

Parousia

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THE SIGN MINISTRIES NEWSLETTER / SUMMER 1997

by Charles Cooper

Hermeneutic

*Key to
Understanding
Scripture*



The question is often laced with frustration and discouragement: "How can Christians read and study the same Bible, yet come away with opposite conclusions?" Perhaps you too have been asked the very same question. Every Christian should be able to study and gain a deeper understanding of the Scriptures concerning salvation, grace, and the second coming of Christ. These are fundamentals of the faith, yet many believers struggle with these truths from Scripture for themselves. Why? Hermeneutics!

The reason two people with similar backgrounds can read the same passage of the Bible and develop two opposing conclusions is because of two differing hermeneutics. That's a fancy word for interpretation. The reason *Time Magazine* can publish three million copies of its weekly magazine for people from every corner of the United States to read and understand is because of a common hermeneutic. We understand the meaning of words, the way words combine to communicate meaning, and the

subtle variations from normal usage that keep the language exciting and new.

Our method of understanding what we read and hear is developed through usage. At an early age, we begin to learn the principles of interpretation concerning the English language. We learn the meanings of words, phrases, expressions, and jargon. But principles alone are not enough to guarantee accurate interpretation. There is also the art of interpretation. That is, after an interpreter learns the principles—the black and white—he must then learn to finesse the process. Because human beings have the ability to communicate in nonverbal ways, mere principles are not enough to clearly understand all we hear, read and see. There are subtle ways language, facial expression, sound, and silence can vary word and contextual meaning. An interpreter must learn to be aware of more possibilities than just a literal meaning. These subtle variations require the art of interpretation.

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Hermeneutic

Key to Understanding Scripture

If we learn both the principles and the art of interpretation through usage and study, then why do we have such a hard time understanding the Bible? Again the answer is in our hermeneutic. However, this time the problem is the lack of a sufficient hermeneutic. For example, we have a sufficient hermeneutic for reading and understanding the daily newspaper. There are very few gaps in our understanding of events happening today; people are up to date on most issues because the media saturates us with information on anything and everything. How often do you see someone reading the newspaper with a dictionary near by? Yet, when it comes to the Bible, one can hardly read a complete paragraph without having to stop to find out the meaning of a key word, phrase, or thought. Essentially, it has been 2000 years since the last pages were written in the New Testament. This causes us to lose the ability to easily understand the teachings of the Scriptures. Secondly, our English Bible is a translation of original Greek and Hebrew sources; this further compounds the problem of understanding the original Author/author.

Therefore, in order to consistently understand the Bible, a student must have a *wholistic* biblical method of interpretation. A wholistic hermeneutic evaluates all aspects of the Scriptures before any conclusion is drawn. By wholistic we mean all the

components that constitute the nature of Scripture. Scripture has literary, supernatural, historical, grammatical, and theological natures. Seldom will a correct understanding of a biblical passage be secured if any one of these components is misapplied or absent from the process of interpretation. Many of the contradictory conclusions reached in Bible study can be traced back to this one fact: the interpreter did not consider all the avenues available when trying to discover the Author/author's intended meaning.

The Sign Ministries maintains a firm commitment to a literal interpretation of Scripture. In both *The Sign* and *The Rapture Question Answered* this standard is referred to in different ways—customary, natural and normal sense; face-value hermeneutic; literal; and taking Scripture exactly for what it says. By such terminology, **The Sign Ministries** seeks to prevent the need to *allegorize* (read a foreign meaning into the text) or *spiritualize* (take Scripture out of its historical context). Scholars often use these methods because Scripture contradicts their presuppositions.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are those who hold strongly to the Word of God but who mishandle matters of interpretation. To an interpreter unskilled in accurately examining God's Word, the idea of *taking Scripture for what it says* is a bit deceptive. On the surface he or

