INSPIRED INSTRUCTIONS FOR INTERPRETATION

THE INFIDELS
... Deploy Deceitfully

II Corinthians 4:2

But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but, by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

THE IGNORANT
... Distort Destructively

II Peter 3:16

As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.

THE INSTRUCTED
... Divide Discerningly

II Timothy 2:15

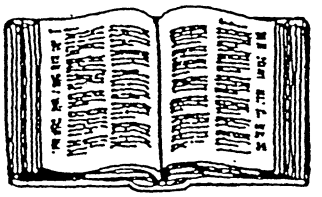
Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Manfred E. Kober, Th.D.

THE INITIATED
... Discriminate Dispensationally

Ephesians 3: 3-5

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.



The Certainty of Scriptural Statements

ALL SCRIPTURE IS TRUE BUT NOT ALL SCRIPTURE IS CLEAR OR PLAIN

2. PET. 3:15-16

15 And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;
16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

The Meaning is

Indicated dogmatic

Inferred definite

Implied debatable

Indefinite doubtful

Invented dreadful

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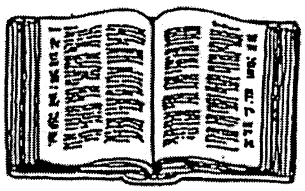

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The Meaning is

Indicated dogmatic

At death the believer is immediately in the presence of the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23)

Inferred definite

At death the believer is carried by an angel into the presence of God (Lk. 16:22)

Implied debatable

Angels protect the bodies of dead believers, as they did with the body of Moses (Jude 9)

Indefinite doubtful

Dead individuals return to life and tell of out-of-body experiences or visits to heaven (cf. Paul, 2 Cor. 12:2-4)

Invented dreadful

The idea of purgatory: The dead must be purged of their sins before entering heaven or paradise. The **truth**: The Savior is our purgatory, seeing that on the cross "He had by himself purged our sins" (Heb. 1:3b)

PROPHECIES OF ISAIAH, 740 – 680 B.C.

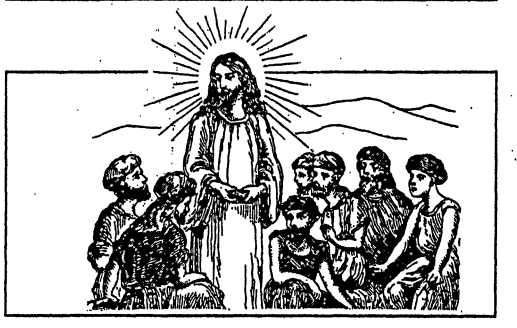
PREDICTION

Is. 7:14
Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

FULFILLMENT

Mt. 1:22-23
Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

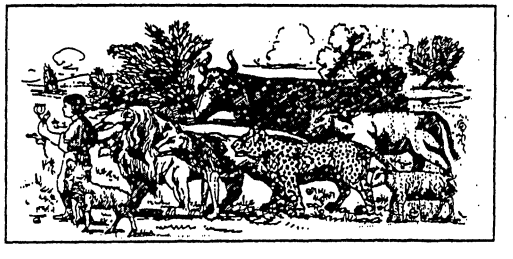
Is. 61:1
The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; and the opening of the prison to [them that are] bound;



Lk. 4:18, 21
The Spirit of the Lord [is] upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,... And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

Is. 2:3
And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Is. 11:6
The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.



Many of Isaiah's hundreds of prophecies have been fulfilled, and that, literally.

It is reasonable to suppose that the unfulfilled prophecies will also see an exact, literal fulfillment.

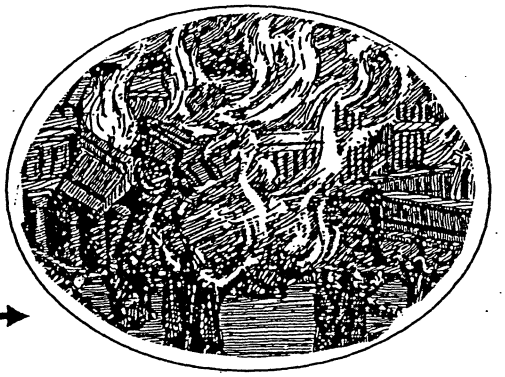
JEREMIAH'S FULFILLED AND UNFULFILLED PROPHECIES

PREDICTION

JER. 50:13

Because of the wrath of the LORD it shall not be inhabited, but it shall be wholly desolate: every one that goeth by Babylon shall be astonished, and hiss at all her plagues.

DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON



FULFILLMENT

DAN. 5:30-31

In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

JER. 29: 10

For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.

RETURN OF ISRAEL TO THE LAND

EZRA 1:1

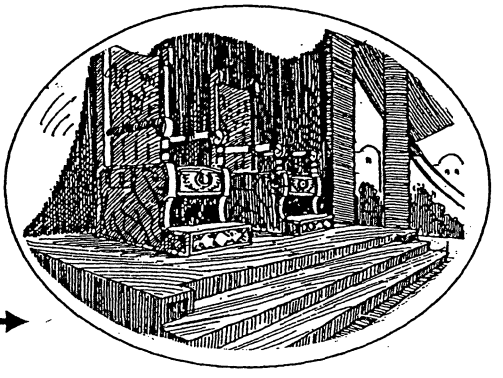
Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing...

(2:1)

JER. 33:21

Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers.

CHRIST IS ON THE THRONE



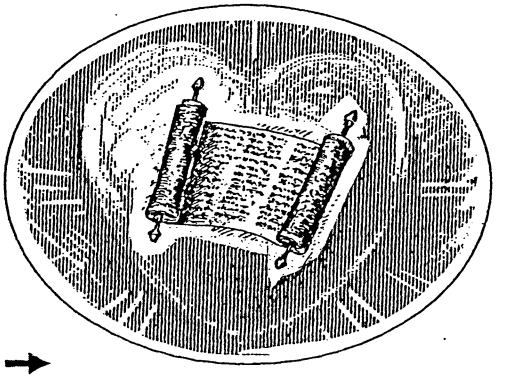
REV. 3:21

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

JER. 31:33

But this shall be the covenant that I will make . . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

GOD'S LAW IN THE HEART



HEB. 8:10

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

Manfred E. Kober, Th.D.

HOW TO INTERPRET PROPHECY

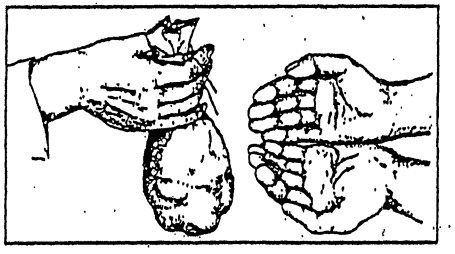
PREDICTION

ZECH. 9: 9
Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

FULFILLMENT

MT. 21: 5
Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

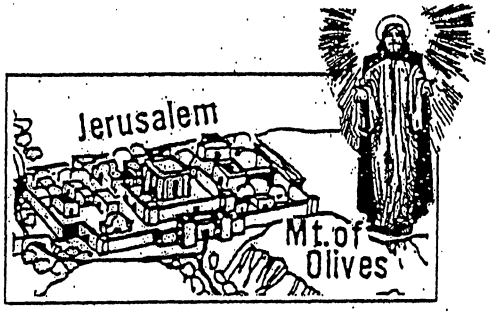
ZECH. 11: 12
And I said unto them, If ye think good, give *me* my price: and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty *pieces* of silver.



