



The Sword & The Plow

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The Coming of Christ and the Restitution of All Things

Introduction

Acts 3:19-26 is among the more difficult passages regarding Christ's second coming. Peter mentions the "times of refreshing" and the "restitution of all things" associated with the coming of the Lord. What do these phrases mean and when were they fulfilled?

*"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the **times of refreshing** shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the **times of restitution of all things**, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."*
Acts 3:19-21

John the Baptist and the Restoration of all Things

The term rendered "restitution" in Acts 3:21 is from the Greek verb ἀποκαθίστημι (apokathistēmai), Strong's #600: to reconstitute (in health, home or organization):

- restore (again). The verb occurs in Matt. 17:11 in connection with John the Baptist:

"And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptist."

Here we find that John was to "restore all things," terminology almost identical with Peter's. The phrase harks back to Malachi's prophecy that "Elijah" (John) would turn "the heart of the fathers to the children, and heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:6). It describes in poetic terms the spiritual reformation of the people, calling them to repentance and faith in Christ. The prophecy does not imply that all men would receive John's message, for clearly they did not, but rather killed him and the Jewish nation at length fell under the curse pronounced by Malachi. This is clearly seen in Matthew's account of John's preaching:

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stone to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Matt. 3:7-12

John warned his countrymen that the coming of Christ would entail a time of sifting the wheat from the chaff, gathering the righteous into the kingdom of heaven - we believe by martyrdom under Nero and the Jews (II Thess. 2:1; Rev. 14:9-16) - but the wicked and disobedient to everlasting destruction in the wars and calamities that overtook the Jews and Romans in A.D. 66-70 (Lk. 21:21-24; I Thess.5:1, 2; II Thess. 7-10; Rev. 11:1,2; 14:17-20). They were not to trust in their lineal descent from Abraham for salvation, but were warned that true repentance and faith alone make men acceptable.

Since Messiah was to burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire, it is clear that not all received either John or Christ; else wise there would be nothing to burn up. Hence, "restoring all things" does not mean all men would receive either John or Christ, or that earth and the material creation would undergo wondrous regeneration as is sometimes supposed. Rather, it means only that John was to be a restorer of *right paths* for the people to walk in, so that they would be prepared to receive Christ when he appeared. In fact, this is precisely how Isaiah described the work of John:

"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Isa. 40:3

From what we have learned about John's work of "restoring all things" we may conclude similar things about the identical phrase as used by Peter. When Peter said heaven must receive Christ until the *times of the restitution of all things*, it would thus seem that he points to the period during which the gospel message was *fully revealed and announced*; following which Jesus would come in wrath upon his enemies. This is confirmed by Jesus' Olivet Discourse, when he said that the gospel must first be preached in all the world,

then the end would come (Matt. 24:14). And that the gospel was preached in the habitable earth within the apostles' life times, we have their own statements as proof (Rom. 10:18; Col. 1:5, 6). Indeed, Jesus said his generation would not pass away until he returned again in judgment upon Jerusalem and the Jews (Matt. 23:34-39; 24:29-34), and told his disciples there would not be time to preach in every city of Israel before he had come (Matt. 20:23). In Acts two, Peter set his own generation as the time in which Christ would return, saying "save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40). Peter's message in Acts 3:19-26, which we have been studying here, repeats the warning, evoking Moses:

"For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." Acts 3:22, 23; cf. Deut. 18:15, 19

The "prophet" here, of course, is Christ. "Hearing that prophet" meant obeying the message of Christ by the mouth of his apostles. Since Moses' warning of destruction for those who failed to obey Christ was specifically addressed to the Jews, we are able to identify the terminus of the prophecy by the destruction of the Jewish state in A.D. 66-70. Therefore, the period leading up the "the restitution of all things" began with out-pouring of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles until the complete revelation of the New Testament. This brings us to the second occurrence of the term **αποκαθιστημι**.

Restoring the Dominion to Israel

Just before Jesus' ascension, the disciples asked him "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" The word "restore" here is the same verb that occurs in Matt. 17:11, and which serves for the noun "restitution" in Acts 3:21. We believe restoring the kingdom to Israel refers to the glory days of Solomon, when he ruled over all the neighboring nations and Israel had world dominion.

"And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life." I Kng. 4:21

The glory and power of Solomon was typical of the dominion of Christ, who was to reign over earth's nations. It was this dominion the disciples had in mind when they asked Christ if he would then restore the kingdom (dominion) to Israel:

"Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt rule them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel." Ps. 2:8, 9

Naturally, many supposed this would entail political and military dominion of national Israel over the Gentiles. However, Christ's kingdom was not of this world (Jn. 18:36). Christ would exercise his dominion from the right hand of God in heaven, not from earth:

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies." Ps. 110:1, 2

Daniel prophesied of the dominion of the saints in earth, placing it at the coming of Christ following the persecution under Nero (the "little horn"):

"And I beheld, and the same horn made war against the saints, and prevailed against them; until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom...and the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." Dan. 7:21, 22, 27

Jesus placed the coming of his kingdom "in power" - the time when he put his enemies (the Jews and Romans) beneath his feet and established his dominion over earth - within the disciples' lifetimes:

"Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." Mk. 9:1; cf. Matt. 16:27, 28

Since this dominion would result from Christ's coming, and since he came in wrath upon the Jews and Romans in A.D. 66-70, restoring the kingdom/dominion to Israel naturally occurred at this same time. Restoring the kingdom/dominion therefore was consequent upon the restitution of all things; the one presupposes the other.