she could think that the Bible is very simple to understand. One need only read it and the meaning is clear. Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." At face-value this verse says that Jesus Christ has not, is not, and will never change. However, the English Bible (King James Version, New American Standard Bible, etc.) is a translation from Hebrew and Greek sources. Translations are the fruit of a group of scholars' personal interpretations. Thus, the original languages should be consulted before a person working with an English Bible can definitively assert the meaning of a passage of Scripture. There are two reasons for this conclusion. Sometimes an English word translates more than one Greek word, and often Greek words have more than one nuance and are difficult to express in English. The scholars frequently have to choose between the different shades of possible meanings. The process of discovering the correct meaning of a text is the heart of the hermeneutical process. Hebrews 13:8 correctly translated highlights the truth: "Jesus is the Christ, the same yesterday, today and tomorrow." The point of the text is not that Jesus Christ has never changed in any shape, form, or fashion. Rather, the emphasis is that He is the Christ; He was, is, and always will be. This second translation of the verse has no contradiction with the fact that Jesus was not always incarnate or that He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." The first translation would contradict these facts about Jesus' life. There is a world of difference between the two conclusions.

To illustrate the delicacy and balance involved in using the *face-value hermeneutic*, consider “the last trumpet” mentioned in I Corinthians 15:52. We received several phone calls from people who felt that we were inconsistent with our hermeneutic. Their understanding of a “face-value hermeneutic” demanded that the meaning of the phrase “the last trumpet” must be the same event as “the trumpet of God” in I Thessalonians 4:16 and the seventh and final trumpet of Revelation 11:15. One caller concluded, in light of these verses, that the rapture is tied to the last trumpet of Revelation and that the rapture is to be found in the harvest as described in Revelation 14:14-20. This person is attempting to use a *face-value hermeneutic* by saying that the trumpet of God, the last trumpet, and the seventh trumpet sequence of Revelation must describe the same event. The caller’s conclusion is based upon the idea of taking Scripture exactly for what it says. From the caller’s questions, I detected a misunderstanding about the meaning of *face-value hermeneutic*. Face-value hermeneutic does not intend that “trumpet” means the exact same thing at every occurrence in the Bible. Or put another way, literal interpretation does not mean ignoring the context. The pressing of Scripture to the point of “wooden literalism” will not solve the problems of interpretation.

At face-value the phrase “the last trumpet” (I Cor. 15:52) and the seventh and final trumpet in Revelation (Rev. 11:15) could designate the same event. The resurrection of the dead and transformation of the living accompany the last trumpet of

I Corinthians 15. Equally, immediately following the seventh and final trumpet in Revelation, the earth is harvested. These similarities would, at face-value, support the contention that the same event is indicated. However, the face-value hermeneutic requires more than similar words and circumstances as a criteria for deciding if two texts are speaking about the same event. Consider the following facts. The seventh and final trumpet of Revelation is clearly a part of the wrath of God. Conversely, the faithful Church is promised total deliverance and separation from the wrath of God (I Thess. 1:10, 5:9). Also, the final trumpet of Revelation is blown after the “mystery of God is finished,” which refers to God’s eternal plan to save Israel (Romans 11:25). This is after the Seventieth Week of Daniel ends, which is indicated by the death of the two witnesses whose ministry lasts 1,260 days or the second half of the Seventieth Week of Daniel (Rev. 11:1-10). This is also after the two witnesses are raised from the dead (Rev. 11:11). The rapture of the church, on the other hand, is not connected with the end of the Seventieth Week of Daniel. Scripture specifically connects the rapture of the church with the beginning of the Day of the Lord. Jesus in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:29-31), Paul in the clearest rapture passage of the New Testament (I Thess. 4:13-5:11), and John in the Revelation of Jesus Christ (Rev. 6:12-17) all point out this significant truth. The sign that signals the beginning of the Day of the Lord is literally depicted in the sixth seal. The Day of the Lord begins before the Seventieth Week of Daniel ends. Therefore,

the rapture of the church cannot be connected to the final trumpet of Revelation. Lastly, the seventh trumpet of the seven trumpet series of Revelation is not the last trumpet predicted in Scripture. Isaiah 27:13 declares, “So it shall be in that day that the great trumpet will be blown; they will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, and they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount of Jerusalem.” The phrase *that day* is consistently interpreted to refer to the eschatological day of the Lord. A closer examination here