MT. 26: 14-15
Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said *unto them*, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they convenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.

ZECH. 12: 10
And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for *his* only *son*. . .

ZECH. 14: 4
And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west. . .



One-fourth of the Bible was predictive at the time of its writing.

About one half of the biblical prophecies have been fulfilled, and that literally.

As a result, to be consistent, one should anticipate a literal fulfillment of unfulfilled prophecies.

Manfred E. Kober, Th.D.

Consistent Literal Interpretation

A Study Showing the Inconsistencies
of Non-Dispensationalists

This article was originally presented orally by George Zeller at the New England Bible Conference, September 17, 2007.
The message is available in Audio Format.

PDF Format

What is Literal Interpretation?

Literal interpretation seeks to understand the Bible in its plain, natural, normal sense. It looks for the clear and obvious meaning of a text. God does not want to hide His truth from the believer; He wants to communicate His truth to His own in a very clear way. The believer's responsibility is to simply take God at His Word. God means what He says and says what He means.

The literal interpreter does not look for hidden meanings in the Bible. Rather, he looks for the obvious sense of the text. The literal interpreter does not seek to read in between the lines, but rather he reads the sacred text in order to determine its plain and simple meaning, in light of the normal meaning of the words, the context and the commonly accepted rules of grammar.

The Allegorical Method

In sharp contrast to literal interpretation is the allegorical method of interpretation. The father of allegorical interpretation was Origen who lived in the third century. Many today still follow his allegorical method of interpretation. Allegorical interpretation involves looking for hidden spiritual meaning which transcends the literal sense of the sacred text.

As an illustration of the allegorical method, consider 1 Samuel 17:40--"And he (David) took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had." What is the meaning of these five smooth stones? Imagine one preacher saying, "These five smooth stones symbolize **faith, hope, love, joy, peace**." This could make a nice five point sermon outline. Somewhere else in the world another preacher gets up in front of his congregation and says, "These five smooth stones represent: **courage, strength, perseverance, power, patience**." According to the allegorical method, it is the pure imagination of the interpreter that determines the meaning of the text. A person can make it mean whatever he or she wants it to mean.

Ask a dispensationalist what the five smooth stones signify and he would say something like this: "The five smooth stones were just what the text says they were. They were five smooth stones, only one of which was used by David in his sling!"

Note: In emphasizing the literal meaning of a text, we are not denying that a text may have many applications. There is one meaning, but there are many applications. The careful Bible teacher needs to make sure that whatever applications he makes are based on the plain, normal, literal sense of the text.

Normal Interpretation

Literal interpretation is the normal way in which we interpret any piece of literature. It seeks to discover the obvious and plain sense of the text. Consider the following newspaper article:

Woman Found Alive After 2 Weeks In Mountains

Associated Press

BAKER CITY, Ore. — A 76-year-old woman was found alive in the mountains Thursday, nearly two weeks after she disappeared while on a hunting trip with her husband, authorities said.

How should we understand this? We understand it literally, according to the normal meaning of words. It means just what it says. The woman was 76 years old, not 34. She was found alive, not dead. She was found in the mountains, not in a desert. She was found nearly two weeks, not two years, after she disappeared. She was on a hunting trip, not a fishing trip. Her husband was with her on this trip, not her brother. The words of this article are understood in their normal and natural sense.

Whether or not this article is true and accurate is an entirely different issue. Many newspaper articles are later found to be inaccurate. We do not have this problem with Biblical interpretation. When it comes to the Bible, we know that whatever we read is true and accurate because God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2), and our Lord Jesus said, "Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). God means what He says and He always says the truth.

We can trust Him and take Him at His Word.

A Helpful Rule

Dr. David L. Cooper, the founder of *The Biblical Research Society,* is known for his "Golden Rule of Interpretation":

> **When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; Therefore, 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 axiomatic and fundamental truths indicate clearly otherwise.**

A shortened form of the above rule goes like this:

> **If the plain sense makes good sense seek no other sense lest it result in nonsense.**

The opponents of dispensationalism depart from the above rule at times, and although they may not want to admit it, they seem to follow this rule:

> **If the plain sense does not fit my theological system, then I will seek some other sense, lest I should end up agreeing with the dispensationalists!**

This is illustrated by an amillennialist, named Hamilton, who made this remarkable admission:

"Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures" [Cited by Charles Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1981), 35].

In other words, if a person really interprets the Bible prophecies literally, he will of necessity be a premillennialist, according to Hamilton, who himself was not a premillennialist!

Consistent Literal Interpretation

Dispensationalism is known for its consistent literal interpretation. The word "consistent" is the key. Non-dispensationalists also interpret the Bible literally in many places, but they do not do it consistently. We shall illustrate this in the following examples.

Example #1--The First and Second Comings of Christ

Think of all the prophecies that were literally fulfilled at Christ's first coming. He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2); He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14); He would be silent before His executioners (Isa. 53:7); men would gamble for His robe (Psalm 22:18); His hands and feet would be pierced (Psalm 22:16), and so many more. Both dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists take these passages at face value and believe they were literally fulfilled at Christ's first coming.

Consider the following two verses which speak of our Lord's two comings:

Zechariah 9:9 was literally fulfilled at the triumphant entry. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." He literally rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The prophecy was fulfilled, as confirmed by Matthew 21:4-5. Dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists alike all agree that this prophecy was literally fulfilled at our Lord's first coming, at the time of the triumphal entry.

Zechariah 9:10 speaks of a future time of worldwide peace: "And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from river even to the ends of the earth." These words, taken at face value, teach us that a day is coming when the instruments of war will be cut off. It will be a time of total disarmament. The Prince of Peace will speak peace. He will have dominion from sea to shining sea!

The problem is that most non-dispensationalists deny that Zechariah 9:10 will ever be fulfilled on this earth. They do not believe in a kingdom age as minutely described by all the prophets. They deny that the Messiah will ever rule this earth in a prolonged era of worldwide peace. Many are amillennial in their theology, believing that there will be no future kingdom on earth. They deny that the Messiah will rule from Jerusalem even though this is the clear teaching of the prophets (Isa. 2:1-5; Jer. 23:5-8).

