

HERMENEUTICS

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Read This First

Hermeneutics is a presentation designed for ministerial education within the Worldwide Church of God. It consists of elementary concepts of this discipline, as applied to the history and tradition of the Church. This material is extremely basic. It should not be considered to encompass even the fundamentals of the discipline of hermeneutics.

The following material is intended to be used in seminars that will be given to all ordained ministers of the Church, beginning in June 1993 and running until the early summer of 1994. Quotations and comments that form the body of this printed presentation will be used to illustrate a verbal presentation, and it is for the private use of those who are invited to be seminar participants.

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It should be understood that this presentation is not yet in its final form. This version (Version 1.1) is substantially different from the first presentation given in early June 1993. This is yet another reason for seminar participants to retain this material for their own use only, realizing that future presentations may include slight modifications. Thank you for your cooperation.

“The thief comes only to steal
and kill and destroy; I have
come that they may have life,
and have it to the full.”

John 10:10

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Principles of Hermeneutics

I. To Begin With...

John 10:10

Traditionally, many ministers and writers in the Worldwide Church of God have quoted John 10:10 as support for a “way of life,” following God’s calling and conversion, that will lead to happiness and “every good thing.” The passage has been used as a fundamental description of the Christian life, the normative pattern of life that Christians can expect because of their calling.

Other scriptures are also used, including the salutation of 3 John 2, “I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health” (KJV), to form the basis of the **health and wealth gospel**. This biblical interpretation is favored by several televangelists and faith healers. This false gospel promises physical, here-and-now blessings over and above the life-style enjoyed by the individual before he or she starts following the tenets of the promoter. This approach is also called the **success gospel**. In this version, the emphasis is on personal development, career advancement, increases in salary, etc. Teachings of motivational speakers are blended and woven with selected scriptures to “prove” that following their brand of Christianity will result in personal success.

The dangers of manipulation, false and misleading promises, and abuse of the gospel are obvious. In addition, the overwhelming evidence of the New Testament emphasizes a radically different result of following Christ. We are told that we will be persecuted, that we will need to take up our cross and follow him and that the normative expectation for Christians is suffering. Free trips to Hawaii, job promotions, new cars or throwing away wheelchairs or crutches are not among the fringe benefits specifically promised by Jesus Christ in John 10:10. We must be careful not to become religious hucksters, selling a specific brand

of medicine that will cure all of the physical ills of those who purchase a bottle. We have no such commission from Jesus Christ.

In the July 1992 issue of *The Plain Truth*, the "Questions" department answered the question, "The apostle John wrote in III John 2 that he wanted the Church members to prosper. Does this mean all Christians should be wealthy?" The response included the thought that this appears as a part of the introductory comments of the letter, and was specifically meant for a man named Gaius. We concluded, "Thus, this verse should not be used as a universal promise that God applies to all his people. This scripture does not guarantee that all Christians will be rich or that they will never suffer from sickness or disease."

Just as we placed 3 John 2 within its **cultural and literary context**, KEY we should also pay closer attention to what John 10:10 actually means, as opposed to glibly using it as a **proof-text**. Chapter 10 of John's Gospel develops the well-known biblical theme of sheep and the shepherd. The accessibility of the shepherd to the sheep is an obvious theme. Strangers do not have a personal relationship with the flock, but the good shepherd does. Verse 10 draws the contrast between Jesus and false shepherds, the thieves who come to kill, steal and destroy.

Many authors have noted that the thesis statement of John's Gospel could be taken from John 20:31. Speaking of the miracles and signs (yet another theme of John), John says, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

The New International Commentary on the New Testament
comments:

Life is one of John's characteristic concepts. He uses the term 36 times, whereas no other New Testament writing has it more than 17 times (this is *Revelation*; next comes *Romans* with 14 times, and *1 John* with 13 times). Thus, in this one writing there occur more than a quarter of all the New Testament references to life. "Life" in John characteristically refers to eternal life (see on 3:15), the gift of God through His Son. Here, however, the term must be taken in its broadest sense. It is only because there is life in the Logos that there is life in anything on earth at all.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary comments on John 10:10:

Jesus' main purpose was the salvation (health) of the sheep, which he defined as free access to pasture and fullness of life. Under his protection and by his gift they can experience the best life can offer. In the context of John's emphasis on eternal life, this statement takes on new significance. Jesus can give a whole new meaning to living because he provides full satisfaction and perfect guidance.

William Barclay's Daily Study Bible adds:

Jesus claims that he came that men might have life and might have it more abundantly. The Greek phrase used for having it more abundantly means to have a superabundance of a thing. To be a follower of Jesus, to know who he is and what he means, is to have a superabundance of life. A Roman soldier came to Julius Caesar with a request for permission to commit suicide. He was a wretched dispirited creature with no vitality. Caesar looked at him.

"Man," he said, "were you ever really alive?" When we try to live our own lives, life is a dull, dispirited thing. When we walk with Jesus, there comes a new vitality, a superabundance of life. It is only when we live with Christ that life becomes really worth living and we begin to live in the real sense of the word.

The Anchor Bible, The Gospel According to John advises that we compare Romans 5:20 with John 10:10 "for a similar expression of the overflowing fullness brought by Christ." Romans 5:20 is discussing the victory of grace over sin: "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more."

In its volume on John, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* summarizes the passage that leads up to John 10:10:

Those who are really "His own" listen to His voice. They recognize that He has been sent from God, and are ready to follow Him as the good Shepherd, who by His sacrificial love rescues His flock from evil and death, and leads them into the best of all pasturage where they can enjoy a richer and a fuller life (9,10). He does not offer them an extension of physical life nor an increase of material possessions, but the possibility, nay the certainty, of a life lived at a higher level in obedience to God's will and reflecting His glory.

In summary, it ought to be obvious that John 10:10 cannot be used by a responsible student of the Bible as though it gives some promise of an improved physical life for the Christian. In fact, in light of the context, such a view is shallow and overlooks the profound truth of the passage. **The passage promises superior, superabundant spiritual life, life empowered by the**

indwelling of Jesus Christ. Because Christians “have” Jesus Christ, because he lives within them, they possess the riches of the superabundant life. This is what Paul meant when he said, “I count all things but loss...that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:8, KJV). This is what Paul meant when he explained that Christ’s death, burial and resurrection was “of first importance” (1 Corinthians 15:3). To attempt a physical, external explanation of what Jesus Christ means to the Christian is to trivialize the profound depth of John 10:10.

3 John 2

An important rule of Bible study is to look at a scripture in the context of its chapter and within its whole book.

Many of the books of the New Testament are, in fact, letters. Third John is a personal letter from the apostle John to a man named Gaius (verse 1). It is not addressed to the Church as a whole but to an individual.

Verse 2 in the New King James Version reads, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.” The New International Version translates this verse, “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.”

According to *The Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, this opening was part of the everyday language of letter writing during the first century. In short, the apostle was writing a common courtesy to his friend.

We can find parallels in modern letter writing. One friend might write to another, “I hope everything is going well with you.” **Thus, this verse should not be used as a universal promise that God applies to all his people.** This scripture does not guarantee

that all Christians will be rich or that they will never suffer from sickness or disease.

To quote this verse out of its context as a proof that Christians whose lives are pleasing to God will prosper and be in good health is to **proof-text**.

II. Hermeneutics Is...

- A. **Hermes:** Hermes was the god in Greek mythology whose task it was to interpret the will of the gods. Hermes was the god of language, who, it was said, invented language as a means of communication between the gods and mortals. Hermes brought the messages of the gods to mortals and was also the god of science, speech, eloquence, writing and art.

Some of the duties and tasks of Hermes are incorporated in the word *hermeneutics*. Hermeneutics refers to the activity of communicating a message from someone (in our case, God's Word, in the form of the Bible) to someone (in our case, 20th-century humankind).

- B. **Definition:** Hermeneutics is the study of the methodological principles of interpreting the Bible. Most biblical scholars consider it as the science of biblical interpretation. Milton S. Terry's work *Biblical Hermeneutics*, considered a traditional classic in this field, draws a distinction between hermeneutics as a science concerned with the study of laws and principles, and hermeneutics as an art concerned with the application of those laws.

Hermeneutics: The broad study of the Scriptures, including literary, grammatical, historical and cultural studies to determine the intended meaning by an author to his original audience. Hermeneutics also includes determining the principles outlined in various scriptures for the application to the present-day audience.

Exegesis: A subset of hermeneutics, specifically referring to grammatical and literary studies.

Grammatico-Historical Method: This method of studying scriptures emphasizes the study of the grammar, literature, language, history and culture of the author and original audience to determine the author's originally intended meaning for his audience.