To consistently understand the Bible, a student must have a wholistic biblical method of interpretation.

reveals that this predicted gathering to the mountain of God will occur after the trumpet judgments of Revelation. It is after the judgment of God that the Lord is worshiped from the holy mountain (Zech. 14). It is after the judgment of God that Israel is saved (Rom. 11:25). It is after the judgment of God that the new Jerusalem occupies the holy mount (Rev. 21:1-5). Sufficient to say, the last trumpet of the Revelation series is not the last prophetic trumpet.

Face-value hermeneutic communicates perfectly our *philosophy* of biblical interpretation. Once we

have discovered the meaning of the text, we take it for exactly what it says. Rather than trying to argue the meaning away, we reconcile it to the rest of the Word of God and sit under its judgment. On the other hand, *face-value hermeneutic* may not be the best phrase to describe our *method* of biblical interpretation. A *wholistic biblical hermeneutic* best describes it. The goal of a wholistic biblical method of interpretation is “to discover the Author/author’s intended meaning.”

By using “to discover” as the verbal description of the activity of the interpreter, the presuppositional basis of a good hermeneutic is divulged—the belief that God has communicated His will in the Scriptures; that all that is necessary to live a godly life can be learned from the Bible; and that the text has a specific meaning determined at the time it was written by the Author/author. These are the beginning truths of Bible study. The Author/author meant what he wrote and wrote what he meant. The interpreter’s

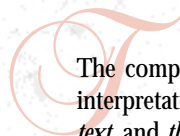
job is to discover the meaning not to determine the meaning. Where the meaning is not readily apparent in the text, it must be discovered from what is written.

The representation of biblical authorship by the use of the dual term “Author/author” helps us to understand that the Bible is more than just a mere newspaper; both God and man had a part in the writing of Scripture. God superintended the process to insure that truth was recorded, but man expressed God’s will in language and customs common to the original audience. To be sure, the human authors of Scripture did not always understand all the possible ways God would deepen the meaning of a text or apply a certain passage of Scripture. Nevertheless, the end result is a supernatural book composed by natural means.

“Intended meaning” is that understanding of a text which the Author/author meant his original reader to know. Modern readers are privileged to read the

mail of Paul to the Philippians. It is important to realize the primary recipients were directly addressed. We, on the other hand, are indirectly addressed. Before any attempt is made to apply the text, an interpreter must concern himself with the original audience and what the text said to them. Determining application must not happen until a proper literary, grammatical, historical, contextual, and theological evaluation has occurred resulting in a proper interpretation. Then the interpreter is free to attempt application of the text, be it prescriptive or descriptive. Prescriptive passages set forth a detailed pattern to follow concerning actions and/or thoughts. Descriptive passages simply inform, describe instructions, give commands to a specific person at the time of writing, or illustrate a biblical principle. The interpreter must use the descriptive passage to support a prescriptive passage that teaches the principle in an explicit manner.

The Keys of a Wholistic Biblical Method of Interpretation



The components of a wholistic biblical method of interpretation include *literature*, *grammar*, *history*, *context*, and *theology*. These five components are critical in discovering the Author/author’s intended meaning. Each component has very specific defining traits. Defining traits are the characteristics of something that are most necessary to its existence. For example an apple has defining traits: a stem, a core with seeds, outer skin, flesh and juices. These elements are necessary for an apple to be an apple. One must have the whole apple before he or she can eat it or make apple sauce or juice.



