

## Interpretation

### Guidelines IV

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~ Welcome back to the Spiritual Safari. In this fourth Guideline report entitled "interpretation" - we will be examining the topic of a spiritual interpretation of the Bible. This subject also encompasses the myriad *versions* of the Bible that are available today – or, the *translations*. Are modern translations dependable? My first statement may very well, regrettably, be a generalization; and a French proverb states that all generalizations are untrue. However, I do not recommend any of our modern translations or interpretations of the Bible. I recognize there are some good things that can be found in some of the modern versions; and, in most of them, the statement can be made that they contain enlightening phrasing which helps with the illumination we seek. Even one or two of the liberal Bibles published today have some excellent Greek translations; but, even so, I cannot recommend any other version of the Word of God for our basis of study than the Authorized King James Version.

The single most regrettable aspect of our modern translations and interpretations of the Bible is that Christians have become so deeply divided doctrinally as the result of each group attempting to make a private interpretation or translation that, naturally, injects into it their version of their own particular religious philosophy. If the liberal does the translating, you can expect at least a taste of liberalism. If the fundamentalist makes the translation, you'll pick up on that bias in certain places, too. However, I believe that the men who made the original translation from Hebrew and Greek to English believed it was the Word of God and I believe they handled it accordingly under a directive from God Himself.

Those men did not translate certain words but, rather, they just transliterated them. "Abba", for instance, meaning, "Father"; they didn't dare translate that word. The same is true for the word "baptize". These were transliterated – and yet so many people today want to be overly

dogmatic about certain things; which is another real danger in our modern translations and interpretations. Further, some of the men making today's modern translations and interpretations simply aren't any good at making interpretations and translations.

I take the personal position that I am not translating anything in this so-called safari but, rather, I am merely *interpreting* the Bible. Most of the modern-day translations are not really "translations," per se, but are, likewise, only interpretations. I try to at least review some portion of each version of the Bible – good, bad and ugly – because, just to see what these men have to say is most interesting to me; but, believe me, most of them are very poor in the realm of academia. So, I call them what they are. Marvelous interpretations can be lousy translations, too, by the way.

Naturally, in order to *translate* something, we have to take it out of one language and re-speak or re-write it in another language in comparable terms; identical terms, if possible. Most of our modern day "translations" are not that at all. What they are trying to do, of course, is get it into a form of modern speech that is easier for man to understand; but, in their attempt to do that, they always seem to miss what the text really says. That can be found in more published versions of the Bible than you can possibly imagine. So, again, I stick by the Authorized King James Version. I don't find it too difficult with all of its "thou," "shalt" and "hath" and "thee" words; they don't bother me and, actually, they have a certain note of reverence. I personally recommend the American Standard Version of the Authorized King James Version Holy Bible from 1901. I feel it is more accurate than any other version available currently. Specifically, the New Scofield Reference Bible has made tremendous steps forward and in making certain distinctions as you read it through, as well as corrections that needed to be made; I personally use that Bible. I recommend it above all others.

One of the most interesting comments I can find regarding translation of the Bible came from a rank unbeliever. Mr. George Bernard Shaw had *many* nasty things to say about present day churches and Christianity in general. But Shaw said, ".... the Authorized King James Version was extraordinarily well done. To the men that were doing the translating, this was not some

collection of ancient books by random authors in various stages of culture; but the Word of God finally revealed to His chosen and expressly inscribed scribes. In that conviction, they carried out their work with boundless reverence and care to achieve a beautiful artistic result” – well, that’s encouraging to me.

In any interpretation of the Bible there are certain rules that must be adhered to. The big difference among many conservative scholars today is the differing of opinion regarding interpretations. We believe the entire Bible is the inspired Word of God; and you may be relieved to hear a quote from one of the leading Pentecostal ministers in this country just a few short years ago: “...one of these days I will see this book as the Fundamental sees it and they shall see it as I do currently. At that time, we shall both see it correctly”. I like that statement, too, friends.

The first general rule one must keep in mind when making any interpretation of the Bible is the purpose for its production. The reason I have gone through the Bible as I have is because I needed to clarify the entirety of Scripture before I could make any reasonable judgment about it – especially any dogmatic statements regarding verses and passages of Scriptures – and this is something that may seem selfish, because it is, but it is all-important; at least, to me it is. When speaking of a verse it is CRITICAL to take ALL *of the* verses connected with it into consideration. ANY doctrine or theology MUST be sustainable throughout the entirety of Holy Writ.

Further, we should always consider to whom Scripture is addressed. For example, God said to Joshua, “Arise and go over the River Jordan”; well, today you may get shot at if you try to cross the Jordan River, so I wouldn’t go cross the Jordan River, personally - particularly if you are an American. If you do, though, don’t think that you have fulfilled Scripture because God wasn’t talking to you - He was talking to Joshua. Although there is a tremendous spiritual lesson for us in that passage, God was not talking to you or me about fulfilling Scripture literally. See, all Scripture is *FOR* us – but not all Scripture is *TO* us - and that is what we need to keep in mind.