Here is an example of misapplied hermeneutics regarding the how and when of creation—and the Worldwide Church of God's repositioning of its approach on the issue:

Is the controversy really between science and the Bible, or is it between people—people who espouse certain scientific theories and people who hold certain ideas of how to interpret the Bible?...

The Bible does not specifically address how and when the creation occurred, and it certainly does not describe it in what we would consider scientific terminology. The Bible simply proclaims who did it, and why he did it.

This does not mean the Bible is incomplete or inadequate. It simply means that the Bible is not intended to be a science textbook nor a history textbook.

July 1993 Plain Truth
"Personal"

The scientific implications of Scripture are often misinterpreted by sincere and well-meaning Christians.

The Bible is not a science textbook, however. Scripture assumes the existence of God.

July 1993 Plain Truth
"About This Issue"

The Bible is not a textbook on science. That doesn't mean it is unscientific—just that its primary focus is not a scientific explanation of the phenomena it describes.

It does claim to be the Word of God. But does this mean every word should be interpreted and understood literally?

Think about it. Do you really believe that God is a rock (Psalm 18:2)? Did God send giant eagles to fly Israel on their wings to safety out of Egypt (Exodus 19:4)? Could the Pharisees have literally swallowed camels (Matthew 23:24)? Obviously, these are not literal statements....

Given the purpose for which Genesis was written, the age of the earth was not an issue. Neither was the idea of evolution. At issue was which god or gods created the earth. Genesis' purpose was to show that God made all things, not to provide a detailed scientific explanation of how he made them.

July 1993 Plain Truth
"Religion and Science: Bridging the Gap"

Commenting on the use of Romans 1:20 as a proof of God from design:

It is tempting to take this further and conclude that science is "proving" God, for surely anyone can see that such design must be the work of a divine Designer....

But this is not saying that the facts uncovered by science inevitably pile up to the point where the agnostic—or even the atheist—must conclude there is a Creator. Historically, this line of reasoning is known as "proof from design." ...

From a strictly scientific point of view, other interpretations of the design of the universe, including the earth, are possible. Thus, many scientists do not regard design as irrefutable proof of God's existence.

July 1993 Plain Truth
"Proof From Design"

III. Givens and Maxims

- A.
 - 1. The Bible is the inspired Word of God.
 - 2. The Bible can be understood.
 - 3. Study of the Bible enhances its understanding.
 - 4. The Bible (the Word of God) is the supreme authority for a Christian.
 - 5. The Bible reveals knowledge that cannot be learned from any other source.

Our Responsibility: Scriptures such as 2 Timothy 2:15, “rightly dividing the word of truth” (NKJV), instruct us to use the Bible properly. We are told that some in Peter’s day were wresting and twisting the epistles of Paul, as well as the rest of Scripture (2 Peter 3:16).

Second Peter 1:20 has been referred to as proof that any attempt to interpret Scripture is wrong. No such teaching is intended in this passage. Speaking of the fact that the apostles were eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ and that they did not follow “cunningly devised fables” (verse 16, NKJV), Peter said:

We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21, NKJV).

“Private” in verse 20 is further explained in verse 21 as “the will of man.” That is, no prophecy is the result of a writer’s uninspired origination. This obvious reference back to the “cunningly devised fables” of verse 16 is compared to the true source of prophecy, the Holy Spirit. **This passage only reminds us of the divine origin of Scripture and certainly does not include a directive that we should not attempt to understand it.**

Yet another point for those who would have concerns that “hermeneutics is not biblical” has to do with the goal of hermeneutics. Paul reminds us, “For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:17, NKJV). The word “peddle” is also translated “corrupt” (KJV) and “adulterating” (Moffatt). **Paul is clearly condemning those who misinterpret Scripture.** This is a potential problem even for those whose motives are sincere and godly. We are aware that “peddling,” “corrupt[ing]” and “adulterating” the Word of God is done by those who sincerely attempt to expound and teach it.

Hermeneutics seeks to help students of the Bible avoid misunderstanding. **All humans, Christians included, have their education, experience, fears and prejudices that affect this process. We all gravitate toward the practice of “reading our own understanding” into the Bible.**

Principles of hermeneutics are precepts which express or describe the various ways followed by interpreters to get at meaning. They are statements of procedure. These principles may be adopted (i.e., consciously

learned), adapted (i.e., consciously changed), or simply appropriated from one's habits of thinking (i.e., unconscious acceptance of what the person regards as axiomatic or the natural way to treat any particular kind of subject matter). These principles of hermeneutics are valid or invalid depending on whether or not readers get the idea that the original author intended to convey. (Mickelsen, pp. 5-6.)

R.C. Sproul discusses this issue in his book *Knowing Scripture*, a section he titles "Objectivity and Subjectivity":

Biblical scholars make a necessary distinction between what they call exegesis and eisegesis. Exegesis means to explain what Scripture says. The word comes from the Greek word meaning "to guide out of." The key to exegesis is found in the prefix "ex," which means "from" or "out of." To exegete Scripture is to get out of the words the meaning that is there, no more and no less. On the other hand, eisegesis has the same root but a different prefix. The prefix eis, also coming from the Greek, means "into." Thus, eisegesis involves reading into the text something that isn't there at all. Exegesis is an objective enterprise. Eisegesis involves an exercise in subjectivism.

All of us have to struggle with the problem of subjectivism. The Bible often says things we do not want to hear. We can put earmuffs on our ears and blinders on our eyes. It is much easier and far less painful to criticize the Bible than to allow the Bible to criticize us. No wonder Jesus frequently concluded his words by saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (e.g., Luke 8:8, 14:35).

Subjectivism not only produces error and distortion, but it breeds arrogance as well. To believe what I believe simply because I believe it, or to argue that my opinion is true simply because it is my opinion is the epitome of arrogance. If my views cannot stand the test of objective analysis and verification, humility demands that I abandon them. But the subjectivist has the arrogance to maintain his position with no objective support or corroboration. To say to someone, "If you like to believe what you want to believe, that's fine; I'll believe what I want to believe," only sounds humble on the surface.

Private views must be evaluated in light of outside evidence and opinion because we bring excess baggage to the Bible. No one on the face of this Earth has a perfectly pure understanding of Scripture. We all hold some views and entertain

some ideas that are not of God. Perhaps if we knew precisely which of our views were contrary to God we would abandon them. But to sort them out is very difficult. Thus, our views need the sounding boards and honing steel of other people's research and expertise. (Sproul, pp. 39-40.)

IV. Hermeneutics in the WCG Tradition

Traditional and Historical Presuppositions

- A. Herbert W. Armstrong set doctrine. No other minister, nor certainly any member, is used by God or inspired for this purpose. Unity results from this approach. An example from a class at Ambassador College, 1965: "God often leads Mr. Armstrong to truth even though the facts aren't present or available."

Truth

This approach does help preserve a level of unity.

Myth

No one, other than HWA, can discern truth.

- B. No one else understands. No one else is a Christian. Virtually no one understood between A.D. 100 and 1934.

Truth

There will always be something that someone doesn't understand.

Myth

God is limited and handicapped to our imperfect, diminished perspective. He does not, and has not, called "those to whom the Son chooses to reveal" (Matthew 11:27):

- C. The Bible interprets the Bible. "Here a little, there a little" (Isaiah 28:13, NKJV). The Bible is the only source that ultimately interprets itself. Therefore, there is no need for study, thought and reasoning. The goal is to fit the "pieces of the puzzle" together, and

those pieces are scattered (“here a little, there a little”).
[We will discuss this misapplication of Scripture later.]

- D. Some established and recommended “Bible helps” can be used to aid in Bible study. These include *Strong’s* and *Cruden’s Concordances*, *The Companion Bible*, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, *Nave’s Topical Bible*, “older” commentaries as distinct from current commentaries, *Halley’s Bible Handbook* and general Bible dictionaries and Bible atlases, as well as selected sources that were generally accepted through quotation by ministers, writers and Ambassador College. *Josephus* and *The Two Babylons* have fallen ^{into} this category.

<u>Truth</u>	<u>Myth</u>
“Outside sources” can and should be used to help us understand the Bible.	Older is better...older sources are less tainted by liberal, conspiratorial forces.

- E. We have taught that “difficult scriptures” all have an explanation. Once “the explanation” appears to have been given, members and Ambassador students have noted it in the margins of their Bibles—giving rise to the saying “inspired margins.” This approach obviously tends to foreclose on further study once “the explanation” has been noted.

<u>Truth</u>	<u>Myth</u>
There are explanations to questions about the Bible.	There is always an exact, “true” explanation. Nothing else can be learned once that explanation has been taught.

