

HOW TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE CORRECTLY¹

INTRODUCTION: Proper Bible interpretation is an absolute necessity in these confusing days in which we live. False teachers as well as true ones, use the Bible to try and support their beliefs & teachings. The difference is, false cults and false teachers come to the Bible to try and make it say what they want it to say, while good Bible interpreters come to the Bible with the desire to simply let it say what it says.

Every Christian should know the following principles and use them whenever studying the Bible. If you do, you will understand God's Word and be kept from being swept away by a false teaching or wrong belief based on man's reasoning. Virtually every false cult or false religion violates one or more of these principles, which is why they have ended up in error. Interpreting the Bible involves work! Paul says in II Tim. 2:15: "*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" The phrase "*rightly dividing*" means literally "*cutting it straight,*" and probably refer to Paul's occupation as a tentmaker. In Bible times tentmakers would often cut the skins of animals and then sew them together like a quilt. If you didn't cut each piece straight, you would end up with a crooked tent! So too, God wants us to "cut straight" (i.e. interpret correctly) the Word of God. May this short paper help you to achieve that goal.

1. "INTERPRET LITERALLY (i.e. NORMALLY or NATURALLY)." In other words, **take the words at "face value."** Take the words & verses to mean just what they normally mean, unless there is clear evidence in the text itself that they should be taken symbolically (see below).

"In contrast to the allegorizing methods of the Roman Catholics, Protestants from Luther on have stressed the necessity of interpreting Scripture literally. By literal is meant taking words in their normal, customary meaning rather than in a figurative or symbolic sense. It does not imply a blind refusal to see any figurative meanings in Scripture... If something in the context indicates that a figurative sense is expected, then the passage should be taken in that sense. However, the expositor should not first seek a figurative sense... When the Apostle John reports that the soldiers did not break the legs of the Lord because He was already dead but instead pierced His side (John 19:33-34), he goes on to argue that this was the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy (John 19:36). He interprets the text in a literal, not an allegorical, manner. On the other hand, the book of Revelation describes a woman clothed with the sun and expressly terms the description a 'great wonder' (Greek *semeion*, 'sign').. Thus there is justification in the text for giving the description a symbolical sense (Rev. 12:1ff.). In the same context the great red dragon is also called a wonder or sign and hence is not be interpreted as a member of the reptilian family but as a symbol of 'that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan' (Rev. 12:3,9)." (Stewart Custer, *Tools for Preaching and Teaching the Bible*, p. 36).

KEY STATEMENTS:

"Literal, if possible is, I believe, the only maxim (rule, policy) that will carry you right through the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation." H. Bonar

The "Golden Principle of Bible Interpretation": "*When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.* Therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic (self-evident) and fundamental truths indicate clearly otherwise." David L. Cooper.

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST, THE APOSTLES, ETC. The Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme example of literal or normal interpretation. He practiced this principle and believed it. He often referred to Old Testament people and events as real, actual, literal people and events that literally, actually occurred! The apostles & other early church leaders (Paul, Peter, James, John, Jude, Stephen, etc.) spoke & interpreted literally as well. For example:

¹ **Note:** Virtually all of these points, & most of the sub-points in this entire paper were taken from "*Syllabus for OT Prophecy*" [an unpublished paper] &/or "*Tools for Preaching & Teaching the Bible,*" both by Dr. Stewart Custer. Additional thoughts have been taken from material by Dr. John MacArthur. I have supplemented their points by the addition of a copious amount of illustrative material from a variety of other sources to illuminate these hermeneutical principles. Original notes written: 20 Aug. 1979. Completely revised, expanded & rewritten: 25 March, 1998. Revised & reformatted for the original website, July, 2006 & February, 2007. –Rev. Mike Edwards

- a. Moses & the burning bush - Mk. 12:26; Jn. 5:46-47
- b. David - Mk. 12:36-37
- c. Jonah - Mt. 12:39
- d. Noah & the flood - Mt. 24:37-39; Lk. 17:26-27
- e. Lot and Sodom & Gomorrah - Lk. 17:28-29
- f. Daniel, Abomination of Desolation - Mk. 13:14
- g. Adam, the fall, Moses - Rom. 5:12-14
- h. David, Abraham - Rom. 4:1-3,6,9-13, etc.
- i. Moses, Mt. Sinai, the golden calf - Acts 7:1-ff
- j. Old Testament persons - Heb. 11:1-ff
- k. Abraham & Rahab - James 2:21-25
- l. Sarah - I Pet. 3:5-6
- m. Cain & Abel - I Jn. 3:11-12
- n. Sodom & Gomorrah, Cain, Balaam, Korah - Jude 7,11

SOME EXAMPLES ILLUSTRATING THIS PRINCIPLE. There are, of course, many other passages we could use that illustrate this principle and which cannot be understood properly unless we interpret them literally. The following are a few examples:

HOW LONG WERE THE "DAYS" OF GENESIS 1? (Most of the following material is taken from the writings of Dr. Henry Morris & Dr. John C. Whitcomb. Specific references regarding a number of the points will be found in the text that follows). Virtually all liberals and many conservatives believe that the days mentioned in Genesis 1 are not literal 24 hour days. Instead they believe that the days in the first chapter of the Bible are symbolic of a much longer period of time (e.g. 1000's of years, millions of years, or even billions of years)! The main reason many Christians in the past have taken that position is because they thought evolution is an undeniable fact, and so making the days in Genesis symbolic seemed to assist in reconciling the biblical account with "scientific facts." There are at least two problems with doing this:

a. Evolution is not true! In fact it is not even a good theory. There is essentially NO genuine scientific evidence to support the theory of evolution. There have been at least half a dozen books written in the past 10-15 years by evolutionists admitting this fact! So today there is absolutely no need to interpret the Bible in such a way as to fit into a theory that doesn't even make sense?

b. There is no indication in the context, or otherwise, that God had in mind anything other than 24 hour days! Here are some reasons why I believe the "days" of Genesis 1 were 24 hour days:

(1) Whenever the word "day" (*yom*-Heb) is used in the Bible with a numeral or an ordinal, it always refers to a 24 hour day.

(2) Whenever the word "day" occurs in the plural (e.g. Ex. 20:11) it always means a 24 hour day-And it occurs over 700 times.

(3) There is another Hebrew word for "day" that means a long period of time (*olam*-Heb), but it was NOT used in the creation account. If God wanted us to understand that the days of Genesis were long periods of time, He could have easily communicated that fact by using a different word.

(4) Who is really limiting God with such an interpretation? Liberals & others often say that we are limiting God by saying He created everything in only six twenty-four hour days. But it is the liberals who are really limiting God. We believe God could have done it in 24 seconds if He had wanted to. They are the ones who think it was too hard for God to create things quickly.

(5) What did *yom* (*day*) mean to Moses & the Israelites? Certainly not billions of years!

(6) Such interpreters ask us to give "day" a meaning it has nowhere else in the Pentateuch.

(7) Many verses don't make sense unless interpreted as 24 hour days. e.g. Exodus 20:8-11; 31:17.

(8) The word "day" when used in the OT without a defining numeral or ordinal can occasionally mean something besides a 24 hour day, but when it does, it is defined by an associated term. e.g. "Day of the Lord." (see below)

(9) Gen. 1:5 must mean 24 hour days, otherwise you have 3 problems:

- *Evening* never bears the meaning of a long geologic period,
- ...Neither does *morning*, &
- ...*Day* never means period.

(10) God added statements which make it difficult to interpret otherwise. e.g. "*morning-evening*," "*darkness-light*," "*day-night*."

(11) A parallel example, to answer someone who tries to use Gen. 2:4 to support the idea that "*day*" means a long period of time, is found in Num. 7 (see Num. 7:1,2,10,84 cf. vv. 12,18,24, etc.). Day is used in a cumulative sense here, as in Gen. 2:4, and it is obvious.

(12) If the author intended to mean 6 literal days, it's impossible to see how he could have done it any more plainly.

(13) If each day equals million(s) of years, then the sun, moon, stars, etc., were set out-but no one was there to see them, nor would there be for millions of years to come. Thus the idea that they would be used "for signs & for seasons & for days & for years" (Gen. 1:14) would not be applicable for many millions or billions of years to come!

(14) Essentially the question is, "*If it really took billions or millions of years, why did God tell us it took 6 days?*"

(15) If the days were long periods of time, then the plants would have been in darkness for millions of years until light appeared on the 4th day. If so, they would have died.

(16) The wording suggests a short period of time for creation. Gen. 1:11 literally reads: "*sprout sprouts*" & verse 12 records that they did so apparently immediately!

THE "GAP" THEORY. This theory states that between Genesis 1:1 & 1:2 the earth underwent "...a cataclysmic change as the result of a divine judgment... There are not wanting intimations which connect it with a previous testing and fall of angels." (*Scofield Reference Bible* -KJV, edited by C.I. Scofield, D.D. Oxford University Press: New York, NY, 1909, 1937, p. 3). Many good men held to this theory in the past, often due to a desire to fit the Bible into an evolutionary framework. Today, however, people are becoming more and more aware of the bankruptcy of the theory of evolution and the fact that it has little, if any, scientific evidence to support it. There is no need for Christians to try and accommodate their Bible interpretations to fit into a worldview to begin with, but especially in regard to such an unsupportable theory. Nonetheless a number of conservative believers still hold to this theory. But careful Bible interpretation based on the literal principle will demonstrate the fallacy of this interpretation. The main arguments of Gap Theory advocates are listed below, along with brief biblical rebuttals:

"Was" should be translated "Became." (?) Answer: (a) While it's true that there are six places where this occurs, in those cases the context clearly shows it (e.g. Gen. 3:22; 19:26; etc.), and there are 258 other occurrences where "*was*" clearly is the correct word (Whitcomb, "*Scientific Studies in Special Creation*," op cit., p. 32); (b) To convey a change of state the preposition "*to*" should occur after the word, but does not (cf. Gen. 2:7 & 25 other places); (c) We have some exact grammatical parallels which show clearly that "*was*" should not be translated "*became*" (e.g. Jonah 3:3; Zech. 3:1-3. Obviously Nineveh didn't **become** a great city after Jonah entered it, nor did Joshua **become** clothed with filthy garments after Zechariah saw him!

"Without form & Void" means the earth had been destroyed already. (?) Answer: The phrase "*without form & void*" (*tohu wa-bohu*) appears only in Isa. 45:18 & Jer. 4:23, and those passages do speak of destruction. Also, *tohu* alone often has an evil connotation. But (a) "*Tohu*" does not always refer to something evil nor does it always project an evil connotation (e.g. Job. 26:7; Deut. 32:10; Job 6:18; etc.), but often refers to the wilderness or desert. The Isaiah passage which says that God didn't create the world a waste (*tohu*) is often advanced to support the gap theory. In reply Whitcomb comments: "However, such an interpretation overlooks the true significance of the final phrase in this verse: 'formed it to be inhabited.' The real point of the passage

seems to be that God did not ultimately intend that the world should be devoid of life, but rather that it should be filled with living things. Thus, He did not allow it to remain in the empty and formless condition in which He first created it, but in six creative days filled it with living things and fashioned it to be a beautiful home for man. The verse thus speaks of God's ultimate purpose in creation, and the contrast in this verse between *tohu* and inhabited shows clearly that *tohu* means 'empty' or 'uninhabited,' rather than 'judged,' 'destroyed,' or 'chaotic.'" (Whitcomb, *The Early Earth*, op cit., p. 123). Also, "*tohu*" occurs in the following verse in Isaiah (45:19) and can hardly be translated ruin in that context.

"Darkness is always a symbol of evil."(?) Gap theorists say that it is improbable that God would have originally created the world in darkness, which is generally a symbol of evil. Answer: (a) Darkness is not always referred to as evil (e.g. Ps. 104:19-24), (b) Why then does God call light "good" and not darkness? "It would seem reasonable to assume that the reason why God did not 'see that the darkness was good' is that darkness is not a specific entity, or a thing, but it is rather an absence of something, namely, light. Perhaps it is for this same reason that God did not see that the 'firmament' (expanse) of the second creative day was good. It, too, was a rather negative entity, being the empty space between the upper and lower waters." (Whitcomb, *Scientific Studies in Special Creation*, op cit., p. 37).

"Created" is different than "Made."(?) The implication of "gap theorists" is that God originally "created" everything, then simply "made" (i.e. refashioned already existing material) the second time around. Answer: Created (*bara*-Heb) and made (*asah*-Heb) are synonymous. "...for God 'created' (*bara*) the great sea monsters (v.21) and He 'made'(*asah*) the beasts of the field (v.25). Surely we are not to find any significant difference here. The sea-monsters were created supernaturally by God, and so were the beasts of the earth. Likewise in 1:26 God said, 'Let us "make" man in our image.' But in the next verse we read that God "created" man in His own image.' Once again the verb seems to be used synonymously" (Ibid, p. 38).

