

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **THE ‘GOLDEN RULE’ FOR INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE**

<sup>7</sup> *“For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.”*  
*Amos 3:7 (ESV)*

<sup>40</sup> *For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

*Matthew 12:40 (ESV)*

<sup>15</sup> *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*

*2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)*

*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)*

<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.*

*Luke 24:25-27 (ESV)*

#### **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

One must recognize that the Bible does contain examples of all sorts of figures of speech, metaphors, symbols, analogies, hyperbole and even allegories. That said, 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 absolutely 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)*

### **Jesus even had to rebuke the disciples for not taking prophecies literally enough**

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.

**Some of Zechariah's 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 symbolize 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>9</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)*

### **More prophecies, by King David and the prophet Isaiah, which were literally fulfilled**

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*, and so were the two thieves.



They were all due to be buried together, alongside each other, as *wicked men*. However, 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. Therefore, 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, even though He had been *assigned* a grave with them. This sudden turn of events 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 it is reasonable to expect all of the remaining unfulfilled prophecies to be fulfilled literally as well**

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? In fact there are none at all.

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 that generation 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.

**One of the most important purposes of prophecy is to enable us to get ready for what is coming**

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 all, 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.