The relief Christ would bring to his persecuted church at his coming brings us to the next phrase in Peter's sermon, the "times of refreshing."

Times of Refreshing

Peter told the Jews *"repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ" (Acts 3:19)*. This does not mean that justification from sin was held in abeyance or that atonement somehow was incomplete until the second coming. The New Testament is unanimous that the atonement was complete and justification from sins a present reality from and after the cross (Rom. 5:1, 11; 8:1, 30; I Cor. 6:11; II Cor. 5:17, 18). Rather, the righteous were justified by obedience to the gospel upon repentance and baptism (Col. 2:13, 14; Eph. 2:1, 6), so that at Christ's coming they might find grace rather than the wrath appointed for their unbelieving countrymen. "Times of refreshing" points to the relief from the persecution of their enemies the saints found at Christ's providential appearing:

"Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." I Thess. 1:6-10; cf. Acts 3:26

This is the meaning of Jesus' statement in the Olivet Discourse, saying the saints' "redemption" was near at hand:

"But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake...And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." Lk. 21:12, 28

Redemption here does not mean from sin, for Jesus purchased our redemption at the cross. Rather redemption here has the meaning of being saved from tribulation and persecution, when Christ came in vengeance upon his enemies. Compare Zechariah's statements:

"As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us." Lk. 1:70, 71

Zechariah mentions the word in the mouth of the prophets since the world began, just like Peter. Both are describing the same events. The salvation mentioned by Zechariah here had nothing to do with sin, but salvation from the saints' oppressors (Jews and Romans). The "times of refreshing" would follow Christ's coming to put his enemies beneath his feet, and therefore answers the basic imagery of the "new heavens and new earth" where the saints have dominion and reign with Christ:

"And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb: and the hand of the Lord shall be known toward his servants, and his indignation toward his enemies." Isa. 66:14; cf. 66:22

From what we have surveyed thus far, we may sum up Peter's sermon in Acts 3:19-26 thus:

- The "times of the restitution of all things" describes the period *following* the full revelation, recordation, and promulgation of the gospel.
- Once the gospel had been fully revealed and proclaimed, Christ would *come in wrath* upon the Jews and nations of the Roman Empire.
- Christ's coming against the persecutors of the church would bring "times of refreshing" to the beleaguered saints.

Let us now compare Acts 3:19-26 with similar passages and see if this is not correct and help make the whole lesson clear.

Peter's Sermon on Pentecost

We have been studying Peter's second gospel message following Christ's ascension. We now turn to his first gospel sermon, given on Pentecost.

Just before his ascension, Jesus told the apostles to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high: *"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:5)*. The apostles were immersed (baptized) with the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost (*"it filled all the house where they were sitting"* immersing them Acts 2:1, 2), When this miracle was known to the multitude of strangers and foreigners visiting Jerusalem for the feast, they came together and were astonished that each heard the apostles speaking to them in their native tongues. (The nations God had divided at the tower of Babel, he thus began uniting in Christ.) Peter explained that the miracle the multitude

witnessed was evidence they were living in the last days:

"But this is that spoken by the prophet Joel; 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" Acts 2:14-21

Joel's prophecy was expressly tied to the destruction of Jerusalem and the cataclysmic judgments that overtook the Roman world in A.D. 66-70.

"Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand." Joel 2:1

The prophet Malachi said that God would send "Elijah" (John the Baptist) before the day of the Lord:

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Mal. 4:5, 6

Thus, two signs that the time of the end was fast overtaking the Jewish nation were now fulfilled - John the Baptist and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. The remaining signs of "blood, fire, and vapor of smoke and the darkening of the sun and moon turning to blood" describe the civil disturbances that preceded the nation's end. First, however, the Spirit would accomplish its work of leading the apostles into all truth (Jn. 16:13; 20:22), "restoring all things." This is implied by the visions and dreams the Spirit would give, and the miracle of speaking in tongues. Hence, first there would be revelation; then would follow consummation. Those who obeyed the gospel would be saved (Acts 2:21); those did not, would be destroyed. Thus, we find the same pattern and message here as in Peter's second sermon (Acts 3:19-26):

- Christ's ascension to heaven, where he was to remain until the full revelation and proclamation of the gospel,

- Followed by his coming in wrath, and
- The salvation of those who obeyed him.

Next, let's turn to Hebrews chapter nine.

The Time of Reformation and the Coming of Christ

The book of Hebrews is devoted to the theme of the obsolete nature of the Old Testament ritual, which was replaced by the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ. Believing Jews were under pressure and persecution to forsake Christ and return to the law. The writer warns his readers against this, saying it is equal to crucifying Christ anew (Heb. 10:26-29). In building his case to abide faithful to the gospel, the writer evokes the two tents of the Tabernacle: the first tabernacle, or "Holy Place," he says answers to the Old Testament, which stood in carnal ordinances "imposed until the time of reformation." The second tabernacle, or "Holy of Holies," answers the New Testament. Under the Old Testament, the worshipper was legally excluded from God's presence, because the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins. But under the New Testament, the worshipper, justified from sin by the sacrifice of Christ, is brought into the legal and covenantal presence of God.

