

## Scriptures and Doctrine :: Symbols or Literal?

### Symbols or Literal?, on: 2007/4/25 6:56

Who decides what is symbolic and what is to be taken literally in the book of Revelation?

If we say the Holy Spirit, than there are many different interpretations from several different groups who claim that the Holy Spirit is teaching them.

If we say the bible, again the same individuals, groups believe how they rightly divide scripture is correct.

Please don't say God, that is too generic. We can all say that and turn right around interpret scriptures with our carnal reasonings.

So, WHO decides to say that this is symbolic and this is not??

Thank you

### Re: Symbols or Literal? - posted by RobertW (), on: 2007/4/25 8:50

Quote:

-----So, WHO decides to say that this is symbolic and this is not??  
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The book of Revelation is loaded with symbols that can be found in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit has to be your #1 teacher. But this does not mean that we will read the Book of Revelation prayerfully and understand it fully. God uses what we know from the word of God to build upon our understanding. This is why I believe Paul had such a firm grip on the Gospel. It was because he had such a firm grasp of the Old Testament. So when God was ready to teach Him the Gospel the first step was to change his mind about who Christ *really* was and is. From there God could piece the Truth together using the vast amount of resources that Paul had studied.

I think the speed with which we understand things is greatly effected by what we already know. Unfortunately we cannot just have God download the fulness of the scriptures into our brains. This is why the more we study the more we can potentially understand. Paul started out with a huge library of information in his mind and God went into that library and showed Him the truth.

This, I think, is the key to understanding the New Testament. But with a word of caution let me say that prophecy is a unique thing. Nothing is more influenced by our personal bias than prophecy. You really have to have a willingness to know the truth no matter what that truth may be. If you start out with preconceived ideas then you are at a disadvantage from the beginning. You will recall that the Jews of the New Testament period had certain Messianic Concepts and Eschatological ideas as Christ appeared on the scene. There was a group known as the Galileans from Galilee. These people were notorious for wanting to be liberated from Roman oppression. They took to the scriptures to find out if God was going to send a deliverer. they affirmed He would.

This Messianic concept took hold of the people at such a level that everything Jesus taught was being filtered through this concept. The Messiah is supposed to relieve the oppression of the oppressed and restore the Davidic Kingdom. The Temple was being built so many felt all the pieces were moving into position for this to happen. HOWEVER, their bias was to the intent that Christ was coming to relieve the oppression of Rome when in reality He was coming to set the people free from the bondage of Sin and Satan. They didn't even believe they WERE in spiritual bondage.

: They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? (John 8:33)

They were slaves to Sin and refused to believe it. So they *neglected* the Gospel that would have set them free from Sin and Satan. They *regarded it not* as they were warned about in Hebrews. So because of their eschatological bias they kept

pt believing that the REAL Messiah was coming to liberate them from Rome. But the REAL Messiah had come to set them free from the bondage of Sin and Satan- the type was the Exodus. And they crucified the True Messiah when He did not take up arms and start a revolution. Again, Jesus was from Galilee where the political activists were. He was crucified as a man from Galilee the place where the rebels were from. And even though He taught against the Galileans teaching (who eventually evolved into what became the fourth Philosophy in Judaism (Pharisees, Saducees, Essenes.) (<https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?viewarticle&aid1950>) THE ZEALOTS. This is why Peter took up his sword and Jesus said to put it away. This was rooted in a bad eschatological viewpoint.

The prophecies of the first coming of Christ were very precise as regards to the *TIMING*. They knew the 'when' but not the 'what'. They had the 'what' all messed up. They had the 'what' (what He would do when He came) based on their own lusts and desires. Their own hopes and dreams. Relief of their physical oppression, etc.

Likewise the second coming is veiled in mystery; not really the 'what' but the 'when'. And the lusts of the people and the desires of their heart weigh in on every interpretation of verse and symbol- just like it did the Jews. My concern has always been that we as the Church would have a large group that missed the point because they were dead set bent on a self-centered eschatologic view. Their own 'wants' weigh in to how they view the Revelation and carries more authority in their interpretation than the Holy Spirit and common sense. What happened to the Galileans, Sacarii, and Zealots? Well, they died at Masada. What happened to the Saducees? They perished with the Temple. What happened to the Pharisees? They moved to Jamnia and started Rabbinic Judaism. By 135 AD they had appointed their messiah, a warrior to lead the Second Revolt as Simon Bar. Kochba. This was Rabbu Abiba's messiah. It was a horrible disaster- but they revealed WHAT kind of Messiah they wanted. How far will many miss the truth of Christ trying to establish their 'WHEN' the Messiah will return?