"Replenish the earth" implies that the earth was filled once before." (?) Answer: The verb in Hebrew for replenish (*maleh*) "simply means 'to fill' with no suggestion of repetition" (Ibid).

Gap Theory Problems. The above arguments used by "Gap Theory" proponents to support their view do not supply such support, as I have tried to demonstrate. In addition, there are a number of biblical & interpretative facts that clearly oppose the gap theory and support the idea that a literal reading of Genesis one is the correct one. These include:

a) Ex. 20:11. "The gap theory holds that the heavens, the earth, and the sea were created **before** the six days of Genesis One. But this passage asserts that **everything was made by God in six days**" (Ibid, p. 39). The fact that this verse along with Gen. 2:1-3 say that the "heavens" were made in 6 days, and the only mention of the heavens in Genesis One is verse one (the stars, etc., occupied the heavens!) makes it obvious that Gen. 1:1 is part of the six days being talked about.

b) Since Genesis 2:3 says that **God did all of His creating during the six days**, there is no room for an earlier creation that was left over and metamorphosed.

c) The Bible says in Genesis 1:31 that God saw everything He had made and **"behold, it was very good."** But if there had been a terrible cataclysmic judgment that had previously fallen, it is extremely doubtful whether God could have said that. Also, a wicked being would be roaming the earth. Is that a condition God would call "*very good*"?

d) There "...is no Scriptural evidence that **Satan's fall** from heaven produced a cataclysm on earth. Satan was only 'cast to the earth' (Ezek. 28:17) after his rebellion and fall, and thus he had no connection with the earth when it was first created" (Henry M. Morris, "*Biblical Cosmology and Modern Science.*" Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1970, p. 63). **Regarding the time of Satan's fall, I would say that it probably occurred some time between Gen. 1:31 (everything was "very good") & Gen. 3:1 (when he appears in a fallen state).**

e) Most "gap" theorists attribute most of the **fossil record** to a "pre-Adamic" world catastrophe, yet plants and animals today are identical to ones in the fossil record!

f) If one holds to the gap theory then there was plenty of **death and destruction** before Adam and the fall, and consequently death is not a result of the fall. This is a serious theological error & contradiction of a number of passages of Scripture (e.g. Rom. 5:12; 8:20-22; I Cor. 15:21).

g) Adam was told to **exercise dominion** over everything (Gen. 1:26). But if all kinds of living organisms had already lived and died in a previous cataclysm, Adam certainly didn't rule over them!

IN SUMMARY, in order to hold to the "gap" theory, one has to interpret the first verses of Genesis in something other than a literal (i.e. normal or natural) fashion. By doing so, one is then forced to perform interpretive "gymnastics" to explain verses such as those listed above, which only make sense when one interprets the initial passage in natural, literal fashion.

THE MILLENNIUM. There are three main viewpoints on the millennium: Post-Millennialism, Amillennialism & Pre-Millennialism. Only the PRE-MILLENNIALIST takes a literal or "natural" interpretive position, in regard to Rev. 20:1-6 (where we read the phrase "a thousand years" five times). **If you interpret literally, there is no way you can come to any other position than a pre-millennial position.** Thus the other views attempt to "spiritualize" (i.e. make symbolic) this & other millennial passages. Once you start "spiritualizing" though, it becomes very difficult to know where to stop! One of the major errors of virtually every cult is their "spiritualizing" of verses, passages & words, infusing them with meanings totally beyond what they really teach.

THERE ARE FIGURATIVE (SYMBOLIC) PORTIONS IN THE BIBLE! The above discussion is not to imply that there are no figurative or symbolic verses or passages in the Bible. There are! But these will normally be clearly obvious when studied in their contexts (e.g. Ps. 65:13; 114:5-6; etc.). Here are a couple of tips to aid you knowing when you should interpret symbolically:

Watch when reading poetry. If you are reading poetic sections of the Bible (e.g. Psalms, Song of Solomon, etc.) you should expect some figurative, poetic expressions (e.g. "The trees clapped their hands", etc).

Watch for words that tip you off that something should be interpreted figuratively. Such words include: "like," "likeness," "as," "as it were," "as if," etc. (e.g. Rev. 1:13-16 where "like" is used 3 times and "as" or "as if" is used 4 times; Isa. 29:4-5; etc).

2. "INTERPRET GRAMMATICALLY." What we mean here is simply this: **Interpret words & sentences according to the universal laws of good grammar.** We are not saying you have to know all the nuances of the English or Pidgin language. Simply read carefully, pay attention to the commas & full stops (periods). Check the original Hebrew & Greek words by the use of a good concordance (Strong's or Young's) and possibly a book like Vine's Expository Dictionary. **Where a period or comma is placed can make all the difference in the world in the meaning of a verse.** Sometimes two Greek words are translated by the same English word, but are different in the original, and this can help explain a possible difficult passage or seeming "contradiction."

THE GRAMMATICAL CONSTRUCTION SHOULD DETERMINE THE MEANING OF A PASSAGE. See Unger: "Principles of Expository Preaching," in "The Expositor and Grammatical Interpretation." pp. 118-135.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THIS PRINCIPLE. Here are a few simple examples of the use of this principle to help us understand and interpret a passage correctly:

Romans 9:5 - "*Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.*"(KJV) Basic laws of grammar tell us that Christ is called God in the above verse. Consequently this is a good verse to establish the deity of Christ. In fact this verse so clearly teaches the deity of Christ that the Jehovah's Witnesses, in their Bible translation, which is called "The New World Translation" (and which is more properly a MIS-translation) changes it to read thusly: "*To whom the forefathers belong and from whom Christ (sprang) according to the flesh; God, who is over all, (be) blessed forever. Amen.*" Notice that they have simply inserted an interpretive colon which is not called for in the original text. By doing so they make the first part of the verse refer to Christ, but the latter part to God the Father. They thus hope to avoid the idea that Christ is God. This is a blatant example of a group not only violating the principle of grammatical

interpretation, but also deliberately changing the Scriptures! The placement of even a "full stop" (period) can make a BIG difference!

Titus 2:13 - "*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;*" (KJV) or, "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus;" (NASV). **This verse calls Jesus two things. What are they? God & Savior! You just used principles of good grammar to figure that out!** For example, if I said to you, "I'd like to introduce you to the editor and president of my local newspaper," you'd be expecting to meet ONE man. However, if I said, "I'd like to introduce you to the editor, and to the president of my local newspaper," you would expect to meet TWO different individuals. Why? Because that is what the sentences mean when written in that way, with those words and that punctuation. **Likewise, if the Holy Spirit had intended to make Christ and God different and/or unequal in this verse, He would have inserted the little word "of" between "and" & "our" in Titus 2:13.** But the Holy Spirit did not do that, for the very good reason that Christ IS equal with God the Father. So in order to avoid the clear teaching of that verse, the Jehovah's Witnesses "New World Translation" deliberately mistranslates it, adding the word "of" which is not in the Greek text. It reads thus in their translation: "*while we wait for the happy hope and glorious manifestation of the great God and of our Savior Christ Jesus...*" **There is NO manuscript basis for their addition of the little word "of" The only reason it has been added by the "JW's", is in order to eliminate the idea that Christ is God!**

Matthew 25:46 - In this verse we find the words "*everlasting*" & "*eternal*." Today many do not believe that hell is eternal. However these same people believe that life in heaven is eternal! Since there are seemingly two different words in this verse in the KJV, one might think that there is a difference between "*everlasting*" punishment & "*eternal*" life. **But by simply getting out your concordance and looking up the verse you will find out that both "eternal" & "everlasting" are exactly the SAME Greek word!** Thus if hell isn't eternal, neither is heaven. You can't have it both ways. In reality, both heaven & hell are eternal, and this verse clearly teaches that!

Galatians 6:2,5 - "*Bear ye one another's BURDENS...*" vs. "*...every man shall bear his own BURDEN.*" Is this a contradiction? Not at all! **Again, by simply checking in a good concordance one can find out that the words translated "burden" are two different words.** The word for burden in verse 2 means a BIG burden, while the word for burden in verse 5 means a SMALL load. There is no contradiction. Believers are commanded to help each other in the major burdens and difficulties of life, while realizing that all of us have to carry some burdens that are common to all of us. A simple word study reveals the answer.

Matthew 16:18 - "*...thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" (KJV) For centuries the Roman Catholic Church has claimed that in this passage Peter is called the rock upon which Christ would build His Church (i.e. that Peter was here designated the first pope). An impartial search of Scripture however will demonstrate that such an interpretation cannot be correct (e.g. Christ is the cornerstone-not Peter (I Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20; I Pet. 2:4, 6, 7-8; etc); The "*gates of hell*" did prevail against Peter so obviously he is not the "rock" being referred to by Christ (Matt. 26:69-75; Gal. 2:11-14); James was the leader of the early "*mother*" church in Jerusalem, not Peter (Acts 15:13-ff); etc. Apart from those facts, if one simply follows the principle under consideration here of interpreting grammatically (i.e. paying careful attention to the grammatical construction, and the definition and meaning of the words used) one will conclude that the RCC interpretation is erroneous. A close examination of the original Greek words will uncover the fact that the word for Peter (*Petros*) means "little stone", while the word for rock (*Petra*) means "foundation stone" or "bedrock!" In other words, Christ was making a "*play on words*," saying to Peter, "*you are a little stone, and upon this bedrock* (i.e. the climactic confession Peter had just made that Christ was indeed the Messiah) *I will build my Church!*" For example: "Petra denotes a mass of rock, as distinct from *petros*, a detached stone or boulder, or a stone that might be thrown or easily moved...In John 1:42 *petros* stands for the proper name, Peter...*petros* denotes a piece of a rock, a detached stone or boulder, in contrast to *petra*, a mass of rock." (W.E. Vine, "*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*" [Fleming H. Revell Company: Old Tappan, NJ, 1966]; Vol. III [Lo-Ser], p. 302, & Vol. IV [Set-Z], p. 76, italics in the original); "*Petra...*(a large mass of) rock... *Petros...*'a stone' or 'a boulder'" (Robert L. Thomas, "*New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*", [Foundation Publications: Anaheim, CA, 1998], p. 1557). A reading of the context of Matthew 16 and a careful study of Christ's three year ministry will demonstrate the progressive, growing understanding of Christ's identity that came to the twelve disciples as they observed His powerful words and miraculous works.

3. “INTERPRET CULTURALLY &/or HISTORICALLY.” The New Testament was written nearly 2,000 years ago. The Old Testament was written from 2,300 to 3,500 years ago. All of it was written in a Middle Eastern (Oriental) cultural setting. An understanding of the history of the times in which it was written, as well as the Middle Eastern (primarily Jewish) culture in which it was couched is imperative if we are to understand much of it. **In short, we must learn to think like a Middle Easterner who lived 2,000 years ago, if we are to understand it fully.** So the more we can learn about the culture, customs, and history of Bible times, the better we will understand the Bible. All of Scripture is connected with the history and culture of its time. The historical background can determine an author's meaning. So don't miss the meaning of a passage by failing to interpret historically &/or culturally.