The second rule of interpretation to adhere to is that there should always be an attempt to discover what the original text says. We must recognize that in our differing versions we ALREADY have certain interpretations. So, if you are interpreting English to English, you may ALREADY be way off base! Again, perhaps some of those versions are good and acceptable - and when you read them in comparison to the Authorized King James Version, I feel we can get about as close as we are going to get to what the Lord truly said – but the important thing to remember when attempting an interpretation is that we need to try to understand what the original text said and, as a result, I don't recommend any other versions of the Bible to anybody; that is, other than the Authorized King James Version.

The late Dr. David Cooper from Southern California University provides me with our third rule to follow when interpreting the scriptures. Cooper said, “....when the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense – seek no other sense. Therefore, take each word at its ordinary, primary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic, fundamental truths, indicate otherwise clearly.” That may be somewhat complicated, but it is just about as fine a statement regarding our topic that one can find written by man. Remember that Heaven and earth shall pass away but the Word of God shall not pass away. The Psalmist said, “....forever, oh, Lord, thy words are settled in the heavens”.

The Bible was born in the east and clothed in oriental form and imagery. The Bible walks the way of the entire world with familiar feet. It enters land after land to find its own everywhere. It speaks to the heart of man in hundreds of languages. It enters into the palace to tell the Monarch that he is a servant of the Most High and into the cottage to re-assure the peasant that he is a child of God. Children listen to the stories from the Bible with wonder and delight just as wise men ponder them as parables of light. It has a word of peace for the time of peril; a word of comfort for the time of calamity; and a word of light for the hour of darkness. Its oracles are repeated in the assemblies of the people; its council is whispered in the ear of the lonely; the wicked and the proud tremble at its warnings - but to the wounded and repentant it has the voice of a loving and concerned mother.

The wilderness and the solitary place have been made glad by it and the fire of the earth has lit the reading of its well-worn pages. It has woven itself into our dearest dreams so that love, friendship, sympathy and devotion, memory and hope put on the beautiful garment of its treasured speech, breathing frankincense and myrrh - the Bible is - the Word of God!

The interpretation that you and I make of the Bible is the human side of the Word of God and that is why there are Methodist and Baptist, Presbyterian and Fundamentals - and others like me. That comes from our interpretation and some of us are, evidently, woefully wrong. The Bible does not teach two things – it teaches just One thing: the Lord Jesus Christ. That One thing must be glorified by any true interpretation. That is important, because none of us have any right to lift out one little theme or passage and build a personal religious philosophy around it based on some contrived ideology. Further, no doctrine should ever be built on a passage that is not completely understood – and definitely not on an uncertain verse.

Unfortunately, many denominations today have done exactly that! Dr. Wescott observed that only one word in one hundred come into question as far as the text of the Authorized King James Version is concerned; and none of those affect any major doctrine. So, there's no reason for Christians to disagree on doctrine. You and I can be absolutely sure that the text we have today in the Authorized King James Version is a reliable text; but there are many other versions - and that is where it all becomes most confusing.

Now, let's look at the definition of the Bible because I feel it should be included in this report concerning interpretation. It would stand to reason that it would need to be in a language that we understand if we are to define it. So, now that we have established a reliable translation, we can attempt a definition. The Bible contains the mind of God; the state of man; the way of salvation. It also contains the doom of sinners; the happiness of believers; its doctrines are holy, and its precepts are binding. Its histories are true and verifiable; its decisions are immutable. Read it for wisdom — believe it for salvation - practice it and be holy! It also contains light to direct you; food to sustain you and comfort to cheer you. It is the pilgrims' staff and the travelers' map; the pilots' compass and a soldier's sword. It is the Christians Charter. In the Bible, paradise is restored, Heaven is opened,

and the gates of hell are revealed. Christ is the grand object and our good is its design – it alone furnishes the dynamic for any ethic we have. The Glory of God is its end. It should fill your memory; rule your heart; guide your feet. Read it slowly, frequently and prayerfully. It is a mine of gold and wealth, the paradise of glory and a river of pleasures. It is only given to you in this life and it will be open at your judgment - and you will remember it forever. It involves the highest responsibility; will reward the most arduous labor and will condemn all people who trifle with its sacred content and context.

In this Spiritual Safari we are dealing with a holy book that is under attack as no other book has experienced in the history of the world. Dr. McGifford made the following statement many, *many* years ago, (Dr. McGifford was a *great* professor of history – but this is his viewpoint): “...there are but few Protestant theologians who treat the early chapters of the Bible as sober history”. Unfortunate statements such as that are made and multiplied ad infinitum. Dr C H Dodd said, “....”long, long ago it became clear that, in claiming for the Bible accuracy and matters of science and history, its apologists have chosen a hopeless position to defend. The harm has already been perpetrated on society by allowing the outdated and worn out morality contained in parts of the Old Testament to stand as authoritative declarations”. So, make no mistake, friends, there are serious attacks being made upon the Word of God - even as I sit here typing this report – and even in some of our so-called conservative seminaries by self-proclaimed fundamental theologians. Some very strange things are, indeed, being said today.