- F. Members have received the explanations mentioned in point E through their pastors, Church literature and “what they taught at A.C.”
- G. We have taught that “difficult scriptures” need to be understood in their context. The phrase “this verse needs to be understood in its context” has been frequently cited. It usually refers to the immediate text of the passage in question, but the usage has also come to generically mean history and culture.

Truth

Reading any passage out of its context allows for pretext—the potential of reading prior assumptions and conclusions into the Bible.

- H. We have used symbolism and typology extensively. No published definitive work exists of all of our traditional definitions, and some have changed through necessity. Much of our symbolism and typology have existed in our hermeneutic of prophecy. Thus, we have had the “times of the gentiles,” “2520,” “1260,” “seven times” and the “day for a year” principle. The duality of prophecy falls under this heading.

Terms used often in this area included “forerunner,” “type,” “antitype” and “prototype.” The identity of modern-day Israel was taught as the key to prophecy. We have also taught a wide range of symbolism, including:

stars=angels

hills=small nations

mountains=large nations

Numerology has also played a significant role in our hermeneutics. Examples are:

6=number of man

7=number of perfection

40=number of trial

We have also seen symbolism in colors, white and red among the prominent ones.

Truth

Inconsistency in interpreting figurative and symbolic language leads to erroneous conclusions.

A consistent methodology is needed.

Myth

20th-century personalities are referred to in the Bible.

- I. We have taught that the Bible is a "coded book." It is not open to the understanding of those who are not called. Those who are called and in the Church by definition have the Holy Spirit and can understand the "things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). A similar scripture has been quoted regarding the teachings of Jesus. Answering the questions of his disciples about why he spoke in parables, Jesus said, "Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (Matthew 13:13, NKJV). That is, only the converted will understand.
- J. We have understood that the Bible is literal and figurative. We have used the terms literal, symbolic and dual. But no specific criteria for evaluation was ever

established. Determination generally depended on the authority of the minister who wrote, taught or preached about a specific passage.

It was understood that **the literal interpretation of a passage should be attempted first, before looking for figurative meaning.** This is a generally accepted procedure. However, some reason from this premise that any figurative interpretation is weaker, less valid and somewhat compromised from the literal.

When we speak of figurative language in the Bible, some Christians become worried. They think that seeing something as figurative means that it is imaginary or unreal. (Mickelsen and Mickelsen, p. 70.)

I HAVE NOT
HISTORICALLY TAKEN
OUR STATEMENTS AS
"CANONICAL" - NO MEANS
HOW TO DEFEND
OR DEFENDABLE

K. Some specific examples from our literature (exact references available) include:

1. The Bible is a coded book, not intended to be understood until the latter half of the 20th century.
2. The Bible is like a jigsaw puzzle, the pieces will fit together in only one way.
3. The Word of God was inspired to be written unlike a textbook. In the Bible, bits of truth about a subject are scattered all throughout its pages—line upon line and precept upon precept.

4. Nearly all sects and denominations encourage the breaking of God's law, teaching that it is done away.
5. Christianity is not working in the United States because it has never been tried.
6. Commentaries can be helpful, but take them with a "grain of salt."
7. The true gospel must proclaim the law of God, which alone can bring peace to the world and success, happiness and joy to the individual.
8. The whole meaning of the gospel is prophetic.
9. As world events unfold, Christians (and especially the ministry—see Amos 3:7) should begin to match up the world scenario with the biblical prophecies.
10. The world has suppressed God's 7,000-year plan. The suppression of the plan has been diabolical and conspiratorial.
11. One third of the Bible is prophecy, 90 percent of which has not yet been fulfilled.
12. Many who preach and publish material about prophecy do not understand it because they do not understand the only

key that unlocks prophecy—the *U.S. and B.C.* In fact, the August 1981 *Good News* said that, without this understanding, “we are left prophetically rudderless.”

13. Members of the Church of God can actually delay the “march of events”—events that will lead to Christ’s second coming. Christ will not come until we are ready—until we have qualified.
14. No world condition can occur, no intervention in world affairs can occur, unless God reveals it first to the Church.
15. The four-step process for the evaluation of future biblical prophecies is:
 - a. Understand that God reveals prophecy through his true servants.
 - b. Learn the keys of Bible prophecy.
 - c. Read the prophecies in your Bible.
 - d. Read the fulfillments in your newspaper—watch the fulfillments on television.
16. Jesus Christ is the greatest newscaster ever.
17. Jesus Christ was a newscaster of future world events. He was an up-to-date futurist in the true sense of the term.

18. The Bible is an Israelitish book, preeminently of and for the Israelitish nationality, inspired by their God through their prophets.
19. A Sermon-on-the-Mount-type character is required for escaping the Great Tribulation. If you develop such Christlike character, the chances of your escaping the Great Tribulation are very good.
20. The entire book of Ezekiel was written primarily for our day.
21. The composite beast of Revelation 13 and 17 is a code that can be cracked by the "here a little, there a little" principle.
22. Seismic sea waves caused by faults under the sea are forecast in Luke 21:25: "On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea."
23. In Revelation, John uses symbolism of scorpions and locusts to describe end-time armies.
24. Subscribe to or read papers with realistic journalists: William Safire, George F. Will, Evans and Novak, Patrick J. Buchanan, James J. Kilpatrick, Norman

Podhoretz, Phyllis Schlafly, Georgie Ann Geyer. Watching world news involves selecting the proper news sources: *The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Times of London, International Herald Tribune, The Wall Street Journal, Christian Science Monitor.*

V. Historical Overview of Hermeneutics

- A. **First Century Church:** Most scholars agree that the *Church did not have a need for formal hermeneutics* while the original apostles were alive. They were eyewitnesses, as Peter tells us, and their personal credibility was accepted within the Church. It should also be noted that the Jews had already pioneered in this field with their high view of Scripture, understood by the attention to detail evidenced by copyists and scribes.

While the Jews' methodology is another study in its own right, it is clear that they laid the foundation for early New Testament interpretation. Suffice it to say, they were meticulous in their scholarship. They even came to regard the individual letters as holy. They did hold the Law in greater esteem than they did the Prophets and the Writings. As a result, the interpretation of the Law was most important to them. The Midrash was a commentary or exegesis that they devised. Most of us are familiar with the Talmud. Later, Hillel and his "school" enunciated seven rules of interpretation. Both Terry and Berkhof have sections on the Jewish background for further study.

- B. **The Patristic Age:** In this age of the early church fathers, a number of far-reaching trends began to develop. Origen is credited with the development of the double and multiple sense of the Bible. This approach opened the door to a subjective approach to Scripture, with the result that the passage in question often came to mean anything but the original intent of the author.

Origen's philosophy, influenced by Philo and the Alexandrian school, also included the thought that the Bible is divine and thus cannot include anything unworthy of God. Further, he reasoned, taken in its literal sense, there was much in the Bible that was unworthy of God—material that was not reasonable. Therefore, human reason established that much of the Bible needed to be changed because it was not logical, and, in fact, seemed false and misleading. This approach paved the way for allegory.

Following Origen, further contributions in this area were made by Jerome and Augustine. They are recognized as the leading proponents of the Western approach to exegesis. Jerome, of course, is best known for his translation of the Vulgate.

Augustine adopted the *fourfold* sense of Scripture. Also called the quadriga, this fourfold method included the following senses:

- literal
- moral
- allegorical
- analogical

The *allegorical* meaning included prophetic meaning as well as the topological meaning. It was by far the most common and popular method of interpreting Scripture until the Reformation.

The *analogical* method referred to an eschatological (end-time) interpretation, which often found its fulfillment in the Church.

The *moral* method was also called the tropological (tropos—a way of life). This had to do with the moral significance of a passage. The *literal* should not need further explanation.

Another important development had to do with the role of the Catholic Church in interpreting Scripture. The church taught that it was the custodian of Scripture. In addition, the church taught that the oral tradition of the church, the writings of the church fathers and the decisions of the councils were part of the interpretive criteria. No passage of Scripture was allowed to be in conflict with the doctrine of the church. Much of their thought in this area was undergirded by the principle of development. The New Testament and its teachings were seen as seeds that were growing and developing. Thus, the church was justified in building a body of tradition that helped Christians understand the Bible.

C. **The Reformation:** Several important principles came out of the Reformation that continue to influence the world of hermeneutics:

1. **The Authority Principle:** The Bible is the supreme and final authority. *Sola Scriptura* was one of the Reformers' themes. This was a radical change from "the church determining what the Scriptures teach" to "the Scriptures determining what the church taught." Many feel that this was the central theme of the Reformation.

2. **The Literal Principle:** The Reformers believed that much abuse had resulted from allegory. Luther

called allegory “dirt” and “scum,” and likened it to a “monkey game.” He was not totally adverse to allegorical interpretation if the object was Christ and not something devised by the Papacy. In this regard, the Reformers accepted the primacy of the original languages. This led to the important development of the historical and grammatical principles.

