

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **IS THE BIBLE TRUE AND SHOULD IT GENERALLY BE INTERPRETED LITERALLY OR SYMBOLICALLY?**

*Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth.  
John 17:17 (RSV)*

<sup>3</sup>*What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? <sup>4</sup>Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar.....*

*Romans 3:3-4(a) (NIV)*

<sup>5</sup>*Every word of God proves true;  
he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.*

<sup>6</sup>*Do not add to his words,  
lest he rebuke you,  
and you be found a liar.*

*Proverbs 30:5-6 (RSV)*

*But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled.*

*Acts 3:18 (RSV)*

*For the Lord GOD does nothing  
without revealing his secret  
to his servants the prophets*

*Amos 3:7 (ESV)*

<sup>29</sup> *“Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. <sup>30</sup> Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, <sup>31</sup> he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.*

*Acts 2:29-31 (RSV)*

*You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;*

*1 Peter 1:23 (RSV)*

*You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it; that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.*

*Deuteronomy 4:2(RSV)*

<sup>18</sup> *I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; <sup>19</sup> and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.*

*Revelation 22:18-19 (NASB)*

<sup>31</sup> *And taking the twelve, he said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished. <sup>32</sup> For he will be delivered to*

*the Gentiles, and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon; <sup>33</sup> they will scourge him and kill him, and on the third day he will rise.”*

*Luke 18:31-33 (RSV)*

*For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, ‘And he was reckoned with transgressors’; for what is written about me has its fulfilment.”*

*Luke 22:37 (RSV)*

### **Why are so few people willing to take the Bible literally and to believe what it says?**

‘*Hermeneutics*’ is defined as the art or science of interpretation, especially of Scripture. So, we all need to decide how we are going to interpret the Bible, i.e. with what method or approach. The primary question in that regard is whether we believe the Bible should ordinarily be taken

- a) literally or
- b) figuratively/symbolically/metaphorically/allegorically.

My own position is that our *starting point* when interpreting the Bible is that we should *generally* take it literally. However, most people do not take the Bible literally and do not believe that it really means what it says. Instead, for one reason or another, they substitute some other meaning in place of the plain words that the Bible uses. In each case, whatever their individual reasons may be, they have got the problem (and the sin) of unbelief. That is they are unwilling, or perhaps unable, to believe what God’s Word says.

For simplicity, we could separate this problem into three main schools of thought, all of which create this handicap of unbelief and lead to faulty interpretation. We shall examine each of them separately in this chapter, but what they all have in common is that they do *not* have it as their starting point that the plain words of the Bible are generally to be taken as literal fact. However, they tend to adopt that approach for different reasons. Moreover, there are different parts of the Bible that they each particularly disbelieve or misinterpret.

### **The three main errors that people make in approaching the Bible and why they therefore fail to believe it at all, or take it as literally as they should**

At the risk of over-simplifying matters, we could say that most of the people who don’t believe the Bible, or who don’t take accept that it means what it says fall into one or more of the following broad groups:

- a) *liberals* – these tend to reject what the Bible says about *social, moral or ethical issues* and adopt more permissive views of their own instead. Often these are just the current fashions and views of the secular world which they have absorbed. They also tend to reject parts of *the gospel* and don’t like things such as sin, judgment and Hell. They also tend to object to the idea of Jesus being *the only way to salvation* and the claims that the Bible makes to being the exclusive truth
- b) *sceptics* – these tend not to believe that the Bible is true, or are not willing to take it literally, in areas which involve *the miraculous or the supernatural*. Thus they reject, or doubt, what the Bible says about creation, the flood, Noah, angels, demons, and the miracles of Moses, Elijah, Elisha and even Jesus. They also tend not to believe in the spiritual gifts, or they at least deny that spiritual gifts are still in operation and meant to be used today.

- c) *allegorists* – these don't believe that the *prophecies* in the Bible are meant to be taken literally. They believe instead that the prophecies are '*allegorical*', or '*symbolic*', representing some deeper, hidden meaning, rather than accepting the plain words used.

I have presented these three broad points of view as if they were entirely separate, stand-alone errors. However, the reality is that they often overlap and many of us make two, or even all three, of these mistakes simultaneously.

Actually the Bible is entirely true and factual and is *generally* meant to be taken literally, whether it is dealing with salvation or with moral, historical, supernatural or prophetic issues. Therefore, most of the time the Bible is meant to be taken completely literally. It means what it says and says what it means.

It sets out what God is telling us on a range of social or moral issues and is very clear, even if we don't like what it says. It also tells us about God's supernatural power and miracles. Finally, it means exactly what it says about what happened historically, and also what will happen in the future. In all of these areas it is generally meant to be taken literally.

At least as our starting point, we are supposed to read the Bible in the same way as we would read a text book, letter or newspaper. We should generally take it at face value and assume that the apparent meaning is the intended meaning, as we do when we read almost everything else. Once we have accepted the plain, literal meaning of the words used and the factual nature of the events described, whether past or future, we can then go further. We can then be entirely open to look for and accept a number of different layers of meaning and content which are *in addition to* the plain, literal meaning.

We find a lot of '*typology*' in the Bible, whereby one literal, historical event or person is a '*type*' of some later or future event or person. There are patterns in the events described in the Bible and these patterns are very useful. However, they can never be the basis for any doctrine, because any *doctrine* must be based upon clear words that are plainly stated in the Bible. Nevertheless, such things can help to *illustrate and explain* doctrines that we already know about.

So, it is right to engage in what the Jewish people call '*midrash*' and to be alert to see types, patterns and figures wherever they arise in the Bible. But they have to be seen alongside, or *in addition to*, the plain, literal facts of the events or people described. The figurative or typological aspects of the Bible do not negate or contradict the plain, literal truth of what the Bible says. Those patterns and types etc are themselves based upon the underlying facts and they fully accept their literalness and historicity.

Before we enlarge on the right way of interpreting the Bible, let us examine each of these three erroneous schools of thought more closely and see why liberals, sceptics and allegorists are all so mistaken and why they each fail to take the Bible as literal truth. We shall see how easily we can get into a mess if we use any of these wrong approaches and therefore end up not believing what is said, or at least not taking it literally enough.

**A. The '*liberal*' view of Scripture - not accepting what God's Word says on a wide range of points, but especially about the nature of the gospel and various social or moral issues.**

A liberal tends to hold views on social or moral issues which have more to do with how the world thinks than with what the Bible says. For example, this would include things like marriage, divorce, sexual ethics, homosexuality, gender confusion, the role of women in the church and in the family, female elders, female ministers, etc.

Liberals usually also object to many aspects of the gospel. For example, they don't like the idea of God's judgment or Hell or the Lake of Fire. Therefore they tend either to ignore or reject these concepts or else they water them down. They also tend to object to the idea that Jesus is the only way

to be saved. They prefer instead to believe that there are *other ways to be saved*, or even that we are *all saved*, regardless of whether we believe or not.

Liberals tend to pick and choose what they like and dislike about what God says. Then, if God's view offends them, or if they 'disagree' with it, they feel free to substitute their own view instead. Sometimes a person will be open enough to say explicitly that they do not accept what the Bible says on a certain issue, and that they have substituted their own view in its place.

However, this editing or filtering process is more often done covertly, and even unconsciously. Very few liberals ever call themselves liberal. I have never heard anybody do so. Many are not even aware themselves that they have these features or think in these ways. As with most other mind-sets, it is largely unconscious and owes much to the way they were taught to think by others and what they have seen others doing. Therefore, as saw earlier, with the influence of Catholic thinking, this problem of liberal thinking may be affecting you more than you realise.

A liberal-minded person does not feel obligated to accept what the Bible says. He therefore 'edits' the Bible as he reads it. If God says something to which he objects, then he simply ignores it, replaces it with his own view, or redefines it to match his own opinions. In this way a liberal can take what God says about virtually any issue and reject it, alter it, or ignore it, as he sees fit. Moreover, this seems so natural to him that he can easily do it without ever consciously realizing that he is doing so.

A liberal comes to the Bible as its critic or judge, to decide whether he agrees with it. Instead he should come to it humbly, like a child, wanting to understand and obey it. When one stops to think, one has to accept that the very idea of '*disagreeing*' with God is absurd. We are effectively saying that God is making a mistake and that we are correcting Him. Therefore not many of us would be brash enough to say openly that we disagree with Him. We know that we would sound foolish if we said it explicitly.

It is much easier just to convince oneself, whenever God is saying something unpopular or politically incorrect, that *He doesn't really mean what He is saying*. Or, we can say that He was speaking only to the people of 2000 years ago, not to our '*more advanced*' society. In each of these ways multitudes of people justify themselves in ignoring, redefining or rejecting what God says. But they usually do these things without ever coming clean and admitting it openly to themselves, and to others.

If you do not have what the Bible calls '*the love of the truth*,' then such editing, whether conscious or unconscious, will come very easily to you. It will not jar with your conscience. But when a person does have the love of the truth *they value truth for itself*. Therefore they are willing to accept it, whatever it may be, even where the truth brings them inconvenience, unpopularity, or danger. They feel they have no alternative but to do so, because if a thing is true then it is true. If so, it must be accepted, regardless of the consequences or implications of believing it.

A person who has the love of the truth simply wants to *find out what God really says, whatever that may be*. Their intention is then to get into line with it, wherever that takes them and whatever the implications may be. A person who does *not* have the love of the truth will feel free to disagree with or ignore God's Word whenever it cuts across their own views.

It may be that in some ways you have done this. Or, perhaps you have bowed to peer pressure and the influence of others who take that '*flexible*' approach to dealing with God's Word. If so, be honest with yourself and openly acknowledge what you are doing. Don't disguise it or call it by any other name. Admit that you are ignoring or misusing God's Word and then repent of it. If you are unsure whether you do any of these things then ask God to reveal it to you wherever it applies.

Make a decision that, from today onwards, you will *accept and obey whatever God says on any issue*, however irksome that may be to you, or however unpopular it may make you. It is finding the truth that matters, not justifying our own opinions. If we do not eliminate this problem of liberal thinking,

where we sit in judgement on God's Word and pick and choose which parts of it we will and won't believe, then we will be crippled in our walk with the Lord. We will be unable to do His will, or even to read His Word properly.

**B. The *sceptical* or '*higher critical*' view of Scripture – promoting doubt and unbelief about miracles and the supernatural in general, and not accepting the book of Genesis in particular**

The *sceptical* or '*higher critical*' approach to Scripture is closely linked to the liberal view. There is an equal unwillingness to accept that God's Word is true and that it is generally meant to be taken literally. Yet it is also distinct from the liberal approach. Its main emphasis is on denying or doubting anything which involves *God's miraculous or supernatural power*.

Therefore, those who approach the Bible this way will be plagued with unbelief wherever the Bible speaks of miraculous or supernatural events. In particular, they will be unable, or unwilling, to believe in the Genesis account of the creation of the universe in six literal days, the fall of Adam and Eve, the worldwide flood and Noah's Ark. Indeed, they tend to reject all of the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

They will also tend to reject or down-play all miracles, wherever they occur throughout the Bible, even those that Jesus performed Himself. Somehow they consider God incapable of doing these things. Or, even if they accept that in theory He *could* perform miracles, they prefer to believe that He *didn't actually do so*.

