



## Day 1 Interpreting the Bible Literally

### Definition of **Literal** interpretation:

“gives each word of the text the same exact basic meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage.”  
Any spiritual meaning only arises *after* the literal designation and is dependent on the literal for its meaning.

### Definition of **Allegorical** interpretation:

“regards the literal sense of the text as a vehicle for a secondary, more spiritual and more profound sense”  
The exact truth of the literal sense is secondary or even irrelevant.

### #1) Literal interpretation goes hand-in-hand with regarding the Word of God as inerrant and inspired.

The Bible was written by men under the control of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:20–21, etc.)  
Literal interpretation is simply an acknowledgement that God *wants* to communicate to us via human language.  
The rules of human language then become the rules of interpreting Scripture... Words have objective meaning, and God has spoken through words.

### #2) Literal interpretation gives the authority to the author, not the reader

We should ask “what does this say” *not* “what does this mean to me?”  
A better question is “how does this apply to me?” – but before we try to apply a Scripture, we must *first* make sure we’ve understood it!

### #3) Literal interpretation makes the Bible accessible to anyone, not just the ‘experts’

Biblical literalism means we can understand the Bible the same way we understand everyday communication.  
If someone enters a room and says, “The building is on fire,” we don’t start searching for figurative meanings... we start evacuating! No one stops to ponder whether the reference to “fire” is metaphorical or if the “building” is an oblique reference to 21st-century socio-economic theories.  
Similarly, when we open the Bible and read, “And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.” (Exodus 14:22), we shouldn’t look for figurative meanings for sea, dry ground, or wall of water; we should simply believe the miracle.

### #4) Allegorical interpretation makes essentially ANY teaching possible

If we try to interpret Scripture figuratively, how are the figures to be interpreted? And who decides what is and is not a figure? Were Adam and Eve real people? What about Cain and Abel? If they are figurative, where in Genesis can we start saying the people are literal individuals? Any dividing line between figurative and literal in the genealogies is arbitrary. Or take a New Testament example: did Jesus really say to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44)? Did He say it on a mountain? Was Jesus even real? Without a commitment to biblical literalism, it is possible to throw out any teaching in the Bible you wish.

**Note:** Of course the Bible makes extensive use of figurative language. This is almost always (98% of the time) very obvious and you don’t need any training to understand it. For example, Luke 13:34 – “...how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!” Clearly the chicken is an allegory (metaphor) for God’s feelings towards His people. In the *rare* case where it’s not clear from the language if we should take something literal or figurative – we should always assume it’s literal unless it wouldn’t make any sense or conflict with a clear teaching of the Bible somewhere else.

Day 1  
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**PART 2**

## **Application to Prophecy: When is the Tribulation?**

Some Christians have suggested that the Tribulation already took place in 70 A.D. with the destruction of the Jewish temple, and that we are already in the 'Millennium' – and that Jesus Christ is ruling the earth in a spiritual rather than physical way. This is done by taking an allegorical view of the Prophetic Scriptures rather than a Literal view. Variations of this basic view go by several names such as "amillennial" and "postmillennial"

For example...

### **Revelation 20:1-3 & 7-8**

<sup>1</sup> And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

<sup>2</sup> And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, <sup>3</sup> And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

<sup>7</sup> And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, <sup>8</sup> And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

- Read allegorically this could be about Satan's loss to Christ on the Cross... and the 1,000 years has now lasted for at least 1,947 years!
- Read literally, there must still be a future time coming when Satan will be bound 1,000 years and there is still a climactic battle coming!

### **Daniel 2:44-45**

<sup>44</sup> And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. <sup>45</sup> Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.

- Read allegorically this could be about when Christ came the first time and set up his kingdom in a spiritual way in the church. The kingdoms of men have been spiritually destroyed and replaced by a spiritual kingdom.
- Read literally, Jesus is actually going to come and destroy all the kingdoms of men, and set up a real kingdom in their place!

### **Revelation 8:8-9**

<sup>8</sup> And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; <sup>9</sup> And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

- Read allegorically this about great upheaval during the 'tribulation' that happened around 70 AD when the Romans destroyed the temple at Jerusalem.
- Read literally, some really bad times are coming that are not like anything that's ever happened.

## **A Literal or Allegorical Tribulation... What did Jesus say?**

### **Matthew 24:21**

<sup>21</sup> For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. <sup>22</sup> And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.