Why do they interpret Zechariah 9:9 literally and Zechariah 9:10 symbolically? Why is it that non-dispensationalists interpret passages relating to the first coming of Christ in a literal manner, and yet totally abandon the literal approach when it comes to the many passages relating to the second coming of Christ and His kingdom reign? ***This is inconsistent.***

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) was a famous English preacher. Spurgeon considered him the best man in the Church of England. He is highly esteemed among Reformed men, and rightly so. He wrote more than one hundred tracts and pamphlets on doctrinal and practical subjects. He published a number of books of sermons and devotional literature, much of which is still widely read today.

For a compilation of quotations from Ryle on prophecy and in particular his position the future of the nation Israel, see the excellent book, *Future Israel--Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged*, by Barry E. Horner, Appendix B, "J. C. Ryle and the Future of Israel" (pages 339-348).

Here are some of J. C. Ryle's comments on the importance of interpreting prophecy literally, according to the normal and natural sense of language:

> I believe that the literal sense of the Old Testament prophecies has been far too much neglected by the Churches, and is far too much neglected at the present day, and that under the mistaken system of spiritualizing and accommodating Bible language, Christians have too often completely missed its meaning. [J. C. Ryle, *Are You Ready For The End Of Time?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001) p. 9; reprint of *Coming Events and Present Duties.*]

> I believe we have cherished an arbitrary, reckless habit of interpreting first advent texts *literally*, and second advent texts *spiritually*. I believe we have not rightly understood "all that the prophets have spoken" about the second personal advent of Christ, any more than the Jews did about the first. [J. C. Ryle, *Are You Ready For The End Of Time?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001) p. 46; reprint of *Coming Events and Present Duties.*]

Ryle then envisions a situation where a Christian is witnessing to a Jew. The Christian tells his Jewish friend how the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah (such as Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Micah 5:2, etc.)

were literally fulfilled by Christ. He then continues:

> But suppose the Jew asks you if you take *all* the prophecies of the Old Testament in their simple literal meaning. Suppose he asks you if you believe in a literal personal advent of Messiah to reign over the earth in glory, a literal restoration of Judah and Israel to Palestine, a literal rebuilding and restoration of Zion and Jerusalem. Suppose the unconverted Jew puts these questions to you, what answer are you prepared to make? Will you dare to tell him that Old Testament prophecies of this kind are not to be taken in their plain literal sense? Will you dare to tell him that the words Zion, Jerusalem, Jacob, Judah, Ephraim, Israel, do not mean what they seem to mean, but mean the *Church of Christ*? Will you dare to tell him that the glorious kingdom and future blessedness of Zion, so often dwelt upon in prophecy, mean nothing more than the gradual Christianizing of the world by missionaries and gospel preaching? Will you dare to tell him that you think it "carnal" to expect a literal rebuilding of Jerusalem, "carnal" to expect a literal coming of Messiah to reign? Oh, reader, if you are a man of this mind, take care what you are doing! I say again, take care. [J. C. Ryle, *Are You Ready For The End Of Time?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001) p. 47; reprint of *Coming Events and Present Duties.*]

Ryle continues to plead for a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies:

> It is high time for Christians to interpret unfulfilled prophecy by the light of prophecies already fulfilled. The curses of the Jews were brought to pass literally; so also will be the blessings. The scattering was literal; so also will be the gathering. The pulling down of Zion was literal; so also will be the building up. The rejection of Israel was literal; so also will be the restoration. [J. C. Ryle, *Are You Ready For The End Of Time?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001) p. 49; reprint of *Coming Events and Present Duties.*]
>
> What I protest against is, the habit of allegorizing plain sayings of the Word of God concerning the future history of the *nation* of Israel, and explaining away the fullness of the contents in order to accommodate them to the Gentile Church. I believe the habit to be unwarranted by anything in Scripture, and to draw after it a long train of evil consequences. [J. C. Ryle, *Are You Ready For The End Of Time?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001) p. 107-108; reprint of *Coming Events and Present Duties.*]

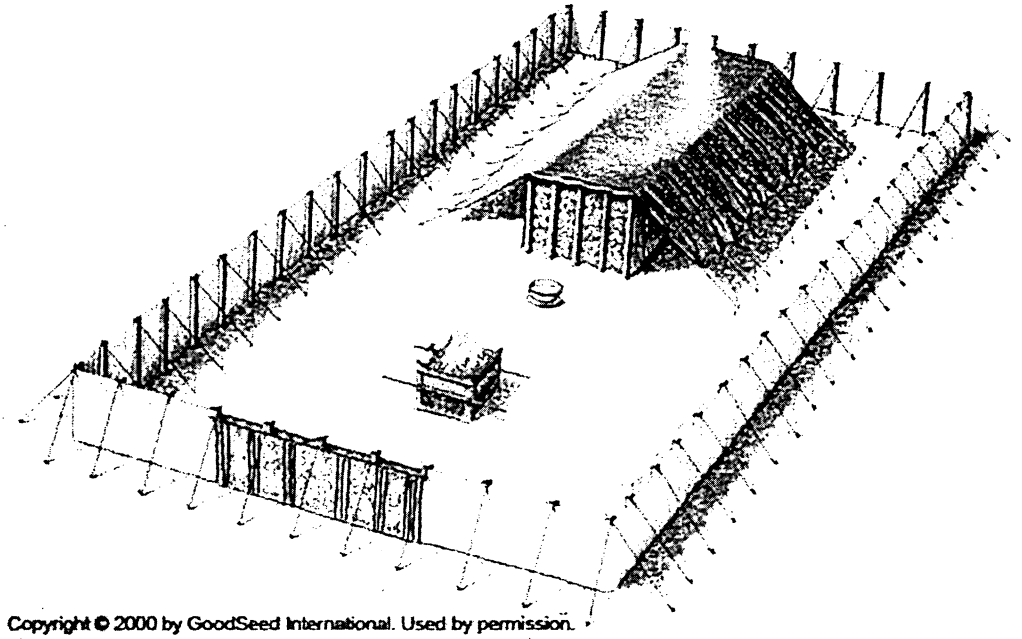
J. C. Ryle had some concluding words about the importance of literal interpretation:

> Cultivate the habit of reading prophecy with a single eye to the literal meaning of its proper names. Cast aside the old traditional idea that Jacob, and Israel, and Judah, and Jerusalem, and Zion must always mean the Gentile Church, and that predictions about the second Advent are to be taken spiritually, and first Advent predictions literally. Be just, and honest, and fair. If you expect the Jews to take the 53rd of Isaiah literally, be sure you take the 54th and 60th and 62nd literally also. The Protestant Reformers were not perfect. On no point, I venture to say, were they so much in the wrong as in the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. [J. C. Ryle, *Are You Ready For The End Of Time?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001) p. 157-159; reprint of *Coming Events and Present Duties.*]