This group of people also tend to reject the supernatural in general, whatever form it might take. They have no place for it and either don't believe in it or don't take it seriously. So their attitude is to insist that everything that happens has a purely natural explanation and is the result of ordinary, physical factors. For them, the supernatural has no part to play in anything that happens, or at least not in anything that happens today, or to them, or to people they know.

Some sceptics are less absolute than that. They may be willing to accept the supernatural *in theory*, but they tend not to accept it *in practice*. So, they can be got to accept that there have been miracles, or that demons have influenced people's lives, but only if you are referring to:

- a) *The past, not the present*. So miracles and healings can occur in the first century, but not in the twenty first.
- b) *Somewhere else, never their own locality*. So people may, perhaps, be miraculously healed in Africa, but not where they live
- c) *Someone else, never themselves or anybody they know*. So, someone else might be affected by a demon, but never themselves.

Therefore there are many gradations and variations of this sceptical approach. At the extreme end there is the outright sceptic, or so called '*rationalist*'. That is something of a misnomer because, although they give themselves that self-aggrandizing name, their thinking is not actually rational at all. That is because they fail to take account of God's supernatural power, which is just as real as anything else in this universe, if not more so. At their most extreme, they reject every notion of the supernatural for anybody, in any place, and at any time. Others are less dogmatic, but the net effect is broadly the same, even for them.

Whatever level they may be at, the bottom line is that they never seem to be willing to accept that any miracle can happen *to them* or that God or an angel can speak *to them today*, or that a demon can

deceive or afflict *them*. At any rate, none of those things ever seem to be accepted as happening now, or here, or to them, or to anybody they know

So, the fact that the less extreme sceptics may be willing to concede that supernatural things could occur, to somebody else, somewhere else, or at some time in the past, it makes very little practical difference. The point is that in their own day to day lives, the supernatural is not accepted or recognized. It is effectively ruled out as having any part to play.

I have never felt able to identify with other people's scepticism. It always seemed to me, even from an early age, that if God is God, then He can do anything. So, I saw nothing difficult about Him creating the universe instantaneously, just by speaking it into existence. Why should that be any problem for God?

The very term '*God*' means that He is, by definition, all-powerful and all-knowing. Therefore He is easily capable of suspending the rules of science and doing anything at all. After all, it was He who formulated all of the rules of science in the first place. Apostle Paul made a similar point to this when he was put on trial before King Agrippa:

***Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?  
Acts 26:8 (RSV)***

So, I have always had the opposite difficulty to the one that sceptics struggle with. I have always struggled to see why they struggle to see. The miraculous and the supernatural, including instantaneous creation, are what God specialises in. So, if the god that you believe in is incapable of such things, then what kind of god is he? He sounds rather small and unimpressive.

Whoever he may be, he cannot be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Indeed, your god would be failing to satisfy the very terms of God's 'job description'. That requires, as a minimum, that He be omnipotent (all powerful) and omniscient (all knowing). So, if your god doesn't have these attributes then he isn't the real God. If so, why bother with him at all?

The apostle Peter evidently had no difficulty believing that miracles and supernatural events really occur. We know that because in his second letter he refers to the incident in the book of Numbers where Balaam, the carnal and corrupt prophet, was prevented from cursing the people of Israel. The donkey upon which he was riding saw the angel of the LORD (i.e. Jesus in a bodily pre-appearance) and refused to take Balaam any further.

Then, when Balaam came over to beat the donkey it spoke to him with a human voice. That is clearly a miracle, by anybody's standards. Yet Peter accepted it as historical fact, i.e. that it really happened, exactly as the book of Numbers says. He did not explain any of it away as symbolic or as flowery language. He took it all literally and seriously and we should all do the same:

***<sup>15</sup> Forsaking the right way they have gone astray; they have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Be'or, who loved gain from wrongdoing, <sup>16</sup> but was rebuked for his own transgression; a dumb ass spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.***

***Peter 2:15-16 (RSV)***

Those who take a sceptical approach to the Bible tend to view themselves as too sophisticated for '*Sunday school stories*'. There is some arrogance in that. However, it is not all down to pride or a feeling of superiority. It is also the result of getting into *the habit of cynicism*. However, that only seems to affect them when it comes to the Bible. They adopt very different standards of appraisal when it comes to believing, or not believing, other things.

Sceptics might therefore refuse to accept apostle Paul's word, or even Jesus' word as being authoritative. Yet they can be remarkably ready to believe anything they read in newspapers or see on

the internet or the TV. One particularly sees this gullibility in the way they accept without question the biased and hostile things that are said about Israel. Most media reporting about Israel consists of lies and misinformation.

So, whereas God tells us to believe His Word and to question everything else, a sceptic tends to do the opposite. They will not accept what the Bible says about Israel, but they will believe anything which the media says. The BBC, like almost all of the world's media, is deeply hostile to Israel. It consistently presents unbalanced and distorted reports and refuses to report anything that is supportive of Israel or critical of the Arabs or Palestinians. That bias is plain enough to be seen by anybody who loves the truth, but invisible to those who don't.

The same applies with the creation -v- evolution debate, another topic about which most of the media is wilfully blind. Sceptics refuse to accept the fact that the universe, and everything in it, has been designed on purpose by someone. The fact that there must have been a Creator is self-evident to any five year old child, but not to them. Sceptics will put aside all logic when listening to the arguments for evolution and ignore everything that their eyes tell them about the immense complexity, beauty and orderliness of nature. They do so because they are not looking for the real truth, but only for confirmation of what they have already decided they *want* to believe.

By the way, it is not merely my personal view that it is self-evident that God created the whole world. God Himself says it is obvious, such that any person who doesn't see that and believe it is a *fool*. That's not what I say. It is what God says:

*<sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; <sup>21</sup> for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.*

*Romans 1:19-23 (RSV)*

Indeed, the book of Job goes even further. We are told that even the animals, birds and fish know what God has done and could teach us about it if we asked them:

*<sup>7</sup> "But ask the animals, and they will teach you,  
or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you;*

*<sup>8</sup> or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,  
or let the fish in the sea inform you.*

*<sup>9</sup> Which of all these does not know  
that the hand of the Lord has done this?*

*Job 12:7-9 (NIV)*

### **What happens if we don't believe in creation and don't take Genesis chapters 1-11 literally?**

Chapters 1-11 of Genesis deal with enormously important events in world history such as creation, the fall of Adam and Eve, the worldwide flood, and the subsequent repopulating of the world, leading to the forming of separate nations and languages at the time of the tower of Babel. When we look at the widespread refusal of our society to believe in events such as these, we are also discussing people who purport to be Christians, not just outright unbelievers.

Scepticism and all other forms of unbelief have spread right into the heart of the churches, not just the world outside. That is the scale of the problem. We are looking at how little is believed, even by people who say they are part of the Church, and even by church leaders. In fact, many leaders are

more sceptical and unbelieving than their congregations are. That is probably due to the harm done to them in their days at Bible College or seminary, many of which tend to spread unbelief like a virus. Countless young men have gone off as sincere believers to study at such places but come out as hardened liberals and sceptics with major unbelief issues. That is why seminaries are often referred to as 'theological cemetaries'.

Those who take a sceptical approach generally reject all of Genesis chapters 1-11. They justify themselves in that stance by saying that these chapters are not meant to be taken literally, but only symbolically. Thus, rather than accepting that God created the whole universe in six literal days, as *He says He did*, they feel entitled to contradict Him and say that it actually took place over 'billions of years'. Likewise, instead of accepting that there was a worldwide flood, they say it was just a *local* flood in the area of Iraq, or that it never really occurred at all. The Genesis account is, therefore, reduced to the status of myths and fables.

### **The whole Bible is undermined if we don't take the book of Genesis literally**

Until Charles Darwin published his famous book, *The Origin of Species*, in 1859, virtually everybody, whatever their background, believed that God created the world. They did so because it is obvious that it was created, due to its order and complexity. Moreover, they believed that God created it in six literal 24 hour days, as the book of Genesis says.

However, Charles Darwin's book struck a chord, especially with those who were already inclined to have a more sceptical frame of mind. Therefore evolution slowly began to be accepted, over a period of several decades, in place of the biblical account. Initially this was mainly amongst non-Christians but later it spread into the churches as well.

Nevertheless, by the middle of the twentieth century, the theory of evolution had become accepted by very large numbers of Christians, especially liberals and sceptics, but also some allegorists. Amongst non-Christians, the theory of evolution was welcomed even more uncritically. It seemed to provide a basis for removing God from the picture entirely and for convincing oneself that the world came into being of its own accord.

That conclusion was felt to be a convenient one, because getting rid of God removes all accountability. If there is no God, then we do not need to care what He might think about us, or whether He might judge us and punish us. The very concept of us being answerable to someone higher than ourselves is objectionable to most of us. So, the chance to remove God altogether and dispense with all judgment and accountability made evolution even more attractive. Indeed, for many people, it is its main attraction.

However, even amongst Christians, the theory of evolution has come to be widely accepted. Having been told it so often at school and in the media, many assume that the theory must have been proved by now and that it has acquired the status of fact. Therefore they feel obliged to make a place for it in their theology. Actually, the theory of evolution has not been proved at all, nor come anywhere to being proved. As theories go, it is remarkably thin and full of holes. It has never been effectively argued, let alone proved. It has nothing going for it and there has never been any credible evidence put forward to support it.

At any rate, no scientist would be willing to accept any other theory on evidence as poor as that which is put forward for evolution. Actually, 'evidence' is too grand a word to use to describe what is said in support of evolution. It is not evidence. Neither is it conducted in accordance with the ordinary scientific method, which is used in every field of real science. The theory of evolution is just a set of speculative ideas which are not based on facts but mere guess work and surmising. Indeed, the things they say fly in the face of the real science rather than being supported by it.

Every argument for evolution that I have ever heard has been inadequate. The reasoning its supporters adopt is circular at best. They also reply to all questions about how creatures can change from one species to another (which is impossible) by simply reciting their favourite phrase. That is they say “*Yes, but over millions of years.....*” It is assumed that the passage of a very long period of time, by itself, makes everything possible. But an impossible thing does not become possible merely by virtue of the passage of time, however protracted, not even “*over millions of years*”, or billions for that matter.

If anybody was to try to justify any other scientific theory, or get a drug licensed for use, with the pitiful amount of evidence that has been put forward for evolution, they would be laughed at. However, there is an unspoken convention amongst the supporters of evolution whereby it is agreed not to ask any awkward questions about it and not to allow anybody else to do so either. Therefore, in the media, those who don't accept evolution are given little or no air time.