"But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: the Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and diverse washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation." Heb. 9:7-10

The "time of reformation" began at the cross. The priestly office and blood sacrifices of the old law were shadows, pointing to the work of Jesus upon the cross. Shadows end where the body begins. The body (substance of our redemption) is of Christ (Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1). The atonement was complete when Christ entered heaven; he therefore sat down at the right hand of God, showing his work had been fulfilled (Heb. 10:11, 12). The Spirit was sent in Jesus' absence to lead the apostles into all truth by the revelation of the gospel. When the Spirit's work was done, Christ would return to save his people from their persecutors:

"So Christ was offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Heb. 9:27

The context of this coming to save his people is made clear in chapter ten:

"For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Heb. 10:36-38

The saints needed patience precisely because they were under mounting pressure and persecution. However, the soon coming of Christ would bring times of refreshing when Jesus put his enemies beneath his feet.

This brief survey of Hebrews shows that it, too, mirrors the pattern and message of Peter's second gospel sermon:

- Christ had gone into heaven as our High Priest where he sat down at God's right hand, having accomplished our redemption;
- The time of reformation describes the work of the Spirit revealing the gospel of our salvation, beginning at Pentecost (Acts 2).
- At the conclusion of the Spirit's work, Christ would return in wrath upon the Jews, saving his beleaguered saints.

A last passage and then we conclude.

I Cor. 13 and that which is "Perfect"

"For we know in part and prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." I Cor. 13:10-13

This passage describes the temporary nature of the prophetic spirit and miraculous gifts. The age of the prophetic Spirit and miraculous gifts dawned with the patriarchs, climbed under Moses and the law, reached its zenith in Christ and the apostles, and set by the time the canon of the New Testament was perfect or complete. The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed; the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. Under Moses, mankind was in the childhood and adolescence of its salvation; man saw God's

redemptive purpose mirrored in a glass darkly. Although the law pointed to the work of Christ upon the cross, Moses put a "veil" upon his face, concealing the gospel beneath the types and shadows (II Cor. 3:12, 13). Not coincidentally, during the period of the law, the worshipper was banished, excluded from the presence of God without veil of the tabernacle while the guilt of sin remained. However, the veils separating man from God and concealing the mystery of the gospel are both taken away in Christ. Just as Moses removed his veil when he entered into the Most Holy Place, we all with "open," unveiled face have now been legally and covenantally admitted into the presence of God within the veil (Holy of Holies) (II Cor. 3:18; Heb. 10:19, 20). Even so, when Paul wrote, the mystery was still as yet being revealed. Hence, the prophetic Spirit and gifts remained, and Paul could say they still saw God's redemptive purpose in Christ through a glass darkly.

When we consider that when I Corinthians was written, very few other New Testament books and epistles existed, we can better appreciate what Paul meant. When Paul wrote I Corinthians, probably only Matthew, Mark, and Luke (?) among the gospels existed; and among the epistles only Galatians, Ephesians, and I & II Thessalonians existed, and perhaps also I Timothy and Titus. Acts, Romans, Philippians, Colossians, II Timothy, Philemon, Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, I, II

& III John, Jude and Revelation did not exist. When that which is complete or perfect was come, Paul says he would then see "face to face" and "know even as I

am also known" (I Cor. 13:12). A man is "known" (recognized) by his face and appearance. Once the Spirit's work of revelation was accomplished, the types and shadows of the law would be perfectly understood and the veil upon Moses' face thus stripped away, allowing men to behold the mystery of the gospel "face to face."

The point we want to come away with from this is that the "restitution (reconstitution) of all things" and the "time of reformation" have the same thing in view as "that which is perfect;" viz., the full revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. John "restored all things" by preaching repentance and baptism, establishing the *right way* for the people to walk in. The Spirit reformed and reconstituted all things by the preaching of the apostles and revelation of the mystery of the gospel. According to Peter's sermon in Acts 3:19-26, once this was accomplished, Christ would return in wrath, bringing times of refreshing to the saints.

Acts 2	Acts 3	Hebrews 9	I Cor. 13
Latter Days	"All the prophets...foretold these days" v. 24		"Now we see through a glass darkly"
Outpouring of the Holy Ghost	Times of the Restitution of all things	Time of Reformation	That which is perfect/complete
Day of the Lord (Acts 2:20)	Coming of Christ (Acts 3:21)	Coming of Christ (Heb. 9:28)	
All that call upon the Lord shall be saved	Times of Refreshing	Will save those that look for him	

Rome's Suppression of the Bacchanalian Cult

Legal Precedent for Nero's Persecution of Christians and Gospel?