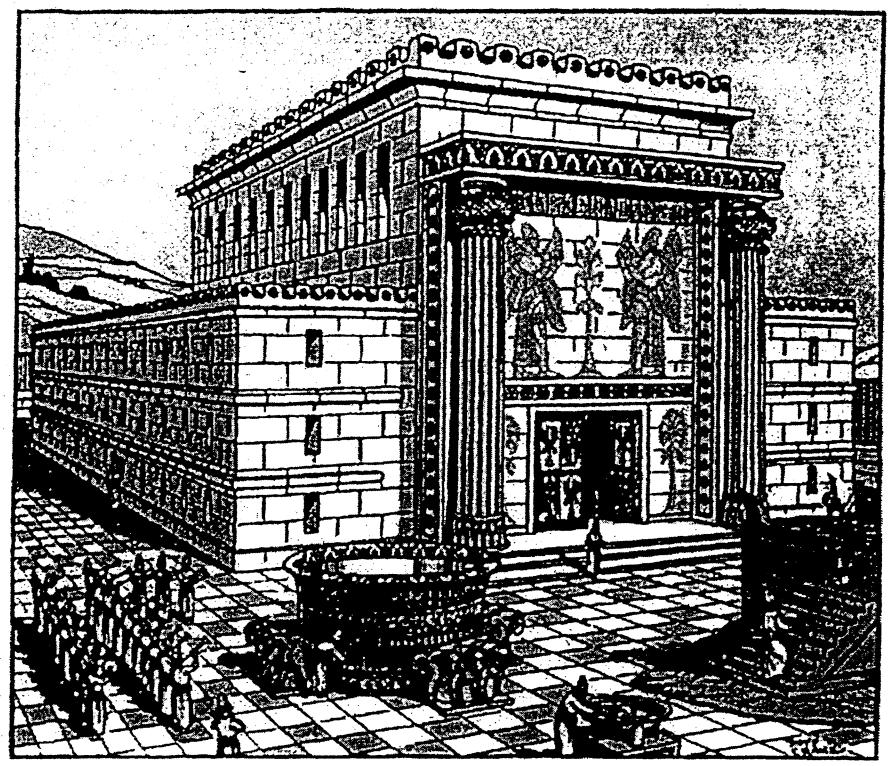
Example #2--The Tabernacle and the Temple

The Tabernacle: In Exodus 25 and following, an amazing tent is described in great detail including its pieces of furniture, the curtains, the pillars, the loops, the staves, the boards, the sockets, the bars, etc.

Exact measurements are given. God had a very precise blueprint for this tabernacle. No Bible-believer would dispute the fact that this tabernacle was erected exactly as described.



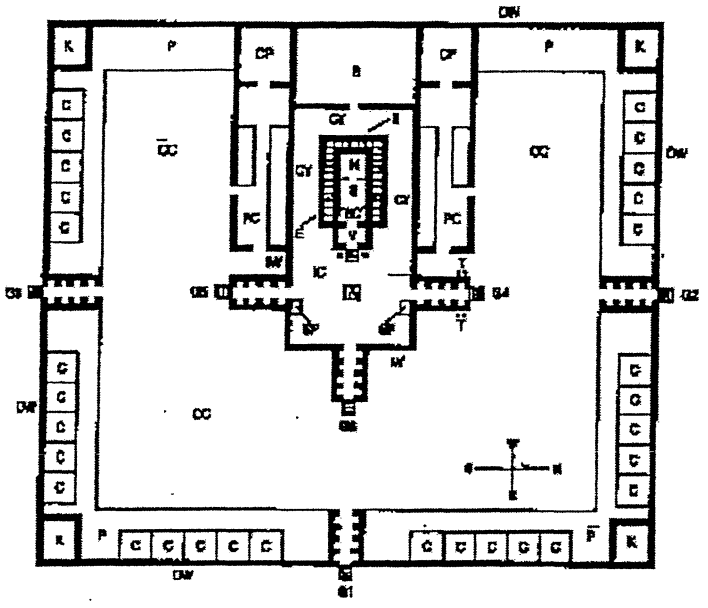
Solomon's Temple: In 1 Kings chapter 6 we learn that God also had a blueprint for the temple. It is carefully described as to its measurements, its building materials, its porch, its chambers, its inner sanctuary, etc. Solomon's temple was a literal building located in Jerusalem and no one would dispute this. No Bible-believer would deny that Solomon's temple was a glorious building that once stood in Jerusalem.



Ezekiel's Temple--In Ezekiel chapters 40-48 another temple is described with amazing detail. Not even Solomon's temple was described with such detail! Chapter after chapter are full of detailed descriptions about this amazing temple and its design. Detailed measurements are given. The chambers, roofs, porches, gates, and courts are described. The holy place and most holy place are detailed. The temple sacrifices are described. The Levitical priests, even the sons of Zadok, are described as serving in the temple. An amazing river flowing out of the sanctuary is described. The descriptions of this temple are so detailed that the *Reformation Study Bible* (formerly called the *New Geneva Study Bible,* edited by R.C. Sproul and and other reformed men) has a detailed diagram of Ezekiel's temple:

Ezekiel's Temple (40:5)

Ezekiel's restored temple is not a blueprint, but a vision that stresses the purity and spiritual vitality of the ideal place of worship and those who will worship there. It is not intended for an earthly, physical fulfillment, but expresses the truth found in the name of the new city: THE LORD IS THERE (Ezek. 48:35). God will dwell in the new temple and among His people.



The Temple Complex

OW	Wall of outer court (40:5)
G1	Eastern outer gateway (40:6–16)
OC	Outer court (40:17)
C	Chambers in outer court (40:17)
P	Pavement (40:17, 18)
G2	Northern outer gateway (40:20–22)
G4	Northern inner gateway (40:23, 35–37)
G3	Southern outer gateway (40:24–26)
G5	Southern inner gateway (40:27–31)
IC	Inner court (40:32)
G6	Eastern inner gateway (40:32–34)
T	Tables for killing sacrifices (40:39–43)
SP	Chambers for singers and priests (40:44–4
A	Altar (40:47; 43:13–27)
V	Vestibule of temple (40:48, 49)
S	Sanctuary or holy place (41:1, 2)
H	Most Holy Place (41:3, 4)
SC	Side chambers (41:5–7)
E	Elevation around temple (41:8)
CY	Separating courtyard (41:10)
B	Building at west end (41:12)
PC	Priest's chambers (42:1–14)
IW	Wall of inner court (42:10)
CP	Priest's cooking places (46:18, 20)
K	Kitchens (46:21–24)

[The above diagram is found in the *New Geneva Study Bible,* R.C. Sproul, General Editor, page 1315.]

The study note above this diagram says this: "Ezekiel's restored temple is not a blueprint, but a vision that stresses the purity and spiritual vitality of the ideal place of worship and those who will worship there. **It** [Ezekiel's temple] **is not intended for an earthly, physical fulfillment [emphasis mine]."** In other words, according to this Study Bible, Ezekiel's prophetic vision of this great temple will never be literally fulfilled. Even though this Study Bible gives a detailed diagram of this temple, those responsible for this Bible do not believe that any such temple will ever be erected on this earth! Why do they understand the tabernacle to be a literal tent and they understand Solomon's temple to be an actual temple, and yet they consider Ezekiel's temple to be a mere vision which will never be fulfilled? This approach is totally inconsistent.

