

INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY

1. Hermeneutics is the science and art of biblical interpretation; it is a science because it is guided by rules within a system, it is an art because the application of the rules is a skill and not a mechanical imitation.
2. The adjusted interpreter regards the scripture as *sola fidei regula* (the sole rule of faith), the only authoritative voice of God to man; other groups regard the Bible as the primary voice among other authorities (the Church fathers, the ancient creeds, ecumenical councils, oral tradition, Papal decisions, etc.).
3. The basic purpose of hermeneutics and grammar is to ascertain what God has said in the scripture, to determine the meaning of the Word of God.
4. Our doctrines of salvation, sanctification, eternal security, etc., are all based on the proper interpretation of the Bible; failure to properly interpret the Bible has led to every sort of false teaching and confusion among believers.
5. In most cases, the doctrinal variations one finds in Christendom are due to different methods of interpretation and failure to consistently apply the rules of hermeneutics.
6. Secondly, the purpose of the science of hermeneutics is to bridge the gap between the minds of the biblical writers and the minds of believers living in different times and places in history.
7. People of the same culture, age, and geographic location understand each other quite easily; however, when the reader is separated culturally, historically, geographically, and by language, the task of interpretation becomes far more difficult.
8. We come to the text of the Bible with some basic assumptions, for which we make no apologies.
9. We believe that only the 66 books of the Old Testament and New Testament are divinely inspired by God and meant to be understood by believers.
10. We believe that one must be born again, desire to know the truth (positive volition), and rightly related to the Holy Spirit (abiding, filled with the Holy Spirit) in order to effectively understand the Scripture.
11. This process is a gradual one, building understanding upon understanding; therefore, the solid meat of Scripture is not fully understood by spiritual novices.
12. We would suggest that the ordinary believer does not possess the tools, training, skills, or placement by God to accurately interpret the Word of God for himself. Acts 8:30-31
13. We firmly believe that God has always provided communicators in every period of history to instruct believers and to equip them with an understanding of His plan. Eph. 4:8,11ff
14. Therefore, since orientation to God is based on the principle of faith, each believer must determine what type of teacher/teaching he is going to accept as truth. Heb. 11:1-2; Rom. 6:17
15. While there are a number of faulty historical schools of interpretation, we adhere to the literal, grammatical, historical school of interpreting the Scripture.
16. The literal method of interpreting the bible is to accept the literal rendering of the sentences unless the nature of the sentence, clause, or phrase within that sentence dictates otherwise.
17. Words must be understood in the context of their sentences, and a sentence must be understood in the context where it occurs.
18. This is the usual and accepted practice for the interpretation of any literature; when we read a book we presume the literal sense of the document until the nature of the literature itself forces us to think otherwise.
19. All secondary meanings or interpretations depend upon the literal layer of the original language; parables, types, allegories, symbols, figures of speech, etc., presume that the language already has literal meaning.
20. For instance, one cannot understand the parable of the sower without recognizing the reality that it is written in literal agricultural language.

21. Literal exegesis does not overlook the figures of speech, symbolic meanings, types, or other literary devices found in the Word of God. ICor. 13:1 (hyperbole); Dan. 7 (animals symbolic of nations); Gen. 6 (the ark is a type of Christ); Gal. 4:24 (allegory)
22. It is only in the priority of literal exegesis that there is any control over exegetical abuse of the Word of God, forcing unbiblical meanings into the Scripture, or exalting allegorical or esoteric meanings over the literal truth.
23. The historical principle for interpreting the Word of God means that the interpreter must give attention to the grammar, the times, circumstances, conditions under which the writer wrote, and the time in which his audience lived.
24. With all this as a given, we believe that prophecy is meant to be taught and understood just like the other 70% of Scripture.
25. It is clear that many drop certain rules of hermeneutics when they approach prophecy, are not diligent to compare Scripture with Scripture, or apply a faulty set of hermeneutics to the entire Bible, which accounts for the wide disagreements among prophetic interpretations.
26. However, we are of the opinion that God has revealed His Word in human history, desires us to understand it accurately, and has provided all that is necessary to complete this task.
27. One essential element for interpreting and understanding the prophetic word relates to the millennial view that one accepts.
28. There are basically three millennial views;
 - a. Amillennial, the belief that there will not be a literal theocratic reign upon the earth, denying the restoration of national Israel (substituting the church for Israel), suggesting that all kingdom promises will be fulfilled in the inter-advent era.
 - b. Postmillennial, the belief that the kingdom of God is now being extended through the world, the gospel will eventually triumph in a long period of righteousness and peace (1000 years), and then Christ will return to the earth.
 - c. Premillennial, the belief that Jesus Christ will return to earth bodily the second time, establish His kingdom in Jerusalem, and rule the earth in peace and righteousness for a period of 1000 years.
29. The correct view is premillennial, with the rapture (the resurrection of Church Age believers only) occurring first, the completion of the final seven years of the age of Israel, the literal bodily return of Christ to earth, the destruction of His enemies, the resurrection of believers who did not live in the Church Age, and the establishment of His worldwide kingdom in Jerusalem for 1000 years.
30. Having established the correct framework in which to place the events of prophecy, we will now look at the principles to correctly interpret prophecy in the first place.
31. We must give careful attention to the language of the passage, determining the meaning of names, geography, customs, materials, plants, animals, etc.
32. One must recognize that much of the prophetic description of the future is given in the language of past historical events, so isagogics are indispensable.
33. Diligent attention must be paid to the context and the flow of the discussion.
34. The interpreter must be mindful of the nonsystematic character of certain prophetic writings; widely separated events in time may be found in the same passage. Isa. 61:1-2; Lk. 4:18-19
35. One must search the entire body of prophetic writings to find what passages parallel each other, recognizing that the same event or person may be in view. Dan. 2:40-44, 7:7-8; Rev. 17:12
36. Next, one must determine if the prophecy is fulfilled, unfulfilled, or has a dual fulfillment; he must determine if the prophecy is conditional or unconditional.
37. Armed with the filling of the Holy Spirit, positive volition, the correct tools, hermeneutics, and doctrinal grid, the diligent, persistent, consistent interpreter can be assured that God will provide the truth of even the most difficult passages. Col. 1:9; IITim. 2:7; IJn. 5:20