**Re: - posted by JaySaved, on: 2007/4/25 9:41**

Quote:

-----Who decides what is symbolic and what is to be taken literally in the book of Revelation?  
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Great question. I have been wondering that as well.

**Re: Symbols or Literal? - posted by enid, on: 2007/4/25 10:20**

I've heard a few things in the past concerning this subject. Nothing concrete, just thoughts.

Like, we take the ten plagues of Egypt as literal  
so why not the book of Revelation?

Also, John was speaking of things he was seeing in the 1st century that belong to the 21st possibly 22nd century. So, how could he relate what he was seeing from the future into 1st century tongue for them to understand it?

Rev 16v21, 'And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent...

Hail does literally fall from heaven, but our disbelief is the size of the hail, a talent, which is about 100 pound weight.

Most have probably seen in the news of hail that has smashed through car windows and injured people. They were only the size of baseballs.

In Daniel, 12v9 Daniel is told, ...'Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.'

In Rev 22v10 we are told, ...'Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand'.

If that was spoken 2000 years ago, how much closer to the end are we now?

Rev 22v11 is, for me, telling us it is too late to change, the judgment is set.

You know what, literal or otherwise, Revelation is happening and will happen.

God bless.

Re: - posted by JaySaved, on: 2007/4/25 11:10

Quote:

-----Like, we take the ten plagues of Egypt as literal so why not the book of Revelation?  
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That is a good point, but we must remember that Exodus also contains symbolism as well.

The plagues were demonstrations of God's power, but the destroying angel that passed over all houses with the lamb's blood is symbolic for the wrath of God passing over all who are in Christ.

Now, the passover event literally happened, but it was symbolic of a greater event to come.

Having said all that, when I see Revelation I see God revealing Jesus Christ. Specifically, I see God writing the History of the church (the body of Christ) in symbolic language beforehand to show us that He is always in control no matter how difficult things get here on Earth.

100 lbs. hail could fall from the sky if God wanted it to, but I see this as symbolic for something...what it is I don't know. :-)

Re:, on: 2007/4/25 11:20

Simple... I do.

Seriously tho... this is a great question. I tend to be quite literal in my interpretation of scripture, but there are places where I believe scripture is obviously speaking symbolically. I think in most instances there is grace enough for all.

Where there isn't much wiggle room would be things like the creation account. Bubbaguy will tell you that the creation account is symbolic. I completely disagree... I believe the creation account is extremely literal. Some believe the 6 days of creation were actually 6,000, citing 2 Peter 3:8 as proof. But in my literal interpretation I can not ignore Genesis 1:5 where scripture says, "...And the **evening** and the **morning** were the first **day**."

I think when you get into the prophetic books, such as Revelation, there is much symbolism. I also think there is much literal, but seems symbolic because you have a first century AD man trying to describe future events. Can you imagine putting one of the Apostles into a Delorean, getting it up to 88 mph, and transporting him from 30AD to 2007... and then having him describe in writing what he says? Much less describing how cool Huey Lewis' song "That's The Power Of Love" is??

I know I haven't offered any answers... but perhaps some food for thought.

Anyone hungry?

Krispy

Re:, on: 2007/4/25 11:21

Quote:

-----...but the destroying angel that passed over all houses with the lamb's blood is symbolic for the wrath of God passing over all who are in Christ.  
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Here's an example where something in scripture is literal **AND** symbolic...

Krispy

**Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2007/4/25 11:32**

One of the challenging things about prophecy also is discerning what has been fulfilled already and what has not. This issue has given rise to the various views of prophecy:

- 1) Preterist
- 2) Partial Preterist
- 3) Historicist
- 3) Spiritualist

Wiki has a list of many more views.

The question we have to ask, again, is "Who was the recipient of the Book as originally written?" We get into a issue with scripture interpretation also known as 'single meaning'. The scripture has the meaning that the original author intended with the addition of what the Holy Spirit had in mind that was beyond the view of the Prophet. Sometimes the Prophets wrote what they did not understand- but certainly our first job is to ascertain what was being conveyed to those to whom the words were originally addressed. What does the scripture say. We have to discover the meaning of the nouns, verbs, etc. All of these and other factors come into play when interpreting any passage.