In Haggai chapter 2, the prophet asks the question, "Who is left among you that saw this house (temple) in her (its) first glory? And how do ye see it now?" (verse 3). At the time of the rebuilding of the temple, there were still some very old Jews who remembered the glory of Solomon's temple. They knew that the temple that was now being built (by a small remnant of Jews who had returned to the land following the Babylonian captivity) was as nothing compared to Solomon's magnificent temple: "Is it not in your eyes in comparison of (with) it as nothing?" (Haggai 2:3). But God promised them, through His prophet, that there would be a future temple that would even surpass the glory of Solomon's temple: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts; and in this place (Jerusalem) will I give peace" (Haggai 2:9). The glory of the future temple, according to this prophecy, would be greater than the glory of Solomon's temple which was truly one of the wonders of the ancient world. Notice also that the future temple is connected with Jerusalem, and that the fulfillment of this promise will come at a time when there is peace in Jerusalem.

Dispensationalists have no problem with the Haggai prophecy. They understand that the future millennial temple (Ezekiel's temple) will surpass the glory of Solomon's temple. But this is a serious problem for non-dispensationalists. Notice this non-dispensational interpretation in the ESV Study Bible:

> The ultimate fulfillment of this passage demands a still wider view of redemptive history...The NT "mystery" is a new spiritual temple composed of people from all nations (1 Cor. 3:9; 16-17), a new community that is the focal point of God's saving work in the world (Eph. 3:8-10). Ultimately, the temple as a sign of God's presence with his people is eclipsed by the presence of the Lord of hosts and the Lamb (Rev. 21:22-26). [Note under Haggai 2:9]

Thus the non-dispensationalists are forced to compare Solomon's temple with a non-literal temple: either the Church (1 Cor. 3:16) or the presence of the Lord in the eternal state. The Church does not fit Haggai's prophecy because it is not a physical temple (see the emphasis of Haggai 2:8 on silver and gold) and because there has been no lasting peace in Jerusalem during the Church age (as required by Haggai 2:9). The eternal state does not fit Haggai's prophecy because there will be no temple in the eternal state (see Rev. 21:22). The non-dispensational approach is found lacking.

Dispensationalists are consistent. They believe that there will be a future temple in Jerusalem which will be exactly as Ezekiel describes. It will be the temple that is on earth during the kingdom reign of the Messiah. For further study: The Millennial Temple of Ezekiel 40-48 by Dr. John Whitcomb (An Exercise in Literal Interpretation).

Example #3--The Plagues

Bible believers, whether they are dispensational or non-dispensational, are all in agreement that the plagues that fell upon the land of Egypt happened exactly as described in the Bible.

One of the plagues was that of frogs and is described in Exodus chapter 8:

> 1: And the LORD spake unto Moses, Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Let my people go, that they may serve me.
>
> 2: And if thou refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite all thy borders with frogs:
>
> 3: And the river shall bring forth frogs abundantly, which shall go up and come into thine house, and into thy bedchamber, and upon thy bed, and into the house of thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thine ovens, and into thy kneadingtroughs:
>
> 4: And the frogs shall come up both on thee, and upon thy people, and upon *all thy* servants.
>
> 5: And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch forth thine hand with thy rod over the streams, over the rivers, and over the ponds, and cause frogs to come up upon the land of Egypt.

[Illustration from *Bible Visuals*, Exodus Part 2.]

Those of a dispensational, covenant or reformed persuasion are all in agreement. These Egyptians were plagued by frogs in enormous numbers, to the point where these amphibians were found in their bedrooms, in their ovens, etc. Why do we all believe this? Because the text of the Bible says so! The text of Scripture is very clear and we take these statements literally.

The book of Exodus is not the only place in God's Word where divine judgments are graphically described. In the book of Revelation we find three series of plagues which will affect, not just Egypt, but the entire world. These are the seal plagues, the trumpet plagues and the vial or bowl plagues. These end-time plagues are described in much the same way that the Egyptians plagues were described in Exodus.

For example, the second trumpet plague is described in Revelation chapter 8:

> 8: 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;
> 9: 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.

Dispensationalists believe that one-third of the sea will become blood, one-third of the sea-creatures will die and one-third of the ships will be destroyed. We believe this because the text says so. A normal reading of

this text leads to this conclusion.

Another plague, the fourth bowl plague, is described in Revelation 16:

> 8: And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.
> 9: And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.

Here we have a horrifying description of global warming. This worldwide warming will not be caused by man, and will not be caused by carbon emissions. This plague will come from the hand of God. [We can be thankful to know that Al Gore is not in control of the end of the world.] Dispensationalists believe that this plague will take place exactly as described, because we take the text of Scripture at face value. We take God at His Word.

Non-dispensationalists do not believe that the plagues described in the book of Revelation will be literally fulfilled. For example, preterists believe and teach that these plagues have already been fulfilled in or around 70 A.D. They believe that the great tribulation has already taken place! Of course, we know that these plagues were not literally fulfilled in 70 A.D. or at any other time in past history. We know that there has never been a time when one-third of the sea became blood, one third of the sea creatures died and one third of the ships were destroyed. Since this has never happened, and since God cannot lie, then this means that there must be a future fulfillment. Dispensationalists believe that these judgments will take place in the coming tribulation period, a time Jesus described as the greatest time of trouble the world has ever known (Matt. 24:21).

Why is it that non-dispensationalists understand the plagues of Egypt literally, as having happened exactly as described, and yet they deny that the plagues described in Revelation will ever be fulfilled literally? It is totally inconsistent.

> "These seven bowl-judgments are *literal!* There is no other reasonable interpretation possible. Shall we believe that the ten plagues upon Egypt were actually as described in Exodus, and dare to turn away these "seven last plagues" of The Revelation from their evident open significance? Four of the ten Egyptian plagues are here repeated: boils, blood, darkness, and hail. What kind of interpretation is it that believes the one and denies the other! There the visitation was in a single land: here, in all the earth. Is it the extent of the horror that appalls the heart? Have we not read, through all the prophecies, of the day when God will return judgment to righteousness: amidst earth-wide visitations?" [*Revelation--A Complete Commentary* by William Newell, p. 245]

Example #4--The Change in the Nature of Animals

Bible believers are generally unanimous in teaching that there was a change in the nature of animals at the beginning of history. This is based on Genesis 1:30: "And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of

the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, **I have given every green herb for meat**: and it was so" (Genesis 1:30). Animals originally were plant eaters or vegetarians. Why do dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists teach this? Because the text clearly states this and we take the Bible at face value. We know there was a change in the nature of animals, because today the animal world is very different. Many animals today are carnivorous. Some animals are omnivores, eating both plants and meat (such as bears, skunks and raccoons). This change in the nature of animals took place either at the time of the fall or after the flood.

