

## GOSPELS INTRODUCTION

39. *The Fourfold Gospel*, McGarvey, Standard.
40. *Studies in the Four Gospels*, Morgan, Revell.
41. *The Expositor's Greek Testament, Gospels and St. John*, ed. Nicoll, Eerdmans.

### Commentaries in sets

42. *The International Critical Commentary*, with volumes on each of the Gospels, T. & T. Clark.
43. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Robertson, Broadman.
44. *Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, Lenski, Wartburg Press.
45. *Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel*, Lenski, Wartburg Press.
46. *Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel*, Lenski, Wartburg Press.
47. *Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, Lenski, Wartburg Press.

## INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

God has spoken, not only through His Son Jesus, but through men moved by the Holy Spirit. The result of such inspiration is in our Bible. We firmly believe that 1) Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to guide men in their witnessing, Matt. 10:17-20; I Thess. 2:13; etc., and in their writing, I Cor. 14:37, etc., and 2) that the original autographs from these men were without error in fact or thought, even though God used men to produce His will in the form of written letters. However, nowhere did God promise to inspire any person who further transmitted that written word, either in preaching, copying or translating. Thus, no copy which we possess of the original autographs is a product of inspired men, nor is any translation of it, (nor interpretation either, since obviously translation is interpreta-

tion). To argue any other way is to be ridiculous, since there are hundreds of differing translations, varying manuscripts and conflicting interpretations. We think it will be worth a bit of space and time to talk about interpretation of the Bible, in whatever version (translation is the same) you possess. Remember this: there is as much difference between revelation and interpretation as there is between God and man. The first is divine, the second is human. Revelation refers to what God has said. Interpretation refers to what men think God said.

God did not name any method of interpretation nor list any rules as being the best to the exclusion of all others. The Bible was written in man's language to all kinds of people (rich, poor, educated, ignorant, men, women, young, old, of any culture in any time or place) and for all time until Jesus comes again. Now if God did not list any methods nor rules, but did put His will into man's language for men to read and heed, how are we to interpret it? It is important to say that everyone, without any exception, interprets the Bible. Some people claim they do not do so, but rather just "let the Bible say what it says." Great! But what does it say? On that point, few are agreed on much, none agreed on all. Let it also be said that no one can approach a study of the Bible without some presupposition(s). Even the attempt to eliminate all bias and let God speak as He wills is a presupposition—perhaps the best one, but yet a presupposition.

The approach that attempts to understand the author, his circumstances, reasons for writing, background, etc., and how he expected to be understood by his first readers, we consider to be the only reliable method that will keep the student in contact with the text. Since God gave no other instructions in the Bible, we know of no better position to hold and remain Biblical students. That He expected the people who read what was written, to know it

thoroughly, and to pass it on to others hardly needs proof, but see II Tim. 2:2; Heb. 5:11ff.; James 1:21-25; I Pet. 2:1-2; 3:15; etc. This approach is commonly known as the Gramatical-Historical, and uses the inductive method of study. It assumes that God expected His Word to be read and studied as any piece of literature made up of words in sentences, etc. The method does not expect or need anything miraculous to be used in discerning God's will. God did not write His book in such a way that the one interpreting it would have to have a revelation from Him to understand the revelation from Him in the Bible. The Bible would be useless if such were the case, since it would have no message for us, the words being meaningless without divine revelation to explain them. If God has given everyone an interpretation who prayed for it, God is quite obviously the author of confusion! We may feel that need to ask God to help us let the Word eliminate from our lives the sinful ideas, etc., that keep us from allowing that Word to speak to us as it can. Yet that is the reason for the Bible: to make us into persons who are the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ! God has done His part—it is up to us to do our part.

The inductive method is not infallible, if for no other reason than that fallible men use it. Finite (fallible) man is unable to be or do anything perfectly. The only realm where perfection lies is where God is. Hence it quite clearly follows that though we have from God an infallible revelation, no infallible interpretation (other than what is given in that infallible revelation) is possible for men of all God has said. This is not to say that He does not expect us to study it and practice it, learning as we live. Salvation can be found no other way. It is simply an affirmation that fallible people are not capable of perfect interpretation all the time. Good and honest men have labored over Bible passages for a lifetime and have been

unsure of what was meant (read here II Pet. 3:16a.). Try Eph. 4:8-10 or Rev. 20:1-6 as examples. It is not shameful to admit some passages are "hard to understand" and need further study.