For instance, in Vassar College, Mary McCarthy, writing on the Vassar Girl in Holiday Magazine a long time ago, said that the colleges’ curriculum has always been the same with one exception - and she lists the curriculum as that of any liberal college today: the English language and literature; other modern languages; Ancient classics and so on – but then she says: “Lastly, and most importantly, the daily, systematic reading and study of the Holy Scriptures as the only and all-sufficient rule of Christian faith and practice has been eliminated....and, with the exception of the last proviso, this remains the basis for the Vassar education”.

Of course, Vassar College in New York is not the only school the Bible has been expelled from; but I have some interesting contrast to blend in on Ms. McCarthy's perfunctory prose. We are living in a day when the divisions between (and I use the term loosely here) Christians - is so great a gulf - but is not drawn on the denominational line. In 1902 a cabinet minister in Great Britain made this statement: "The old denominational barriers are growing shadowy and unreal. The real division that is coming soon is between those who believe that the Bible is the Word of God and those who do not"! Well, that just happens to be where we are at today, friends. I personally resent the statement made by many that no intelligent person believes the Bible anymore. Our Supreme Court Justices are saying that right now! They say that no intelligent person could ever believe the Bible. Well, our court system is in such a catastrophic condition that most people simply dismiss and disregard the entity known as the law anyway – and all because of statements like that! Not to worry, though, because the mouths of these heretics will soon be sewn shut.

Gladstone said, "...when we talk about the questions of the modern era there is but one of any importance. That question is of the Gospel that can and will right all wrongs. I have been in public position for fifty-eight years. All but eleven of those have been spent in the cabinet of the British government. During the balance of forty-seven years, I have been associated with no less than sixty of the masterminds of the century; and all but five of those sixty were genuine Christians". Now, do you suppose that the change from that time to now could have anything at all to do with the sorry state that Britain is currently in? These are some tremendous statements that I never even heard mentioned in my schooling. Unfortunately, *nobody* hears them in their schooling anymore, either! My position is that there are too few Christians leading our country; and too many of them claim "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." But they have absolutely no knowledge of Scripture at all.

Gladstone is not the only great man that has taken the position that he does, of course. Michael Faraday was one of the greatest English chemists and physicist's humanity has ever known. He discovered the principle of



electromagnetic induction in 1831. He found that moving a magnet through a coil of copper wire caused an electrical current to flow in the wire. The electric generator and the electric motor are still based on this principle. There are very few men that enter a laboratory and pour acid in test tubes or look at microscopic bits of matter and try to figure out what they are that don't have to pay tribute to Michael Faraday. He was, unquestionably, far more of a genius than Albert Einstein. Now, I will be the first to admit that I do not completely comprehend the theories set forth by Einstein, but what I do understand is that he merely overstated the obvious.

*"Why will people go astray when they have the blessed book from God to guide them?" – asked Michael Faraday.*

Sir Isaac Newton said, "....if the Bible is true the time will come when men shall travel at fifty miles per hour!" Voltaire said, "....poor Isaac Newton was in his dotage when he made his prophecy about the future speed of travel. It only proves further what the infectious Bible will do to an otherwise healthy and scientific mind". Well, I see what that infection did! I wish we had more of it. So, allow me to also overstate the obvious myself once for Mr. Einstein's sake: "Voltaire was very much mistaken and Isaac Newton was absolutely correct"! Do you think Isaac Newton knew something that many men do not know? I challenge the modern scholar to rebut and answer these reports. I could multiply these and bring in another volume of equal or greater content than what is ahead of you now in your reading if need be. So, if you dare, I am looking forward to that conversation.

Remember, *"Thus saith the Lord"* occurs more than twenty-five hundred times in Scripture. Revelation means *"God has spoken"*. The Bible makes the unequivocal claim that Holy Writ is plenary verbal inspiration from God; and that inspiration guarantees the revelation that we have from Him. A Russian Communist leader said, "....religion is the opium of the people". Well, obviously, that man sure knew something about drug abuse and distribution, now didn't he? This individual also said that dope is worthless – but they sure did fund the Russian government heavily with drug



proceeds. Doesn't make sense, friends. See, the Bible will make a hypocrite out of a man faster than anything else in this world.

Sir George Kenyan was the late director and principal librarian of the British Museum, and he stated the following: “Thanks to these manuscripts, the ordinary reader of the Bible can feel comfortable regarding the soundness of the text, apart from a few verbal alterations that are unimportant and natural in books transcribed by hand. The New Testament, we now feel assured, has come down wholly intact”. This is one of the most important discoveries that have ever been made. We can be sure that we have as close of a translation from the original as possible – and, not only that – but inspiration still guarantees the revelation of it all from God on High!

Now, as we close our last study concerning the Bible itself, we are going to continue these Guidelines in our next safari report with a *structure* for the study of the Bible in light of all that has already been said in these first four reports. I'll end here with a quote from Dryden when he says: “....whence but from Heaven could men unskilled in arts, in several ages born, and in several parts, weave such agreeing truths - or how or why? Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie? Unasked about their pains, ungrateful of their advice, starving their gain for martyrdom....is how they paid so dear a price” ~

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