The non-dispensational *New Geneva Study Bible* (*Reformation Study Bible*), edited by R. C. Sproul and others, has this note under Genesis 1:29--"**The human and animal (v.30) diets were originally vegetarian**, a situation altered after the flood." Here is an example of non-dispensationalists taking the Bible literally because that is exactly what the text says!

In Mark's gospel we learn of a time when the nature of animals was changed temporarily. The temptation account as given by Mark is only two verses in length, but Mark tells us something that the other gospel writers do not mention: "And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; **and was with the wild beasts**; and the angels ministered unto him" (Mark 1:12-13). If someone else had been in the desert with the wild beasts, he probably would have been devoured! But when the Lord Jesus was there, the wild animals did Him no harm. When Christ is present on earth in His kingdom, a similar situation will be true worldwide. We learn about this in Isaiah 11:

> 6: The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.
>
> 7: And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
>
> 8: And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den.
>
> 9: They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

What is the plain and normal sense of this passage? Just as Genesis 1:30 teaches that animals were once vegetarian, so Isaiah 11:7 teaches that animals shall once again be vegetarians in the kingdom. Animals that now are meat eaters will be plant eaters during the kingdom. This is the plain sense of the text. Non-dispensationalists depart from the plain, literal interpretation of the text, simply because their theology does not allow them to do so. They do not believe in a future, earthly kingdom.

The *New Geneva Study Bible* (later called the *Reformation Study Bible*), edited by R. C. Sproul and others, has this note under Isaiah 11:6-9--"Carnivorous animals, now remade with natures that protect what they formerly devoured, effectively portray the wonderful peace on earth in the new age ruled by the Messiah. The vision corresponds to reconciling love in the church." Let us analyze this note. They do not believe that Isaiah 11:6-9 should be taken literally. Instead it is merely a "vision" which portrays something. And when they speak of "the new age ruled by the Messiah," they are not referring to an actual future kingdom age, because to them the kingdom is here and now. In their view, Isaiah's prophecy merely portrays the wonderful peace and reconciling love found in this present church age. They deny that this prophecy has anything to do with the actual nature of animals.

To insist that Isaiah's prophecy corresponds to "reconciling love in the church" is preposterous. What Isaiah describes is certainly not taking place today. If you go to any zoo, you will not find any lions eating straw. Today no loving mother would allow her child to play with a deadly poisonous snake. We are reminded of a Russian zookeeper who made this boast, "In our zoo here in Moscow, the wolf dwells with the lamb in the same cage, something which you Americans do not have." But he failed to mention that a new lamb had to be put in the cage every day!

Once again we find inconsistency in the way non-dispensationalists handle the sacred text. Why does the plain sense make good sense in Genesis 1 but not in Isaiah 11, especially when both passages are speaking of the diet of animals? Isaiah 11, understood literally, does not agree with their theological system which says that the kingdom is here and now, whereas the teaching of Genesis 1:29-30 does not threaten their theology. This illustrates the point that theologians are often inconsistent when it comes to their use of the literal hermeneutic, and they often tend to abandon the natural and normal meaning of words when the words describe future kingdom conditions. Dispensationalists are known for their ***consistent use*** of the literal hermeneutic. If the text of the Bible contradicts my theological system, should I abandon the literal sense of the text, and force it to mean something else? If the sacred text contradicts my theological system, would it not be better to abandon my theological system?

Example #5--Fishing

Consider Matthew 4:18--"And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers." This verse teaches us, among other things, that these disciples were fishing on the Sea of Galilee. How could anyone read this text and deny that these men were fishing on the Sea of Galilee? The Bible says it and we believe it. No one would dispute this. Dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists alike would agree with the plain, obvious sense of this passage. These men were fishing on the Sea of Galilee.

Consider another passage in Ezekiel 47: "Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert [the Arabah, the waterless region between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea], and go into the sea [the Dead Sea]: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh. And it shall come to pass, that the fishers shall stand upon it from En-gedi even unto En-eglaim; they shall be a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many" (Ezekiel 47:8-10). This passage is also about fishing. This passage is teaching that there will come a day when men will be fishing on the Dead Sea! Today no one fishes on the Dead Sea for the simple reason that no fish can survive in that body of water. But this passage says that the waters of the Dead Sea will be healed and men will spread forth their nets and catch a large variety of fish!

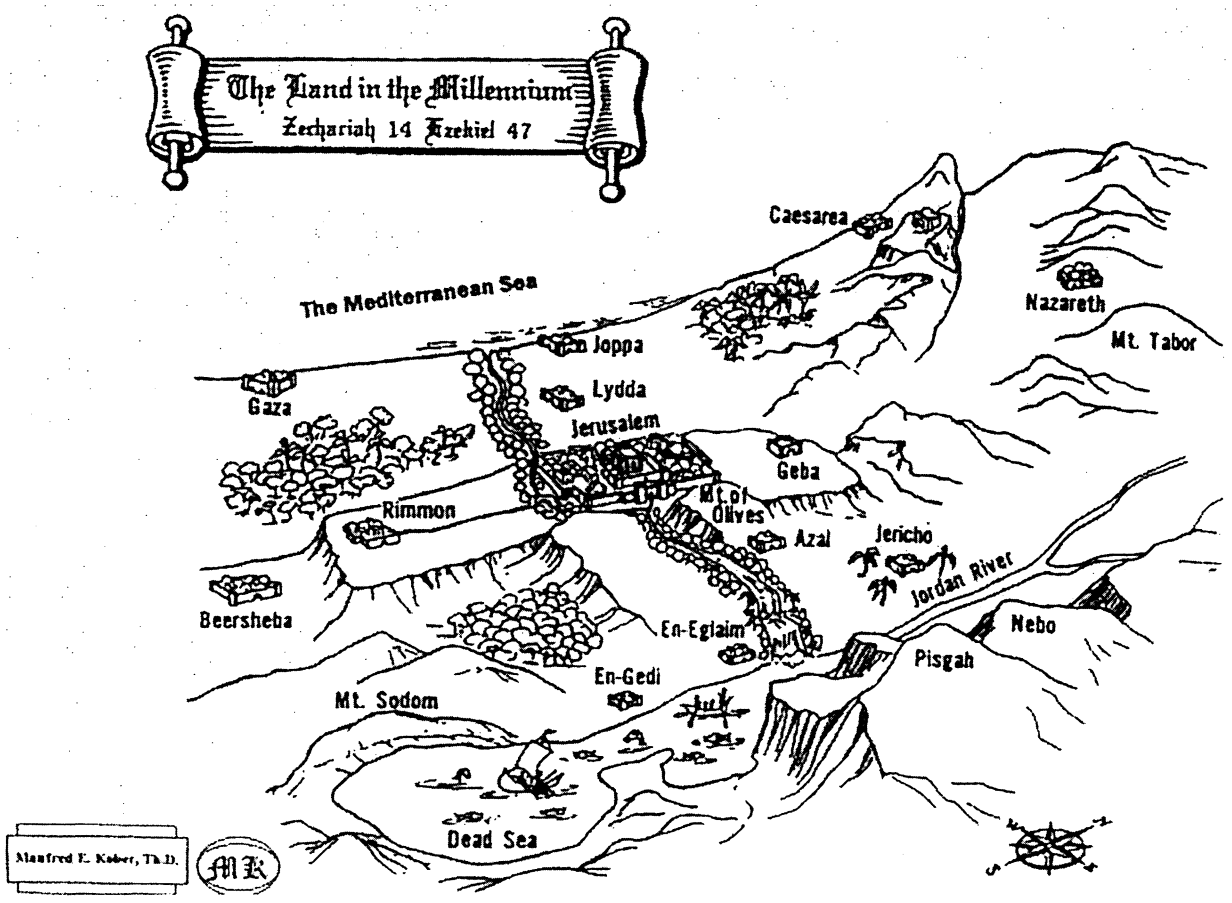
No one would deny that the disciples were fishing in the Sea of Galilee according to Matthew 4:18, because the Bible says so. But there is hardly a non-dispensationalist in this world who believes that in the future men will be catching fish on the waters of what is now known as the Dead Sea. Why don't they believe this? The Bible clearly teaches this in Ezekiel 47, but they refuse to take it literally because it conflicts with their theological system. If they deny a literal kingdom, then they must also deny any fishing activity that takes place in that kingdom. Again we see their total inconsistency. They understand Matthew 4:18 literally and believe that men were fishing on the Sea of Galilee. They refuse to believe Ezekiel 47:8-10