What I would like to do now is simply present a lengthy series of examples of historical or cultural information that give real insight into various passages of Scripture. Hopefully this will do two things: (1) Illuminate your understanding of some biblical passages that you may not have correctly understood previously, and, (2) Whet your appetite to do similar research on your own-especially as you seek to preach and teach God's Word to others!

a) **“BY MY SPIRIT” - Zech. 4:6.** "Then He answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts." Many use the statement "not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit..." without understanding its historical setting. The Jews had returned after a 70 year captivity and were trying to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The work had bogged down, and many of the old Jews who had returned felt what was being built was pathetic in comparison to the physical glory of the previous temple built by Solomon. But God sent Zechariah to stir the hearts of the people to finish construction. The point of the above verse, as well as verse 10 ("For who hath despised the day of small things...") was that the ability to finish the construction, as well as God's blessing, was not dependent on how fancy the temple was. God would strengthen their little band to finish the work, and the people shouldn't despise the less elaborate rebuilt temple since God's blessing did not depend on how fancy the temple might be! There can be a number of applications of the truth that God is not dependent on outward, physical power or extravagance, but the primary meaning had reference to the people of Israel who were rebuilding the temple.

b) **“DWELL BETWEEN HIS SHOULDERS” - Dt. 33:12.** "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the LORD shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders." This had deep meaning to the reader who knew the culture well. It refers to a hammock or cradle, "...made of camel's hair, and used by the village mothers and the mothers of tent dwellers. It is a hammock about two by two and a half feet (60cm x 70cm), with a strong cord at either end, so that it may be carried on the mother's shoulders, with the cords passing across her forehead... When the mother carries the child, she will draw a part of her large white veil over the hammock as a protection against the hot sun, either partly or completely covering it." ("Strange Scriptures That Perplex the Western Mind," Barbara Bowen, p. 21). With the above understanding, reread the verse. While the primary meaning was to the tribe of Benjamin, but there is a wonderful application to any believer who is one of "God's beloved" and the richness of the imagery is greatly enhanced when we understand the custom. It is very similar to how mothers in PNG carry babies on their backs in bilums (string bags).

c) **“A WHITE STONE” - Rev. 2:17.** In some cases, there are several plausible options regarding the precise meaning of "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone..." Here are several: "If a man sins against a young woman of his tribe or of another tribe, he will be put to death. However, sometimes the people accept 'blood' money and the culprit goes free. Always afterwards he lives in a white tent, or rides a white camel, and has a large white stone in front of his tent. These are to show that no one has any right to harm him; he is forgiven; the price is paid and it is with him now as though he had never committed the sin" ("Strange Scriptures", pp. 64-65). "In the ancient world a white stone was a vote of acquittal and approval. A black stone was a vote of condemnation and disapproval. When a body such as the Sanhedrin heard a case presented, they would come to a vote on it. A bowl was passed around, and each member cast into it a white stone or a black stone to indicate approval or disapproval. This is where our idiom 'to blackball someone' came from. In the case of voting for candidates for office, sometimes the very names of the candidates were scratched on the stones. Archaeologists have discovered such stones in the ruins of ancient buildings. The Lord Jesus will give His faithful people a vote of approval so specific that their names are on the vote." ("From Patmos to Paradise-A Commentary on Revelation", Stewart Custer (BJU Press: Greenville, SC, 2004), p. 29. John MacArthur: "There has been much speculation about what the white stone symbolizes. Some link it with the Urim and Thummim on the breastplate of the high priest (Ex. 28:15, 30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8)...Others identify the white stone as a diamond, the most precious of stones, symbolizing God's

precious gift of eternal life to believers. It seems best, however, to understand the white stone in light of the Roman custom of awarding white stones to the victors in athletic contests. A white stone, inscribed with the athlete's name, served as his ticket to a special awards banquet. In this view, Christ promises the overcomers entrance to the eternal victory celebration in heaven." (*The MacArthur NT Commentary-Revelation 1-11*", (Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 1999), p. 91.

d) "**A LAMP UNTO MY FEET...A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH**" - Ps. 119:105. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Again, the full depth of meaning eludes us if we are not interpreting historically. "Several years ago we were on our way from Emmaus to Jerusalem late at night, traveling on donkey back. As we rode along we noticed a path at a distance, but leading to ours, along which some men were walking. As they approached us, we noticed that as they walked over this narrow, stony path, filled with holes and many good places to stumble, a little light kept shooting out before them. We waited until they joined us and found they had small foot lamps. Some had straps tied around the ankle with a small clay lamp attached; others were larger clay lamps carried in the hand. They would swing the lamp a few feet before them to throw a light on the stony, unsafe path... God does not promise light for a mile ahead or a half mile, but for one step at a time"(Ibid, p. 78).

e) **TYRE** - Ezek. 26:3, 4, 8, 12. The power of this prophetic passage referring to Tyre can never be fully appreciated or understood until one knows the history of what happened to Tyre over several centuries. "Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to mainland Tyre three years after the prophecy...When Nebuchadnezzar broke the gates down, he found the city almost empty. The majority of the people had moved by ship to an island about one-half mile off the coast and fortified a city there. The mainland city was destroyed in 573...but the city of Tyre on the island remained a powerful city for several hundred years... The next incident was with Alexander the Great... 'Tyre was one city divided between the mainland and an Alcatraz-like island fortress. Nebuchadnezzar took the mainland city but passed by the island city. Alexander planned... to take all of Tyre... (it) would obviously be a massive undertaking. The island was completely surrounded by powerful walls, reaching to the very edges of the sea... this Greek general decided to build a land peninsula out to the island. Work went well at first, but the depth increased as they progressed, as did also the harassment from the Tyrians. From their high walls, the islanders could do much damage, especially when one remembers that the workers were prepared for work and not war... Occasionally the Tyrians would stage raids on the causeway which greatly retarded progress... this activity was countered by the Greeks with two tall towers built and manned directly on the mole (causeway) for protection... The Tyrians countered here with a full-scale raid on the whole operation which was very successful; they made use of fire-ships to start the towers burning and then swarmed over the mole after the Greeks were routed. General destruction of the mole was made to as great an extent as the raiding party was capable... Alexander realized he needed ships. He began pressuring and mustering conquered subjects to make ships available for this operation... Alexander's navy grew from cities and areas as follows: Sidon, Aradus, Byblus,... 10 from Rhodes, three from Soli and Mallos, 10 from Lycia, a big one from Macedon, and 120 from Cyprus... Philip Myers (a secular historian) made an interesting quote here;... The larger part of the site of the once great city is now bare as the top of a rock- a place where the fishermen that still frequent the spot spread their nets to dry.'" (*Evidence That Demands a Verdict*," by Josh McDowell (Here's Life Publishers: San Bernardino, CA, 1979), pp. 275-276).

f) **ATHENS** - Acts 17:16-34. Before preaching on Paul at Athens, thorough research on the city of Athens is highly recommended. See for instance "*The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands*", Charles F. Pfeiffer & Howard Vos (Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 1967), pp. 460-475. There are many facts about the city that greatly aid in interpreting the text. In addition, a thorough acquaintance with Athens will enable you to make the passage come to life as you describe it to your listeners!

g) "**THE CAMEL & THE NEEDLE'S EYE**" - Luke 18:25. On this one, there are at least two quite different possible interpretations, both based on culture/history. The first view is that Christ meant a real, bona-fide sewing needle. Some scholars point out that such a proverbial saying was in common use among the Jews of that day.

The second view is that the "needle's eye" refers to a small gate in city walls. "Various interpretations have been given to (Christ's) statement... that (the) needle's eye was the name of a certain type of gate... I wondered whether this actually was what Jesus referred to... But the question was settled in my mind while I was in the Holy Land a few years ago. A Syrian guide was taking me through the city of Damascus on a tour. We came to a section of what apparently had been a very ancient wall, and he called my attention to the nature of the huge wooden gates. Then he pointed to a small, low door beside the main gate... I was convinced. The Jaffa gate in Jerusalem also has a very fine example of one of these small 'needle eye' entrances... Picture the metaphor Jesus

used. Camels loaded with sacks of grain, wood, charcoal, or other commodities entered the city daily. If a merchant should happen to arrive in the evening after the main gates of the city were closed, the only way he and his beast could possibly enter would be for the camel to be unloaded of all of its baggage and made to kneel and literally crawl through the 'needle's eye' on his knees... The clear implication is that a wealthy man, in order to become a Christian, must be ready to let go of his material wealth and humble himself to the level of a poverty-stricken sinner at the feet of Jesus. The rich young man would not do this; hence, he could not enter" (G. Christian Weiss, *"Insights into Bible Times and Customs."* Back to the Bible: Lincoln, NE, 1972, pp. 24-26).

h) **"COALS OF FIRE ON THEIR HEAD" - Rom 12:20.** "Here is what I believe to be the most natural and obvious interpretation of the apostle's statement. In Bible times, and even today in Bible lands, the only fire the people have in their dwellings is kept in a brazier or in a clay pot. Here, coals of charcoal are continuously kept burning. If this charcoal fire ever goes out, some member of the family must take the brazier or pot to a neighbor's house to borrow some live coals from him. In those countries almost everything is carried on the head... a female member of the family lifts the brazier to her head and starts for home. If the neighbor happens to be a truly generous woman, she will 'heap' the brazier or pot... if she is stingy or reluctant, she may only give a few tiny embers... when the Apostle Paul exhorted Christians to feed an enemy and to give him drink... This would be a symbol of the finest generosity and sincerity" (Weiss, Ibid, pp. 68-70).

i) **THE LOST COIN - Luke 15:8-10.** "A practice of long standing in Bible lands... is that when a woman marries, her bridegroom gives her a wedding gift of a string of ten pieces of silver... often worn on her headdress, or it might be worn around her neck... In Bible times it was a particularly great calamity if a wife lost one of the coins which her husband had given her at the time of their wedding... such carelessness on her part would be regarded by her husband as a lack of affection and respect for him. He might even suspect her of having spent the coin for some secret, sinister purpose... Among the Jewish people, the 'nuptial coins' worn by the wife were held very sacred and could not be taken by a creditor to pay a debt. The wife could use this money only in the case of destitution in widowhood... One can also see that this parable is just as important as the other two in Luke 15 in illustrating the joy that exists in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents..." (Weiss, Ibid, pp. 71-72).

"The lost coin belonged to a coin-bedecked headdress of the kind often worn by Palestinian wives as part of the dowry given to them at marriage. The woman in this parable lit a candle, not because it was nighttime, but because the typical Palestinian house lacked windows and had only one low door, which let in very little light. Apparently the coin had fallen on the lower level of the one-room house. There it lay hidden somewhere underneath the straw scattered over the lower level because of domestic animals. The housewife swept with a broom, probably a palm branch, not to uncover the coin but to make it tinkle on the hard earthen floor so that she could determine its whereabouts" (Robert H. Gundry, *"A Survey of the New Testament."* Academic Books-Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 1981 revised edition, p.160).

j) **MARRIAGE CUSTOMS - Mt. 22 & 25.** The Groom comes last, and once inside, doors sometimes are shut and no further guests are allowed! Also the march through the streets, and the bride's maidens-in-waiting, will often go out from his house with lamps to join the welcome and escort as the bridegroom comes near, amidst shouts of "He is coming, he is coming."

k) **PHARISEES.** "A Pharisee could not eat in the house of a 'sinner' (a non-Pharisee), but might entertain a sinner in his own house. He had to provide clothes however, the sinner's own clothes being ritually impure. Observance of the Sabbath was similarly scrupulous. Some rabbis of the Pharisees forbade spitting on the bare ground during the Sabbath lest the action disturb the dirt and thus constitute plowing, which would break the prohibition of working on the Sabbath. A woman should not look in a mirror on the Sabbath lest she see a grey hair, be tempted to pluck it out, yield to the temptation, and thereby work on the Sabbath... But the Pharisees devised legal loopholes for their convenience. Though one could not carry his clothes in his arms out of a burning house on the Sabbath, he could put on several layers of clothing and bring them out by wearing them. A Pharisee was not supposed to travel on the Sabbath more than three-fifths of a mile from the town or city where he lived. But if he wished to go farther, on Friday he deposited food for two meals three-fifths of a mile from his home in the direction he wished to travel. The deposit of food made that place his home-away-from-home, so that on the Sabbath he could travel yet another three-fifths of a mile... (Mk. 2:23-28; Mt. 12:1-8).

"The disciples were plucking grain while going through the fields (Mk 2:23-28; Matt. 12:1-8; etc.), not because they wished to antagonize the Pharisees, but because they were genuinely hungry. Deuteronomy 23:25

permitted the practice. Stealing was not the charge, therefore, but working on the Sabbath by rubbing the grain in their hands to separate the kernels from the chaff (threshing!).

“In the well-known parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Lk. 18:10-14), the prayer of the Pharisee may be paralleled by the following excerpt from the Jewish Prayer Book: 'Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast not made me a Gentile... who hast not made me a slave... who hast not made me a woman.'...But modern stereotyping of the figures of the Pharisee and the publican has taken away the force of the parable. Pharisees seriously served God by fasting twice a week (Mondays & Thursdays), tithing all their possessions, and keeping the moral, ethical, and ceremonial commandments of the law. The common people admired them greatly. Publicans, on the other hand, collaborated with the hated Roman oppressors, fleeced their fellow Jews, and practiced all sorts of fraud; the common people detested them. The audience must have been shocked to hear Jesus put the Pharisee in a bad light, the publican in a good light. But the very unexpectedness in the reversal of good and bad roles underscored the nature of forgiveness as God's gift, unmerited and granted solely on the basis of repentant faith...