3. **The Sufficiency Principle:** This guideline is also called the perspicuity of Scripture. The Reformers declared the clarity of Scripture. That is, the Bible is written to be understood.

The Sufficiency Principle has also been called the Principle of Private Interpretation. R.C. Sproul comments:

After Luther's bold declaration and subsequent work of translating the Bible into German at Wartburg, the Roman Catholic Church did not roll over and play dead. The Church mobilized its forces into a three-pronged counteroffensive known as the Counter Reformation.

One of the sharpest prongs of the counterattack was the formulation against Protestantism made by the Council of Trent. Trent spoke to many of the issues raised by Luther and other Reformers. Among those issues was the issue of private interpretation. Trent said:

“To check unbridled spirits it [the Council] decrees that no one, relying on his own

judgment shall in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions presume to interpret them contrary to the sense which Holy Mother Church to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation has held or holds or even contrary to the unanimous teaching of the Fathers, even though such interpretations should never at any time be published."

Did you catch the flavor of this pronouncement? The statement is saying, among other things, that it is the responsibility of the Roman Catholic Church to expound the Scriptures and to declare the meaning of the Scriptures. This is not to be a matter of private judgment or private opinion. This statement by Trent was clearly designed to speak to the Reformation principle of private interpretation. (Sproul, pp. 34-35.)

4. **The Analogy of Faith:** That is, the Bible can be interpreted by the Bible. The Analogy of Faith declared that the Bible does not contradict itself. This approach dictated that the Christian attempt to harmonize Scripture rather than attempt to criticize its discrepancies.

Supplementing this approach was the concept of the priesthood of all believers. All Christians had access to Jesus Christ and could be led to understand the Bible through the Holy Spirit. This was a reaction to the heavy-handed approach of the Papacy. While there are many differing perspectives of the "priesthood of all believers," the effect has been to make the Bible the property of the individual Christian and not the church alone.

Once again, we must recognize dangers in either extreme. Ministers and members alike have responsibilities in studying and applying the Word of God.

D. Post Reformation:

The development of the **grammatico-historical method** deserves some comment. This method was an 18th-century attempt to marry an interpretative approach with grammar and history. The grammatical school bases sound interpretation on language and its usage. The historical school attempts to understand the text via a study of the background, culture and prejudices of the historical setting of the original author. With a few embellishments, the grammatico-historical method is a fundamental step in forming the basis for a sound, conservative and biblically based hermeneutic.

1. With our understanding of inspiration in mind, the techniques of Bible study that are acceptable

to the tenets and practices of the Worldwide Church of God are generally based in the grammatico-historical approach.

2. This approach to studying the Scriptures will inspire Church members in their personal Bible study. It is easy for a member who has been in the Church for 10 or more years to say: "I already know that scripture. I don't need to restudy it." When your members hear you explain the Scriptures more thoroughly, they will say to themselves: "I never saw that before. Maybe there's more to the Scriptures than I thought."
3. You will use fewer scriptures in your sermons. Using fewer scriptures will allow you to mine the ethical, inspirational and doctrinal teachings of the scriptures you use. We often shortchange the real power and effectiveness of the scriptures we use in our sermons.
4. Your sermons will "spring from the Scriptures." Having a thorough mastery of the scriptures you are using for your sermon will drive home the entire content of your message.

VI. Grammatico-Historical Approach to Hermeneutics

- A. **Correct Reading of Text:** Most of us do not know Old Testament Hebrew or New Testament Greek. If we can pronounce a word written in either language, we're doing pretty well. Nor do most of us have the time or desire to learn these languages. With these facts in mind, we have to rely on other people to translate the Bible for us and to define the usage of the words. But we don't have to feel intimidated by that or feel insecure. The Bible translators really know what they are doing and they explain a great deal to us.

It's best to wipe the slate clean and start over with a fresh Bible that is not marked. For your main studying/reading Bible, it helps to select a translation that you are not as familiar with. The different wordings will trigger new thoughts and fields of study.

1. **Translations:** The most effective way for us to learn what the original languages of the Bible mean is to read them in translation. There is nothing wrong with that. That's how Bible translators make their living. Some excellent translations, without limiting ourselves to this list, are:

- a. New International Version
- b. New King James Version
- c. New Revised Standard Version
- d. Revised English Bible
- e. New American Standard Bible

Please see the "Some Popular Bibles at a Glance" chart, Appendix A, page 67.

B. Form or Genre—Understanding the Language:

Some general forms or genre used in the Bible:

- a. History (Narrative)
- b. Wisdom Sayings
 - 1. Proverbs
 - 2. Riddles
- c. Prophecy
 - 1. Prediction and Warning
 - 2. Apocalyptic
- d. Poetry
- e. Law
- f. Gospel
- g. Epistle

An example of Poetry/Songs:

The basic form of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. Hebrew poetry pervades the Old Testament (one third of the Old Testament is poetry), and the parallel form influences the Greek New Testament.

Poetic parallelism is found in virtually every book of the Old Testament. Parallelism introduces an idea and then, in the next line, expands on that thought. Often, the second line clarifies or narrows the intent of the passage.

1. **Synonymous Parallelism**—A repetition of a thought, with the second line often explaining the ultimate meaning.

Psalm 10:1: *Why, O Lord, do you stand far off?
Why do you hide yourself in
times of trouble?*

2. **Antithetic Parallelism**—A contrast of two parallel but opposite ideas.

Psalm 1:6: *For the Lord watches over the
way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will
perish.*

3. **Prophetic Poetry**—A striking combination of parallelism and imagery. It is important to understand that parallelism is not limited to the Psalms. It was a dynamic part of Hebrew speaking and writing.

Amos 3:3-7: *Do two walk together unless
they have agreed to do so?*

*Does a lion roar in the thicket
when he has no prey?*

*Does he growl in his den
when he has caught nothing?*

*Does a bird fall into a trap on the
ground where no snare has been
set?*

*Does a trap spring up from the
earth when there is nothing to
catch?*

*When a trumpet sounds in a city,
do not the people tremble?
When disaster comes to a city,
has not the Lord caused it?*

*Surely the Sovereign Lord does
nothing without revealing his plan
to his servants the prophets.*

God gives seven rhetorical questions that show how two events can be connected. Cause and effect is being demonstrated. Each statement argues from an observed result to an assumed cause.

The first of these questions is a statement of parallelism teaching the obvious. Walking together for any period of time will involve a meeting of the minds.

Verse 7 ends the series of questions and explains the role of prophets in interpreting. The statement shows the close relationship between God and the prophet in making known God's will. God uses prophets to proclaim judgment.

But can all of this somehow be interpreted to mean that we are prophets, and that we know what God will do before he does it? Taking either verse 3 or verse 7 out of context is not an appropriate use of Scripture.

Examples of Prophetic Literature—Apocalyptic:

[Three recently updated PCD letters follow. These should give you a “feel” for how we are explaining speculative prophecy and apocalyptic literature.]

L020

Thank you for your recent inquiry about the mysterious words “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN” found in Daniel 5:25.

Belshazzar, ruler of the Babylonian Empire, watched as these words were supernaturally written on the palace wall the very night his kingdom fell. Most biblical scholars and historians agree that the “handwriting on the wall” occurred in 539 B.C. Each of the words written on the wall indicated not only a measure of weight (used in much the same way as our ounce and pound or gram and kilogram) but also a specific meaning apart from weight.

Thus, the *mene* not only indicated a specific weight, but also meant, in a broader sense, “counted out” and “measured.” God had “counted out” the years of Belshazzar and had determined that his reign was now complete (verse 26).

The basic unit of weight in Babylon was the gold shekel. The word that appeared on the wall was *tekel*, a cognate of *shekel*. Daniel applied this word to Belshazzar himself. Belshazzar was weighed and “found wanting” (verse 27).

The final word was *upharsin*, which is derived from a verb meaning to divide. Belshazzar’s kingdom had “been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians” (verse 28). As verse 30 explains, “That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain.”

Some earlier students of biblical prophecy have attempted to explain the handwriting on the wall by converting the weights to a common monetary value. For example, a *mene* they evaluated as 50 shekels. *Mene, mene* would equal 100 shekels, a *upharsin* (or *peres*, verse 28) could be valued at half a *mene* or 25

shekels, and a tekkel would equal one shekel. According to this methodology, the next step would be to add these numbers together, totaling 126 shekels. Some have then further proposed reducing this number to the common coin, or gerah (a shekel equals 20 gerahs). Following these steps, the total amount of the monetary value would be 2,520 gerahs.