literally and they deny that men will ever be fishing on the Dead Sea.

Ezekiel 47 also describes an amazing river which will originate from the house of the LORD (compare Joel 3:18) as a very shallow stream. Gradually the stream will get deeper and fuller until it is over a man's head. It eventually travels east until it empties into the Dead Sea which, as we have just learned, will be turned into fresh water teeming with fish (see Ezekiel 47:1-10). The Dead Sea will be miraculously transformed into a living sea!

In Zechariah 14:8 we learn that half of this river will empty into the Dead Sea and half of the river will empty into the Mediterranean Sea.

Manfred Kober has provided the following illustration of the future topography of the Holy Land showing this amazing river of life flowing into the two great seas:



The descriptions of this river are as literal as literal can be. There are clear geographical references made in connection with this river (Ezek. 47:8-10). There are exact distances and depths measured out (Ezek. 47:3-5). The details concerning this river are very descriptive and specific. This river flows into the sea (the Dead Sea) and the waters, which once were the saltiest on earth, become fresh. There will be many varieties of fish in this same body of water where fish formerly could never live. Fishermen will stand beside it and there will be the spreading of nets. Are we to reject this whole description and spiritualize it and give it some strange meaning according to our own fancy, or should we take it at face value and give the words their literal and normal and obvious sense?

When people depart from a literal interpretation they deny the plain sense and they give the text some other sense according to their own lively imagination. It is almost humorous to read the commentaries and see

how people spiritualize this river and make it mean whatever they want it to mean.

I wrote to Gary DeMar, a well known preterist author and a leading critic of dispensationalism. [One of his attacks on dispensationalism is called *Last Days Madness--Obsession of the Modern Church* (Atlanta: American Vision, 1999).] The question I asked him was simply this:

> Ezekiel 47 and other passages teach that there will be a river flowing from the temple, emptying into the Dead Sea, with the result that the waters of the Dead Sea will be healed so that fish will live there and fishermen will fish there (verses 1-10). When was this fulfilled?

His answer was lengthy, but the essence of it was that this passage in Ezekiel 47 has already been fulfilled by Jesus Christ who is our River of Life. [This is the typical answer of a preterist: "It is **fulfilled**, not **future**!"] Now we would certainly agree that Jesus Christ is our River of Life, and we would still be dead in sins apart from Him who is our Life, but does this mean that the clear statements about the river in Ezekiel 47 (and how the waters of the Dead Sea will be healed) will never find literal fulfillment? The key question really is this: Is God going to do what He said He would do in Ezekiel 47, or not? To simply say that all of the details and specific statements of this prophecy were fulfilled by Jesus Christ does not do justice to the clear statements of Scripture. It does not honor Christ to deny the plain and obvious and natural sense of His Word. The waters of the Dead Sea were never healed at Christ's first coming and during the last 2000 years no fishermen have been spreading their nets there. Ezekiel's prophecy has never been fulfilled, but those who take God at His Word know that it will be.

Gary DeMar is here using an allegorical approach. Allegorical interpretation involves looking for hidden spiritual meaning which transcends the literal sense of the sacred text. DeMar has abandoned the literal sense of the passage.

Example #6--Longevity

In Genesis chapter 5 we read about men living before the flood, most of whom lived more than 900 years. Verse 27 gives the total years of Methuselah as being 969 years. Those who take God at His Word believe that Methuselah lived this many years because that is exactly what the text says. Bible believing reformed men and Bible believing covenant men would agree with dispensationalists that these men living prior to the flood had extremely long life spans.

In Isaiah 65 we learn about a future period of time when a "child shall die an hundred years old" (verse20). Today if a person were a hundred years old, we would never refer to him as a child. But if a normal lifespan were a thousand years, then it would make sense to refer to someone who dies at the early age of one hundred as a child. In this same chapter we read this: "They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: **for as the days of a tree are the days of my people**, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands" (Isaiah 65:22). Trees commonly live to be hundreds of years old. It is said that olive trees can sometimes live two millennia. Some think that a very young olive tree on the Mount of Olives at the time of Christ could still be alive today. Whether this is true or not, no one doubts the longevity of trees. There is coming a time on this earth when men will live very long, with their years being compared to the years of a tree.

Non-dispensationalists deny that there will ever be a future time on this earth when men will live so long, in spite of these clear statements found in Isaiah 65. Again it is a question of consistency. Why do they believe the clear statements of Genesis chapter 5 and yet deny the clear statements of Isaiah 65? Why do they believe what God said has already happened in history but deny what God says will someday happen

in prophecy?

Dispensationalists believe that longevity will be the norm in Christ's thousand-year kingdom.

Example #7--"Days" and "Years"

> "For ***in six days*** the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:11).

God says that His work of creation happened in six days. Does He really mean what He says? Does He mean "six days" or does He mean something else? Can we take Him at His Word?

For a more detailed analysis of how the "days" of Genesis 1 should be understood, see our paper, The Six Days of Creation.

Before the dawn of uniformitarian evolutionism, there was general unanimity among students of the Bible that the days of creation were six literal 24-hour days. The pressures of unsubstantiated scientific theory should not force Bible believers to abandon the natural sense of language.