“*Moses' seat* refers to the chair on synagogue platforms from which the rabbis of the Pharisees interpreted the Mosaic law to congregations (Mt. 23:2,6; Mk. 12:38-40; Lk. 20:45-47). Jesus told His listeners to obey the Mosaic law when it was taught by the Pharisees, but not to follow their example. He proceeded to compare the rabbis, who added their own rulings to the Mosaic law, to a merciless camel driver who overloads his camel and then will not raise even a finger to adjust the load so that there will be an equal distribution of weight on both sides. 'Phylacteries' (v.5) refers to amulets containing copied portions of the law and fastened to the left arm and forehead. The Pharisees made them especially large to parade their piety. The display also included the lengthening of the blue borders or tassels at the corners of their garments, worn in accordance with Numbers 15:37-41... The gnat (Mt. 23:16-ff) was a small unclean insect, the camel a large unclean animal. The Pharisees strained wine through a piece of cloth or a fine wicker basket to make sure they would not swallow an unclean insect in drinking the wine." (All the above from Gundry, *Ibid*, pp. 48, 130, 165, 178-79).

Sabbath laws and regulations. “One section of the Talmud, the major compilation of Jewish tradition, has twenty-four chapters listing Sabbath laws. One law specified that the basic limit for travel was 3,000 feet from one's house; but various exceptions were provided. If you had placed some food within 3,000 feet of your house, you could go there to eat it; and because the food was considered an extension of the house, you could then go another 3,000 feet beyond the food. If a rope were placed across an adjoining street or alley, the building on the other side, as well as the alley between, could be considered part of your house.

“Certain objects could be lifted up and put down only from and to certain places. Other things could be lifted up from a public place and set down in a private one, and vice versa. Still others could be picked up in a wide place and put down in a legally free place—but rabbis could not agree about the meanings of wide and free!

“Under Sabbath regulations, a Jew could not carry a load heavier than a dried fig; but if an object weighed half that amount he could carry it twice. Eating restrictions were among the most detailed and extensive. You could eat nothing larger than an olive; and even if you tasted half an olive, found it to be rotten and spit it out, that half was considered to have been eaten as far as the allowance was concerned.

“Throwing an object into the air with one hand and catching it with the other was prohibited. If the Sabbath overtook you as you reached for some food, the food was to be dropped before drawing your arm back, lest you be guilty of carrying a burden.

“Tailors did not carry a needle with them on the Sabbath for fear they might be tempted to mend a garment and thereby perform work. Nothing could be bought or sold, and clothing could not be dyed or washed. A letter could not be dispatched, even if by the hand of a Gentile. No fire could be lit or extinguished—including fire for a lamp—although a fire already lit could be used within certain limits. For that reason, some orthodox Jews today use automatic timers to turn on lights in their homes well before the Sabbath begins. Otherwise they might forget to turn them on in time and have to spend the night in the dark.

“Baths could not be taken for fear some of the water might spill onto the floor and ‘wash’ it. Chairs could not be moved because dragging them might make a furrow in the ground, and a woman was not to look in a mirror lest she see a gray hair and be tempted to pull it out. You could carry ink enough to draw only two letters of the alphabet, and false teeth could not be worn because they exceeded the weight limit for burdens.

“According to those hair-splitting regulations, a Jew could not pull off even a handful of grain to eat on the Sabbath unless he were starving—which, of course, is often a difficult thing to determine and would be cause for considerable differences of opinion. If a person became ill on the Sabbath, only enough treatment could be given to keep him alive. Treatment to make him improve was declared to be work, and therefore forbidden...Among the many other forbidden Sabbath activities were: sewing, plowing, reaping, grinding, baking, threshing, binding sheaves, winnowing, sifting, dying, shearing, spinning, kneading, separating or weaving two threads, tying or untying a knot, and sewing two stitches.

“The Sabbath was anything but a time of rest. It had become a time of oppressive frustration and anxiety. The people were sick to death of this system that had been imposed on them by ungodly, worldly legalists, and they were indeed ‘weary and heavy-laden’ (Matt. 11:28). (John MacArthur, *“New Testament Commentary-Matthew 8-15”* [Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 1987], pp. 281-283)

l) **"SCHOOLMASTERS"** - Gal. 3:24-28. "Jewish boys entered local synagogue schools at about 6 years of age. There they used the Old Testament as a textbook for reading and writing. Lessons also included simple arithmetic, extra-biblical Jewish tradition, and complicated religious rituals. Besides this narrow academic training, every Jewish boy learned a trade. To become an advanced scholar in the Old Testament, a Jewish young man attached himself as a pupil to a rabbi. For example, Paul, before his conversion, studied under the famous rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). In contrast, Graeco-Roman education was liberal in scope. Slaves supervised Graeco-Roman boys in their earlier years by giving them their first lessons and **then leading them to and from private schools** (!) till they were brought into adulthood with a great deal of ceremony. As young men they could then attend universities at Athens, Rhodes, Tarsus, Alexandria, and other places to study philosophy, rhetoric (oratory), law, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, geography, and botany." (Gundry, *Ibid*, p. 52)

m) **"FEEDING OF THE 5,000"** - "For several reasons all four Gospels narrate the feeding of the five thousand (Mk. 6:30-46; Jn. 6:1-15; Matt. 14:13-23; Lk. 9:10-17). It was perhaps the most impressive of Jesus' miracles... the incident was the turning point in the career of Jesus. He performed the miracle during the season of Passover, the very time of year the Jews expected the Messiah to manifest Himself. Furthermore, the Jews expected the Messiah to repeat the Old Testament miracle of manna by feeding them, like a second Moses, at a great apocalyptic feast. The Dead Sea Scrolls even contain instructions for the table arrangements at such a feast. Consequently, when Jesus miraculously fed the crowd (exactly what they expected Messiah to do) at the Passover season (exactly when they expected the Messiah to show Himself openly as the Messiah), they surged forward to make Jesus their king. But He refused. Jesus insisted on becoming the spiritual monarch over their hearts before accepting a politico-military crown" (Gundry, *Ibid*, p. 145).

n) **"FIG TREES"** - Lk. 13:6-9; Mk. 11:12-15. "In the parable of the fruitless fig tree, the tree represents Israel. Since it took three years before the fruit was considered ceremonially clean, and since the owner had for three more years sought in vain for fruit, the tree must have been six years old. Fig trees deprived surrounding vines and other plants by absorbing an extraordinary amount of nourishment from the ground. The owner therefore allowed only one more year, a seventh, for bearing fruit. Likewise, Israel was to have one more chance to bear spiritual fruit pleasing to God... Jesus cursed the barren fig tree on the way into Jerusalem not in a fit of temper, but as a symbolic act. It may be wondered why Jesus expected to find figs when they were out of season. Palestinian fig trees, however, normally retained some green (or winter) figs which had not ripened during the autumn harvest" (Gundry, *Ibid*, pp. 158, 175).

o) **"THAT 'FOX' HEROD"** - Lk. 13:31-32. "Jesus contemptuously referred to Herod as a female fox (vixen) not to be feared, in contrast, say, with a lion. Perhaps the feminine form of 'fox' hinted that Herod was dominated by his unlawful wife Herodias, who had demanded the head of John the Baptist" (Gundry, *Ibid*, p. 159).

p) **"CALL NO MAN 'FATHER'"** - Mt. 23:9. This verse "...does not prohibit the family use of the term 'father,' but it does forbid the religious use of the term 'father' in a way that gives men authority properly belonging to God alone" (Gundry, *Ibid*, p. 179).

q) **"IT IS FINISHED!"** - Jn. 19:30. "*It is finished!*" ...was a shout of victory. Here the Greek has a single word that was sometimes used on receipts to mean, *'Paid in full.'* Not only was Jesus dying. By dying He had also accomplished redemption. He had paid off the debt of sin" (Gundry, p.193).

r) **THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE** - Mt. 27:51. "The veil of the temple is said to have been sixty feet by thirty feet with the thickness of the palm of the hand (about 5 inches [12.5cm]). The rending of the veil from the TOP to the bottom represented divine action..." (Gundry, Ibid).

s) **ROMAN CITIZENSHIP** - Acts 22:26-29 cf. Acts 16:37-40. Paul "...was about to be scourged [i.e. beaten with a flagellum (Latin), which consisted of leather thongs attached to a wooden handle and weighted with sharp bits of bone and metal. Men often died from the ordeal.] for the purpose of extracting information from him, an illegal procedure against an un-condemned Roman citizen... Paul's citizenship by birth was superior in status. The names of citizens were registered in Rome and in their places of residence. The citizens themselves possessed wax, wooden, or metal certificates with the names of witnesses. Execution was the penalty for false claim to citizenship. If a citizen was not carrying his certificate or if his certificate was suspected of forgery, the authorities might ask him to produce his witnesses. Possibly for this reason Paul, who traveled widely, did not appeal to his Roman citizenship very often... (while in Rome, Paul)..." enjoyed considerable freedom as a prisoner. Though chained to a Roman soldier and confined to the house which he rented, he could receive visitors and any other kind of attention from his friends. The reason for this laxity was that he was a Roman citizen against whom no charge had yet been proved." (Gundry, Ibid, p. 235, 239).

t) **WHO FOUNDED THE CHURCH AT ROME?** "The early church father Clement of Rome suggested that Paul and Peter were martyred in Rome. By the time of Tertullian (early third century) the church had generally accepted this tradition. The local church in Rome, however, was probably not founded by an apostle, certainly not by Paul and almost certainly not by Peter... the Roman historian Suetonius wrote that the emperor Claudius banished the Jews from Rome in A.D. 49 or 50 because of rioting at the instigation of one called 'Chrestus,' probably a misspelling of 'Christus' (Latin for Christ). If so, Christianity had already gone to Rome. But Peter was still in Jerusalem at the Jerusalem Council in about A.D. 49. Furthermore in Romans Paul makes no reference and sends no greeting to the apostle Peter" (Gundry, p. 276).

u) **"THIS GENERATION SHALL NOT PASS AWAY"** - Mt. 24:34. "This generation'-that is, the generation that begins to see the portents of the Tribulation-can be certain the end is very near, even though the specific day and hour will stay uncertain. (footnote) The ambiguity of 'this generation' leaves the possibility open for each generation from Christ's own onward to be the one that will experience the final events of the age." (Gundry, p. 181).

v) **"FROM THE BLOOD OF ABEL TO ZECHARIAH"** - Lk. 11:51. "When Jesus said, 'From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zechariah,' He meant, 'From the first martyr in the Old Testament to the last,' because in the Hebrew arrangement of the Old Testament books Genesis, where we read about Abel, came first and 2 Chronicles, where we read about Zechariah, last. Zechariah was the son of Jehoiada, the high priest during the reign of Joash of Judah, and is not to be confused with the postexilic minor prophet of the same name." (Gundry, p. 158).

w) **"THE ANOINTING OF JESUS' FEET"** - Lk. 7:36-50. "It was customary for uninvited people to enter and watch a dinner party. The prostitute who did so in the following story could stand behind Jesus perfuming His feet because in usual fashion Jesus was reclining horizontally on a cushion, His head toward the table, His feet stretched out behind with sandals off." (Gundry, p. 136).

x) **"THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY"** - Jn. 8:1-11. "The accusers tried to put Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. If He recommended the death penalty in accordance with Mosaic law, they could accuse Him of going against Roman authority, which forbade the Jews to impose the death penalty. If He did not recommend the death penalty, they could destroy Jesus' reputation by telling the people that Jesus did not hold to the Mosaic law. It was customary for the eldest accuser to throw the first stone. The center of attention, therefore, shifted to the eldest when Jesus challenged them, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.' Each accuser left as he became the eldest in the group through the exit of someone older. Various suggestions concerning what Jesus wrote on the ground are inconclusive. The final 'sin no more' keeps Jesus from teaching an easygoing attitude toward sexual immorality." (Gundry, p. 153).

"It should also be noted that the accusers weren't really interested in doing God's will in the matter. If they were, they would have brought the man too, since the law stipulated that both parties should be put to death (Lev. 20:10). Regarding Jesus' writing in the dirt, one has conjectured that perhaps Jesus wrote the names of the accusers in descending order from oldest to youngest, demonstrating His omniscience & that he knew them "inside out" and their sins as well. We will never really know until we get to heaven.

y) **SADDUCEES, JESUS & RESURRECTION** - Mt. 22:23-33; Lk. 20:27-40; etc. "Later books of the Old Testament contain several clear proof texts for the doctrine of the resurrection, but the Sadducees accepted only the Pentateuch as fully authoritative. Jesus therefore appealed to God's statement to Moses at the burning bush, *'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.'* The argument was that the present tense *'I am'* implied Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still related to God and therefore alive in spirit as late as the time of Moses." (Gundry, p. 178). This is thus a powerful evidence also for the concept of the verbal-plenary inspiration & inerrancy of Scripture, since Jesus built his whole argument on the simple tense of a verb found in a passage of the Old Testament!

z) **JESUS' RIDING ON THE DONKEY** - Mt. 21:1-11; Jn. 12:12-15. "Jesus rode an unbroken young donkey never before employed for any other purpose and therefore suitable for this sacred use. We may infer from Matthew that to keep the unbroken donkey in line, the mother was led alongside. The palm branches that the crowds spread on the roadway symbolized Jewish nationalism, as shown by the imprint of palm branches on Jewish coins from that period. Their utilization here shows that the crowds still had in mind a nationalistic, political Messiah. But instead of riding into Jerusalem on a war horse in keeping with the idea of the crowd, Jesus rode on a donkey as a meek and peaceful monarch (a positive sign of messiah-ship however, as the prophetic reference from Zech. 9:9 shows). The shout 'Hosanna!' was roughly equivalent to 'God save the King!'" (Gundry, p. 173).