This explanation continues by noting the date of Babylon's fall, 539 B.C. Finally, some have found it interesting to speculate that the 2,520 gerahs could represent years. Depending on how events in the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar are calculated, this speculation brings its adherents to a date between 1975 and 1982.

However, many modern biblical reference books, based on the latest archaeological and historical information, calculate the value system of the Babylonian money differently. For example, there is evidence that a mene was valued at a standard 60 shekels, not 50. Of course the total of all the coins would be considerably different based on this information. In addition, this method of calculating prophecy is arbitrary and easily manipulated. Since the 1970s and 1980s have come and gone, it would appear that interpreting the coinage in prophetic years has no validity.

While many people have attempted to interpret this passage as an elaborate eschatology, it is impossible to pinpoint an exact prophetic fulfillment other than what occurred in 539 B.C. Such speculation may be interesting, but should not obscure the clear intent of this divinely inspired message to Belshazzar.

Thank you for your question. It is a pleasure to assist you with your study of the Bible.

L057

We received your inquiry and are happy to answer your question. You asked whether the Bible provides support or evidence for a 7000-year plan of God.

No scriptural reference categorically states or proves this theory. Based on the seven-day week, and on the seven days of creation, some have reasoned that God has also set aside some 7000 years to work with man. Verse 8 in 2 Peter 3, which includes the words "one day is as a thousand years," is used to support this view. Peter was inspired by God to use this phrase to help humans understand God.

This scripture is not necessarily intended to be understood as a literal statement concerning chronology. In this passage, God's eternity is explained metaphorically to show the vast difference between God and man. It is not wise to use this reference to establish a set method for calculating biblical chronology that God has not clearly revealed.

In earlier times, many Christians looked to the conclusions of Archbishop James Ussher of Arlet in Ireland. Based on Archbishop Ussher's calculations, many Christians wrongly believed that Scripture said that the universe and the earth, as well as all life, had been created only 6000 years ago. In the year 1658, Ussher worked out an exact year that he believed pointed to the creation of the earth. He believed that the earth was created on Sunday, October 23, 4004 B.C.

Bishop Ussher created many chronologies using dates and events in the Bible. He was a strong proponent of the concept of a 7000-year plan. However, scholars have found numerous inaccuracies in the chronological works of Ussher. Additionally, scientific studies in geology and astronomy have shown that the universe and earth came into existence billions of years ago.

Throughout history, students of the Bible have naturally been interested in trying to establish a set period of time in which God's plan will be fulfilled. Often, these theories are based on misunderstandings of, or even a disregard for, the findings of geology, astronomy and archaeology. Nowhere in the Bible do we find a clear

date as to the beginning of human life. Through the use of carbon-14 dating, evidence suggests that modern forms of human life may have existed long before 4000 B.C.

Revelation 20:1-4 indicates that the future reign of Christ on earth encompasses a literal 1000-year period. However, that in itself does not prove that the earlier portion of God's plan is an exact 6000 years. A period of 6000 years, prior to the reign of Jesus Christ, cannot be proven merely by drawing an analogy with the seven-day week. The Bible nowhere specifies a figure of 6000 or 7000 years.

The content and meaning of God's plan is infinitely more important than its time frame. Similarly, it is more important to be ready for the return of Christ than to know the date of his return. God's plan centers around his power, love, and saving grace, not chronologies and "endless genealogies, which cause disputes" (1 Timothy 1:4).

Thank you for your question. It has been a pleasure serving you.

[The reader may also refer to *The Plain Truth*, July 1993, p. 21]

T003

Thank you for your question concerning the 1,290 and 1,335 days mentioned in Daniel 12:11-12.

First, it will be helpful to understand the emphasis of the book of Daniel. Daniel demonstrates the absolute sovereignty of God while depicting a long-range, grand overview of God's plan of salvation.

The first portion of the book is dedicated to the inspiring accounts of Daniel's relationship with God and how God directed his life. We are encouraged as we read how God intervened and rescued Daniel and his friends as they lived and worked in the midst of Babylon.

The book of Daniel is written in a literary style called apocalyptic. *Apocalyptic* derives its meaning from the Greek *apokalyptein* ("to uncover" or "to unveil"). This style of writing conveys the hope and expectations of the people of God in all ages, who live and work in the midst of spiritual Babylon as they look to the events related to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Apocalyptic style is characterized by a heavy usage of symbolic representations and terminology. The theme of apocalyptic passages is often conveyed with images and symbols. We must, therefore, view the detailed prophecies of Daniel with this in mind.

Chapter 12 specifically addresses the time known among students of the Bible as the Great Tribulation. Jesus referred to this time period in Matthew 24:21-22. Daniel 12:1 discusses this time as a time of trouble "such as never was since there was a nation." The verse continues to promise God's salvation: "At that time your people shall be delivered."

Verses 2 and 3 discuss the resurrection and the eternal inheritance of the righteous. This reassurance and encouragement is reiterated at the end of the chapter: "You . . . will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days" (verse 13).

Chapter 12 is a continuation of an inspired revelation given to Daniel in vision by an angel. This revelation begins in chapter 10 and continues through chapters 11 and 12. The angel, the messenger of this revelation, then instructs Daniel, in chapter 12, verse 4, to seal the words of this revelation.

The practice of "sealing" originated in the Middle East and certified that a letter or other document was exact and official as written. Seals made from clay, semiprecious metals or gold were attached to a letter by both the recording scribe and witnesses. Once a document was sealed, it became unchangeable.

Daniel clearly desires to know the outcome of these prophecies. However, we read that he heard the words, but they signified nothing to him. He is told in verse 4 to "seal the book until the time of the end," in verse 9 to go his way because "the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end," and, finally, in verse 13, to "go your way till the end."

Verse 5 introduces "two others" who now join Daniel and the first angel. One of these additional angels now gives Daniel this enigmatic message of 1,290 and 1,335 days.

The angel first mentions a time period of "a time, times, and half a time" (verse 7). Within the context of the next two verses, it may be assumed that this period refers to 3½ years. Other prophetic, apocalyptic literature, such as the book of Revelation, also refers to a similar period of time.

Many commentators and scholars identify this period as the Great Tribulation, a period of time immediately preceding the second coming of Jesus Christ. Some feel that the period of the Great Tribulation is seven years, and that the "time, times, and half a time" is the second half of this period. Others see it as the second half of Jesus' seven-year ministry, prophesied in Daniel 9:27. Jesus brought an end to the sacrifices "in the middle of the week." Therefore, it is conjectured that he still has one-half of his ministry remaining.

Daniel 12:8 records Daniel's perplexity: "Although I heard, I did not understand." In response to Daniel's more specific question ("What shall be the end of these things?"), the angel now responds, mentioning the 1,290 and 1,335 days.

Most attempts to decipher these two periods of time focus on two aspects of verse 11. First, verse 11 clearly refers to the Temple and its associated practices: "The daily sacrifice is taken away." Second, the "abomination of desolation" is referred to. Ideas and theories, therefore, center on a future reinstitution of the sacrifices in the Temple, followed by some abominable, sacrilegious act that will curtail them. However, attempts to find exact applications for these literal numbers have failed.

The clear message of this portion of Scripture is the need to endure to the end. Those who wait and persevere until the end of the 1,335 days are commended, "Blessed is he who waits" (verse 12).

Jesus quoted Daniel's reference to the "abomination of desolation" in his great Olivet prophecy (Matthew 24:15). He indicates that the Great Tribulation will follow the events spoken of in Daniel 12:11. Jesus also gave an important parable as a part of the famous Olivet prophecy in Matthew 24. We believe, as do many scholars, that Matthew 24 is an important link, along with the Old Testament book of Daniel and the New Testament book of Revelation, in understanding predictive prophecy. Jesus commended the "faithful and wise servant" (Matthew 24:45-51). A major theme of the parable is the faithful servant continuing to remain expectant and obedient in spite of an apparent delay in his master's return. On the other hand, the evil servant interprets his master's delay as an excuse to lapse into immoral and unchristian actions.

The 1,290 and 1,335 days can be understood in a similar way. The book of Daniel also commends the faithful servants of God who continue their vigilance and dedication even when the time for the fulfillment of a prophecy has apparently passed (Daniel 12:11-12).

These two periods of time exceed in length the 3½ years (1,260 days). We are not

certain why they are of this length or of the specific events that may occur to denote their fulfillment. It may be that Christians will need to endure beyond this period of 3½ years (Hebrews 10:35-39).

Christians today, like those of all ages, should be aware of our Lord's admonition: "But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

Thank you for your question. It is a pleasure to assist you with your study of the Bible.