Dr. Gary North has been one of the leaders of the postmillennial reconstructionist movement (the "theonomy" movement). [Since the mid 1970's theonomy has been most often used in Protestant circles to specifically label the ethical perspective of Christian Reconstructionism, a perspective that claims to be a faithful revival of the historic Protestant view of the Old Testament law as espoused by many European Reformers and Puritans.] In 1987 Gary North sent out a newsletter in which he scolded dispensationalists for their failure to teach creationism, especially regarding the six literal days of the creation week. [Gary North, *Christian Reconstruction,* "Christianity and Progress" (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, May/June, 1987, Vol. XI, No. 3), 3-4.] He attacked C. I. Scofield for holding to the gap theory, a position commonly held among many of the earlier dispensationalists, but rejected by many if not most dispensationalists today. North made the false accusation that no dispensational seminary takes a position on a recent creation and that no dispensational seminary takes a position that the days of Genesis 1 were literal 24 hour days. This accusation was false, evidenced by the fact that Grace Theological Seminary had published a written positional statement on this issue, entitled *Biblical Creationism,* which was adopted by its faculty on July 6, 1979. Many other dispensational schools also took a solid position on the six literal creation days as revealed by a publication of the Independent Fundamental Churches of America entitled, *IFCA Schools Questionnaire Composite* which was published in 1986. This questionnaire was sent to 263 Bible Institutes, Bible Colleges and Seminaries. Ninety-four schools responded to the questionnaire and one hundred and seventy schools did not respond. But of the schools who responded, fifty-five took a position in support of the days in Genesis 1 as literal 24 hour days; one school did not teach this and 30 schools did not take an official position on this issue.

Dr. North is to be commended for his literal approach to the first chapter of Genesis and his insistence that the six days of the creation week were literal 24-hour days. He takes Genesis 1 very literally and understands the six days in their normal and natural and obvious sense. "Days" mean "days." "Morning and evening" means "morning and evening." "Fifth day" means "fifth day." If Dr. North were to follow the same literal approach that he uses in Genesis 1 and apply that to Revelation chapter 20, then he would be a premillennial dispensationalist and he would be forced to abandon his postmillennialism. But instead he abandons his literal hermeneutic. For him, the thousand years in Revelation 20 are very symbolic. The term

"thousand years" (mentioned six times in Revelation 20) does not really mean a thousand years, according to North.

Dr. North has highly recommended David Chilton's book, *The Days of Vengeance--An Exposition of the Book of Revelation,* as the key work on prophecy and North himself wrote the preface. He states that no one has and no one can write a better commentary on Revelation, so it is not unreasonable to assume that Gary North would be in agreement with Chilton's position on Revelation 20. Here is Chilton's non-literal understanding of the thousand years: These thousand years represent "a vast, undefined period of time....It has already lasted almost 2,000 years, and will probably go on for many more. The thousand years is to be understood as a symbolical number, denoting a long period...It may require a million years." [David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance--An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), 507. Dr. North's preface is found on pages xv-xxxiii.]

Dr. North is totally opposed to the evolutionary theory, and yet he handles Revelation 20 in a way very similar to how the evolutionists handle Genesis 1. The evolutionists say:

> Evolution is really impossible, but if you give us enough time, all things are possible. We don't need God; we just need time. Even though we cannot see evolution taking place today, if you give us enough time then anything can happen. [This is beautifully illustrated by a statement made by evolutionist Rick Gore, in an article entitled, "The Awesome Worlds Within a Cell," which appeared in *National Geographic* in September 1976. In discussing how the first living cell originated, Gore said, "The odds against the right molecules being in the right place at the right time are staggering. Yet, as science measures it, so is the time scale on which nature works. Indeed, what seems an impossible occurrence at any one moment would, given untold eons, become a certainty" (390). Likewise, evolutionist George Wald wrote this: "Time is in fact the hero of the plot. The time with which we have to deal is of the order of two billion years. What we regard as impossible on the basis of human experience is meaningless here. Given so much time, the "impossible" becomes possible, the possible probable, and the probable virtually certain. One has only to wait: time itself performs the miracles. (*Scientific American* "The Origin of Life," August 1954, p.48) In other words, evolutionists teach that "With time, all things are possible!"] Thus we cannot take the days of Genesis 1 literally because we need much more time than six days. We need millions and millions of years. Without that much time our evolutionary theory is in great trouble!

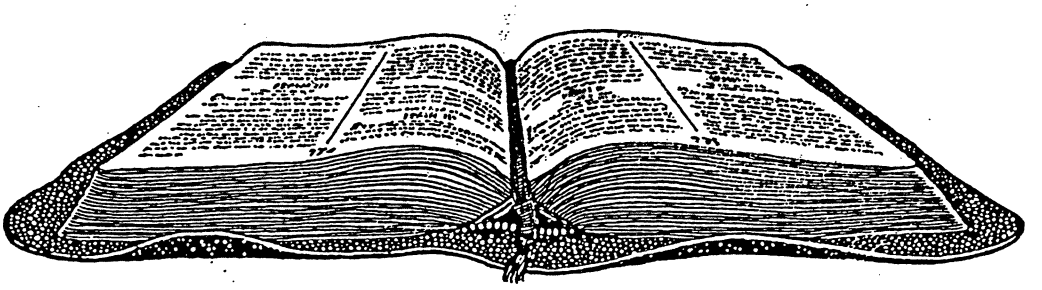
Reconstructionists echo the thinking of the evolutionists in their approach to Revelation chapter 20:

> Reconstructing society according to Biblical law seems impossible, but if we have enough time it can be done. We certainly don't see it taking place today. In fact, it seems as though society is becoming more and more lawless. But with enough time these changes for the better will come. We don't need Christ's personal coming to this earth to change society. We can do it but we need time. If you give us enough time anything can happen. Thus we cannot take the thousand years of Revelation 20 literally because we need much more time than that. We need thousands and thousands of years, perhaps EVEN A MILLION YEARS for us to overcome and have dominion over the earth. But be patient. It will happen! But without that much time our reconstruction/postmillennial theory is in great trouble!

We can be thankful for a great Creator God who was able to make the heavens and the earth in six literal days! And we can be thankful for a great coming King, the Lord Jesus Christ, who can suddenly and mightily transform society by bringing in His promised kingdom (Daniel 2:44). He is not dependent upon man's feeble efforts at improving society. All man can do is make society more and more corrupt, even as it was in the days of Noah!

Again we have the problem of inconsistency. Gary North understands the days in Genesis 1 literally, in their normal sense. He understands the years in Revelation 20 in a non-literal way, in a symbolic way. It fits his theology to make the days of Genesis 1 to be literal days; it contradicts his theology to understand the millennium of Revelation 20 as a literal millennium of 1000 years. Should not the text of the Bible determine our theology instead of letting our theology govern how we understand the text?

Reasons for Literal Interpretation:



1. The Philosophical Reason:

The purpose of language

2. The Biblical Reason:

Fulfilled prophecy

3. The Logical Reason:

Objective truth

4. The Cultural Reason:

Literal interpretation