I obtained further insight & explanation regarding why there were two donkeys, during a lecture by Dr. Stewart Custer in a graduate class in 1994. He pointed out that Jesus was, of course, not riding on two donkeys at once. So why two donkeys? Answer: If you have seen funerals, particularly for leaders of countries (e.g. the funeral procession of Presidents Eisenhower & Kennedy) you will note that there was a rider-less charger (horse) led in front of the horse-drawn carriage carrying the body of the deceased leader. This tradition goes back thousands of years. Usually the lead horse has its stirrups turned backward, to show that the country is leaderless. Christ came and let the donkey stay rider-less to show that the previous king is gone, and then he rode the second one to show that He is the new king. He rode on a donkey because that was the symbol of peace. Horses were symbols of war.

aa) **"I SPEAK, NOT THE LORD"** - I Cor. 7:12 cf. v. 10. "Paul's indication that these instructions are his own rather than the Lord's does not imply they lack authority, but merely that Jesus said nothing on these points and therefore Paul must give his own teaching as one who is 'trustworthy' and possesses the Spirit (vv. 25,40)." (Gundry, pp. 265-66).

bb) **"BEAR YOUR OWN BURDEN" vs. "BEAR ONE ANOTHERS BURDENS"** - Gal. 6:2,5. The key to this text is that there are two different Greek words translated "burden" in the KJV. The word in verse two means a very large burden, while the word in verse five refers to a normal, individual-size load. The lesson is this: we are to carry our own responsibilities, but help others with enormous, life-crushing problems. (Note: This should properly belong under II).

cc) **PAUL WITH FELIX** - Acts 24:24-27. "His (Tertullus') flattery of the governor Felix and promise of brevity (vv. 1-4) were traditional ways to begin speeches. Drusilla was a girl bride not yet twenty years old. As a small child she had been betrothed to a crown prince in Asia Minor; but the marriage did not take place because the prince refused to embrace Judaism. Later, Drusilla married the king of a petty state in Syria. When she was sixteen, however, Felix, with the help of a magician from Cyprus, lured her from her husband to become his third wife. Quite understandably, then, when Paul reasoned with Felix and Drusilla about righteousness, self-control, and the future judgment, Felix, who had expected an abstract discussion of Christianity, thought the sermon uncomfortably pointed and personal. He dismissed Paul from their presence, but still kept him in custody and hoped that Paul would offer him a bribe to be freed. But hope for a bribe from Paul was not the only factor that prevented Felix from releasing the apostle... Felix's offending the Jews on a number of previous occasions and a change of administration in the central government at Rome had made his political position as governor rather precarious. He dared not offend the Jews again by releasing Paul." (Gundry, p. 236).

dd) **"MARANATHA"-EVIDENCE OF 1ST CENTURY AUTHENTICITY** - I Cor. 16:22. "...an important Aramaic phrase, *'Maranatha'* which means 'O (our) Lord, come!' (compare Rev. 22:20). It shows that the designation of Jesus as Lord dates from early times in Aramaic-speaking circles and is therefore not to be attributed to later, Greek-speaking Christianity--against the claim of some modern (liberal) scholars that the view of Jesus as a divine figure was a rather tardy development, not original to Jesus Himself or to the earliest Church." (Gundry, p. 269).

ee) **GNOSTICISM & THE APOSTLE JOHN - I John & Colossians.** "The heresy of Gnosticism was probably growing in Christendom by the time John wrote. Indeed, according to early tradition John hurriedly left a public bath in Ephesus when he heard the Gnostic leader Cerinthus had entered. (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III. iii. 4: 'There are also those who heard from him [Polycarp] that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, "Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within"). Building on the notion that matter is inherently evil, Cerinthus distinguished between an immaterial, divine Christ-spirit and a human Jesus with a physical body, and said the Christ-spirit came on the human Jesus right after His baptism and left just before the Crucifixion. Against this Cerinthian doctrine John stresses that it was the one person 'Jesus Christ' who began His public manifestation by being baptized and finished it by being crucified; 'This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood' (I Jn. 5:6). That is, Jesus Christ really died as well as entered His ministry by the water of baptism. The water also refers to the water which flowed with the blood from Jesus' pierced side and proved the reality of His death." (Gundry, pp. 338-39).

ff) **"LAODICEA" - Rev. 3:14-18.** "Laodicea was a prosperous center of banking, a place of manufacture of clothing from the raven-black wool of sheep raised in the region, and a center for medical studies. In particular, a famous Phrygian powder used to cure eye diseases came from the region. So self-sufficient was Laodicea that after a destructive earthquake in A.D. 60, the city did not need the financial aid Rome gave to neighboring cities for reconstruction. In clear allusion to these facts Christ castigates the Laodicean Christians for their spiritual poverty and nakedness in the midst of affluence and advises them to acquire spiritual wealth, to clothe themselves with white clothing (righteousness), and to treat their defective spiritual eyesight, or distorted sense of values, with spiritual medicine (3:18). Cold water is refreshing; hot water is useful. But the Laodiceans were like the water from nearby hot springs, which after flowing through the aqueduct were tepid--and nauseating... At (nearby [18 miles distant]) Hierapolis (there were located)...ancient hot springs. The spring water has been celebrated from ancient times as a cure for eye trouble. Such hot springs also provided lukewarm drinking water for the nearby Laodiceans." (Gundry, pp. 351, 353).

gg) **"THE POUNDS" - Luke 19:11-28.** A "pound" or "mina" = 100 drachmas or \$16.00, so 10 pounds equaled approximately K232. "The parable teaches that, contrary to the expectations of the crowd accompanying Jesus, the kingdom of God would not appear immediately in its outward political form. Instead, there was to be an interval during which Jesus would be absent. Meanwhile, the disciples are to work faithfully. When Jesus does return, there will not be a triumph for the Jewish nation in which every Jew will automatically participate. Rather, Jesus will reward or punish people individually. Perhaps we feel sorry for the harshly treated servant who instead of investing the money entrusted to him carefully preserved it. The point is, however, that no such condition as 'safe' discipleship exists. To follow Jesus truly entails the risk of life-investment, as opposed to the security of life-preserving." (Gundry, p. 169). "Notice that each servant received the same amount (in contrast to the parable of the talents in which each received according to his ability, Matt. 25:15). The minas represent the equal opportunity of life itself; the talents, the different gifts God gives each individual." (Charles Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*-NASV. Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 1978, p. 1584).

hh) **"IF ANY MAN THIRST... I AM THE LIGHT" - Jn. 7:37-39; 8:12.** "During the first seven days of the Festival of Tabernacles, priests brought water in a golden vessel from the Pool of Siloam to the temple for a water-pouring ceremony. On the climatic eight (or seventh) day of the festival, Jesus shouted to the crowd in the temple courts that He was the source of the true spiritual water, the life-giving Spirit... Throughout the week-long Festival of Tabernacles the Jews keep four huge candelabra burning in the temple area to commemorate the pillar of fire which led and guarded Israel in the wilderness (See the Mishnaic quotation from Sukkah 4:1, 5ff.; 9:5ff., in C.K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background*, pp. 157-159.). That custom formed the background for Jesus' claim to be the true spiritual light." (Gundry, Op cit., p. 153).

A fuller explanation of the ceremony comes from Dr. Edersheim: "Yet a third company was taking part in a still more interesting service. To the sound of music, a procession started from the Temple. It followed a priest who bore a golden pitcher, capable of holding about two pints (1 litre)... When the Temple-procession had reached the Pool of Siloam, the priest filled his golden pitcher from its waters. Then they went back to the Temple, so timing it that they should arrive just as the pieces of the sacrifice were being laid on the great Altar of Burnt offering towards the close of the ordinary Morning sacrifice service... Priests trumpets welcomed the arrival of the priest, as he entered through the 'Water-gate'... Here he was joined by another priest, who carried the wine for the drink-offering. The two priests ascended 'the rise' of the altar... the wine was poured, and, at the same time, the water into the western and narrower opening.

"Immediately after 'the pouring of water,' the great 'Hallel' consisting of Psalms cxiii to cxviii was chanted antiphonally, or rather with responses, to the accompaniment of the flute... while to each of the other lines they responded by Hallelu Yah... As they repeated these lines, they shook towards the altar the branches which they held in their hands--as if with this token of the past to express the reality and cause of their praise, and to remind God of His promises. It is this moment which should be chiefly kept in view... the public services closed with a procession round the altar by the priests, who chanted, 'O then, work now salvation, Jehovah! o Jehovah, send now prosperity.'

"But on 'the last, the Great Day of the Feast,' this procession of priests made the circuit of the altar, not only once but seven times, as if they were again compassing, but now with prayer, the Gentile Jericho... We can have little difficulty in determining at what part of the services of 'the last, the Great Day of the Feast,' Jesus stood and cried, 'If any one thirst let him come unto Me and drink!' It must have been with special reference to the ceremony of the outpouring of the water, which was considered the central part of the service. Moreover, all would understand that His words must refer to the Holy Spirit, since the rite was universally regarded as symbolical of His outpouring.

"The forthpouring of the water was immediately followed by the chanting of the Hallel. But after that there must have been a short pause to prepare for the festive sacrifices. It was then, immediately after the symbolic rite of water-pouring, immediately after the people had responded by repeating those lines from Psalm cxviii--given thanks, and prayed that Jehovah would send salvation and prosperity, and had shaken their branches towards the altar, thus praising 'with heart and mouth and hands,' and then silence had fallen upon them--that there rose, so loud as to be heard throughout the Temple, the voice of Jesus. He interrupted not the services, for they had for the moment ceased: He interpreted, and He fulfilled them." (Alfred Edersheim, "*Jesus, the Messiah*." Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI, 1979 reprint (1 vol. edition), pp. 316-319).

ii) **"THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM" & "BINDING & LOOSING"** - Mt. 16:19. "The keys of the kingdom and the binding and loosing have been variously explained as authority 1) to establish rules of church order and discipline; 2) to open the door of the church first to Jews and then the Gentiles (which Peter did on the Day of Pentecost [Acts 2] & later in Cornelius' house [Acts 10]) (cf. Acts 15:7 where Peter recognizes that fact); 3) to forgive sins (a Roman Catholic view when tied to the Roman Catholic understanding of priesthood); (4) to admit or refuse admittance into the church according to people's response to the Gospel; and (5) to accept or reject professing disciples who have denied Jesus and then want to come back into the church. In receiving this authority, Peter represented the other disciples; for the power of binding and loosing belongs to all of them according to Matthew 18:18"(Gundry, op cit., p. 149). Keys in Scripture symbolize authority & "Depict the responsible position and the power to make decisions...(Rev. 3:7 is)...a quotation from Isa. 22:22, where it is a symbol of authority. Compare the 'keys of death and of Hades' (1:18) and the 'keys of the kingdom' (Matt. 16:19)." (*Ryrie Study Bible*, pp. 1044 & 1899). cf. Isa. 22:22; Lk. 11:52; & Rev. 3:7; 9:1-11. So *anyone* who knows the way of salvation taught in the Word of God possesses the keys to the kingdom! Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, saying that they had possessed the "key of knowledge" but did not enter the kingdom of heaven themselves, and hindered others from coming in!

jj) **WASHING FEET** - Jn. 13:1-11. "The ambitious scurrying of the disciples for the honored seats nearest Jesus, the host at the meal, contrasts sharply with the humble service of Jesus in washing the disciples' feet, the duty of a slave. According to Jewish custom, the pupils of a rabbi were expected to perform the duties of slaves for him, except for washing his feet, which was too menial. Here the rabbi did for His pupils what not even they were expected to do for Him." (Gundry, p. 184).

kk) **"...AND I WILL WATER YOUR CAMELS ALSO"** - Gen. 24:14. "The test which the servant used to find a proper wife for Isaac is a signal to the reader of the values expected of the wife in this society. This was so important that the narrative has him repeat the description of the test three times for emphasis. His plan was to let the bride demonstrate her wisdom by offering him and his camels a drink. Such attention to the laws of hospitality could be expected with respect to the man, but only a truly wise woman could be expected also to have concern for another man's animals. If she knew the value of property before marriage, it could be expected that she would be a suitable mistress of his master's household afterwards (see also Prov. 31:10-31). (Victor H. Matthews, "*Manners and Customs in the Bible*." Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody, MA, 1995, pp. 21-22).

ll) **HEMS & GARMENTS** - I Sam. 24:6-7. "The rather elaborate hems with suspended tassels found on most garments in the ancient Near East symbolized the rank of kings and their advisers as well as the military. This can be seen in David's remorse over cutting off the hem of Saul's garment in I Sam. 24:6-7. He realized that by

doing this he had symbolically weakened the king's authority. Hem and tassels; parts of which were dyed blue with an extract taken from the hypobranchial gland of the murex snail, were also worn as a sign of wealth among the nobility and merchant class (Ezek. 23:6). Even the poor, however, were expected to have at least four blue threads in their tassels as a sign of devotion (Num. 15:37-41)." (Matthews, p. 119).

mm) **CITY WALLS.** Cities in the ancient world contained several major features. Most important among these was the wall. Ancient cities unearthed in Palestine had walls as much as 30 feet thick, rising to a height of 50 feet or more. They were constructed of a mixture of stone and mud brick, with larger quantities of stone being used in the hill country sites where it was more easily quarried... The walls were the major defense of the city and thus were constantly maintained and refortified with towers and in some cases with the addition of a glacis. This latter feature consisted of a clay and stone slope built up against the face of the wall. Some were plastered over to present a smooth surface that would be more difficult for attackers to scale. The glacis was also designed to prevent the effective use of battering rams against the wall or city gate (see Joab's attack on Beth-Maacah in 2 Sam. 20:15-16).