VII. Results of Not Having a Hermeneutical Methodology

- A. **Proverbs 18:24:** The KJV reads, "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

The NKJV admits there is a problem with this interpretation when it adds in the margin for "show himself friendly" that an alternate translation is "may come to ruin." Obviously, there is a big difference between these two translations. As a matter of fact, they are almost opposite in meaning. One translation is encouraging you to have many friends; the other is discouraging you from having too many.

The alternate translation noted by the NIV is the preferred one. The NIV reads, "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." When we take into consideration antithetical parallelism, or parallels of opposites, this translation makes the best sense.

Now it's very easy to read this scripture in the NIV, see it has a different meaning there, and say to yourself, "Well, I like the old King James reading better." That's not a valid technique for choosing a translation. **The overriding principle for choosing a translation is to find accuracy and clarity of the original thought for a modern audience. It's not to prove your preconceived point or objective.**

For additional information about Proverbs 18:24, see Appendix B, page 68.

B. **Deuteronomy 22:5:** "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the Lord your God" (NKJV). This scripture prohibits a masquerade that would seem to reverse the natural order. That is, distinction between male and female dress is prescribed. But the primary application of this verse was to religious and cultic practices of Canaan, specifically in the worship of Astarte. Thus, the verse clearly states that cross-dressing, dressing in drag, is prohibited even under the cloak of religion. But while the verse labels transvestites as not being an example of Christian dress and behavior, it says nothing about a woman wearing jeans to work in the yard, ride a horse, go shopping, etc. In fact, it does not give a list of the places where a woman can wear jeans and places she cannot.

C. **Isaiah 28:13:** "Here a little, there a little" (NKJV). We have traditionally used this scripture as one of our hermeneutical methods. In essence, we have explained this scripture to mean that a correct doctrinal conclusion is arrived at by compiling scriptures from throughout the Bible to build a doctrinal statement on a specific issue. Though certainly it is important to consult a variety of scriptures, does this verse supply us with a hermeneutic?

Isaiah 28:1: *Woe to that wreath, the pride of
Ephraim's drunkards,
to the fading flower,
his glorious beauty,
set on the head of a fertile valley—*

*to that city, the pride of those laid
low by wine!*

verse 7 *And these also stagger from wine
and reel from beer:
Priests and prophets stagger from beer
and are befuddled with wine;
they reel from beer,
they stagger when seeing visions,
they stumble when rendering decisions.*

verse 8 *All the tables are covered with vomit
and there is not a spot without filth.*

verse 9 *“Who is it he is trying to teach?
To whom is he explaining his message?
To children weaned from their milk,
to those just taken from the breast?*

verse 10 *For it is:
Do and do, do and do,
rule on rule, rule on rule;
a little here, a little there.”*

verse 11 *Very well then, with foreign lips
and strange tongues
God will speak to this people,*

verse 12 *to whom he said,
“This is the resting place,
let the weary rest”;
and, “This is the place of repose”—
but they would not listen.*

verse 13 *So then, the word of the Lord to
them will become:
Do and do, do and do,
rule on rule, rule on rule;
a little here, a little there—
so that they will go and fall backward,
be injured and snared
and captured.*

The Expositor's Bible Commentary explains:

*Isaiah had a vision of the alleged spiritual
leaders of Ephraim, the northern
kingdom, staggering in their inebriation
and wearing some kind of floral wreath
on their heads, probably tilted at a jaunty
angle.... The drunkards of verse one are
leaders of the people.... The
administration of justice requires great
wisdom and clear-headedness.*

Otto Kaiser, in his commentary on Isaiah, translated
from the German by R.A. Wilson, notes:

*Perhaps among the late cultic prophets,
an alcoholic technique of ecstasy was
practiced, so that the charge of being
drunk on duty was doubly true.*

Expositor's continues, commenting on verses 9-10:

*As the prophet declared the word of God
in this drink-dominated setting, his
hearers made their response. The NIV is*

probably right in treating both these verses as a quotation of the words of the drunkards. They felt insulted. Were they not themselves spiritual leaders, well able to teach others? What right had this man to place them in the classroom and teach them the spiritual ABC's?

Many commentators have been puzzled by v. 10 and have wrestled to make sense of the Hebrew. The truth of the matter seems to be, as the NIV margin suggests, that it is not meant to make sense.

Isaiah's words had hardly penetrated the alcohol-impregnated atmosphere that surrounded his hearers. What they picked up were simply a few stray syllables, some of them repeated, like the baby-talk that delights the child but would insult the adult. They mouth this gibberish back at the prophet.... Their sin had turned the word of God, through Isaiah, into a meaningless noise that might just as well have been a foreign language.

Kaiser comments:

The suggestion has been made that the words are a mocking imitation of the way Isaiah usually spoke.... We do not know enough either to accept or to reject an interpretation which implies an individual infirmity on Isaiah's part. In view of v. 11,

therefore, there are two possibilities. The first is that of a vulgarism or colloquial term corresponding to our "burble". An alternative and less artificial suggestion is that the words are an imitation of a teacher.... A wise man, who is teaching his pupils the alphabet and is making them write down from dictation the letters...

The Word Biblical Commentary contributes, on verse 10:

LXX understands this to be "a little." Wildberger points to the suggestions of Wellhausen, followed by Procksch, that this pictures a drunken schoolteacher who orders his pupils to repeat the alphabet.... They then understand "little" to refer to a child being called upon to recite.... The main question is whether "little" applies to what is taught or who is being taught. Driver thinks it refers to "another little drink."

Expositor's now comments on verses 11-13:

Very well, then, the next message will come through foreigners (v. 11). The Assyrian devastation of Judah (cf. 1:5-9) is surely in view.

Was drunkenness the people's main sin? No, far more serious still was their failure to hear God's word offering rest to those

who insisted on rejecting it (v. 12). The prophet was clearly speaking of the call to faith.... The effects of drink may pass off, but unbelief can be a permanent barrier to God's word.

It is possible, especially in view of the repetition of the drunkards' syllables from v. 10, that their fall is thought of first of all as a result of their drunken staggering (v. 7); but the range of analogies is then extended to the picture of the hunter's snare. If this is so, the wording is similar to 8:14-15 and the essential message the same.

The Word Biblical Commentary observes:

Vv. 9-13 use a parable of teaching children their letters to show how God used even drunken priests and prophets to speak his message to a people doomed to repeated disaster. The episode's unity lies in the consistent metaphor of drunkenness for Ephraim.... What became in v. 10 as mumbling incompetence is turned by the Lord in v. 13 to be an instrument of judgment leading to their destruction. The four verbs in the last two lines, stumble, be broken, be snared, and be captured, are repeated from 8:15, reinforcing the understanding that this section points back to the events of 734-21 B.C.

Our traditional, WCG, understanding of this passage flows from the authorized (KJV)—verses 9-10, representing the reply of the drunkards:

*Whom shall he teach knowledge? and
whom shall he make to understand
doctrine? them that are weaned from the
milk, and drawn from the breasts. For
precept must be upon precept, precept
upon precept; line upon line, line upon
line; here a little, and there a little.*

In Hebrew, verse 10 reads *sav lasav sav lasav, kav lakav kav lakav*. It was the Hebraic equivalent to “blah, blah, blah” with a literal meaning, as it is translated in the English Bible.

God then repeats this phrase in verse 13, as what the drunkards will hear from the Assyrians—“for with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people” (KJV). The Assyrians will be speaking a foreign language, so it will sound like “blah, blah, blah.”

Thus, this passage in Isaiah—the sarcastic reply of drunkards to God’s Word, and God’s mimic back—does not constitute a rule on which to hang our hermeneutical hat. This passage in the NIV and the NKJV is much clearer than in the KJV.

The act of simply comparing the versions is a tip-off that we did not have the right understanding of this verse. The margin of the NIV, which the translators consider part of the text, explains the Hebrew phrase.

- D. **John 10:10; 3 John 2:** Many of us have traditionally used these two verses to prove that God wants us to have a prosperous and trouble-free life.

John 10:10 reads: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"—or "more abundantly," as the KJV reads.

Here is what was written about this scripture in an article titled "This is the Life! Real Abundant Living" (*The Good News*, May 1986):

God, perhaps, may not add material things early in life. He may not add them right away. It may be some little time, but He will give you all the material goods and necessities that you really need, and even a great many of the luxuries, if your life pleases Him. Yes, you can have those things when you know how to possess them and how to use them.

Another article, titled "Will Man Ever Love His Fellowman?" (*The Plain Truth*, April 1985), comments:

God wants you and me to be happy, to have zestful, fulfilling life and to be able to share it with others—that's love (John 10:10; 3 John 2).