[Editor's Note: Here follows Livy's account of Rome's suppression of the Bacchanalian cult about 186 B.C. We believe suppression of this cult provided legal precedent for Nero's persecution of the church and gospel. Tertullian and Justin Martyr record that the Jews published great calumnies against the church, which moved government officials to take action against it. The calumnies listed by Tertullian mirror those levied against the Bacchanalian cult; viz., incest, murder, human sacrifice, cannibalism.¹ Members of the Bacchanalian cult were punished with imprisonment and death. Of particular interest is the senate's decree forbidding anyone to sell or to buy anything for the purpose of escaping, or to harbor or conceal or help them in anyway, language that tracks closely Rev. 13:16-18. (Bk.39:17)]

[39.8]During the following year the consuls Sp. Postumius Albinus and Q. Marcius Philippus had their attention diverted from the army and the wars, and the administration of provinces, by the necessity of putting down a domestic conspiracy. The provinces were allotted to the praetors as follows: the civic jurisdiction to T. Maenius, the alien to M. Licinius Lucullus, Sardinia to C. Aurelius Scaurus, Sicily to P. Cornelius Sulla, Hither Spain to L. Q. Crispinus, and Further Spain to C. Calpurnius Piso. Both the consuls were charged with the investigation into the secret conspiracies. A low-born Greek went into Etruria first of all, but did not bring with him any of the numerous arts which that most accomplished of all nations has introduced amongst us for the cultivation of mind and body. He was a hedge-priest and wizard, not one of those who imbue men's minds with error by professing to teach their superstitions openly for money, but a hierophant of secret nocturnal mysteries. At first these were divulged to only a few; then they began to spread amongst both men and women, and the attractions of wine and feasting increased the number of his

followers. When they were heated with wine and the nightly commingling of men and women, those of tender age with their seniors, had extinguished all sense of modesty, debaucheries of every kind commenced; each had pleasures at hand to satisfy the lust he was most prone to. Nor was the mischief confined to the promiscuous intercourse of men and women; false witness, the forging of seals and testaments, and false informations, all proceeded from the same source, as also poisonings and murders of families where the bodies could not even be found for burial. Many crimes were committed by treachery; most by violence, which was kept secret, because the cries of those who were being violated or murdered could not be heard owing to the noise of drums and cymbals.

[39.9]This pestilential evil penetrated from Etruria to Rome like a contagious disease. At first, the size and extent of the City allowing more scope and impunity for such mischiefs, served to conceal them, but information at length reached the consul, mainly through the following channel. P. Aebutius, whose father had served in the cavalry and was dead, had been left under guardians. On their death he had been brought up under the care of his mother Duronia and his stepfather T. Sempronius Rutilus. The mother was completely in her husband's hands; and as the stepfather had so exercised his guardianship that he was not in a position to give a proper account for it, he was anxious that his ward should either be put out of the way or placed at his mercy through his getting some hold upon him. One way of corrupting the youth's morals was through the Bacchanalia. The mother told the youth that she had made a vow on his behalf during an illness, namely, that as soon as he recovered she would initiate him into the Bacchic mysteries, and in that way would through the kindness of the gods discharge the vow by which she was bound. He must preserve his chastity for ten days, then after supper on the tenth day she would take him to a place set apart for the rite of initiation.

There was a freedwoman named Hispala Fecenia who, though she was a courtesan, was worthy of better things than the gains to which she had been

¹ Tertullian, *Apology*, I, vii, viii; *Ante-Nicene Fathers* pp. 23, 24; cf. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, XVII; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, p. 203.

accustomed from her girlhood, and by which she supported herself even after she had been manumitted. As their houses were near one another, an intimacy had sprung up between her and Aebutius, which was in no way injurious to either his reputation or his purse. She sought his company and his love unsolicited, and as his parents kept him close in every way, he was maintained by the girl's generosity. Her passion for him had gone so far that after her guardian had died, and she was no longer a ward, she begged the tribunes and the praetor to appoint a guardian for her. Then she could make a will and she constituted Aebutius her sole heir.

[39.10]With these proofs of her love they had no secrets from each other, and the youth told her in a jocular tone not to be surprised if he absented himself from her for some nights; he had a religious duty to perform, the discharge of a vow made while he was ill, and he intended therefore to be initiated into the Bacchic mysteries. On hearing this she was terribly upset and exclaimed, "Heaven forbid. Better for us both to die than that you should do this," and then invoked deadly curses on the heads of those who had advised him to take this course. The youth, astonished at her outburst and excitement, bade her spare her curses; it was his mother who had given him this command with the consent of his stepfather. "Your stepfather, then," she replied, "for, perhaps, it is not right to charge your mother with it, is by this act hurrying on the ruin of your modesty, your reputation, your hopes and your life." Still more astonished, he asked her what she meant. With a prayer to the gods and goddesses to forgive her if, constrained by her affection, she disclosed what she ought to be silent about, she explained that when she was in service she had accompanied her mistress into that place of initiation, but had never gone near it when once she was free. She knew it to be a sink of every form of corruption, and it was a matter of common knowledge that no one had been initiated for the last two years above the age of twenty. As each person was brought in, he was handed over to the priests like a victim and taken into a place which resounded with yells and songs, and the jangling of cymbals and drums, so that no cry from those who were suffering violation could be heard. She then begged and implored him to get out of the affair in whatever way he could, and not to rush blindly into a place where he would first have to endure, and then to commit, every conceivable outrage. Until he had given his word to keep clear of these rites she would not let him go.