Begin any study with a **literary analysis**. The Bible contains seven distinct genres or types of literature: *narrative*, *prophecy*, *wisdom*, *psalm*, *gospel*,



epistle and *apocalyptic*. Each type of literature has specific defining traits. Any attempt to interpret a verse or paragraph from one of these genres must be sifted through its defining traits. *Narrative* literature allows one to convey history in the form of facts, stories, accounts, and biographies from a theological perspective. Narrative literature usually gives a straight forward account of what happen without any commentary. The interpreter is not told to do or think anything. *Prophetic* literature utilizes “thus says the Lord” to make His people aware of His will concerning a particular issue. Their response will result in God’s present and future actions. *Poetic* literature allows the author to express his emotional state without reservation. *Gospel* literature conveys the earthly life of Jesus Christ, documents His teachings, and outlines the basic chronology of His life. *Epistolary* literature presents ideas, concepts, doctrines, etc. often in the form of an argument. *Wisdom* literature teaches basic truth concerning how one lives wisely. *Apocalyptic* literature communicates a message of hope to God’s people in a time of tribulation. It employs various figures of speech, narrative, poetry, and prophetic utterances. Apocalyptic literature has nine specific defining traits. An interpreter attempting to discover the meaning of a verse without a full understanding of these traits will make errors in interpretation. Few Bible students pay close attention to literary analysis; this often leads to errors in interpretation and application. That is a very broad statement, but it is altogether true.

2

After refreshing your memory concerning the nature of the specific genre under consideration, a **grammatical analysis** is the next step. It is logical to examine grammar next since it is inherently more consistent than the remaining elements of the interpretive process. Sentence structure does not change. Subjects, verbs, objects, and modifiers are the tools of communication. But be warned! Knowing how a word functions in a given sentence seldom is the determinant in discovering a particular passage’s meaning. Often the grammar will only serve to help the interpreter formulate the right questions which, when answered, provide insight into the meaning of the text.

Grammatical analysis includes the area of individual words. Words tend to evolve over time. Word studies help the interpreter to trace the development of a word from its beginnings to the time period of the particular writing under consideration. Few words

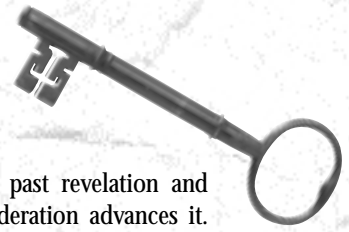
start and maintain the same exact meaning from beginning to end. Usually a word will pass through several stages before a fixed nuance is settled upon. Different authors will use words differently. An interpreter makes a great mistake in assuming a word always means the same thing regardless of who used it and when. This type of error most often leads to faulty interpretations. An example of this type of error occurs with the word *saved*. To mistakenly conclude that it only refers to spiritual salvation from hell and eternal separation from God will lead to faulty interpretations in many passages in both the Old and New Testament. The term can also refer to physical deliverance from sickness or a dangerous situation.

Grammatical analysis also covers grammatical structure. Grammatical structure deals with the relationship between or arrangement of terms within a given passage of Scripture. At this point, an interpreter will need to be very familiar with basic grammar. Relationships like purpose, result, time, concession, means, manner, condition, comparison, and contrast are indicated by adverbs and adjectives. Phrases and clauses will also indicate these relationships. After grammar school, English speakers normally do not think much about grammar. Though grammar is used everyday, grammatical analysis is not. Adverb clauses are the work-horses of the English language, but few can describe, define, or state their importance. However, grammatical analysis is crucial to the hermeneutical process. No part of a grammatical diagram should be taken for granted; the importance of each word, phrase, or clause may be relative, but understanding the Author/author’s intended meaning is impossible without each piece of the puzzle. Grammar will not provide the answer to the problem, but it will certainly limit the possibilities. When Paul writes “the love of God constrains us,” several options are available to the interpreter. The New Testament uses two different words for *love*. Is it emotional love or intellectual love? That little word *of* could mean “God’s love for me” or “my love for God.” Which does Paul mean here? A word study would answer the first question and further study would answer the second.



3

The third component of a wholistic biblical method of interpretation is **historical analysis**. Concern yourself with the time period and the impact of the events of the day in which the text was written. Take note of beliefs, social norms, and material traits of the biblical world that may have influenced



the writers of the biblical text. Ask yourself: (1) Where is the author and his audience? (2) What political, economic and social situations are confronting them? (3) What cultural reference(s) need to be defined? (4) What is the purpose of the writer for the whole book? The Bible was not written in a vacuum. The writers and the audience of the biblical text were confronted daily with situations and circumstances which influenced their thoughts and conduct.