Nevertheless, despite the weakness of the theory, and the absence of any evidence for it, evolution was an idea whose time had come. Most of its supporters never really examined it. Evidence was not felt to be necessary. They felt they just had to accept it because others were accepting it. Today we are told so frequently that evolution is “*proven scientific fact*” that many of us passively assume that it must be so and ask no further questions. This has meant that even within many churches, the account of creation in the Bible has been pushed aside. A lot of Christians are actually afraid to say that they believe in creation, even to other Christians, in case they might look foolish for believing it.

Instead of rejecting the Bible's account outright, many Christians felt more comfortable arguing that what the Bible said about God creating the universe in six days was just “*poetic language*”. Thus, allegorical thinking, which had previously been directed mainly towards the prophetic parts of the Bible, (see below) was put to wider use to help explain away the Genesis account as well.

There are all sorts of variations and combinations of views. Many people who take an allegorical approach to prophecy would not doubt the Genesis account or the miracles, though a lot of them might doubt the supernatural generally, as sceptics do.

Many people from a Reformed background adopt a confused and contradictory stance. Some take the creation account literally, but don't believe in the flood. Most of them don't take Bible prophecies literally. Others from Reformed churches don't take any of these things literally. Some will accept the biblical accounts of miracles but refuse to believe that any miracles could occur today, in particular, most of them don't believe that spiritual gifts are still in operation.

However, when people refuse to believe in the miracles, whether past or present day, most are doing so because of their *sceptical* mind-set, not due to taking the *allegorical* approach. Nevertheless, for our purposes, when looking at Genesis 1-11, we shall combine these three schools of thought together. Ultimately, if a man ceases to take the Bible literally, or to see it as fact, then he is in unbelief and is mishandling the Scriptures, whether he does so because he is a liberal, a sceptic, an allegorist, or all three combined.

### **Facts and doctrines which are undermined by not believing Genesis chapters 1-11**

The following key facts or doctrines are undermined if we do not take Genesis chapters 1-11 literally:

- a) that God created the Earth and the universe.
- b) that he did so in six literal days.
- c) that this culminated in God creating Adam and Eve as fully formed, mature adults on day six.

- d) that they were created sinless and perfect with no sin nature.
- e) that they fell into sin by their own free choice.
- f) that their sin meant they died spiritually, acquired a sin nature and began, from that moment, to die physically.
- g) that all their descendants inherited a sin nature from them and, in due course, became sinners themselves, who must likewise die, both physically and spiritually. This is the position for everybody who has ever lived, including ourselves.
- h) that the evil of mankind became so intense, and so widespread, that God chose (about 1600 years after the Creation) to wipe out all life on earth, except for those who were saved in the Ark that Noah built.
- i) that God flooded the whole planet, also causing massive geological changes in the process and forming the things we now see, such as fossils, rock strata, oil, gas, and other metal or mineral deposits. The flood also involved the movement of the continents and the formation of separate land masses and islands. In fact, all such things are actually *explained by the flood* rather than being obstacles to our believing in it.
- j) that prior to Adam and Eve there was no death, not even for animals. Adam and Eve were originally vegetarians, as were all the animals, even the ones we now know as carnivores. (This contradicts one of the key elements of evolutionary thinking. They say that there were millions of years prior to Adam and Eve, assuming they are willing to believe to believe this couple ever existed at all. During those ages of time, according to them, countless people and animals supposedly lived and died while ‘evolving’ into us.)
- k) that there was a Tower of Babel and a wicked man called Nimrod who founded what came to be known as *Babylon*, which later became a major theme throughout the whole Bible. He sought to be the first world ruler and was thus a type, or forerunner, of the future antichrist.
- l) that God frustrated Nimrod’s plans by creating a multitude of languages and dividing the world into separate nations. Until this point the whole world spoke one language (probably Hebrew). From the time of the Tower of Babel onwards, God wanted nations to be separate and distinct from each other. That fact has great relevance to the nations of Europe today. They are being joined together in a Federal Union with the aim of becoming one single super-state. In addition to that, the whole world is moving towards the formation of a one-world Government, of the type sought for unsuccessfully by Nimrod, but which *the* antichrist will finally achieve.

So, one can see, even from this brief list, that the whole of the rest of Scripture depends on Genesis chapters 1-11 being literally true. If the biblical account is not true, such that Adam and Eve didn't sin, and didn't pass on their sin nature to us, then it would follow that we do not have a sin nature.

But we do, and that matters, because it puts us on a collision course with God and in line for His judgment. More importantly, if we don't believe Genesis 1-11 about how our sin problem began, then why should we believe anything else the Bible says, for example about how our sin problem can be dealt with by Jesus' death and resurrection? Above all, we should be guided by how Jesus handled the Bible. You will notice that He always accepted it at face value and took it literally.

### **Examples of occasions where Jesus took the Bible completely literally**

God told Noah to build a very large ship. It took him about 100 years. It was not a little boat with a giraffe's head sticking out of the top as it is portrayed so inaccurately in the pictures in most

children's books. On the contrary, until the late nineteenth century (AD) with the advent of modern metal ships, nobody had ever built a ship as big as the Ark. So, that is the right way to picture it. God told Noah to build it so that he and his family, and breeding pairs of all the animals, could survive the worldwide flood that was coming.

By the way, God *sent* all the animals and creatures to the Ark. Noah didn't have to go out and catch them, or even herd them together, as some people assume. Noah was a real man who existed in history. He was born in approximately the year 2948 BC. Many people, even in churches, now assume the account of the flood to be a mere children's story or a fable. But Jesus didn't. He took it completely seriously. These are His own words:

***26"And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: 27they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.***

***Luke 17:26-27 (NASB)***

Jesus ought to know whether the worldwide flood really happened and whether Noah really built the Ark. Jesus was alive and saw it all happen at the time. He was an eye-witness. He therefore knows for certain whether or not it is true. So, the fact that Jesus spoke of the flood in such literal terms, and accepted it without any reservation as an historical event, is a profoundly important indicator for us.

Now look at how Jesus also took literally the account in the book of Genesis of the destruction of the town of Sodom and the rescue of Abraham's nephew, Lot and his family:

***28"It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; 29but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. 30"It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.***

***Luke 17:28-30 (NASB)***

Jesus is saying that the past judgment by the flood, and then the fiery judgment on the town of Sodom, were real historical events and so will be the future judgment of this world. Therefore He is warning us to take that future judgment seriously and not to be like Lot's wife. She perished because she looked back. She hankered after the world as it was and was reluctant to leave Sodom, despite what the angels had said about the judgment that was coming on the city. Note again that Jesus viewed Lot's wife as a literal person who really lived, not as a myth or fable. And He wasn't embarrassed to say so:

***32"Remember Lot's wife. 33"Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.***

***Luke 17:32-33 (NASB)***

On another occasion Jesus was speaking about the prophet Jonah. He was swallowed by a huge fish, having already drowned and died under the water. Jonah's dead body was brought to the shore by that huge fish and God then brought him back to life, so that he could preach to the people of Ninevah and urge them to repent. Note again how Jesus takes the account of Jonah's experience completely literally. He says nothing to doubt or contradict any of it:

***29As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. 30"For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.***

***Luke 11:29-30 (NASB)***

The "sign of Jonah" to which Jesus refers is the fact that Jonah was raised from the dead. Jesus meant that He Himself, like Jonah, would be raised from the dead.

Likewise, Jesus also takes literally the account of how the Queen of the South (the Queen of Sheba) came to visit King Solomon. Some people today doubt whether she really existed, but Jesus views her as a real historical figure:

*<sup>31</sup>"The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. <sup>32</sup>"The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.*

*Luke 11:31-32 (NASB)*

Jesus took *all* the historical facts of the Old Testament literally. There is no example of Him ever doing otherwise. That ought to be conclusive, even by itself. We should therefore do the same as Jesus did when the Bible speaks about past events.

### **If Genesis chapters 1-11 are not literally true, then why should we believe anything else in the rest of the Bible?**

If we don't believe in Genesis 1-11, then we undermine the whole of the rest of the Bible too. If the accounts of creation and of the lives of Adam, Noah etc are not literally true and factual, then why did Jesus believe in them and speak of them all as fact? If they are not real, then it must follow that Jesus was either mistaken or lying. If so, He would not be God and we ought not to listen to Him at all.

If evolution is true, and these events described in Genesis 1-11 really are just fables and myths, then what confidence can we have in Jesus, or the apostles? How can we believe *any* of what they say about sin, judgment, Hell, the Lake of Fire, salvation, the future fulfilment of Bible prophecy and so on? Everything else in the Bible becomes unreliable if we can't trust the book of Genesis.

Many people in churches who claim to be Christians do not believe in miracles either. Some are embarrassed by anything supernatural and they ignore it or try to explain it all away. The Bible commentary writer, the late William Barclay, was a classic example of that. In many ways he was sincere and he did have some valuable insights into the Bible. However, his faith was undermined by his background, and by the sceptics and so called '*higher critics*' who had taught him. As a result he could not bring himself to believe in the miracles, not even those performed by Jesus Himself.

He argued, for example, that when Jesus fed the 5000 it was not a miracle at all. Barclay's theory was that the people were inspired, or ashamed, by the boy's example in offering to share his lunch with the crowd. Therefore he believed that all the other people simply got out their own packed lunches, which they had been hiding, and shared them with each other.

So, William Barclay taught that the 'miracle' of Jesus feeding the multitude was actually just an allegorical account of the 'real' miracle, which was how He taught the people to share. That is so lame it is pathetic. Yet, many believe it, because they have been taught, by word and by example, not to believe in miracles, due mainly to the unbelief of their leaders.

One is reminded also of the apochryphal story of a liberal/sceptical theologian. He was preaching about Moses parting the waters of the Red Sea, to enable the people of Israel to walk across the dry sea bed to escape from the pursuing Egyptian army. He explained that it was not really a 'sea' as such, but a reed bed, with shallow water, about two feet deep.

Therefore, he said, the Israelites were able to 'paddle' across it, and that it should not really be called the Red Sea at all, but the 'Reed' Sea. As he said this, an elderly black man in the congregation cried

out “*Praise the Lord. What a miracle!*” The liberal/sceptical preacher looked at him patronisingly and said “*Didn’t you hear me? I said that the water was only two feet deep.*”

The elderly black man replied “*Yes - praise the LORD! What a miracle that God was able to drown the whole Egyptian army in two feet of water*”. The story may be apocryphal, but it illustrates how silly it is to try to explain away the miraculous or the supernatural. Ultimately, you have to make your choice and decide whether you are going to believe God’s Word or not. But if you choose not to do so then, like the sceptical preacher above, you will create more problems for yourself than you solve.

### **C. The allegorical view of Scripture - not accepting that the prophecies in the Bible are meant to be taken literally**

As we saw earlier, our English word '*hermeneutics*' means the approach we take to interpreting the Bible. Ordinarily, we don't find this very difficult when reading every other kind of literature. We use our common sense and it is usually fairly obvious how a text book, business letter, contract or any other document, should be understood. However, when it comes to the Bible, many of us operate without any of that common sense, especially with prophecy.

A number of misguided methods of interpretation have been developed. Each of these are based on not taking the Bible at face value, and instead assuming that in some way it is being symbolic and means something other than what it says. It is a disastrously mistaken approach and leads to many errors. Sadly, it is the method now used by most churches in the Western world.