[39.11]After he reached home his mother brought up the subject of the initiation and told him what he had to do in connection with it on that day, and what on the following days. He informed her that he would do

nothing of the kind; he had no intention of being initiated. His stepfather was present. The mother at once exclaimed, "He cannot pass ten nights away from Hispala's embraces; he is so intoxicated with the fascinations of that venomous serpent, that he has no respect for either his parent or his stepfather or the gods." Amid the objurgations of his mother on the one side and his stepfather on the other, he was finally, with the assistance of four slaves, driven out of the house. The youth betook himself to his aunt Aebutia, and explained why he had been expelled from his home, and at her suggestion laid the matter privately before the consul the following day. Postumius told him to come again in three days' time, and in the meantime inquired of Sulpicia, his mother-in-law, a grave and judicious woman, whether she knew an old woman called Aebutia living in the Aventine quarter. She replied that she knew her to be a woman of respectable and strictly moral character; on which the consul said that it was important that he should have an interview with her, and Sulpicia must send for her to see her. Aebutia came to Sulpicia, and the consul coming in as though by accident turned the conversation on to her brother's son. The woman burst into tears and began to lament the youth's misfortunes, robbed as he had been of his fortune by those who ought to have been the very last to do so. He was, she said, at her house at the time, "he had been driven away by his mother because the honest and respectable youth refused - may the gods forgive me - to be initiated into what were commonly believed to be impure and obscene mysteries."

[39.12]As the consul considered that he had ascertained all that was necessary about Aebutius, and that the evidence was trustworthy, he dismissed Aebutia and asked his mother-in-law to send for Hispala, a freedwoman, who was well known round the Aventine, as there were some questions he wished to put to her. Hispala was alarmed at the message, and at being summoned into the presence of a woman of such high rank and character, without knowing the reason, and when she saw the lictors and the consul's attendants in the vestibule, she nearly fainted. She was conducted into an inner apartment where the consul and his mother-in-law were present, and the consul told her that there was nothing to be afraid of if she could make up her mind to speak the truth; she might trust the pledged word of such a woman as Sulpicia and his own promise of safety, but she must give him a description of what usually went on at the nocturnal Bacchic rites in the grove of Simila. On hearing this, the woman was seized with such a fright and a trembling in all her limbs that she could not open her lips. At last she recovered her nerves, and said that when quite a girl she had been initiated, together with her mistress, but since she had been manumitted, now

some years ago, she knew nothing of what went on there. The consul commended her for having confessed that she had been initiated and begged her to be equally truthful in the rest of her story. She avowed that she knew nothing further, on which the consul warned her that she would not receive the same consideration and forbearance if she were confuted by some one else, as she would if she made a free confession, for the person who had heard these things from her had disclosed everything to him.

[39.13]The woman being convinced, and quite rightly, that Aebutius was the informer, flung herself at Sulpicia's feet and implored her not to let a conversation between a freedwoman and her lover be treated so seriously as to amount to treason. What she had told him was for the purpose of frightening, not because she really knew anything. Postumius was very angry, and told her that she must be imagining that she was joking with her lover, and not speaking in the house of a grave and august lady and in the presence of the consul. Sulpicia raised the terrified woman from the floor, spoke soothingly to her and tried to quiet her. At length she became calm, and after bitterly reproaching Aebutius for the return he had made after all she had done for him, and declared that while she stood in great fear of the gods, whose occult mysteries she was revealing, she stood in much greater fear of men who would tear her to pieces if she turned informer. So she begged Sulpicia and the consul to remove her to some place outside the borders of Italy where she could pass the rest of her days in safety. The consul bade her be under no apprehension; he would see to it that she found a safe home in Rome. Then Hispala gave an account of the origin of these rites.

At first they were confined to women; no male was admitted, and they had three stated days in the year on which persons were initiated during the daytime, and matrons were chosen to act as priestesses. Paculla Annia, a Campanian, when she was priestess, made a complete change, as though by divine monition, for she was the first to admit men, and she initiated her own sons, Minius Cerinnus and Herennius Cerinnus. At the same time she made the rite a nocturnal one, and instead of three days in the year celebrated it five times a month. When once the mysteries had assumed this promiscuous character, and men were mingled with women with all the licence of nocturnal orgies, there was no crime, no deed of shame, wanting. More uncleanness was wrought by men with men than with women. Whoever would not submit to defilement, or shrink from violating others, was sacrificed as a victim. To regard nothing as impious or criminal was the very sum of their religion. The men, as though seized with madness and with frenzied distortions of their bodies, shrieked out prophecies; the matrons,

dressed as Bacchae, their hair dishevelled, rushed down to the Tiber with burning torches, plunged them into the water, and drew them out again, the flame undiminished, as they were made of sulphur mixed with lime. Men were fastened to a machine and hurried off to hidden caves, and they were said to have been rapt away by the gods; these were the men who refused to join their conspiracy or take a part in their crimes or submit to pollution. They formed an immense multitude, almost equal to the population of Rome; amongst them were members of noble families both men and women. It had been made a rule for the last two years that no one more than twenty years old should be initiated; they captured those to be deceived and polluted.