If the reader concludes that this position leaves all persons to be their own judge of the interpretation they hold as to its correctness, and so practice as they understand, all others notwithstanding, said reader is correct. To disclaim the practice of the Roman Catholic Church and its infallible interpretation (not to mention current Neo-Orthodox and existential theologians), yet to set one man, a group of men, or religious denomination up as having "the infallible interpretation" is not different in principle. If it be said then that such a position means that no one knows absolutely about all or any interpretations, that is also correct, and so much the better. People do not need judges—they need the right to interpret God's revelation and practice as they so understand. God so intended that that is all anyone needs. Whether He will excuse some or all for little or much bad interpretation is His business. Our business is to give ourselves whole-heartedly to discerning His will for our own lives and doing it. He expects each believer to encourage others to do likewise. If we do those two things well, we shall be plenty busy, far too busy to "play God" for other men, by which is meant that we can not determine absolutely about anyone's faith or obedience. We may offer help where it appears to be needed, and this God expects (Matt. 7:2-5), but beyond that we have no authority to go.

The process begins by actually recognizing thought units known as *words*. Whether composed of one letter or many, we attempt to understand how it fits into the phrase, clause, paragraph, book, etc. Usage alone determines the meaning of a word. We may utilize other things, such as etymology, composition, etc., but it finally boils down to

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this: the author meant it to be understood as he used it. The relationship to the *sentence* construction, and larger *context* may help determine that meaning. The subject under discussion, the book in which we find the passage, any *parallel passages* in other books, the larger context of the writer and first readers, (i.e. *historical circumstances*): all must be considered.

No other method but the inductive method allows (yea, demands) that all the facts be heard, and the conclusion drawn only when such is done. We are obligated to study God's Word, and obey it as we understand it. We may become more perfect in our understanding, and so become better disciples, even as Peter did. But we must extend to every person the same right as we ask for ourselves: the right to read and heed as one understands.

No one has an infallible interpretation of all of God's Word. All have some, doubtless. But there it ends. We would not have any way of recognizing the fact that some one had an infallible interpretation of all of it (except by revelation from God) but by usage of the inductive method. Yet God expects us to read and heed: primarily to receive salvation in Christ, and to teach others of Him. We know of no other method by which to discern the Lord's way except to read the written Word and act as we understand it. God's word can be understood, adequately enough to become Christian and live a godly life, growing in grace and knowledge, II Pet. 3:18. Millions of people have done so for 20 centuries! You can, too! (By the way, if you have understood some or all of what you have just read, what method and rules did you use?)

We conclude by affirming our whole-hearted allegiance to God's Word, and encourage you who read this to do the same, while at the same time discouraging allegiance to any interpretation of it. We believe that any translation of God's Word (as given in the original autographs) can be

used to direct men to a saving relationship to Jesus Christ, and to teach such persons to lead a godly life. Some translations are better than others, but all can be used to further the kingdom of our Lord here on earth. Likewise, we encourage the use of commentaries, etc. Even though men disagree in those commentaries, comparisons are helpful, as are new ideas. Don't be afraid to use aids; just be alert to the fact that men are given to error in thinking and yet can be helpful to spiritual growth.

## LEPROSY — SOME FACTS AND FANTASIES

First, read Leviticus 13 and 14 in your Bible, and try to read it in some modern version like New American Standard, etc., if you can. See also Ex. 4:6; Num. 12:10; II Kings 5:27. There has been needless worry as well as mental suffering over this disease of the Bible. Part of it is because of translation problems, part of it is because of failure to read the text carefully and understand the reason for the treatment of lepers. Certainly a failure to understand God's reasons for commanding the Israelites to do certain things has caused part of the trouble with leprosy. We recommend that everyone read S. J. McMillen's book, *None of These Diseases* (Spire books, Revell) to help in understanding why God commanded the Israelites to do certain things along the line of cleanliness, etc.

Let it be noted that the Bible does not state anywhere that the leper was equal to nor to be treated as a sinner. That the people of Israel all sinned is a rather evident fact—but all who sinned were not required to live outside the camp or village! Everyone would have been outside the camp had that been the case. But lepers were required to live apart from others—doubtless not because