John 10:10 is in the context of the Good Shepherd and the sheep. In the very next verse, Christ said: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Christ is talking about spiritual

salvation, not having two cars, a good job, trips to Hawaii, a beautiful house—"success." We cheapen and horribly misuse the scripture when we say something like: "God wants us to enjoy the finer things of life. He wants us to have life, and have it more abundantly, as John 10:10 says." Let's be honest. How many times have we heard something like that from the pulpit, especially during the Feast of Tabernacles?

Our traditional interpretation of John 10:10 is taking a beautiful, inspiring scripture about Christ giving us eternal life and using it as justification for a steak dinner.

We have often linked John 10:10 with 3 John 2: "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you." We have traditionally used this scripture as proof that God wants us to have the good life. We've even gone as far as saying, if you obey, God will give you good health and abundant living.

This verse, however, is nothing more than a polite, common greeting of a first-century Greco-Roman letter. There are hundreds of letters on clay tablets and paper that give similar greetings. There is even a book of letter writing from this period that explains the appropriateness of such a greeting.

Today, we would write something like, "I hope everything is going well for you and your family." If it were in a more religious context, for example, from one minister to another, we might easily write, "I want

you to know that I regularly mention you, your family and your service to the Church in my prayers.”

This is a polite, encouraging greeting to a brother in the ministry. It’s not something you take to the bank of heaven and say to God: “OK. Pay up.”

So John was simply writing a polite, appropriate and even expected greeting to his friend Gaius. **We can’t use this scripture as proof that God promises health and wealth to those who obey him.**

Note Jack Kuhatschek’s comments, and note the individual he attributes as the source of contemporary abuse of this passage:

Another example of an application based on a faulty interpretation is the use of 3 John 2 by those who believe every Christian should be financially wealthy. In the King James Version the verse reads: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.”

Concerning the popular application of this verse, Bruce Barron writes:

Ever since Oral Roberts interpreted this passage in this way in the 1950s, charismatic evangelists have quoted the apostle John’s words, as translated in the King James Version, as a demonstration of God’s desire that we may “prosper and be in health.”...Yet Christians with

stronger backgrounds in biblical study have repeatedly questioned the faith movement's understanding of the verse.

Read in context, 3 John 2 seems to be a personal wish for Gaius, the recipient of John's letter, not a divine promise for all Christians. Pentecostal scholar Gordon Fee has discovered that this verse is "the standard form of greeting in a personal letter in antiquity." He concludes, "To extend John's wish for Gaius to refer to financial and material prosperity for all Christians of all times is totally foreign to the text."

Whether it is a favorite verse on guidance, a supposed promise of prosperity or whatever, we must be sure our application is based on a proper translation and interpretation of Scripture. Anything else clearly exceeds the proper limits of application.

- E. **Revelation 3:7-8:** Another scripture that we have sometimes misused is Revelation 3:7-8, which reads: "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut....'"

In the past, we have explained this scripture in this way:

You can't be in God's Church today without knowing something of the key of David.

Luke 1:32-33 is a good place to begin to unlock this vital truth. Luke shows that God the Father is going to give to this same Jesus Christ, about whom we have been reading, "the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever."

We in God's Church know what that means. We know that the throne of David has continued to our day, and that Christ is coming to sit on that very throne and rule over the house of Israel. We also know the modern identity of Israel, which is one of the great keys to unlocking the meaning of Bible prophecy.

June-July 1982 *Good News*

"Christ's Letter to You!"

Many commentaries explain that Revelation 3:7 is part of a quotation from Isaiah 22:20-22. It reads: "In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiah. I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open."

This is a reference to Eliakim replacing the haughty Shebna as prime minister to Hezekiah. Eliakim was the new chief steward, deputy or chamberlain, and was given the keys allowing him to fulfill his responsibilities. The scripture in Revelation refers to Christ, himself, now

having the key of David, or access to David's throne, symbolic of Christ's rule.

Christ has the key of David—an expression that indicates control of the royal household. The key is a symbol of authority, role and function. Christ opens the way to the heavenly palace.

As Shebna or Eliakim used to allow people access to Hezekiah, Christ now allows access to himself and God the Father. This scripture was meant as an encouragement to the church at Philadelphia, not as a key to unlocking the mystery of the Bible.

Material from Isaiah is used by John to show Christ as having absolute power to control access to the kingdom of God.

F. **U.S. & B.C. :**

1. On page 11 of *The United States and Britian in Prophecy*, we begin Chapter 2 by saying, "The House of Israel is not Jewish." Is it really as simple as we have made it seem? What do references in the New Testament that seem to confuse the house of Israel and the house of Judah mean? That is, wasn't everyone in the New Testament either Jewish or gentile? Compare Luke 2:31-32, John 1:47, 3:1, 10, Acts 2:22, 26:7 and James 1:1.

Our often-used statement of Christ in Matthew 10:6, telling his disciples to "go...to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (NKJV), should

be understood in the context of Matthew 9:36, a mere seven verses before it in the text. Jesus was moved with compassion for the multitudes who were "weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (NKJV). Thus, **the context would strongly imply those sheep were lost spiritually—not geographically.**

2. On page 25, we need to understand the riddle and the parable of Ezekiel 17 and the "three overturns" of Ezekiel 21 properly.
 - a. Ezekiel 17:22-24 speaks of a tender young twig from the top of the cedar, which is planted on a high mountain. This is a prophecy of the Messiah, rather than a daughter of King Zedekiah. **Virtually all scholars and commentators see a messianic interpretation of Ezekiel 17:22-24.**
 - b. Ezekiel 21:25-27 is the famous "three overturns" passage. "Overturn," the word used in the KJV, is also translated "overthrown," "distortion" and "ruin." **The repeating of the word is a literary technique describing the intensity of God's judgment ("ruin, ruin, ruin"). The passage is an obvious reference to Christ's second coming, but not so obviously a reference to three geographical/chronological events.**
3. On page 32, we quote (partially) Hosea 12:1, showing that Ephraim follows the east wind.

The east wind travels west—thus, we must go west from Assyria to find Ephraim.

But is this the kind of logic and reasoning needed to correctly understand this verse? How can we be certain the the blowing of the wind refers to the migrations of Ephraim? This reference to wind is actually a reference to Ephraim's vainly following after the wind.

Then, we quote Psalm 89:25 because we already "knew" Great Britain is in the sea. This verse reads: "I will set his hand over the sea, his right hand over the rivers."

First, some context. This is a covenant psalm. The foundation of the psalm is the promise of a throne for David forever (2 Samuel 7:14-17). The psalm begins with a hymn from the congregation (verses 1-18) that is answered by the king.

The king recalls the covenant promises of God made to David. The context explains that God is not limited to time and space. Human sin does not end divine grace, human infidelity to the covenant does not invalidate God's fidelity.

The psalm clearly drives Christians to Jesus Christ. **Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the covenant, not a human king.** It is possible this psalm was recited when both the accession of the heavenly king and the earthly king were celebrated.

Verse 25 uses “hand” to express the dominion and authority given to an earthly king by a heavenly king. The verse is immediately followed by obvious messianic references to the Son of God, who will rule forever.

Yet, in the past we did not discuss the context. **We simply made the claim that “hand” can be translated “scepter”—but the Hebrew words for “hand” and “scepter” are not even close.**

The third step is to quote Jeremiah 3:18 to prove that Ephraim also went north from Jerusalem. We need the word “north” for a migratory pattern. This verse seems to supply it. But a careful reading of this context demonstrates that “north” was not intended to direct us to Great Britain.

Finally, we mention that “coasts” in Jeremiah 31:8 (KJV) is “another hint.” However, “coasts” does not mean shoreline exclusively, but refers to borders—some of them land borders.

VIII. Introductory Principles of Bible Study and Hermeneutics

Overview:

- A. **Book studies are more effective than theme studies.** A book study focuses your attention on the context of the scripture. Look for themes in the book, repeated words and the development of ideas.
- B. **Use an unmarked Bible, preferably a new, less familiar translation.** This technique focuses your attention on the scriptures, rather than preconceived ideas.
- C. **Spend time in background studies.** Read background material in Bible dictionaries and introductions in commentaries. Determine the practical circumstances that warranted the writing of the book.

Principles:

1. **Determine the author's audience of his day. Determine what response the Holy Spirit desired from the author's intended audience.** Each biblical book was inspired by God for a specific audience of the author's time, and we need to know what was being communicated then to properly apply it to today.

The target audience of the Bible can be seen as two extremes:

A	B
<u>Original</u>	<u>Today</u>

325—476—622—1066—1517—1776

- a. Only for A: Written only for the original audience. The Bible is useful only for anthropological and historical studies.
- b. Only for B: Written only for the latter half of the 20th century. It was “never before understood.”