[39.14]When she had finished giving her evidence, she fell on her knees and again begged the consul to send her abroad. He asked his mother-in-law to set apart some portion of her house where she could take up her abode. An upper room was assigned to her which was approached by a flight of steps from the street; these were blocked up and an entrance made from inside the house. All Fecenia's effects were at once transferred, and her household slaves brought in, and Aebutius was ordered to take up his quarters with a client of the consul's. As both his informants were now in his hands, Postumius reported the affair to the senate. Everything was explained as it occurred, the information which he had first received, and then that which he had obtained in answer to his questions. The senate were greatly alarmed for the public safety; these secret conspiracies and nocturnal gatherings were a danger to the State; and they were alarmed for themselves, lest their own relations and friends might be involved. They passed a vote of thanks to the consul for having conducted his investigations so carefully and without creating any public disturbance. Then, arming the consuls with extraordinary powers, they placed in their hands the inquiry into the proceedings at the Bacchanalia and the nocturnal rites. They were to take care that Aebutius and Fecenia suffered no injury for the information they had given, and they were to offer rewards to induce other informers to come forward. Those who presided over these mysteries were to be sought out not only in Rome, but everywhere where people were in the habit of assembling, so that they might be delivered up to the consuls. Edicts were published in Rome and throughout Italy forbidding any who had been initiated from meeting together to celebrate their mysteries or performing any rites of a similar character, and above all, strict inquiry was to be made in the case of those who attended gatherings in which crime and debauchery had occurred. These were the measures which the senate decreed. The consuls sent orders to the curule aediles to search out all the priests of those rites and, when they were arrested, to keep them in

such custody as they thought best until their trial. The plebeian aediles were to see that no rites were performed in open day; the police commissioners were instructed to post watches throughout the City and take care that no nocturnal gatherings took place; and as a precaution against fires, five men were appointed to assist the commissioners and take charge of the buildings assigned to them on this side the Tiber.

[39.15]When the various officials had been told off to their duties, the consuls convened the Assembly and mounted the Rostra. After the usual prayers with which proceedings are opened before the magistrates address the people, the consul began thus: "In no meeting of the Assembly has this solemn appeal to the gods been so appropriate and, I would add, so necessary. For it reminds you that it is these gods whom your ancestors ordained that we should worship, reverence, and pray to; not those who have driven the minds of people enslaved by foul and foreign superstitions, as though by goading furies, into every form of crime and every kind of lust. I am at a loss to know how far I ought to keep silence, and how far I ought to go, in what I have to say. I fear, if you remain in ignorance of anything, that I may leave an opening for neglect, whilst, if I disclose everything, I may create too much alarm. Whatever I say, you may be certain that it does not come up to the enormity and horror of the thing. We shall make it our business to say enough to put you on your guard. That the Bacchanalia have for some time been going on throughout Italy and are now practiced in many parts of the City you have, I am sure, learnt not only by report, but also by the nightly noises and yells which resound all over the City; but I do not think you know what it all means. Some of you fancy that it is a particular form of worship; others think that it is some permissible kind of sport and dalliance; its real nature is understood by few. As to their numbers, you would inevitably be very much alarmed if I were to say that there are many thousands of them, unless I went on to explain who and what sort of people they are.

"In the first place, then, women form the great majority, and this was the source of all the mischief. Then there are the males, the very counterparts of the women, committing and submitting to the foulest uncleanness, frantic and frenzied, driven out of their senses by sleepless nights, by wine, by nocturnal shouting and uproar. The conspiracy does not so far possess any strength, but its numbers are rapidly increasing day by day, and its strength is growing. Your ancestors would not have even your Assembly meet in an irregular and haphazard way, but only when the standard was hoisted on the citadel and the centuries in their array marched out, or when the tribunes had given notice of a meeting of the plebs, or the Assembly had been duly convened by one of the

magistrates. Whenever the people met together there was bound to be a lawful authority to preside over it. Have you any idea what these nocturnal gatherings, these promiscuous associations of men and women are? If you knew at what age those of the male sex are initiated, you would feel not only compassion for them, but shame as well. Do you consider, Quirites, that young men who have taken this unhallowed oath are to be made into soldiers? That after the training they have received in that shrine of obscenity they are to be entrusted with arms? Shall these men, reeking with their impurity and that of those round them, wield their swords in defence of the chastity of your wives and children?

[39.16]"The mischief would not be serious, if they had only lost their manhood through their debauchery - the disgrace would fall mainly upon themselves - and had kept from open outrage and secret treason. Never has there been such a gigantic evil in the commonwealth, or one which has affected greater numbers or caused more numerous crimes. Whatever instances of lust, treachery, or crime have occurred during these last years, have originated, you may be perfectly certain, in that shrine of unhallowed rites. They have not yet disclosed all the criminal objects of their conspiracy. So far, their impious association confines itself to individual crimes; it has not yet strength enough to destroy the commonwealth. But the evil is creeping stealthily on, and growing day by day; it is already too great to limit its action to individual citizens; it looks to be supreme in the State. Unless, Quirites, you take precautions, this Assembly legally convened by a consul in the daylight will be confronted by another assembly gathered together in the darkness of the night. Now they, disunited, fear you, a united Assembly, but when you are dispersed to your homes and your farms they will hold their assembly and plot their own safety and your ruin. It will then be your turn, scattered as you will be, to fear them in their united strength.