4

The fourth component is **contextual analysis**. All things being equal, context will usually limit the range of interpretive possibilities and will most effectively qualify the right answer. Each word must be considered within the sentence. Each sentence must be considered within the paragraph. Each paragraph must be considered within the chapter. Each chapter must be considered within the book. Each book must be considered within the whole Bible. The Olivet Discourse, as recorded by Luke, indicates that both the disciples and all the people heard Jesus' sermon on end-times. Matthew indicates only the disciples heard the sermon. Mark indicates specifically that Peter, James, John, and Andrew heard it. It is from the context that these truths are gleaned.

5

The last component of a wholistic biblical method of interpretation is **theological analysis**. By no means am I suggesting that this step is last in importance. Rather, theological consideration is left last because the whole of Scripture is the focus. Theological analysis concerns itself with God and the continual revelation of His will for the world. In attempting to understand a passage of Scripture, the

interpreter must be aware of past revelation and how the passage under consideration advances it. Thus the two primary questions theological analysis is concerned with are (1) What does the passage say about God; and (2) What does the text say about God's will for His creation?

Theological analysis must take into consideration that God's revelation of Himself is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. There is no greater revelation than Jesus Christ. How God unraveled human history progressively to bring His Son into the world is the thread that runs throughout Scripture. Equally important is the fact that human history is moving to a definitive conclusion. Every passage of Scripture deals either directly or indirectly with these issues. The interpreter's job is to figure out how each passage contributes to our understanding of these two important truths.

CONCLUSION

We have purposely simplified our explanation of the hermeneutical process in order to help Bible students understand how they themselves can study Scripture. However, this shorter statement on the hermeneutical process should be understood as an overview of the topic rather than a complete and exhaustive discussion of these matters. The beginning Bible student would do well to give serious attention to the whole matter of Bible interpretation before drawing conclusions about difficult passages of Scripture. **The Sign Ministries** hopes to be a help to those serious about Bible study. For more information regarding hermeneutics and a list of recommended resources, please contact us by mail, phone, or email.

PrayerNet

We at **The Sign Ministries** fully recognize that the battle is not with flesh and blood, but spiritual powers in heavenly places. We are convinced that prewrath is the biblical position on the rapture of the Church. That this truth could be lost amidst confusion and apathy is mind boggling. But since this truth is so critical to the life and motivation of the Church, Satan has no choice but to confuse and cloud the minds of believers. The road blocks, side issues, personal attacks, and the unwillingness of some to even consider the position demonstrates Satan's strategy to keep this truth from God's people. We are grateful to all of you who support our ministry. We would ask that you set aside one minute of your daily prayer time to pray for us. There are five specific things to pray about:

1. That God would give our ministry an open door through which the prewrath position could be preached universally
2. That He would open the eyes of those hostile to prewrath simply because it's different from what they've been taught
3. That those who sincerely argue against prewrath would have integrity and not misrepresent the position
4. That those who understand prewrath will seek to bring others to the light of God's truth with gentleness and reverence
5. That as we minister together, unbelievers would come to know Christ and believers would be encouraged to live holy and godly lives to the praise of our great and glorious God

Conferences and Seminars

God has blessed us with the opportunity to share in some wonderful conferences and seminars during this last quarter.

In early April we shared our multimedia presentation of an overview of end time events at a well-attended seminar at the Valleybrook Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. People from many different churches in the Eau Claire area attended, and it was a joy to renew old acquaintances. This was an exciting seminar since it was the idea of one

young man, Alan Kurschner. Alan did all the work in arranging the conference as well as advertising and publicity, which included three radio interviews that we took part in.

We also shared in a seminar with the Lighthouse Alliance in Columbus, Ohio. We had a wonderful time as a number of pastors attended and expressed great interest in our ministry. They let us know that they now have a better understanding of the prewrath rapture of the elect.