Conclusion: We not only need both, we need to understand that the message was also relevant for the intervening centuries.

2. **Determine the genre of the book.** This will help determine the author's purpose. The true object of interpretation is to understand the exact thought of the author. The literary character of the scripture interpreted should be taken into consideration, as the Bible is written in a variety of scriptural styles—such as history, poetry, worship, prediction—and uses a variety of figures of speech. These factors determine the interpretation of a particular text.

Example:

Proverbs state a wise way to approach certain selected practical goals but do so in

terms that cannot be treated like a divine warranty of success. The particular blessings, rewards, and opportunities mentioned in Proverbs are likely to follow if one will prove the wise courses of action outlined in the poetical, figurative language of the book. But nowhere does Proverbs teach automatic success. (Fee and Stuart, p. 198).

3. **Wisdom literature deals with life experiences.** It makes no claim to be promises, guarantees or laws.
4. **Do not overstep the purpose of Scripture by reading it as a scientific treatise about creation.**
5. **To understand apocalyptic literature, we need to understand what it meant to its original audience, that it is filled with symbolism and that it has its own rules.**
6. **Determine if a teaching is cultural or transcends cultural boundaries.** For example, "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (2 Corinthians 13:12) has a cultural bias, but the principle of warmly greeting fellow Christians transcends all cultures.
7. **Carefully determine the transcendent principles of Scripture.** We study the Scriptures for spiritual growth. Practical and godly application of the Scriptures is our goal.

8. **The obscure text should not determine the meaning of the plain and clear.** Clear teachings should illuminate unclear passages.
9. **Be silent where the Bible is silent and speak where the Bible speaks.** Don't argue from silence. We may not assume that the Bible fails to address a topic because the subject/topic was already accepted or well known.
10. **Remember the principle of growth, or continuing revelation and enhanced understanding.** God deals with humans at our level of understanding. The New Testament takes spiritual precedence over the Old Testament. For example, the Old Testament prophesied salvation through Jesus Christ, but it does not reveal the significance of Christ's crucifixion, burial and resurrection. Later passages are understood as more complete. Carnell's *Five Principles of Hermeneutics* are helpful:
 - a. The New Testament should interpret the Old Testament.
 - b. The Epistles should interpret the Synoptic Gospels.
 - c. Systematic Passages should interpret Incidental Passages.
 - d. Universal Passages should interpret Local Passages.

- e. Didactic Passages should interpret Symbolic Passages.

11. **Scripture should never be interpreted in isolation from its context.** Careful thought should be given to the immediate context, the general context and the context of the whole of Scripture. This will serve to relate the revelation contained therein to other divine revelation.

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*indicates recommended introductory reading.

SOME POPULAR BIBLES AT A GLANCE

BIBLE TRANSLATION	COMMON ACRONYM	ISSUE DATE	VERSION TYPE	WORD EXAMPLE	GENERAL COMMENTS
New American Standard Bible	NASB	1971	Strictly Literal	"flesh"	The NASB is a new version in the tradition of the American Standard of 1901. The translators were committed to being true to the original-language texts, which the NASB accurately reflects. Thus, it is an effective study Bible but not good for reading.
New King James Version	NKJV	1982	Literal	"flesh"	The NKJV is a revised version of the Authorized King James of 1611, and preserves as much as possible of the original. The NKJV is the only major modern translation to be based on the Textus Receptus, whose manuscripts are part of the Majority Text.
New American Bible	NAB	1970	Literal to Dynamic	"flesh"	The NAB is the first American Catholic Bible translated from the original languages by Catholic and some Protestant scholars. The NAB, as do other Catholic and some Protestant translations, includes the apocryphal books. The notes contain only a small amount of distinctively Catholic dogma.
New Revised Standard Version	NRSV	1990	Literal to Dynamic	"flesh"	The NRSV is a new translation of the Revised Standard Version of 1952. The NRSV translation committee included scholars affiliated with various Protestant denominations, as well as Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Jewish scholars. The ecumenical NRSV has gained acceptance by a wide array of Christian groups.
New Jewish Publication Society Version	NJPS	1985	Thought for Thought		The NJPS is a new version of the Hebrew Scriptures of 1917. Called the Tanakh, the new English translation relies on the traditional Masoretic Text. This makes the NJPS a conservative translation when compared with modern translations that use other readings, as from the Septuagint or Dead Sea Scrolls.
New International Version	NIV	1978	Thought for Thought	"sinful nature"	The NIV is a completely new translation by more than 100 of the best international scholars in the evangelical tradition. The translators produced a version midway between a literal rendering and a free paraphrase. It has been called "one of the best all-purpose Bibles available to English-speaking Christians."
New Jerusalem Bible	NJB	1986	Thought for Thought	"self"	The New Jerusalem Bible had its beginnings in a French version, La Bible de Jérusalem. Like its French counterpart, the English NJB was translated from the original languages rather than Latin. The NJB is ecumenical, though isolated cases of Catholic teaching can be found in its extensive introductions, notes and study aids.
Revised English Bible	REB	1989	Thought for Thought	"old nature"	The REB is a radically revised version of the New English Bible (NEB) of 1970. The REB has eliminated some of the criticized renderings of the NEB. Even though it is more conservative than its predecessor, the REB is probably not a Bible for those who want to reconstruct the wording of the original-language texts.
Good News Bible	GNB	1976	Modern Speech	"human nature"	The GNB, also called Today's English Version (TEV), is published by the American Bible Society. Translators sought to set forth the biblical texts in simple, everyday and natural English. The GNB surpassed all records for paperback sales during its first few years of existence. People apparently wanted to read the Bible in modern English.
Contemporary English Version	CEV	1991	Modern Speech	"selfish feelings and desires"	The New Testament CEV is underwritten by the American Bible Society. The Old Testament is scheduled to be published in 1996. The publishers have called the CEV a user-friendly Bible, written at the same reading level as the newspaper <i>USA Today</i> . Outdated terms and traditional biblical terms such as justification have been replaced with English equivalents.
Phillips Version	PV	1957	Paraphrase or Free	"old nature"	The New Testament PV was revised in 1973, using a more critically acceptable Greek text published by the United Bible Societies. The popularity of this version is in its free style and readable 20th-century English. The PV is not a study Bible, but can be read for enjoyment if one compares it to a more literal version.
The Living Bible	LB	1971	Paraphrase or Free	"evil desires"	The LB is, in fact, a free paraphrase. Yet, it has been extremely popular with fundamentalist Christians. Once again, this is evidence that Christians want a Bible version that communicates its message in modern terms. Readers of the LB should take translator Kenneth Taylor's advice: "For study purposes a paraphrase should be checked against a rigid translation."

Proof-texting Proverbs 18:24

King James Version:

"A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly."

New King James Version:

"A man who has friends must himself be friendly." Marginal note: Or "may come to ruin."

New International Version:

[This is the standard translation for our English-language Church publications] "A man of many companions may come to ruin."

New Revised Standard Version:

"Some friends play at friendship"

Comment: Loneliness is everywhere. Many people feel cutoff and alienated from others. Being in a crowd just makes people more aware of their isolation. We all need friends who will stick close, listen, care and offer help when it is needed—in good times and in bad. It is better to have one such friend than dozens of superficial acquaintances. Instead of wishing you could find a true friend, seek to become one. There are people who need your friendship. Ask God to reveal them to you, and then take on the challenge of being a true friend.

Soncino Bible Commentary:

"The first word, *ish*, means 'a man,' and the phrase 'a man of friends' signifies one who indiscriminately multiplies his friends.... This type of friendship is referred to in the passage, 'There is a friend that is a companion at the table, and he will not continue in the day of thy affliction' (Ecclesiasticus 6:10)."

Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries:

"The first line reads literally 'A man of friends [is] to be shattered.' The verb is a play on the Hebrew for 'to make friends' (found in 22:24); but it is not the same word, as AV ('must shew himself friendly') and RSV would prefer. (RSV reads: 'There are friends who pretend to be friends.') The RV gives the most probable sense of the Hebrew text: 'He that maketh many friends (doeth it) to his own destruction.' But the Hebrew is very cryptic, and there is a case for reading the opening word (cf. RSV) not as 'a-man-of,' but as 'there-are' (a very small consonantal difference): 'There are friends to (one's) undoing.'"

Expositor's Bible Commentary:

"It is better to have one good, faithful friend than numerous unreliable ones.... The Hebrew is difficult. It means 'for being crushed' or 'to be shattered' but not 'to show oneself friendly' (cf. KJV). The idea may be that there are friends to one's undoing."

In conclusion, we must do our homework. We must avoid proof-texting and using the Bible to prove our already-decided-upon thesis. And, we must remember...*we have all been guilty!*