"You ought, therefore, every one of you, to pray that your friends may have preserved their good sense. If unbridled and maddening lust has swept any one away into that whirlpool, you must judge him as belonging not to you but to those whom he has joined as fellow-conspirators in every kind of wickedness. I do not feel sure that even some of you may not have been misled. For there is nothing which wears a more deceptive appearance than a depraved superstition. Where crimes are sheltered under the name of religion, there is fear lest in punishing the hypocrisy of men we are doing violence to something holy which is mixed up with it. From these scruples you are delivered by numberless decisions of the pontiffs, resolutions of the senate and responses of the augurs. How often in the times of your fathers and grandfathers has the task been assigned to

the magistrates of forbidding all foreign rites and ceremonies, prohibiting hedge-priests and diviners from entering either the Forum, the Circus, or the City, seeking out and burning all books of pretended prophecies, and abolishing every sacrificial ritual except what was accordant with Roman usage! Those men were masters of all human and divine love, and they believed that nothing tended so much to destroy religion as the performance of sacrificial rites, not after the manner of our fathers, but in fashions imported from abroad. I thought I ought to tell you this beforehand, so that none of you may be distressed by fears on the score of religion when you see us demolishing the seats of the Bacchanalia and dispersing their impious gatherings. All that we shall do will be done with the sanction of the gods and in obedience to their will. To show their displeasure at the insult offered to their majesty by these lusts and crimes they have dragged them out of their dark hiding-places into the light of day, and they have willed that they shall be exposed not to enjoy impunity, but to be punished and put an end to. "The senate has entrusted my colleague and myself with extraordinary powers for conducting an inquiry into this matter. We shall make an energetic use of them, and we have charged the subordinate magistrates with the care of the night-watches throughout the City. It is only right that you should show equal energy in doing your duty in whatever position you may be placed and whatever orders you receive, and also in making it your business to see that no danger or disturbance arise through the secret plots of the criminals."

[39.17]They then ordered the resolutions of the senate to be read, and offered a reward for any one who should bring a guilty person before the consuls, or give in his name if he were not forthcoming. In the case of any one who had been denounced and then taken to flight, they would fix a day for him to answer the charge, and if he failed to appear, he would be condemned in his absence; for any one who was abroad at the time they would extend the date should he wish to make his defence. They then published an edict forbidding any one to sell or buy anything for the purpose of flight, or to receive, harbour, or in any way assist those who fled. After the Assembly had broken up, the whole of the City was thoroughly alarmed. Nor was the alarm confined within the walls of the City or the frontiers of Rome; there was uneasiness and consternation throughout the whole of Italy when letters began to arrive announcing the resolutions of the senate, the proceedings in the Assembly and the edict of the consuls. During the night following the disclosure of the affair in the Assembly, guards were posted at all the gates, and many who tried to escape were arrested by the police commissioners and brought back. Many names were handed in, and some of these,

both men and women, committed suicide. It was asserted that more than 7000 of both sexes were implicated in the conspiracy. The ringleaders were, it appears, the two Atinii, Marcus and Caius, both members of the Roman plebs; L. Opiternius of Falerium, and Minius Cerrinius, a Campanian. They were the authors of all the crime and outrage, the high priests and founders of the cult. Care was taken that they should be arrested as soon as possible, and when brought before the consuls they at once made a complete confession.

[39.18]So great, however, was the number of those who fled from the City that law-suits and rights of property were in numerous cases lost by default, and the praetors were compelled through the intervention of the senate to adjourn their courts for a month, to allow the consuls to complete their investigations. Owing to the fact that those whose names were on the list did not answer to the summons, and were not to be found in Rome, the consuls had to visit the country towns and conduct their inquiries and try the cases there. Those who had simply been initiated, who, that is, had repeated after the priest the prescribed form of imprecation which pledged them to every form of wickedness and impurity, but had not been either active or passive participants in any of the proceedings to which their oath bound them, were detained in prison. Those who had polluted themselves by outrage and murder, those who had stained themselves by giving false evidence, forging seals and wills and by other fraudulent practices, were sentenced to death. The number of those executed exceeded the number of those sentenced to imprisonment; there was an enormous number of men as well as women in both classes. The women who had been found guilty were handed over to their relatives or guardians to be dealt with privately; if there was no one capable of inflicting punishment, they were executed publicly. The next task awaiting the consuls was the destruction of all the Bacchanalian shrines, beginning with Rome, and then throughout the length and breadth of Italy; those only excepted where there was an ancient altar or a sacred image. The senate decreed that for the future there should be no Bacchanalian rites in Rome or in Italy. If any one considered that this form of worship was a necessary obligation and that he could not dispense with it without incurring the guilt of irreligion, he was to make a declaration before the City praetor and the praetor was to consult the senate. If the senate gave permission, not less than one hundred senators being present, he might observe those rites on condition that not more than five persons took part in the service, that they had no common fund, and that there was no priest or conductor of the ceremonies.

Assassin-in-Chief

In absolute monarchies, all legislative, executive, and judicial power is gathered together in the person of the king. Christ is absolute monarch of the world; he received dominion over earth when he ascended to the right hand of God in heaven (Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:33; I Pet. 3:22). He now rules the nations in justice with a rod of iron and a view to the advancement of the gospel (Ps. 2:8, 9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5).

But experience has taught that men cannot be trusted with absolute power. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. Men thus devised the "separation of powers." We divided the legislative, executive, and judicial powers, and set them as "checks and balances" against one another. We also defined the limits of their powers and reduced them to writing in the U.S. Constitution, so that all men might know these limitations, and they might be fixed and certain. But this was not enough. We also created the Bill of Rights as a further bulwark of our liberties, lest the limited powers granted the central government be abused.