Recently we conducted two Pastors and Church Leaders Conferences. The first was in Seattle, Washington, and the second was in Portland, Oregon. What a privilege to share with those leaders who are on the front lines and eager to study God's Word with open minds and hearts.

The middle of May brought us to a church conference with Pastor Joe Carr and the Brookfield Baptist Church in Brookfield, Georgia. It was a productive time

with a group of people who had been prepared by their pastor for our visit. There was an openness to the message and a genuine excitement about the days in which we are living.

We are now scheduling conferences and seminars for the fall and winter of 1997-98. We would welcome the opportunity to present an overview of end time events in your church or area. Call 1-800-627-5134 for more information and to set up a meeting.

MINISTERIOS LA SEÑAL

The last week of April we had the distinct pleasure of seeing firsthand the ministry of Bob and Serena Myers in Mexico. During our stay Bob conducted an end times seminar at a Bible training school. Eighteen students and about twenty pastors attended and were blessed as a result of Bob's instruction. We also had dinner with Pastor Armando Alducin and his family. Pastor Alducin directs one of the key ministries in Mexico pastoring a church of about 3000. He also oversees five other branch churches. Pastor Alducin is prewrath in his eschatology and has generously offered to help our ministry. The Myers, along with their conference work, are now busy translating *The Rapture Question Answered* into Spanish.

Bob Myers would be a great blessing to your church, group, or ministry. As a former missionary to Chile he has a good grasp of the Spanish language and a thorough knowledge of what the Bible has to say about end time events. For more information about our Latin American ministry, please call Bob at 011-525-813-0419, or write:



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Huixquilucan, Edo. de Mexico
C.P. 52764, Mexico

July 14-18, 1997

Like-minded in eschatology and grounded in a biblical philosophy of missions, The Master's Mission is a shining example of how effective preparation can equip effective missionaries. The Sign Ministries' Executive Director Roger Best will be speaking to the newest class of missionary candidates at TMM in July. You're invited to come visit and see the mission at work and hear Pastor Best teach from God's Word.

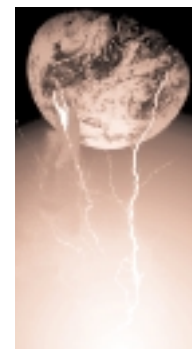
The Master's Mission is located in Robbinsville, North Carolina, just an hour-and-a-half from Knoxville, TN. The mission's 1500 acre training base provides a pastoral setting for a practical, "hands-on" approach for equipping missionaries with technical skills as well as firm foundations in biblical doctrine.

For more information, call TMM at 1-800-419-8618 or The Sign Ministries.

The Master's Mission

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THE SIGN Ministries



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Ministry Update

God has continued to richly bless **The Sign Ministries** during the first half of 1997. In the first five months of the year we've presented three Pastors and Church Leaders Seminars, participated in four other Prophecy Seminars, hosted two End Times Conferences, and traveled to India and Mexico City. We currently have more than six thousand individuals (including over eight hundred pastors!) on our mailing list who

receive *Parousia* and request Bible study resources. We've mailed out more than fifteen hundred copies of *The Sign* this year, over a thousand copies of *The Rapture Question Answered*, and many other books, transparency sets, and audio cassette albums. Daily we receive dozens of phone calls and email messages, and our staff works hard to respond to each one. Our website continues to grow with more information and resources,

and we've had over ten thousand visitors since the site's inception.

On the horizon, we're eagerly awaiting the publication of Robert Van Kampen's new end-times novel, *The Fourth Reich*, in October of this year. Pastor Roger Best has been contacted about speaking at conferences across the country as well as in Australia, in England, and again in India. We're also preparing to enter the world of radio broad-

casting with the construction of a facility to handle program recording and call-in interviews. It is our hope that this medium will allow us to expand our ministry and to define, declare, and defend the prewrath rapture.

We sincerely appreciate all of you who are co-laborers for Christ and fellow ministers of the gospel. May God encourage you in your walk with Him.