If the plain words of, the Bible say "ABC", the allegorical method or approach urges you to interpret it as actually meaning "XYZ" instead. This secondary meaning which is assumed to be there, hidden beneath the surface, is usually something obscure and indirect which you would never think of for yourself unless someone told you that it meant that.

People who attend churches which take the allegorical approach are taught not to rely on the ordinary, plain meaning of the words of the Bible. Instead they are told to seek a “*deeper underlying meaning*” that some teacher says those words have. He then becomes the Bible’s interpreter, rather than the Bible speaking for itself. On that basis, without him and his colleagues to tell us what the allegories mean, the Bible cannot be understood at all.

The allegorical approach would be fine if the Bible ever *told* us to understand it that way, but it doesn't. Likewise, it would be less of a problem if there was only one consistent way of interpreting what the supposed symbols mean, as opposed to the countless variations which people have dreamed up.

### **Some very specific prophecies about the city of Tyre, which were literally fulfilled**

One of the strongest arguments in support of the plain/literal interpretation of prophecy is the fact that all of the prophecies that have been fulfilled so far have been fulfilled literally, with real, tangible events. For example, let’s look at some prophecies by Zechariah and Ezekiel concerning Tyre, the proud, wealthy, principal city of Phoenicia. It was a coastal city and was in two parts. The largest section was on the mainland, but there was another, smaller part of the city which was on an island, half a mile out to sea. Let’s look first at what Zechariah prophesied about Tyre:

<sup>3</sup> *For Tyre built herself a fortress*

*And piled up silver like dust,*

*And gold like the mire of the streets.*

<sup>4</sup> *Behold, the Lord will dispossess her*

*And cast her wealth into the sea;*

***And she will be consumed with fire.  
Zechariah 9:3-4 (NASB)***

Now let's look at a much more detailed prophecy from the book of Ezekiel. The people of Tyre had been taking pleasure in the misfortunes and sufferings of Israel. Their lack of compassion grieved God, which is a lesson to us not to do as they did. As a punishment for their callous attitude towards His chosen people, God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel in 586 BC. He said that Tyre was going to experience the following specific judgments from God:

- a) nations (plural) will come and destroy Tyre. The King of the first of these nations is named, i.e. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.
- b) King Nebuchadnezzar will break down the walls and towers of Tyre
- c) the debris will be scraped away, so as to make Tyre a bare rock.
- d) the stones and timber will be thrown into the sea.
- e) Tyre will cease to be a city and will be uninhabited.
- f) it will never be rebuilt.
- g) it will become a place where fishermen spread their nets (to dry them).

Now consider verses 1-14 below and pick out each aspect of Ezekiel's prophecy:

***<sup>1</sup> Now in the eleventh year, on the first of the month, the word of the LORD came to me saying, <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, because Tyre has said concerning Jerusalem, 'Aha, the gateway of the peoples is broken; it has opened to me. I shall be filled, now that she is laid waste,' <sup>3</sup> therefore thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves. <sup>4</sup> They will destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; and I will scrape her debris from her and make her a bare rock. <sup>5</sup> She will be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken,' declares the Lord GOD, 'and she will become spoil for the nations. <sup>6</sup> Also her daughters who are on the mainland will be slain by the sword, and they will know that I am the LORD.'"***

***<sup>7</sup>For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will bring upon Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, chariots, cavalry and a great army. <sup>8</sup>He will slay your daughters on the mainland with the sword; and he will make siege walls against you, cast up a ramp against you and raise up a large shield against you. <sup>9</sup>The blow of his battering rams he will direct against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers. <sup>10</sup>Because of the multitude of his horses, the dust raised by them will cover you; your walls will shake at the noise of cavalry and wagons and chariots when he enters your gates as men enter a city that is breached. <sup>11</sup>With the hoofs of his horses he will trample all your streets. He will slay your people with the sword; and your strong pillars will come down to the ground.***

***<sup>12</sup>Also they will make a spoil of your riches and a prey of your merchandise, break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses, and throw your stones and your timbers and your debris into the water. <sup>13</sup>So I will silence the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps will be heard no more. <sup>14</sup>I will make you a bare rock; you will be a place for the spreading of nets. You will be built no more, for I the LORD have spoken," declares the Lord GOD.***

***Ezekiel 26:1-14 (NASB)***

What Zechariah said above about Tyre, plus all of the points (a) - (g) that were prophesied by Ezekiel, were fulfilled literally and exactly, not just metaphorically. To begin with, the part of the city that

was on the mainland was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. He laid siege to it for 13 years until 573 BC. He tore down the land-based part of the city, but did not destroy the rest of it, which was on the island.

However, 254 years later in 332 BC when Alexander the Great was passing by, conquering the known world, the people of Tyre resisted him. Instead of surrendering, they all took shelter on the small island a short distance out to sea, Nebuchadnezzar had never managed to reach that little island all those years before when he had attacked Tyre. The people of Tyre had used it on other occasions in the past as a place to escape to. Therefore they thought they would be safe there from Alexander's attack, as their ancestors had been with previous attacks. But they were wrong. God arranged for the remainder of the prophecies to be fulfilled by Alexander.

Alexander was a pagan and so, without having any idea that he was fulfilling a prophecy, and knowing nothing of the Hebrew Scriptures, he got his armies to take the rubble and timber of the ruined city of Tyre and throw it all into the sea. It was exactly as both Zechariah and Ezekiel had prophesied. In that way he built a half-mile long causeway, all the way out to the offshore island. He used all the rubble and debris of Tyre for this purpose, even the dust! How amazing is that? If we had time, we could give many more such examples, from the other prophets, where their various prophecies are literally and exactly fulfilled, just as these were.

**The Bible does sometimes use figures of speech, but they are not allegories. They just need to be understood correctly and then taken literally in terms of what they actually mean**

The Bible, like any book, does sometimes use figures of speech and colourful, poetic phrases. There can be no doubt about that, because Jesus says so Himself:

<sup>25</sup>*"I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father.*

*John 16:25 (ESV)*

However, even when figures of speech are used, they still mean exactly what the figure of speech is intended to convey. So, when Jesus says "*I am the vine; you are the branches*" He simply means that He is the source of our life and power and that we must be attached to Him and draw our strength and wisdom from Him, or else we can do nothing. It's not complicated. Even an unsophisticated person can recognise it as a helpful figure of speech. It doesn't need to be "de-coded".

So, even on those occasions when the Bible uses such vivid expressions or poetic phrases the meaning is still easy to see. However, it is only easy to see if you are being plain and uncomplicated, and are using your common sense. If you aren't, then even the simplest statements can be misunderstood. Consider this passage from Isaiah. It contains a figure of speech but the meaning is plain enough. It refers to the way in which the line of succession of King David, the son of Jesse, will be cut but that in the future David's line will be restored by the Messiah, Jesus:

<sup>33</sup> *Behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts  
will lop the boughs with terrifying power;  
the great in height will be hewn down,  
and the lofty will be brought low.*

<sup>34</sup> *He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an axe,  
and Lebanon with its majestic trees will fall.*

<sup>1</sup> *There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*

<sup>2</sup> *And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,*

*the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.  
<sup>3</sup>And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.  
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;  
<sup>4</sup>but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.  
Isaiah 10:33 – 11:4 (RSV)*

This was a prophecy made by Isaiah about how the Messiah would arise like a shoot from the stump of Jesse, i.e. as if the kingly line of Jesse was a tree which had been chopped down. Obviously, that kingly line of Jesse/David isn't a tree and Jesus isn't a shoot, but the metaphor is clear and expresses Isaiah's point very well.

**There are also some more difficult figures of speech that are harder to understand, for example the expression "a good eye".**

The expression "a good eye" is used by Jesus in Matthew chapter six. Very few versions of the Bible translate it correctly, because it is a Jewish figure of speech, or slang expression, which most English speaking translators have not understood properly. That is probably because they didn't ask a Jewish believer to help them to translate it.

The translators of the New King James Version (NKJV) presumably don't understand the meaning of the phrases, 'good eye' and 'bad eye'. But they have at least been honest enough just to translate them literally, word for word. They appear to have done that rather than try to guess at their real meaning, which has to do with being generous or stingy. They express it as follows:

*<sup>22</sup> "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. <sup>23</sup> But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"  
Matthew 6:22-23 (NKJV)*

The question is what does Jesus actually mean by saying:

..... "If ..... your eye is good, or "..... if your eye is bad....."?"

Over the years I have heard a number of preachers struggle with that passage. They have generally assumed that Jesus was talking about our "spiritual eyesight", or having "clear vision" or "the ability to see things spiritually". Most Gentiles have never heard of the Jewish figure of speech "a good eye". Therefore that particular phrase makes no sense to them if translated word for word, without any explanatory footnote.

Therefore, most translation committees choose to alter or expand it in translation to try to get it to make some kind of sense. The problem is that they get it wrong, because they simply don't know what the slang expression actually meant. Let's look at a few other examples of the translation of Matthew 6:22-23 which all elaborate upon it wrongly. They each use embroidered phrases along the lines of how "a pure eye lets sunshine into your soul" and about having a "clear eye" or a "healthy eye" etc.

They go wrong because they alter Jesus' words to try to force them to make sense rather than make enquiries as to what Jesus actually meant. Had they done so they would have discovered that Jesus

was not speaking about eyesight at all, but *generosity*. At any rate, here are some of the attempts to translate the phrase by a number of translators who did not realise that it was a figure of speech:

<sup>22</sup>*"Your eye is a lamp for your body. A pure eye lets sunshine into your soul. <sup>23</sup>But an evil eye shuts out the light and plunges you into darkness. If the light you think you have is really darkness, how deep that darkness will be!*

*Matthew 6:22-23 (New Living Translation)*

<sup>22</sup> *"The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. <sup>23</sup> But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

*Matthew 6:22-23 (NASB)*

<sup>22</sup>*"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, <sup>23</sup>but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

*Matthew 6:22-23 (ESV)*

None of these attempts convey the correct meaning. The phrase '*to have a good eye*' means to be generous, whereas to '*have a bad eye*' means to be stingy or mean. It's as simple as that. The meaning comes over most clearly in the Jewish New Testament, translated by a Jewish believer, David H Stern. He keeps the literal, word for word translation, but then helpfully includes the meaning in brackets afterwards. He does so because he knows that most Gentiles have no idea what the meaning of those phrases is:

<sup>22</sup>*The eye is the lamp of the body. 'So if you have a 'good eye' [that is, if you are generous] your whole body will be full of light; <sup>23</sup>but if you have an 'evil eye' [if you are stingy] your whole body will be full of darkness.*

*Matthew 6:22-23 (Stern Version)*

All we need to do is realise that the phrases 'good eye' and 'bad eye' have to do with being generous or being stingy. Then all the rest of the passage makes sense. Jesus is saying this in the wider context of talking about financial giving and laying up treasures in Heaven. He then goes on to speak of how we cannot serve both God and money, and how we must not be anxious about money and provision etc. Against that backdrop, it makes perfect sense for Jesus to speak of being generous or stingy and the effect it has on us. The whole passage fits together perfectly once you realise what the figures of speech mean.