Hank Hanagraft is popularizing a form of partial preterism that makes much of the Book of Revelation a historical document. This appears to be his answer to the popular Left Behind series. That will raise some eyebrows I'm sure. ;-). This is not new though. The debate here centers on the dating of the Book. Was it written before or after the destruction of the Temple in AD 70? Some say before and others after. Personally I believe it was after and sometime in the 90's.

The book was written of things that were, are, and shall be. One of the challenges is sorting that out. What 'was'? What 'is' (at the time of the writing of the book). And what 'shall be here after'.

Just a little more on the dinner table...

**Re:, on: 2007/4/25 12:01**

Robert, I saw a thing on that great theological TV channel called the "History Channel" (note tongue planted firmly in cheek) about Revelation... and they had all these self appointed theologians going on and on about how the Book of the Revelation really isn't about future events, but rather a coded message of encouragement for the Christians in the first century. They explained how all the imagery was actually code for the Roman Empire and Caesar and all that...

Is this what Hank is teaching? Or am I misunderstanding you?

By the way, y'all... watch those History Channel documentaries on the Bible for entertainment purposes only. Do not watch them with the anticipation that they'll get *anything* correct. About the only thing they get consistently correct is that yes, Virginia, there was a man named Jesus.

Krispy

**Re: - posted by JaySaved, on: 2007/4/25 12:02**

You know Krispy, they say the heart of rock n' roll is still beating...and from what I see I believe it!

**Re: - posted by JaySaved, on: 2007/4/25 12:05**

I think Hank for the most part is right about the bible, I don't agree with much of partial preterism though.

I agree, anytime secular TV tries to tackle the bible it should be view as entertainment purposes only and to get a good laugh.

I remember a History Channel program that spoke of Revelation as either 'God's prophesy' or the 'ravings of a madman' and they brought out numerous 'scholars' who saw it as a mad man's fantasy.

**Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2007/4/25 12:09**

Quote:

-----KrispyKrittr on 2007/4/25 16:21:39

...but the destroying angel that passed over all houses with the lamb's blood is symbolic for the wrath of God passing over all who are in Christ.

Here's an example where something in scripture is literal AND symbolic...

This isn't really the kind of 'symbol' that we have in the Revelation. This is really a type or shadow of a truth which would be seen later in full colour and dimension. In a sense it is a kind of a prophecy.

The 'symbols' of the Revelation are very different to OT types and figures. The event of the Passover was a literal event and a prefiguring of Christ's redeeming death but the signs/symbols of the Revelation are more like a 'code' which needs a careful interpretation.

Whose interpretation? Well that is the issue under discussion. I don't think anyone believes that Christ is holding 7 stars or that there is a throne in heaven with a bloodied Lamb. I don't think anyone believes that Lamb has 7 eyes and 7 horns. These are not literal events at all in the manner of the Passover. The question is why do we choose to interpret any of these 'signs' as literal events?

In Rev 1:16 the figure representing Christ holds 7 stars in his right hand. In the next verse the figure places his right hand upon John... what happened to the seven stars he was holding? ;-)

The word translated 'signified' in Rev 1:1 is the translation of a Greek word which, like the English equivalent, has the word for 'sign' within it. This is a book of signs; we need to be cautious about how we decode it.

It would be very complex if with a modern secular code we were sometimes using the code and sometimes using uncode words. How would we ever work out what was 'code' and what was real? The traditional Dispensational view is to say something like 'literal where possible'. I think perhaps with the Revelation that ought to be 'figurative unless impossible'?

**Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2007/4/25 12:29**

Quote:

-----Is this what Hank is teaching? Or am I misunderstanding you?

I have not read the book per se but have listened to him talk about the subject many times. I gather that he believes most of the events have been fulfilled literally. For years he would never take a firm stand on pre or post trib, etc.,. He says over and over that we need to read the bible for all it is worth and basically discounts premil., post mil, pre trib, etc. He is way outside evangelical mainstream from what I gather.

Re:, on: 2007/4/25 12:50

Quote:

-----You know Krispy, they say the heart of rock n' roll is still beating...and from what I see I believe it!  
-----

LOL... ya know... that bad boy may be barely breathin'...

Krispy