"Open field tactics, terrain considerations, and strategies based on numbers of chariots and soldiers that can be brought to play are found in a number of biblical passages (1 Kings 20:23-30; 22:29-36; 2 Kings 23:28-30). However, a major challenge to military strategists in the monarchy period was the capture of a walled city. The strong points of the city (walls, glacis, moat, and gate complex) had to be overcome. Again, it was the Assyrians who perfected strategies to offset each of these challenges. Their reliefs (pictures) show assault ramps, wheeled tanks attached to battering rams, sappers tunneling under walls, infantrymen with inflated goat skins crossing rivers and moats, and mobile towers bristling with archers thrust up against the city wall. Tactics involving these methods and structures were probably used in the Assyrian capture of Samaria (2 Kings 17:5-6) and the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1-4).

"While the people of the city rained down stones and arrows on their attackers (2 Sam. 11:24), the strategy of the besieging army was to spread the defenders as thinly as possible along the walls. During lulls in the fighting psychological ploys were sometimes employed. In 2 Kings 18:19-35, Rabshakeh, the Assyrian spokesman, called to the people of Jerusalem to surrender and to overthrow King Hezekiah... famine also worked in favor of the besieging army. They could continue to obtain supplies from the surrounding countryside and from supply columns. However, if the siege lasted for too long the defenders found the price of goods rising precipitously (2 Kings 6:25) and they sometimes resorted to cannibalism (2 Kings 6:26-29). Water supplies were a constant matter of concern. Cisterns (water tanks) were dug around the city (Jer. 38:6) and built into the roofs of many homes to catch rain water. In times of war the entrance to springs outside the city walls were concealed (2 Chron. 32:4) and a water tunnel was cut from inside the city to the spring. The Siloam Tunnel may have been constructed by Hezekiah to divert the waters of the Spring of Gihon prior to the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 20:20). It was driven through solid rock for over 1700 feet by two teams of workmen cutting from opposite directions. In some places this tunnel is over 155 feet below the ground... These tunnels could also sometimes be a weak point for the city, as David's men demonstrated when they traversed the tunnel into Jerusalem to surprise and capture the city (2 Sam. 5:8)." (Matthews, pp. 103-104, 149).

nn) **HEROD THE GREAT - Mt. 2:16-18.** "The Roman senate approved the kingship of Herod, but he had to gain control of Palestine by force of arms. Because his ancestry was Idumean (Edomite), the Jews resented him. Herod was scheming, jealous, and cruel; he killed two of his own wives and at least three of his own sons. According to Matthew's nativity account, it was he who had the infants in Bethlehem slaughtered. Augustus (Caesar Octavius) once said it was better to be Herod's pig than his son (a play on words, since the Greek words for *pig* and *son* sound very much alike)." (Gundry, p.11)

oo) **JEWISH SYNAGOGUES.** "It is debatable whether synagogues originated during the exile, the restoration, or the inter-testamental period. But a reasonable conjecture is that since Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the first temple (Solomon's) and deported most of the people from Palestine, they established local centers of worship called synagogues ('assemblies') wherever ten adult Jewish men could be found... The typical synagogue consisted of a rectangular auditorium with a raised speaker's platform, behind which rested a portable chest or shrine containing Old Testament scrolls. The congregation sat on stone benches running along two or three walls and on mats and possibly wooden chairs in the center of the room. In front, facing the congregation, sat the ruler and elders of the synagogue. Singing was unaccompanied. To read from an Old Testament scroll, the speaker stood. To preach, he sat down. For prayer, everyone stood.

"The typical synagogue serviced consisted of: (1) Antiphonal recitations of the Shema (Deut. 6:4ff., the 'golden text' of Judaism [*Shema* is the Hebrew word 'Hear']) and of the Shemone Esreh (a series of praises to God

[Shemone Esreh means 'eighteen,' but in fact the exact number of benedictions has varied from time to time.); (2) Prayer; (3) Singing of Psalms; (4) Readings from the Hebrew Old Testament law and prophets interspersed with a Targum or loose oral translation into Aramaic (or Greek), which many Jews understood better than Hebrew; (5) A sermon (if someone competent was present); and (6) A blessing or benediction... The whole congregation joined in the 'Amen' at the close of prayers. The head of the synagogue selected different members of the congregation to lead the recitations, read the Scripture, and preach. Qualified visitors were likewise invited to speak, a practice which opened many opportunities for Paul to preach the gospel in synagogues." (Gundry, pp. 38-39).

pp) **THE MACCABEES.** Antiochus "... sent his general Apollonius with an army of 22,000 to collect tribute, outlaw Judaism, and enforce heathenism as a means of consolidating his empire and replenishing his treasury. The soldiers plundered Jerusalem, tore down its houses and walls, and burned the city. Jewish men were killed, women and children enslaved. It became a capital offense to practice circumcision, observe the Sabbath, celebrate Jewish festivals, or possess copies of the Old Testament. Many Old Testament scrolls were destroyed. Pagan sacrifices became compulsory, as did processional marching in honor of Dionysus (or Bacchus) the Greek god of wine. An altar to the Syrian high god, identified as Zeus, was erected in the temple. Animals abominable according to the Mosaic law were sacrificed on the altar, and 'sacred prostitution' was practiced in the temple precincts.

"Jewish resistance came quickly. In the village of Modein (or Modin) a royal agent (kiaz) of Antiochus urged an elderly priest named Mattathias to set an example for the villagers by offering a heathen sacrifice. Mattathias refused. When another Jew stepped forward to comply, Mattathias killed him, killed the royal agent, demolished the altar, and fled to the mountains with his five sons and other sympathizers. Thus the Maccabean Revolt began in 167 B.C. under the leadership of Mattathias's family. We call this family the Hasmoneans, from Hasmon, great grandfather of Mattathias, or the Maccabees, from the nickname 'Maccabeus' ('the Hammer') given to Judas, one of Mattathias's sons." (Gundry, pp. 7-8).

qq) **CAPITAL PUNISHMENT.** "According to the account of Jesus' trial, the Romans reserved the right of capital punishment... A Talmudic description of stoning says the condemned was first asked for a confession. He was then stripped. A witness against him pushed him face first off a ledge or platform twice the height of a man. The victim was then turned on his back. If he was not dead from the fall, a second witness dropped a stone on his chest. If death had still not occurred, others joined in dropping stones (See the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 6.1-4). Though often cited, however, this description does not apply to New Testament times." (Gundry, p. 215).

rr) **CORINTH.** "Corinth was a port city noted for debauchery. 'To act like a Corinthian' meant to practice immorality. 'Corinthian girl' was synonymous with 'harlot'... The athletic games at Corinth were second only to the Olympics. The outdoor theater accommodated twenty thousand people, the roofed theater three thousand. Temples, shrines, and altars dotted the city. A thousand sacred prostitutes made themselves available at the temple of the Greek goddess Aphrodite. The south side of the marketplace was lined with taverns equipped with underground cisterns for cooling the drinks. Archaeologists have discovered many drinking vessels in these liquor lockers; some bear inscriptions such as 'health,' 'Security,' 'Love,' and names of gods... It is important to understand the background of Paul's discussion concerning food associated with the worship of idols (Rom. 14; I Cor. 8-10). In the ancient world, pagan shrines were the main suppliers of meat for human consumption. Thus most of the meat in butcher shops had been dedicated to idols. The gods received a token portion, burned on the altar--and usually not a 'choice cut' at that! After a sacramental meal with the worshiper, the priests offered the excess meat for sale to the public. Jews, however, usually purchased meat in Jewish shops where they could be sure it had not been dedicated to a pagan god. Should Christians be as scrupulous as the Jews? ...Paul advocates freedom to eat, but cautions his readers lest the exercise of that freedom inflict spiritual damage on people with unformed consciences." (Gundry, pp. 228, 263, 266). NOTE: Additional supplementary historical information will be photocopied & given to you in your hermeneutics class, which you can add to these notes.

4. "INTERPRET ACCORDING TO THE CONTEXT" (i.e. CONTEXTUALLY). What we mean here is simply this: Always read the verses surrounding the verse or verses you wish to understand. The context, or verses surrounding a passage will usually give much help in understanding the author's original meaning! A few examples of this principle follow. NOTE: The New American Standard Bible (NASV) normally shows where most paragraph breaks occur in the text, by the printing of bold-faced numbers at those points. It might be worth purchasing an NASV Bible for that benefit alone, not to mention the high degree of accuracy of that version, in serving as a study Bible.

a) **THE TWO STICKS - Ezek. 37:15-23**. This is a passage the Mormons totally misinterpret, in order to try and give credibility & support to their false Book of Mormon. Here is what an official Mormon (LDS) booklet says: "The Bible prophet Ezekiel foresaw that in the latter days the writings of the Jews-the Bible, and the writings of the remnants of Ephraim-The Book of Mormon, would be joined together: ...and they shall become one in thine hand. (Ezek. 37:17)" (*Joseph Smith's Testimony*, published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, p. 36). Words fail me in trying to describe how ridiculous & totally unbiblical such an interpretation is! If the Mormons simply observed the basic principle of interpreting contextually, they could never arrive at such a silly conclusion.

The passage is relating an object lesson God told Ezekiel to give the Jews. The context (vv. 15-28) makes the meaning completely clear. God Himself interprets the meaning of the object lesson for Ezekiel, so that he would know what to tell the Jews when they asked him for the meaning. The two sticks symbolically represent the divided kingdoms of Israel & Judah and give the Jews God's promise that one day they will no longer be a divided kingdom, but one kingdom, and they will have one king who will rule over them all. That king of course is Jesus, and this passage is yet to be fulfilled. It has absolutely nothing to do with the Bible, and DEFINITELY nothing to do with the Book of Mormon! It might also be added that the story in the Book of Mormon of Jews traveling across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas is a pure fiction with NO scientific or archaeological support whatsoever. Consequently the Bible nowhere teaches that early Mormons are synonymous with the tribe of Ephraim!

b) **LATTER DAY PROPHETS? - Isaiah 11:1-5, 11**. The Mormon church quotes part of the latter verse ("And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people") to try and say that the Bible foretold that there would be an apostasy from the truth and that there would be a future restoration. Mormons believe that this restoration was fulfilled when God visited Joseph Smith and told him to start a new church. However, if the principle of interpreting according to the context is applied, this Mormon teaching is blown out the window! In the context we learn that when this prophecy is fulfilled there will be wolves & lambs lying down together, calves & lions getting along fine, little children playing with deadly snakes without being hurt, lions eating straw like oxen, etc.(vv. 6-9). None of that is happening today, nor did it happen in 1830 when Joseph Smith attempted to rise to fame! The passage is actually a prophecy which refers to Christ's future return and the millennial conditions that will exist at that time.