That example of a translation problem illustrates the fact that where the Bible contains a figure of speech in the original Hebrew or Greek, we just need to find out *what that expression actually means in their culture/language*. After that, we must either use some other phrase which conveys the same meaning in English. Or, we could set it out word for word but include a footnote explaining its meaning. Then, from that point on, we should accept the meaning of the expression and believe what it is saying.

So, in this example, Jesus intends us to realise that he is not talking about eyesight but generosity or stinginess. Once we have grasped that, He then wants us to take Him literally, i.e. to believe that the effects of being generous or stingy really will be as He describes them. This point will be dealt with further below when we come to consider right and wrong ways to translate the Bible. We shall examine the differences between the approaches of literal translation, which is done word for word, and '*dynamic equivalency*' which is a looser way of translating.

**There are some genuine allegories in the Bible, but when they occur it is usually made very clear that they are allegories**

The central belief of those who take the allegorical approach to interpretation is that all, or virtually all, prophecy is assumed to be an enormously long series of allegories. I will freely concede that there are some instances where the Bible does present allegories. We shall look at an example of this below, from the book of Ezekiel where the Bible tells us expressly that what is being said is an allegory.

However, that is unusual. Therefore, far from giving us any basis for assuming that the rest of the Bible is *generally* meant to be taken as an allegory, this example from Ezekiel suggests the direct opposite. What I mean is that when the allegory is used in Ezekiel we are *told so plainly*. That suggests that the rest of the time, unless it is obvious, or where we are explicitly told that it is an allegory, then it is *not* intended to be taken as such. That is usually the case. So, allegories are the exception, not the norm. At any rate, look how on this occasion God uses an allegory to make a vivid but clearly understandable point:

*<sup>1</sup> In the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, write down the name of this day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day. <sup>3</sup> And utter an allegory to the rebellious house and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Set on the pot, set it on, pour in water also; <sup>4</sup> put in it the pieces of flesh, all the good pieces, the thigh and the shoulder; fill it with choice bones. <sup>5</sup> Take the choicest one of the flock, pile the logs under it; boil its pieces, seethe also its bones in it. <sup>6</sup> "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose rust is in it, and whose rust has not gone out of it! Take out of it piece after piece, without making any choice. <sup>7</sup> For the blood she has shed is still in the midst of her; she put it on the bare rock, she did not pour it upon the ground to cover it with dust.*

*<sup>8</sup> To rouse my wrath, to take vengeance, I have set on the bare rock the blood she has shed, that it may not be covered. <sup>9</sup> Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the bloody city! I also will make the pile great. <sup>10</sup> Heap on the logs, kindle the fire, boil well the flesh, and empty out the broth, and let the bones be burned up. <sup>11</sup> Then set it empty upon the coals, that it may become hot, and its copper may burn, that its filthiness may be melted in it, its rust consumed. <sup>12</sup> In vain I have wearied myself; its thick rust does not go out of it by fire. <sup>13</sup> Its rust is your filthy lewdness. Because I would have cleansed you and you were not cleansed from your filthiness, you shall not be cleansed any more till I have satisfied my fury upon you. <sup>14</sup> I the LORD have spoken; it shall come to pass, I will do it; I will not go back, I will not spare, I will not repent; according to your ways and your doings I will judge you, says the Lord GOD."*

*Ezekiel 24:1-14 (RSV)*

In the above passage, God tells Ezekiel to present the people of Jerusalem with this allegory (or parable) about a boiling pot. It was intended to symbolize how Jerusalem would be besieged by the king of Babylon and 'boiled,' as if the city was a pot with meat in it. The meaning of this, and the fact that it is an allegory, is already obvious enough to begin with. Nevertheless, for the avoidance of all doubt, it is then directly stated to be an allegory. Consider how very different this is from the multitudes of other passages that are *not* allegories but are wrongly assumed to be so.

In this next example the Bible goes even further. The passage is not only stated to be an allegory, but the meaning of the allegory is then carefully explained. It leaves us in no doubt that that is what we are dealing with:

*<sup>1</sup> The word of the Lord came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, propound a riddle, and speak an allegory to the house of Israel; <sup>3</sup> say, Thus says the Lord God: A great eagle with great wings and long pinions, rich in plumage of many colors, came to Lebanon and took the top of the cedar; <sup>4</sup> he broke off the topmost of its young twigs and carried it to a land of trade, and set it in a city of merchants. <sup>5</sup> Then he took of the seed of the land and planted it in fertile soil; he placed it beside abundant waters. He set it like a willow twig, <sup>6</sup> and it sprouted and became a low spreading vine, and its branches turned*

toward him, and its roots remained where it stood. So it became a vine, and brought forth branches and put forth foliage.

<sup>7</sup> “But there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage; and behold, this vine bent its roots toward him, and shot forth its branches toward him that he might water it. From the bed where it was planted <sup>8</sup> he transplanted it to good soil by abundant waters, that it might bring forth branches, and bear fruit, and become a noble vine. <sup>9</sup> Say, Thus says the Lord God: Will it thrive? Will he not pull up its roots and cut off its branches, so that all its fresh sprouting leaves wither? It will not take a strong arm or many people to pull it from its roots. <sup>10</sup> Behold, when it is transplanted, will it thrive? Will it not utterly wither when the east wind strikes it—wither away on the bed where it grew?”

Ezekiel 17:1-10 (RSV)

<sup>11</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to me: <sup>12</sup> “Say now to the rebellious house, Do you not know what these things mean? Tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, and took her king and her princes and brought them to him to Babylon. <sup>13</sup> And he took one of the seed royal and made a covenant with him, putting him under oath. (The chief men of the land he had taken away, <sup>14</sup> that the kingdom might be humble and not lift itself up, and that by keeping his covenant it might stand.) <sup>15</sup> But he rebelled against him by sending ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and a large army. Will he succeed? Can a man escape who does such things? Can he break the covenant and yet escape?

<sup>16</sup> As I live, says the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant with him he broke, in Babylon he shall die. <sup>17</sup> Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company will not help him in war, when mounds are cast up and siege walls built to cut off many lives. <sup>18</sup> Because he despised the oath and broke the covenant, because he gave his hand and yet did all these things, he shall not escape. <sup>19</sup> Therefore thus says the Lord God: As I live, surely my oath which he despised, and my covenant which he broke, I will requite upon his head. <sup>20</sup> I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon and enter into judgment with him there for the treason he has committed against me. <sup>21</sup> And all the pick of his troops shall fall by the sword, and the survivors shall be scattered to every wind; and you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken.”

Ezekiel 17:11-21 (RSV)

**Our general approach to prophecy should be to take it literally. That should always be our starting point, before we begin to look for patterns or types or engage in any *midrash*.**

We saw above that when Ezekiel used these allegories he *said* he was doing so. He even explained their meaning. In other cases the allegory is usually so obvious that it doesn't need to be pointed out. At any rate, what we can say very clearly is that there is no instruction, or even permission, given anywhere in the Bible for us to approach the bulk of Scripture as if it was *generally* symbolic, or as if it *usually* contained secondary, allegorical meanings.

That is not the way that Jesus, or the apostles, or the prophets, approached the Bible. They assumed that a passage was *not* an allegory unless they were specifically told that it *was*, or unless its allegorical nature was totally obvious. Examples of that would be where Jesus spoke of Himself as being a ‘*door*’ or a ‘*Shepherd*’ or of us being *sheep* and so on.

That consistent example of how Jesus and the prophets and apostles approached the Bible ought, even by itself, to convince us of the wrongness of the allegorical approach, whereby the presence of an allegory is assumed, almost across the board. We hardly need any additional reasons to reject it. Nevertheless, there are plenty of other reasons to say that the allegorical approach is mistaken, some of which we will examine below.

## **The mistakes and confusion that the allegorical approach causes**

The mistake of treating the Bible as allegorical, in instances where the Bible does not instruct us to do so, is mainly made in relation to prophecy. Therefore, the most obvious book which tends to get wrongly allegorised is Revelation. But it is also done with all the other prophetic passages in both the old and New Testaments, especially Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah and Matthew. Prophecy as a whole adds up to about 30% of the Scriptures and is spread all over the Bible.

However, let's look firstly at an example from the book of Revelation. It shows how people can go badly wrong, and end up with wildly inaccurate beliefs, if they adopt the allegorical approach and assume that passages are allegories when, in fact, they aren't. Then, later in this chapter, we shall examine five more specific examples of doctrinal errors that come from assuming a passage to be an allegory when it isn't.

## **The error of not accepting that the 1000 year millennial reign of Jesus Christ on the Earth is literally what will happen**

Perhaps the most obvious error made by those who allegorise the prophetic Scriptures is in relation to the period called the '*Millennium*'. This is the 1000 year reign of Jesus Christ. It is going to happen on this physical Earth, not in Heaven. Revelation chapter 20 speaks of this future period, but so too do most of the prophetic books in the Old Testament.

The main difference is that Revelation goes further and specifies the *length* of this Kingdom. It tells us six times that it will last for 1,000 years. How many times does that need to be said in the Bible for us to be willing to believe that God means exactly what He says, and is not using the device of an allegory?

Due to so many preachers misguidedly treating this passage from Revelation, and other passages from other books, as if they were allegories when in fact they aren't, most people in Britain still don't believe in a literal Millennium, whatever length it may be. Most people do not even know that Jesus will reign on the Earth at all. Yet it is frequently spoken about, and in great detail, by most of the prophets, not just by apostle John. However, for now, let's read part of Revelation chapter 20 and pick out some of the other key features of what will happen before, during and after those 1000 years:

*<sup>1</sup>Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. <sup>2</sup>And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; <sup>3</sup>and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. <sup>4</sup>Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. <sup>5</sup>The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.*

*<sup>6</sup>Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. <sup>7</sup>When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, <sup>8</sup>and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. <sup>9</sup>And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. <sup>10</sup>And the devil who deceived them was*

***thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.***

***Revelation 20:1-10 (NASB)***

While Jesus is reigning as King on the Earth, Satan will be put into a prison so that he is not able to deceive people. He will stay locked up until just before the end of that 1000 year period. Moreover, we see that believers who have died are raised from the dead at the start of the Millennium. They will then live on the Earth, in their physical resurrection bodies, and reign with Jesus during the whole period.

We see from verse five that unbelievers, i.e. unsaved non-Christians, are not resurrected until later, at the end of the 1000 years. We learn elsewhere, in various other passages, that at the end of the 1000 years all the unbelievers are also physically raised from the dead. They too are then given resurrection bodies, in order that they can be judged at the Great White Throne judgment.

Before that, towards the end of the 1000 years, Satan will be released for a short period. He will then take his last opportunity to deceive as many people as he can, and to lead a worldwide rebellion against the King, Jesus. He will even attempt to attack Jerusalem. But that revolt will be snuffed out very abruptly by Jesus. After that, Satan himself will finally be thrown into the Lake of Fire, which was prepared for him so long ago.

