation 22:7

SIDEBAR: FROM THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

The three *promises* from the Lord:

“I know your deeds. Behold,

- (1) I have put before you an open door which no one can shut...
- (2) Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie— I will make them bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.
- (3) I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. I am coming quickly.”
Revelation 3:8a, 9-11a

The problem with living in Laodicea:

‘Behold, I stand at (what) the door (of what) and knock, if anyone hears
My voice and opens the door, I will come in to (who) him, and will dine
with (who) him, and (who) he with Me.’
Revelation 3:20

THE LITERAL SCHOOL OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION:

First, What it Is:

1. Literal

A *literal* interpretation means the understanding which any person of normal intelligence would get, without any special spiritual gifts and without any required “code” or “key.”

2. Normal

A *literal* meaning of Scripture is as the normal, everyday, common understanding of its terms.

3. Historical

The sentences and words must be understood in their historical setting and not be taken out of their space-time, cultural context.

4. Grammatical

The true, *literal* meaning of a sentence is rooted in its grammar; emerging from the structure wherein all parts of speech— including nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, articles, prepositions, etc.— are placed in a form from which a specific meaning can be derived. It also gives each word the same exact meaning it would have in any normal, ordinary, customary usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking.

5. Contextual

Every sentence should be understood in the context of the paragraph, the paragraph in the setting of the book, and the book in view of the whole Bible.

6. Authorial

The *literal* meaning is the meaning of the author. The reader’s obligation is to *discover* the meaning that the author determined, and not what the reader desires it to mean.

7. Exegetical

The true meaning of a text is the one read out of it (exegesis), the one that the author put in it. It is not the meaning read into it (eisegesis) by the reader. Again, the reader’s task is to *discover* the meaning already in a text, and not *determine* what he thinks it ought to mean.

8. Singular

There is only *one* (not many) textual meaning: the one expressed in it by the author. Since the very same words of the Bible are coauthored by the divine Author and the human writer, this *one* meaning expressed in the text is the *same* for both writers.

9. Objective

The *literal* meaning of a text is the same for everyone, not just for some. The meaning is fixed and determined, not fluid and dynamic.

Next, What it is Not:

1. It does not eliminate *spiritual application*:

“You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.”
Deuteronomy 25:4

For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” God is not concerned about the oxen, is He?
1 Corinthians 9:9

2. It does not eliminate *figures of speech*:

The next day he (John the Baptist) saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”
John 1:29

“I am (what) the true vine, and My Father is (what) the vinedresser.”
John 15:1

Primary Point One:

When the *literal* sense makes good sense, seek no other sense, lest it result in nonsense.

3. It does not eliminate the use of *types*:

Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ (what) our Passover also has been sacrificed.
1 Corinthians 5:7

4. It does not eliminate the use of *symbols*:

“As for the mystery of the (1) seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the (2) seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”
Revelation 1:20

“I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this (what) rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the (what) keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth

shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”
Matthew 16:18-19

5. It does not eliminate the use of *parables and allegories*:

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.
Galatians 4:22-26

“Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.”
Matthew 13:18-19

Last, Why it is of Vital Importance:

1. **Literal interpretation is the normal (standard) approach in all languages.**
2. **All secondary meaning depends on the literal meaning.**
3. **The greater part of the Bible makes sense when taken literally.**
4. **Literal interpretation will take the secondary meaning when demanded.**
5. **Literal interpretation is the only “sane and safe check on the imagination of man.”**
6. **Literal interpretation is the only one in line with the nature of inspiration.**
7. **Any other approach is self-defeating, for it claims that the literal truth is not the proper way to interpret, even though it expects its readers to take its words literally.**

Summary:

The *literal* method of Biblical interpretation does not mean that everything in the Bible is true literally; rather, it means that everything in the Bible is *literally* true.