The Bahai's also misinterpret this passage, and try to claim that the earlier verses describe Baha'u'llah, their alleged prophet. Such an interpretation fails for the same reasons. None of the things described in the passage are occurring, or have occurred, so this passage definitely does not refer to Baha'u'llah!

c) **WE CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT HEAVEN IS LIKE? - I Cor. 2:9**. This verse is often misused by Christian preachers. It states that "...eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Many preachers have then gone on to preach whole messages revolving around the idea that we can't even imagine what heaven is like. But in reality, while we certainly do not know everything about heaven, we do know a lot, as the very next verse makes clear: "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit..."!!

d) **"HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE IF WE NEGLECT SO GREAT SALVATION?" - Heb. 2:3**. This statement is often used by Christians in witnessing to the unsaved. But it was written to professing believers, the writer of Hebrews trying to encourage them not to go back under the laws & customs of Judaism!

e) **I CAN DO ANYTHING THROUGH CHRIST? - Phil. 4:13**. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" is claimed by believers for almost everything from winning sporting events, to passing exams they haven't studied for! But the context makes it clear that Paul was referring to the fact that sometimes he had lots to eat, sometimes he had little, sometimes he had plenty and sometimes he didn't have everything he desired, but God sustained him, regardless of his situation. i.e. He could endure it!

f) **THE 144,000 - Rev. 7 & 14**. It seems as though everyone wants to be the 144,000. Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the 144,000 are JW's. Mormons claim that the 144,000 are the Indians of the southwest United States. Herbert Armstrong of "The Radio Church of God" claimed that the 144,000 were Great Britain & America. But all such interpretations are nonsense. The context makes it clear who they are: Jews! The names of the tribes are listed there. There is no reason to believe that they are anyone or anything else!

g) "**WHERE 2-3 ARE GATHERED... THERE AM I IN THEIR MIDST.**" - Mt. 18:20. This verse is perhaps the most misused verse of all. Usually the verse is quoted whenever we have a low prayer meeting attendance, or few turn up for some activity. But the context makes it clear that this verse refers to church discipline, assuring church leaders that they need not worry when exercising biblical church discipline! Jesus is saying that when you act in accordance with Scripture in disciplining, you can know that God is in agreement with you, for where 2-3 agree regarding such things, we can be sure that heaven is standing behind us in such difficult decisions.

h) **A FALLING AWAY, THEN A RESTORATION? - II Thess. 2:3.** "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first..." Mormons like to quote this much of the verse, to try and support their teaching that all churches fell away from the truth and then God later appointed Joseph Smith to restore truth. Interestingly the Mormons don't even quote the last half of the verse! If they did then everyone would know this verse is referring to the tribulation period before Christ's second coming. What's more, if the Mormons wish to insist that this verse refers to Joseph Smith, then Smith is apparently the anti-Christ, since the verse says that after the falling away, there will not be a restoration, but instead, the "Man of Sin" (the antichrist) will then appear!!

i) **WORK YOUR WAY TO HEAVEN? - Phil. 2:12-13** cf. various passages listed under 5. g. below. The Jehovah's Witness will often try and use Phil. 2:12 ("...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling") to support their false belief that a person must work their way to heaven. However, a simple reading of the context shows the falsehood of their claim. The passage goes on to say "For it is God who works in you (God was already inside i.e. Those Philippian believers were already saved!) both to will and to do of His good pleasure." In other words, Paul is simply saying that since God is working in you, giving you both the desire as well as the power to do good, "work it out" Show it out, or show it forth! Demonstrate that God has saved you, by your godly conduct & behavior! (The term "work out" literally means "show out" or "show forth.").

j) "**THE LORD WATCH BETWEEN ME & THEE...**" - Gen. 31:49. This verse reads: "The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another." The verse sounds beautifully appropriate for two lovers until its context is considered. It turns out to be the suspicious words of Laban to Jacob, warning him not to try to rob him blind when his back is turned! This kind of grievous mistake can be avoided by simply making it a habit to examine the context." (Custer, Tools, Op cit., p. 34).

5. "INTERPRET ACCORDING TO THE HARMONY OF SCRIPTURE (i.e. 'AS A WHOLE')." "This is really viewing the Bible in its entirety as the context." (Custer). What we mean is simply this: The Bible is one book, but it has 66 parts, and we should compare Scripture with Scripture to make sure we are getting the correct interpretation. The Bible does NOT contradict itself! All of it is inspired by God (II Tim. 3:16-17; II Pet. 1:20-21). So if you have 60 clear verses that teach one thing, and come across one verse that seems to teach the opposite, you don't throw the 60 clear verses out in favor of the one difficult one! Rather you go back and study that one verse further, to find out what you are misunderstanding. For example, if the whole Bible teaches that a person is saved by grace through faith (& it does!), and you come across one that seems to imply that a person is saved by works, you don't throw out the clear teaching of the whole Bible for that one verse! You go back and study that one difficult verse further. There is undoubtedly something you're not understanding correctly.

Similarly, in order to understand a doctrine or subject in the Bible properly, we must compare passages with each other. For instance if you just read one verse on prayer which contains a wonderful promise (e.g. "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it"), but haven't studied other verses in Scripture that talk about the conditions that need to be met before we will experience answered prayer, you will have a faulty belief regarding prayer. Compare Scripture with itself, to properly understand it. As an evangelist humorously stated once: "*The Bible sheds a lot of light on those commentaries!*" Now please understand. There is nothing wrong with using good Bible commentaries. In fact I strongly encourage you to do so. But a good, thorough study of related verses throughout the Bible will interpret and clear up many questions. If you have a Bible with cross references in it, USE THEM! Use a concordance to find related verses, especially when studying a topic. Here are a few examples demonstrating the importance of interpreting according to the whole, or the harmony of Scripture:

a) **A VIRGIN OR JUST A YOUNG WOMAN? - Isa. 7:14 cf. Mt. 1:21-23.** The question of whether Isaiah's statement should be interpreted "young woman" or "virgin" is clearly answered by Matthew, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

b) **IS HEALING IN THE ATONEMENT?** - Isa. 53:5c cf. I Pet. 2:23-24. Many charismatic evangelists claim that God doesn't want any believer to be sick declaring: "...the Bible says, 'with His stripes we are healed.'" But if you would read the context of that passage (principle #4 above) you will immediately realize that the healing being talked about is NOT physical, but spiritual, and refers to our sins. A comparison with I Peter 2:23-24, where Peter quotes the Isaiah verse, clearly confirms that this interpretation is correct.

c) **"MY FATHER IS GREATER THAN I"** - John 14:28 cf. Phil. 2:5-8. The Jehovah's Witnesses delight in quoting this verse in John to try and support their false belief that Jesus was not God, or at the least not equal with the Father. The answer though is found in the Philippian passage. Christ voluntarily lowered Himself when he condescended to come to this earth. While He was still fully, 100% God, He was also a man, and as such he experienced limitations that the Father does not experience and that He Himself did not experience prior to coming to earth. For example Jesus got hungry. He got tired. He got thirsty (e.g. Mt. 8:24; Mk. 2:23; Jn. 4:6-7). The Father has no such needs. And so while Christ was upon this earth, He could honestly, legitimately say that the Father was greater than He was. But if you were to ask Christ that same question today, the answer would be no! Christ is now back in heaven, once again He has no limitations, & He, the Father & the Holy Spirit are one!

d) **"I SPEAK, NOT THE LORD"??** - I Cor. 7:12 cf. 7:10 & Mt. 5:32; 19:3-12. At first glance it appears that Paul is saying that I Cor. 7:10 is inspired (the "Lord" says), while verse 12 is not ("I speak, not the Lord"). But by comparing Scripture with Scripture we find out that in verse 10 Paul was quoting teaching that Jesus had already given, while in verse 12 he is given new teaching regarding marriage that Jesus had not previously discussed. Paul was not saying his speech was less inspired, but rather that Jesus hadn't covered the situation he was referring to, so he (Paul) would give further inspired teaching in that area!

e) **IS CHRIST A LESSER GOD??** - Isa. 9:6 cf. Isa. 10:21. In talking with Jehovah's Witnesses you will find out if you quote the former verse, that they will admit that it describes Jesus Christ and also calls Christ "*Mighty God*." But they will immediately answer that while Christ is described as *Mighty God* "...only Jehovah is *Almighty!*" (sic). But this bogus argument is not difficult to answer. Simply turn over a page to Isaiah 10:21 and you will find Jehovah (God the Father) called the same name ("*Mighty God*"). So if the term "*Mighty God*" means a lower, second-class God, then Jehovah is too! Obviously He is not! In reality what these verses demonstrate is that God the Father and God the Son are co-equal in power and glory! In addition, using our principle of interpreting according to the harmony of Scripture, we could note that the Jehovah Witness idea that Jesus is some sort of lesser, secondary "God" is not biblically possible! There is only one God (Dt. 6:4) all other supposed gods are just false idols (I Cor. 8:4-6)!

f) **IF WE USE JESUS' NAME IN PRAYER, WE CAN GET ANYTHING??** - Jn. 14:13-14 cf. Ps. 66:18; Jas. 4:2-3; I Jn. 5:14-15; Jn. 9:31; etc. As mentioned at the start of this section, Jesus was not giving "*Carte Blanche*" (unlimited) power to believers to get anything as long as they ask "in Jesus' name." When we compare this verse with other passages on prayer, we learn that God is not obligated to answer the prayers of the unsaved (though He can answer them if He wishes, and sometimes does!-Jn. 9:31); God will not answer our prayers if we have sin in our heart (Ps. 66:18); He will not answer if we pray with wrong motives (Jas. 4:2-3); God will not answer if we do not ask according to His will (Jn. 5:14-15); etc. Just taking one verse out of context without comparing it with the rest of the Bible will eventually lead into error.

g) **ARE WE SAVED BY WORKS?** - James 2:14-28 cf. Gen. 15:6; 22:9 & Rom. 4:1-5, 16-25. The Bible from cover to cover teaches that salvation is by grace alone (e.g. Rom. 1:17; 3:20,28; 4:5; 5:1; 6:23; II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:16; 3:3,11-13; Eph. 2:5,8-9; Titus 3:5; etc.). So when we read in James 2:24 "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" we can know, before even beginning our study, that the passage in James is clearly NOT teaching that we are saved by "good" works. Applying principle #4 (Interpret contextually) & principle #5 (Interpret according to the whole of Scripture) we find our answer. First of all, since the entire Bible teaches one is saved by grace, we know there must be another answer to the James passage. In looking at the context we note that James uses Abraham as an example. If we will use our cross-references to look up the quotes from Genesis that James uses, we find that the statement "Was not Abraham justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" comes from Genesis 22. But James' statement "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness" comes from Genesis 15. So the "works" that James says showed that Abraham was a believer (Gen. 22) occurred LONG AFTER God had declared Abraham righteous (Gen. 15)! In other words, James is saying that the proof that Abraham was a believer was seen by his behaviour or the works that he performed many years later. It is not that Abraham was saved by offering his son (he WASN'T!). But the proof that Abraham possessed true saving faith was demonstrated by what he did in his life. That this is the proper

interpretation of this passage is confirmed when we compare Paul's clear teaching regarding Abraham in Romans 4.

6. **“INTERPRET ACCORDING TO THE CLEAREST MEANING.”**

a) **EXPLANATION:** "The expositor should not make an interpretation more complicated than is necessary to explain a passage. This principle of economy is often termed '**Occam's Razor**' because of the famous saying of William of Occam, 'The number of entities should not be increased unnecessarily.'... This principle does not mean that the difficult interpretation is invariably wrong, but a complex interpretation should be used only when genuinely necessary." (Custer, *Tools*, p. 37).

b) **EXAMPLES.**

Col. 2:9. This verse, simply and straightforwardly teaches that Christ is God: "...in Him (Christ) dwelleth all the fullness of the godhead bodily." Now the JW's go through a lot of interpretative gymnastics trying to say that this verse does not mean Christ is equal with the Father. This principle says we shouldn't come up with complicated interpretations unless it's clearly necessary. In this case it definitely is NOT necessary—particularly in light of the teaching of the entire Bible that Jesus Christ is God & fully equal with the Father! e.g. Micah 5:2 cf. Ps. 90:2; Isa. 9:6; Mt. 1:21-23; Jn. 1:1; 8:58; 10:30; 14:9; 20:28; Titus 2:13; Rev. 1:7-8 cf. 21:6 & 22:12,13,16,20; Rev. 1:17-18; etc.

The "Moonies" (The Unification Church) come up with similar complicated & fanciful interpretations of all kinds of biblical passages. For example, they teach that the raven & dove that Noah sent out from the ark are actually symbolic for Adam, Jesus Christ & Sun Myung Moon ("*the third Adam*"-sic). That is pure nonsense! The birds were just that—birds!