Now, let us look at how very differently Revelation 20:1-10, and other related passages, are dealt with by those who believe that we are meant to allegorise the Scriptures. Their various misinterpretations produce all sorts of different sequences of events. But none of them are anything like what the text actually says.

### **The allegorical view of Revelation 20: 1-10 and other related passages, and the various mistakes which that approach produces**

Those who take the allegorical approach to Bible prophecy look at this same passage, and many other related passages, but come up with a very wide range of mistaken beliefs. We shall now set out some of the most common errors:

- a) They don't believe that there will actually be a 1000 year reign of Jesus on the Earth. They assume instead that that is just a 'metaphor' for Jesus "*reigning on the Earth now, through His body, the church*". They mean that He reigns through us.
- b) Therefore they believe that the '*reign*' of Jesus is not in the future, but is already happening now.
- c) So, according to them, the Church is already 'ruling and reigning' now on this Earth. If they are right, then one has to say that it is all a very disappointing damp squib or anti-climax, in comparison to the glowing terms in which the Bible describes what that time will be like.
- d) They believe that the stated length of Jesus' reign, i.e. 1000 years is not to be taken literally. Instead it is viewed as 'poetic language', just meaning "*a long time*". It is usually taken to refer to the whole Church age, which is already nearly 2000 years.
- e) Amazingly, they also believe that Satan is *already in prison*, even now as you read this. So, they believe that the deception and chaos that we all experience today is not caused, or even increased, by Satan or his demons. It is assumed that if Satan and his demons play any part in our lives at all, then it is only very minor. It therefore follows, in their view, that nobody is 'demonised.' So nobody is oppressed, deceived or tormented by demons. Moreover, nobody needs to have any demon cast out of them.

- f) So, the allegorists' specific errors about Bible prophecy also affect their general understanding of the various things that are done by demons, here and now. So, their mistaken 'eschatology' (the study of the end times) distorts their 'demonology' (the study of demons). This is a good example of how misunderstanding Bible prophecy can spill over and distort all the rest of your theology too. I emphasise that because the errors and confusion caused by the allegorical approach are by no means confined to the area of prophecy.
- g) Most of those who take the allegorical approach do not believe that resurrected Christians will ever be brought back to live on this physical Earth again. Instead, most of them believe that believers will go to Heaven and stay there permanently. Thus most Christians who accept the allegorical approach do not believe that we will ever live again on this Earth. There is no place in their thinking for any future role for this physical Earth. Future events after we die are generally assumed to be purely '*spiritual*' and to take place in Heaven.
- h) They do not believe that any literal, military attack will ever be mounted by Satan on King Jesus, or on the city of Jerusalem. Indeed, those who take the allegorical approach basically see no role for Jerusalem at all, either now or in the future. They see no role for Israel or the Jewish people either. These are all assumed to be irrelevant, and to have no further part to play in God's plans. So, Israel is relegated from centre stage, which is how the Bible views it. Instead it is assumed to have little or no part to play in anything. That profound mistake leads them on to all sorts of other related errors in both doctrine and practice. See below and see also later books in this series which deal with Israel and '*replacement theology*', i.e. the mistaken idea that the Church has replaced Israel.

### **How then *should* we interpret the Bible?**

The correct approach to interpreting the Bible, or at least the correct *starting point*, is very simple. It is generally meant to be understood literally. Most of the time it is not complicated. It usually means exactly what it says. Therefore you should generally assume that any words used in the Bible are to be given their plain, ordinary, everyday meaning unless there is a good reason to do otherwise.

An example of that would be where the text is clearly a metaphor or figure of speech, or where the text itself says explicitly that an allegory is being used, as we saw above. Do not assume that the words of the Bible *generally have* any special, secret, mysterious or allegorical meaning hidden beneath the surface. To make such an assumption is both wrong and dangerous, because it treats the exception as if it was the rule.

So, let us now set out what is known as the '*golden rule*'. Unless there is a very good reason to do otherwise, this approach should always be taken when interpreting any verse of the Bible, whether it is law, history, poetry, prophecy or a letter. Just use the same simple method almost all the time.

### **The "*golden rule*" for interpreting the Bible correctly**

Whilst recognizing that the Bible does contain examples of all sorts of figures of speech, metaphors, symbols, analogies, hyperbole and even allegories, we should always *begin* the reading of any passage of the Bible with this as our starting point or *default-setting*:

*".....take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning, unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and other [obvious and fundamental] truths, indicate clearly otherwise."*

In short, every word in the Bible is to be understood exactly as it reads, unless there is something in that passage, or in some other passage, which clearly shows that it should be understood in some

other, non-literal way. Some examples would be the passage we saw earlier from Matthew 6:22-23, when Jesus used a Jewish figure of speech, about having a 'good eye', i.e. being generous, or when He spoke of Himself as a door or a Shepherd or a vine etc.

I should also add that following this golden rule does not in any way prevent you from also being able to see that a particular passage in the Bible is meant to be taken as a 'type'? That is where a literal event or person which is described in the Bible *also* prefigures, or gives information about, some future event or person. That is, *as well as being* literally true/factual/historical, the person or event can *also* be a type of someone or something else.

For example, Jacob's son, Joseph is a type of Jesus, because many of the facts and circumstances of his life illustrate events that would later occur in the life of Jesus. There are very many of these, for example, the way that Joseph suffered in order to save his own people, the way he was sold for pieces of silver, the fact that his brothers did not recognize him, even when he was standing in front of them and the way that Joseph, in the end, suddenly revealed his identity to all of his brothers at the same time. All of these things literally happened to Joseph. Yet, they do *also* prefigure real, literal events that have occurred, or will one day occur, in the life of Jesus.

Thus we learn more from these events in the life of Joseph than just the details of the events themselves. They did all literally happen to Joseph and they are real events in history, but they also point to and help to illustrate other, bigger events as well. They have a deeper meaning, and you could even say a secondary meaning, by virtue of being a type. But that secondary meaning is *in addition* to the plain, literal meaning. It is *not an alternative* to it.

So, the fact that there are more than 20 striking similarities between the events of Joseph's life and those of Jesus' life does *not* mean that those events never really happened to Joseph. They did literally happen. It is just that they also have a secondary, typological meaning *as well as, not instead of*, the literal, surface meaning.

I ought to point out that I have actually slightly shortened the 'golden rule' from the way it is usually expressed. Most people begin it with the following words, which I chose to leave out:

*"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, you should generally seek no other sense."*

I removed those words because, although strictly correct, at least in one sense, they have the potential to be misunderstood and often are. What they actually mean is that where the plain sense of the words used makes common sense then you should *generally* seek no other sense *instead of* that literal meaning.

That is correct. However, some people take it too far and wrongly assume that we should *never expect to see any further or deeper meaning, not even in addition to, or alongside*, the literal meaning. In fact, there can be, and quite often there is. As we have seen, there can be types and prophetic patterns *in addition to* the plain meaning.

So, if you understand the words of the first line of the golden rule in that way, then those words are helpful and should be included. However, some people misunderstand them and wrongly take them to be a prohibition against seeing *any* types and patterns etc in the Bible. Therefore I felt it might be safer to leave the first line out, so as to prevent that error.

This golden rule is not a new approach. It has always been the right approach. It was the way that Jesus, the apostles and the Old Testament prophets always interpreted the Bible, though only as a starting point. Let's look at another example which demonstrates that this is how they consistently operated:

## **The prophet Daniel took Jeremiah's prophecies literally**

When the prophet Daniel was a young man he was taken into captivity in Babylon, together with most of the people from the Southern part of Israel called Judah. This catastrophe of being sent into exile had been prophesied earlier by the prophet Jeremiah. He had said it would happen and it did, exactly as he described it:

*<sup>11</sup>'This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. <sup>12</sup>'Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation.*

*Jeremiah 25:11-12 (NASB)*

Jeremiah said that the captivity in Babylon would last for 70 years and that's exactly how long it did last. However the question, for our purposes, is *what did the people at the time think?* Did they believe that Jeremiah meant that it would last 70 literal, ordinary years? Or, did they think that he was just saying something symbolic? We get the answer by looking at how the prophet Daniel, who lived later than Jeremiah, interpreted what Jeremiah had said. As you can see for yourself, he took it all absolutely literally:

*<sup>1</sup>In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasu-e'rus, by birth a Mede, who became king over the realm of the Chalde'ans-- <sup>2</sup>in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years which, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. <sup>3</sup>Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.*

*Daniel 9:1-3 (RSV)*

When the 70 years that Jeremiah had specified were almost completed, Daniel began to pray and fast and to get the Jewish people ready for the return to the Land. He took the writings of Jeremiah at face value, and believed that 70 years meant 70 literal years, with no symbolism at all. We should approach the Bible exactly as Daniel did.

## **How should we interpret the remaining, unfulfilled prophecies in the Bible about the future? Should they also be taken literally, as per Daniel's approach?**

The answer is yes. We should expect all Bible prophecies to be literally fulfilled. What the Bible says about the future is going to happen exactly as it says it will. God has decided that He will not take any major step without revealing it beforehand to His prophets. Therefore if we want to know what the future holds, we need to look in the Bible:

*"For the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.*

*Amos 3:7 (ESV)*

Thus, we are meant to take all the prophecies about the future completely seriously. We must therefore make ourselves aware of all of these things, and get ready for them to happen, *exactly as prophesied*. Otherwise, what is the point of God putting them in the Bible? Anybody who thinks that I am advocating an excessively literal approach to prophecy need only look at some of the mistakes the apostles made, when they failed to realise that Jesus was speaking literally.

They overlooked or ignored some of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah's death and even the things that Jesus told them Himself. They did not take Him literally enough when He told them quite bluntly that He was going to be put to death. Perhaps that was partly because it was an

unpleasant message and they did not *want* to believe it. Yet, it turned out, in the end, that He had meant every word literally:

*<sup>31</sup>And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. <sup>32</sup>For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. <sup>33</sup>And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." <sup>34</sup>But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.*

*Luke 18:31-34 (ESV)*

In relation to the suffering and death of the Messiah, the apostles only ever made the mistake of not taking Jesus' words, or the Old Testament prophecies, *literally enough*. This was especially so in relation to His death and resurrection. At any rate, there is no example of any occasion where Jesus ever had to correct them for taking anything *more literally* than they should have. In the end, the apostles realised that they should have known all along that Jesus would literally die and rise again. Firstly, the Old Testament prophets, and especially Isaiah, had said that He would do so and, secondly, Jesus Himself had said that He would.

They just hadn't noticed it, or rather they hadn't taken it seriously. Yet Jesus had told them Himself that He would do both these things. They had not realised these facts before, or taken them seriously, because they did not take His words literally enough. Eventually they came to understand that He had meant every word literally. But they only realised that after the resurrection had happened:

*<sup>6</sup>And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup>and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup>So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. <sup>9</sup>For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.*

*John 20:6-9 (NASB)*

Later, when Jesus met some of His disciples after His resurrection, and walked with them on the road to Emmaus, He gently rebuked them about their failure to understand Scripture properly. They did not recognise Him, even as he spoke to them, partly because they believed Him to be dead and partly because He was now in His resurrection body. It was also partly because God did not open their eyes so as to be able to realise who He was.

They discussed the events of the previous week, when Jesus had been put to death, and also the amazing new rumour that He had risen from the dead. If they had taken His previous words literally then they would have been fully expecting that. However, they hadn't and so they weren't. Jesus then pointed out their errors. Firstly, all these events had been prophesied in advance by the Hebrew prophets. But, secondly, He had told them Himself:

*<sup>13</sup>That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. <sup>16</sup>But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup>Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" <sup>19</sup>And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, <sup>20</sup>and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. <sup>21</sup>But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.*

<sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning,<sup>23</sup> and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.<sup>24</sup> Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

<sup>25</sup> And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"<sup>26</sup> Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

<sup>27</sup>And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.<sup>28</sup> So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther,<sup>29</sup> but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them.<sup>30</sup> When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.<sup>31</sup> And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight.<sup>32</sup> They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

*Luke 24:13-32 (ESV)*

The above passage proves to us that there really is a right way and a wrong way to interpret the Bible and that it matters. It is not true to say that all ways are equally valid, or even that they have any merit at all. Some ways of interpreting the Bible are just wrong, and that fact needs to be faced. What we can clearly say is that every case where the apostles were ever corrected by Jesus for their mishandling of Bible prophecy involved them *not taking it literally enough*.

There are no cases where Jesus had to rebuke them for taking prophecy literally when it was *not supposed to be*, or for taking it *too literally*. Surely, if prophecy was mainly, or even frequently, meant to be symbolic and allegorical then He would have needed to be regularly correcting them to stop them from missing those allegories due to being overly literal. But He never did. Can you think of even one example of Him doing so?

So, the apostles had been wrong not to realise that the prophecies in the Old Testament, and also Jesus' own words to them, about dying and rising again, were meant to be taken literally. My argument is that we are equally wrong if we do not take at face value the prophecies that still remain to be fulfilled in the future. They will all literally happen. If you are not convinced, let's look now at some more examples of the literal fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies about Jesus' first coming.

### **More Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus' first coming which were all literally fulfilled, even in the smallest details.**

The prophet Zechariah said that the Messiah would ride into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of a donkey. That is typical of the kind of prophecy which those who interpret the Bible allegorically would say is just symbolic. One can imagine allegorically-minded people, in the centuries before Jesus came, seeing this prophecy about the Messiah riding a young donkey as a symbol and coming up with all sorts of ideas as to what the young donkey might '*represent*'. However, we see from the gospels that Zechariah's prophecy did not symbolise or '*represent*' anything. That's because it wasn't a symbol. He meant what he said and it was exactly fulfilled, in the plainest possible way.

Jesus literally rode into Jerusalem on a real donkey. It was literally a young colt, which had literally never been ridden before. Zechariah meant exactly what he said on all these points. Not even one detail was merely allegorical or symbolic. Look at Zechariah's prophecy below and then read Matthew's account of how it came to be fulfilled:

*<sup>9</sup>Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your king is coming to you;  
He is just and endowed with salvation,*

*Humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.  
Zechariah 9:9 (NASB)*

*<sup>1</sup>And when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Beth'phage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, <sup>2</sup>and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup>If any one says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" <sup>4</sup>And they went away, and found a colt tied at the door out in the open street; and they untied it. <sup>5</sup>And those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" <sup>6</sup>And they told them what Jesus had said; and they let them go. <sup>7</sup>And they brought the colt to Jesus, and threw their garments on it; and he sat upon it. <sup>8</sup>And many spread their garments on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. <sup>9</sup>And those who went before and those who followed cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! <sup>10</sup>Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!"*

*Mark 11:1-10 (RSV)*

Now look at what the prophet Zechariah prophesied concerning the 30 pieces of silver and the potter. Zechariah is referring to Judas, who betrayed Jesus to the Chief Priest:

*<sup>12</sup>I said to them, "If it is good in your sight, give me my wages; but if not, never mind!" So they weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages. <sup>13</sup>Then the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I was valued by them." So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the LORD.*

*Zechariah 11:12-13 (NASB)*

We then see the fulfilment of the prophecy. It is not a metaphor for something else. Neither is it a symbol. It is a plain statement of fact. Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 literal pieces of silver:

*<sup>14</sup>Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests <sup>15</sup>and said, "What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?" And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him. <sup>16</sup>From then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.*

*Matthew 26:14-16 (NASB)*

Moreover, after Judas hanged himself, the Chief Priests literally disposed of those 30 pieces of silver. There is no allegory. They gave them to a literal potter in return for his field. Even the fact that Judas 'threw' the coins down is literally fulfilled. So too is the fact that it occurred in the house of the LORD, i.e. in the Temple:

*<sup>1</sup>Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death; <sup>2</sup>and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor. <sup>3</sup>Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, <sup>4</sup>saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!" <sup>5</sup>And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself. <sup>6</sup>The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood." <sup>7</sup>And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers.*

*Matthew 27:1-7 (NASB)*

Now consider some more Old Testament prophecies about how Jesus would be betrayed by Judas. The first example is from Psalm 41:

*<sup>6</sup>Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted,  
who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me.*

*Psalm 41:9 (RSV)*

In case there was any doubt as to whom this prophecy is speaking about, Jesus Himself refers to it, even before His betrayal by Judas. He tells His disciples that it will be fulfilled, and by whom:

*<sup>18</sup>I am not speaking of you all; I know whom I have chosen; it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' <sup>19</sup> I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. <sup>20</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me." <sup>21</sup>When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." <sup>22</sup>The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke.*

*<sup>23</sup>One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was lying close to the breast of Jesus; <sup>24</sup>so Simon Peter beckoned to him and said, "Tell us who it is of whom he speaks." <sup>25</sup>So lying thus, close to the breast of Jesus, he said to him, "Lord, who is it?" <sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. <sup>27</sup>Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly."*

*John 13:18-27 (NASB)*

In this next passage King David prophesies, approximately 1000 years BC, that men would divide the Messiah's garments and also that they would cast lots to decide who would get them:

*They divide My garments among them,  
And for My clothing they cast lots.  
Psalm 22:18 (NKJV)*

This was a very strange thing for David to prophesy. It was extremely specific, and even obscure. It is not the sort of thing that generally happens, or which might happen to anybody. Therefore one can easily imagine why, prior to their fulfilment, people might have viewed these statements as merely symbolic. But they weren't. They were all literally fulfilled. Apostle John even tells us that they had to happen, so that the Scripture could be fulfilled:

*<sup>23</sup> Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. <sup>24</sup> They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says:*

*" They divided My garments among them,  
And for My clothing they cast lots."  
Therefore the soldiers did these things.*

*John 19:23-24 (NKJV)*

Here are another two very specific prophecies in Psalm 34 and Zechariah chapter 12. They indicate that *no bone* in the Messiah's body will be broken, but that He will be *pierced*:

*He keeps all his bones;  
not one of them is broken.  
Psalm 34:20 (RSV)*

*"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born.*

*Zechariah 12: 10 (RSV)*

These two prophecies are literally fulfilled in John chapter 19. Note, however, that only the first part of Zechariah 12:10 is fulfilled at the crucifixion, i.e. the fact that body of Jesus is pierced with a spear. The rest of it still remains to be fulfilled, at the end of this present age. In the future the Jewish people will collectively turn to Jesus and accept Him. All of them will do so together, as a whole nation. Then they will mourn over what was done to Him. That part of this prophecy is still in the future and remains to be fulfilled. But it will be, and just as literally as the first part was fulfilled:

***<sup>31</sup>Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath (for that sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. <sup>32</sup>So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; <sup>33</sup>but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.***

***<sup>34</sup> But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. <sup>35</sup>He who saw it has borne witness--his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth--that you also may believe. <sup>36</sup>For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "Not a bone of him shall be broken."***

***John 19:31-36 (RSV)***

Now look at this next prophecy made below by Isaiah. It is equally precise and says that He will be assigned a grave with the wicked, but that He will actually *be with a rich man* in His death:

***"His grave was assigned with wicked men,  
yet He was with a rich man in His death,....."  
Isaiah 53:9(a) (NASB)***

The Roman soldiers intended for Jesus to be buried alongside the two thieves who were crucified with Him. Remember that Jesus took the place of the criminal, Barabbas. He was, therefore, meant to have the same pauper's grave that Barabbas would have had, in which the two thieves were also buried. Barabbas was wicked. So were the *two thieves*. They were all due to be buried together, alongside each other, as *wicked men*.

But there was a last minute change of plan. A wealthy man, Joseph of Arimathea, asked to be given Jesus' body. He then put it in the tomb which he had prepared for himself. It was brand new and had been hewn out of solid rock. So, it must have been very expensive. So, in the end, there was a sudden and unforeseeable change of direction. Jesus was actually buried in the tomb of this *rich man*, Joseph of Arimathea, not with the wicked after all. This was contrary to all usual procedure, but it fulfilled the prophecy exactly:

***<sup>57</sup>When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. <sup>58</sup>This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. <sup>59</sup>And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, <sup>60</sup>and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away.***

***Matthew 27:57-60 (NASB)***

Surely the pattern in relation to these prophecies is obvious and undeniable and anybody can see it. They were all fulfilled literally. It is reasonable therefore to expect that the same will happen with the remaining prophecies. Therefore God will hold us accountable for the degree to which we believe, and take seriously, the remaining prophecies, which have not yet been fulfilled.

He expects us to know all the unfulfilled prophecies which remain and to take them seriously, and get ourselves ready for their literal fulfilment. Jesus took very seriously the failure of the Jewish people of

His own day to recognise that He was their Messiah and to be aware that the day of His visitation, (as prophesied by Daniel) had arrived.

Jesus actually wept when He contemplated the terrible consequences of Israel's failure to believe these prophecies and to be ready for Him. That was especially the case with Daniel's prophecies about the time of His coming. He knew that their neglect and unbelief would, for a time, bring God's judgment on most of the Jewish people:

*<sup>41</sup>When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, <sup>42</sup>saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup>"For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, <sup>44</sup>and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."*

*Luke 19:41-44 (NASB)*

There are clearly still many more prophecies which remain to be fulfilled. Thus it matters very much whether these are to happen literally, or only in some allegorical, symbolic way. I have given several examples of literally fulfilled prophecies, and could have given very many more. However, I cannot think of a single prophecy that has ever been fulfilled in a *non-literal* way. Can you? I have never yet seen anybody give even one credible example of such a fulfillment. But surely, if the allegorical approach was valid, wouldn't there be lots of examples of non-literal fulfillments all over the Bible, which we could all point to?

To show the vast scale of this subject of prophecy, let us look at just some of the dramatic events which the Bible says will happen. We will just present these in brief outline, because in later books in this series we shall look at Bible prophecy in much greater detail. Our point, for the moment is just to show how important and numerous these future events are. They will affect the future of the whole Earth and everybody on it.