7. **“INTERPRET REVERENTIALLY.”** **This is the number one principle one should follow, and is really foundational to all of the other principles given! Or as Custer says, "In many ways this is the master principle of all biblical studies."** (Custer, *Tools*, p.28). The Bible is not like any other book, it was inspired by God. And so we should approach it differently. We should also pray and ask the Holy Spirit's guidance in understanding it. If you knew the author of a book and wanted to understand what it taught, if the author was staying at your home the smartest thing to do would be to go and ask him about anything in his book that you didn't understand clearly. So it is with the Bible. The Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible, and is delighted to enlighten our minds if we will pray and ask Him to do so. That is why we should always begin our Bible reading and Bible study times by asking God's help, instruction & illumination! Dr. Stewart Custer makes some excellent comments in this regard:

a) "The Scripture is the Word of the living God. Students of the Bible should come to it with awe and humility, seeking God's message for their souls. There must be submission to the will of the divine Author." (Custer, *Tools*, p. 28).

b) "The student ought to be prepared to obey what he understands in Scripture. **It has been often said that no man can judge the Bible; the Bible judges men.**" (Ibid)

c) "If it is true that the Bible is the verbally inspired and infallible Word of God, the student should treat it with a reverence that is not proper for any other book. **This reverence is not at the expense of a concern for the grammar and history of the Bible but in addition to it.**" (Custer, pp. 28-29).

d) The biblical writers encourage a profound reverence for the Word of God (e.g. Ps. 119:89; Isa. 66:2; Jn. 8:31,32; II Tim. 3:15; I Thess. 2:13).

8. **“INTERPRET IN THE LIGHT OF PROGRESSIVE REVELATION.”** "Although there is a real unity to the teaching of all of Scripture, it is not all equally complex or complete. **Scripture introduces a doctrine in elementary form.** A number of important ideas may be there, but they are in condensed, cryptic form. As the interpreter traces the doctrine through the Scriptures in chronological order of its appearances, the interpreter can perceive the doctrine being expanded, clarified, and thoroughly developed into a unified whole. **The last chronological occurrences of the doctrine are usually the most detailed and complete.** There are several important corollaries to this principle. **The law of first-mention** stresses that the first time a subject is introduced is often a key to the understanding of the later development of the doctrine. A careful study of that

first passage will give insight into later references. Also, **in at least one passage in Scripture the doctrine will be fully discussed and explained.** The interpreter should search for such a key passage. **Finally, the last references to a subject often have parallels with the first mention.**

"For example, the subject 'justification by faith' is first mentioned in Genesis 15:6-7, and this passage strongly influence's later teaching on the subject. Romans 3 and 4 fully expound the subject of justification by faith and specifically refer to Genesis 15:6-7. The last references to justification bring the doctrine to a fitting climax (Rev. 15:3; 19:11; 22:11). The great doctrine of the person of Christ begins in Genesis 3:15 with a cryptic reference to the seed of the woman; there are key passages in the New Testament that shed floods of light on the doctrine (Matt. 1:23); Gal. 4:4ff.); the doctrine comes to a complex end in the final book (Rev. 12:1-5; Rev. 22:13). **Most of the biblical doctrines follow this form of presentation. God has revealed the doctrines in 'germ' form at the beginning, expanded and clarified them by succeeding revelation, and finally brought them to a consummation at the close of His revelation.** The expositor should not expect to find the most complex and detailed presentation of a doctrine at the chronological beginning of its revelation.

IMPORTANT NOTE! "The method of progressive revelation must be sharply distinguished from the liberal hypothesis of the evolutionary development of religion. Liberals suppose that mankind started out in animism and slowly developed first into polytheism, then into monolatry, and finally into monotheism. This supposition contradicts the Genesis record as well as the clear teaching of the New Testament (Gen. 4:4; Rom. 1:21-23)." (Custer, *Ibid*, pp. 34-35).

9. "INTERPRET IN ONE WAY ONLY." "A given passage has only one true interpretation, though it may have many applications to the life of the believer. When the scholastics of the Middle Ages gave a four-fold interpretation of Scripture, it was assumed that a priest would have to explain it to the laity. Such methods led only to confusion. In the Medieval church the term 'Jerusalem' would be given four different meanings in any text of Scripture. Literally it referred to the city; allegorically (symbolically) it meant the church; morally it meant the human soul; and anagogically (spiritually) it referred to the heavenly city. No wonder a priest was needed to explain it! It is much clearer to take 'Jerusalem' as the earthly city (Acts 1:8) unless there is something in the context to indicate that additional meaning is implied (Rev. 21:2).

"A good illustration of the importance of this principle is what interpreters have done with the account of the healing of the lame man at the beautiful gate of the temple (Acts 3:1-8). **The proper interpretation of the account is that the incident is a demonstration of the power of the Lord Jesus Christ in a spectacular miracle** (Acts 3:16). But many applications have been exalted by expositors into the primary position of the interpretation: the lame man is like a sinner sitting at the gate of religion but powerless to enter in; although he may have been an authority on ankle bones, he could not use his own, etc. **Rather than choosing a text that requires such allegorizing methods, it is better to choose one that contains in its main theme the exact literal meaning which the expositor desires to preach on.** If the expositor desires to preach a salvation message, how much better it is to choose a text that tells exactly what one must do to be saved (Acts 16:23-33)." (Custer, *Tools*, pp. 36-37).

ADDITIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING PROPHETIC PASSAGES

There are some particular principles of interpretation in regard to eschatology (prophecy, last things) which I would like to briefly mention before completing this study. In addition to the above nine principles, the following ones should also be kept in mind when studying Bible prophecy (Once again, as with all the previous main points, all of these points, & most of the sub-points are taken from "*Syllabus for OT Prophecy*" (unpublished paper) or "*Tools for Preaching & Teaching the Bible*," both by Dr. Stewart Custer.

10. "INTERPRET CHRISTOLOGICALLY."

a) "Our Lord Jesus Christ is the heart and center of all prophecy (cf. **I Pet. 1:10-11**). Prophecy is arranged in concentric circles around Him. See A.T. Pierson: "*Knowing the Scriptures*," pp. 34-35." (Custer, *Syllabus*, p. 4) & "Michael P.V. Barrett, "*Beginning With Moses: A Guide to Finding Christ in the Old Testament*" (Ambassador-Emerald International: Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1999).

b) Throughout the Old & New Testament Jesus Christ is revealed. He is seen clearly in the New Testament miracles He performed and statements that He made about Himself. But besides such direct statements we are told that many of the characters, instances, etc., of the Bible are types or shadows of Jesus Christ. For example Romans 5:14 tells us

that Adam was 'the figure of him that was to come.' In Luke 24:25-27 we are told that ALL the Scriptures speak of Christ. When interpreting Scripture, and especially prophecy, we need to remember that Christ truly is 'the heart and center of all prophecy.'" (Custer) cf. Heb. 9:9-11,24-26; 11:19 I Pet. 3:20-22; etc.

c) For a good study on this subject see "*Christology of the Old Testament*," by E.W. Hengstenberg. This is a classic and is now in an abridged form running to 700 pages. Such books as "*Portraits of Christ in Genesis*," "*The Tabernacle*," & "*The Romance of Redemption*,"-all by M.R. DeHaan (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI), "*The Tabernacle*," by Henry Soltau (Kregel Publications: Grand Rapids, MI, n.d.) are a few examples of books that are helpful in regard to types. The one by Hengstenberg deals with prophetic passages.

11. "INTERPRET ACCORDING TO THE PERSPECTIVE OF PROPHECY." We have reference here to the prophet and how he views things.

a) "**The prophet often sees things together that are widely separated in fulfillment:** The first and second advents of Christ" (Isa. 61:1-2). (Custer, Syllabus, p. 4). In reading this passage, if you were a Jew living before Christ you would get the impression that when the Messiah came He would immediately set up His kingdom and begin to rule. But such was not the case. It's interesting to note that when Christ read this passage in the synagogue he deliberately stopped in the middle of verse two (Lk. 4:16-21)! This also explains why many of His followers wanted to set Him up as a physical, political king. They misunderstood this prophecy, because they failed to realize that prophetic passages often telescope, or condense, events that are widely separated.

b) "**The future often appears to be present or completely past...** Prophecies of the future are sometimes described with ancient weapons (Zech. 9:10)." (Ibid).

12. "DON'T OVER-EMPHASIZE PROPHECY." A good student of Scripture studies all of Scripture, not just one part. During the past 2-3 decades there has been a real "glut" of books dealing with Bible prophecy which have flooded the market. Some people spend all their time studying nothing but prophecy. Some preachers spend all their time preaching on just one subject: prophecy. To do so is not good. If there is no balance in our preaching & teaching, it will result in the immature development of believers.

13. "DON'T UNDER-EMPHASIZE PROPHECY." Sometimes one may be tempted to say something similar to the following: "Bible prophecy is too complicated, I think I'll just forget about studying it & preaching on it." However that is a wrong attitude! We should not shy away from preaching on a subject of theology because it involves hard, intensive study! God says some very definite things about the sluggard in the book of Proverbs, and a pastor can be lazy in his study and sermon preparation, just as a laborer can be lazy in any other job. May we not be found guilty of laziness when we stand at the judgment seat of Christ!

14. "DON'T BE TOO RELEVANT IN YOUR INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY." We can come up with interpretations that are so "up to date" or relevant, that if Christ doesn't return soon, we will look silly-not to mention wrong! The ones who gathered on a hill in white robes a century or more ago to await Christ's coming are a case in point. Several recent groups and cults have done similar things in the past 20 years! Such groups maintain that they have received their views from a study of the Bible. But to develop such faulty teachings will bring great shame upon Christ and His Word! Jesus said no one knows the day or the hour of His return (Mt. 24:36)! **So steer clear of unbiblical predictions & interpretations, especially in regard to prophecy!** False cults have been making erroneous predictions for a century or more, but it's particularly distressing when Bible believers make similar mistakes!

A couple of examples:

1982-The "Jupiter" Effect. A number of fundamental preachers said that 1982 was going to be the year that the tribulation was going to start. The reason they gave was that all 9 planets would be lined up on one side of the sun, and they felt that this would trigger gravitational upheavals that would occur on earth and be the start of the signs described in the book of Revelation. There were at least two problems with that idea (both of which were pointed out by Christians at that time): (1) The planets would not be in a straight line, but spread out over a 100 degree angle, (2) Such an astronomical occurrence happens every 179 years, and there is nothing in past history that indicates anything extraordinary like that has ever happened in the past! (Custer, quoting Dr. Joseph Henson). Of course nothing happened in 1982, and Christians who had promoted such thinking, or passed out tracts to that effect, were greatly humiliated & embarrassed!

Hal Lindsey. Lindsey wrote the famous book on Bible prophecy, "*The Late, Great Planet Earth*," one of the highest selling books of all time! He is a professing Christian (who has been married three times!). He has written some good things regarding Bible prophecy. Unfortunately his later books seem to have gotten farther and farther off base! One man has said about Lindsey's book on Revelation: "Some commentaries on Revelation are helpful to read after generations; Lindsey's is so 'relevant' for this decade (the 1980's) that if the Lord does not return now (the 1980's) it will be of little value for the next generation." (A statement that turned out to be rather prophetic-no pun intended) (Faith for the Family, Vol. 5, No. 10, p. 12).

Here are a few examples of what this critic was referring to: "He (Lindsey) interprets the sixth seal as a nuclear exchange (pp. 108ff.), the first trumpet as a more severe nuclear attack (p. 130), the second trumpet as a colossal H-bomb (p. 131), the third trumpet as another thermonuclear weapon (p. 132), and the fourth trumpet as the pollution in the atmosphere caused by the fallout from the nuclear exchanges (p. 133). Lindsey cannot decide whether the fifth trumpet refers to supernatural mutant locusts or to Cobra helicopters (pp. 138ff.). He is definite in claiming that the last earthquake is a reference to the last full-scale nuclear exchange of all remaining missiles (p. 226)." (Ibid). Lindsey also (previously) stated that he believed Christ would return in 1988. That kind of relevancy is to be avoided at all costs!"

CONCLUSION:

It is hoped that this study has aided you in learning the tools of proper biblical interpretation. It now remains for you to use them daily, as you seek to mine the wealth of spiritual treasure to be found in the Bible! May we say with Psalmist: "*O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day*" (Ps. 119:97).

SUGGESTED READING

Custer, Stewart. "*Tools for Preaching and Teaching the Bible*" (chapters 2-5, pp. 11-52, BJU Press: Greenville, SC, 1979). NOTE: A revised & enlarged edition of this book was issued in 1997 & similar material is found in that volume on pp. 39-52.

MacArthur, John F. Jr. "*Charismatic Chaos*" (chapter 4, pp. 85-105 has a good section on the subject of biblical hermeneutics). Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1992.