### **A brief summary of some of the major prophecies which still remain to be fulfilled in the future**

We learn of the following series of events simply by taking literally what the Bible says. However, if we do not take the Bible literally, then we will not realise, or believe, that any of the following events are going to happen. That is how significant this is. It makes a huge difference whether we take the Bible literally or not, because that will determine whether we know about these future events and are ready for them or are unaware of them and thus unprepared.

There is going to be a particular generation for whom all of this will be especially relevant because it will happen to them. We may or may not be that specific generation, but the point is that we could be. Therefore, whether we are or not, we all need to know what is coming and to be capable of telling others of these future events:

1) The real Church is going to be '*raptured*'. That means that Jesus will suddenly appear to all saved people, i.e. genuine believers, but He will not be visible to false believers or unbelievers. This will happen at a time when nobody expects Him. He will then remove His entire Church from the Earth "*in the twinkling of an eye*". The date of this is not known and cannot be known in advance. Those genuine Christians who are alive at the time will then be taken straight up to Heaven, without ever dying.

2) At the same moment, all genuine, saved Christians who have already died before this time will be resurrected. This is known as "*the first resurrection*". The era of the Church will then be over. Jesus will give eternal, indestructible, resurrection bodies to all His followers who have died at any stage in the past, and also to those who are taken up alive to Heaven at the rapture.

- 3) From that point on, the many people who go on to become believers in Jesus after the Church has been removed will be called '*tribulation saints*'. They will be real believers, and will be saved, but they will not be part of the privileged group known as '*the Church*'.
- 4) Following the rapture, the whole Church will spend a number of years in Heaven, during which the faithfulness, fruitfulness and effectiveness of every saved person will be judged individually at the *Judgment Seat of Christ*. See Book Four for a full discussion of this judgment for Christians and some of the criteria by which we are going to be judged. The Church will then be joined to Jesus as His 'bride'. This will all happen in Heaven, before Jesus visibly returns to the Earth, accompanied by the Church.
- 5) Meanwhile, on Earth, a very evil man will arise who will gain control over the whole world. The Bible refers to him as the '*antichrist*', '*the Beast*', '*the man of sin*' '*the man of lawlessness*' and by various other titles. Satan himself will enter into him and he will receive all the power of Satan. Through entering the body of this man, Satan will briefly get to be the ruler of the whole world and to receive the worship for which he has always craved.
- 6) During the second half of his seven year reign this evil man, the antichrist, will kill *two thirds* of all the Jewish people on the Earth. During that time, which is called '*the day of Jacob's trouble*', he will do twice as much harm as Adolf Hitler, who killed one third of all the Jews. This whole seven year period is called '*the tribulation*'.
- 7) However, the second half of it is going to be extraordinarily brutal, at a level of cruelty never seen before in world history. It is therefore called '*the great tribulation*'. Multitudes of Christians and Jews will be executed, either for their faith in Jesus, or merely for being Jewish.
- 8) At the end of this horrific period the entire Jewish people, i.e. that third of them who survive, will have their eyes opened. They will then, at long last, recognise Jesus (Yeshua) as their Messiah. Thus all Israel (at that time) will be saved. They will be saved collectively, as a whole nation, and all at once.
- 9) Jesus the Messiah will then return physically and visibly to the Earth to save His surviving Jewish people from the armies of the antichrist who have gathered to attempt to annihilate Israel. This time everybody on Earth will be able to see Him, including unsaved, unbelieving people.
- 10) All of the genuine Christians and also all the saved, believing Jews who have ever lived, will accompany Jesus from Heaven when He returns to the Earth. They will all be in their eternal, resurrection bodies, such that they cannot get sick or die or grow old.
- 11) Jesus will depose the antichrist, and his assistant, '*the false prophet*', and throw them both into the Lake of Fire. They will then have it all to themselves for 1000 years. That's a long time. It is longer than the time since the Norman invasion of 1066, if you want to try to imagine it.
- 12) Then Jesus will reign on this physical Earth for those 1000 years as King of Israel and King of the whole Earth. King David, in his resurrection body, will serve as Jesus' deputy in ruling Israel. The resurrected David is referred to as '*the Prince*' in the book of Ezekiel and it is clear that he will play a major role. The 12 apostles will also serve, under David, ruling over the 12 tribes of Israel.
- 13) Jesus will reign over all the saved people from all times in history, whether they were Jewish or Gentile believers. They will all be in their resurrection bodies. In addition, living alongside them, but in their mortal bodies, there will be all those Jewish people who finally come to believe in Jesus as a group at the end.

14) There will also be that remnant of Gentiles who become believers and are saved during the tribulation, i.e. during the antichrist's reign. By this we mean those Gentiles who become Christians during the tribulation but still manage to survive to the very end of it, when Jesus returns. They will only be a small minority of those who get saved during the tribulation, because we know that the vast majority of those will be martyred by the antichrist.

15) Those saved believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, who survive through all the years of the tribulation and are still alive on the Earth when Jesus returns, will not be in eternal resurrection bodies. They will be in their ordinary, mortal bodies. But they will still be allowed to continue to live on the Earth under King Jesus during His Millennial Kingdom. They will then have children, just as we do now, and will steadily repopulate the Earth over the 1000 years. Their numbers will eventually be enormous.

16) If you want to get the scale of how the world population will grow under Jesus' reign, just think back to 50 years or so before the Norman invasion of 1066 and look at how many people have been born since then. But then increase that to allow for the fact that under Jesus' rule life expectancy, even for people in their mortal bodies, will be far higher. Plus there will be zero infant mortality as well. So, there could easily be tens of billions of people on the Earth by the end, probably a much larger world population than we have now.

17) No unsaved people will be allowed to enter Jesus' 1000 year Kingdom when it begins. Those who are unsaved will all be killed when He returns to the Earth. They will then be sent to Hell to await their judgment at the Great White Throne. That judgment of the unsaved will take place 1000 years later, at the end of the Millennium.

18) Therefore, at the start on the Millennium, for a period of time, absolutely everybody on Earth will be a genuine Christian. That will be the case for both Gentiles and Jews. They will all be saved and believe in Jesus. In addition, Jesus will be physically present, and providing a perfect Government. It will be an almost ideal world, at least for a time.

19) However, as new babies are born and grow up during the 1000 years, some of them will choose not to follow Jesus. They will all have free will, just as we do now, and some will choose to rebel against Jesus. At first they will do so quietly, in their hearts, but eventually they will rebel openly, and violently, and in large numbers.

20) During Jesus' reign, Satan and all his demons will be bound and prevented from interfering with, or deceiving, anyone living on the Earth. However, towards the very end of the 1000 years, they will all be released and allowed a short period of freedom. Then they can have one last chance to whisper into the minds of human beings.

21) They will then entice large numbers of unsaved people into a final rebellion against King Jesus. They will rebel even though they know who He is, and have seen Him physically reigning on the Earth and providing a perfect government. In doing this they will show just how wicked and foolish human beings can be, in that they would freely choose to rebel, even in those almost perfect conditions. One would think it impossible for people to be so idiotic, but the Bible says it will happen.

22) Jesus will crush that final worldwide rebellion merely by using the power of His own voice. He will have no need for any help from the Church, or Israel, or from any angel.

23) Then Satan will, at long last, be cast into the Lake of Fire, together with all his demons, to join the antichrist and the false prophet. They will all stay there for eternity and will never be released, ever again.

24) Then all the unsaved people who have ever lived will be released from their temporary confinement in Hell and will be physically resurrected, ready to face their judgment, and God's final wrath, at the Great White Throne Judgment. This is known as "*the second resurrection*" and is only for the unsaved. They will all be given eternal resurrection bodies. Their bodies will be just as indestructible and eternal as the resurrection bodies which will be given to saved people.

25) Then the Great White Throne Judgment will occur. This is solely for the unsaved. They will all have to appear before Jesus, to be judged by Him and receive his wrath. Once His judgment of them is complete all unbelievers, from all ages in history, will be thrown into the Lake of Fire. They will then remain there with Satan and all the demons, for all eternity. In fact, Hell itself will be thrown into the Lake of Fire, i.e. the whole place, not just the people in it.

26) This physical Earth, or at least its surface, will then be burned up. Everything that is wicked will be destroyed and a new Heaven and a new Earth will be created. Then God the Father Himself will come to live upon the new planet Earth. He will bring the whole of Heaven with Him and it will come down to rest on the Earth, where it will remain forever. It will be known as the "*New Jerusalem*".

27) There will then begin what we might call the "*eternal state*". It is the permanent, eternal, fully completed Kingdom of God, which will never end. There will no longer be any sin, rebellion, pain, suffering, sadness, sickness, death, Satan, demons, or judgment. All of that will be over and gone forever. Thus, it will be even better than Jesus' Millennial Kingdom is going to be. The eternal state will be entirely perfect, whereas the Millennial Kingdom will still have sinners in it.

Can you see how important, but also how specific and detailed, each of these predicted events are? Yet I have only given a very brief summary of them here. There is so much more that we are meant to know about, and that we will know about, *if* we take the Bible literally and accept what it says. But, if we don't, then we won't know about any of these future events, or see the direction in which world history is heading.

All of these things predicted in the Bible are going to literally happen. Therefore we all need to be aware of them, getting ready for them and telling others about them. In other words, we need to take all Bible prophecies seriously, whether they are made by the prophets or the apostles or by Jesus Himself. We must study them, understand them accurately and remember them. Note what apostle Peter had to say on this:

***<sup>1</sup> This is now the second letter that I have written to you, beloved, and in both of them I have aroused your sincere mind by way of reminder; <sup>2</sup> that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.***

***2 Peter 3:1-2 (RSV)***

Jude also confirms this and urges us to remember the predictions, i.e. the prophecies given by the apostles:

***But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;***  
***Jude 17 (RSV)***

Peter went on to confirm that there would come a time when people would ignore and disparage Bible prophecy, for example they will not believe, in or be expecting, the return of Jesus Christ and the judgments and so on. So, even the unbelief and ignorance of our age fits with what the Bible says will happen. If there was ever a time in which people would disbelieve the prophecies of the Bible and not believe that Jesus is physically coming back to the Earth, then this would seem to be it. Our own generation, at least in the West, is probably more blind and uninformed about these future events, and has more unbelief, than any past generation:

<sup>3</sup> *First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions <sup>4</sup> and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation." <sup>5</sup> They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water, <sup>6</sup> through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. <sup>7</sup> But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.*

*2 Peter 3:3-7 (RSV)*

One of the purposes of Bible prophecy is to inform us about the future and enable us, and those we know, to get ready for what is coming. However, if we take an allegorical approach to Bible prophecy we will not know about, or get ready for, anything. That is one reason why it matters so much that we know whether these events are going to literally happen, or whether the prophecies are merely symbols and mean something else entirely. We therefore need to know which approach is correct and which is wrong. So, let us look more closely at *why* I maintain that the allegorical approach is wrong and how we can be sure of that.