Enter 9/11 and the Bush administration.

Following the attack on 9/11, Geo. W. Bush stated the "enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country." Thus, by the simple expedient of defining the crimes of terrorists as "acts of war," the whole Bill of Rights and U.S. Constitution were swept aside. In times of war, constitutional limitations upon the power of government do not apply. Prisoners of war do not have the protection of the Writ of Habeas Corpus, the right to counsel, to face one's accusers, to make bail, or a speedy, public trial.

At first, we did not realize what was happening, or, if we did, the enormities of 9/11 caused us to wink at it. As long as it was only foreign nationals - Islamic extremists - that were languishing in secret prisons, we could live with ourselves.

But in 2008, George W's destruction of the Bill of Rights suddenly took an ominous turn: The war on terror was no longer confined to foreign nationals: American citizens (conservatives in particular) were now in the cross hairs. Homeland Security issued a policy study that styled gun owners, returning veterans, pro-life activists, people who are against the Federal Reserve, and those we grieve federal violation of the U.S. Constitution as potential terrorists. Already absolute power was corrupting absolutely.

Enter the Indefinite Detention Bill

On Dec. 31st, 2011, President Obama signed into law the Indefinite Detention Bill, which authorizes the U.S. military to arrest and detain indefinitely U.S. citizens suspected of terrorism or supporting terrorist groups. No probable cause hearing before an impartial magistrate; no accusation or formal charges; no right to legal counsel; no writ of Habeas Corpus to test the lawfulness of your detainment. You just disappear and are held in secret confinement...indefinitely! Based upon Homeland Security's idea of who potential terrorists are, donating to a pro-life organization, the Constitution Party, or membership in the NRA may one day be enough to detain you. But that is not all.

Enter Obama, Assassin-in-Chief

On March 5, 2012, Attorney General Holder delivered a speech in which he claimed the president has authority to assassinate U.S. citizens suspected of involvement in terrorist activities. Not preventing by lethal force the imminent threat of serious terrorist act, mind you, but to assassinate men suspected of *past* involvement in terrorist crimes.

Obama has now assassinated three U.S. citizens, including a 16 year old boy barbecuing in the backyard with his father, his 17 year old cousin, and 7 other people in one strike. The boy was born in Denver, CO; his father was born in New Mexico. Only the father was suspected of terrorist connections: the others were collateral damage (murders).

Proverbs says, "*The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion*" (Prov. 28:1). When Herod married his brother's wife, John the Baptist told him it was unlawful (Matt. 14:4). This was a comparatively petty transgression, but John spoke out all the same. It was his duty as a man of God.

The federal government now claims the power to ignore all restraints upon its power; to detain indefinitely and assassinate U.S. citizens without formal charge. If John spoke out when Herod consummated an illegal marriage, how can America's pulpits remain silent now?

Foreign extremists are not freedom's greatest threat: that distinction belongs to Washington D.C. and the presidency.

Questions from Our Readers

Q: Mr. Simmons:

I've got a friend who is going around saying that preterists don't believe that there is life for us after death--no hope, everything is already in the past, etc..

Do you know any preterists who believe this?
Thanks,

A: Thanks for writing. No, I have never heard of a single preterist who has this view. Probably, whoever is saying this has drawn this conclusion on his own, supposing that because preterists believe all prophecy is fulfilled, that therefore there is nothing more in store in terms of our salvation. In fact, there were some preterists foolishly saying we are "in heaven now" based upon their idea that all must be fulfilled now to be consistent as preterists. They took that view based upon Revelation 21 & 22, but even those passages show that the heavenly Jerusalem came down out of heaven from God to earth, showing that he is present with and in the world by the church, which is his capital city. There is in store for every person his own day of judgment and final reward: eternal life in heaven for the Christian; eternal damnation for unbelievers. Thus, the most significant thing of all still awaits us, and your friend is quite mistaken.

Blessings,

Q: Hi Kurt,

I bring you greetings as a fellow preterist.

I recently came across your article on Daniel 7, and I have a question about it.

Daniel mentions ten horns, and you say these were the ten senatorial provinces of Rome. After speaking of these horns, Daniel talks about a little horn rising; then he says that three of *the first* horns were uprooted before him, and you say these were the provinces of Britain, Armenia and Syria. However, these were imperial provinces. This seems to pose a problem and I was wondering how you would address it.

Farrar mentions ten "major" provinces, and Chilton and others seem to lend credence to his list, but I can't seem to find how he determined these. Do you happen to know?

I appreciate all the work you're doing to further the movement. God bless you, sir.

A: Thanks for writing, and thanks for the question.

The fourth kingdom was "different" from the others (Dan. 7:7) in that it was a republic; whereas all the rest were monarchies. This distinguishing feature of the Roman Empire is carried over to the ten senatorial provinces, which were the remnants of Rome's republican beginnings. They are represented in Daniel two by the ten toes of the image. However, there was no time when Rome had only ten provinces. In Nero's day, there was something like twenty-eight provinces. The ten senatorial provinces therefore stand for *all of the provinces*. They are singled out from the rest in the vision because the ten senatorial provinces were an *identifying feature* of the empire beginning 27 BC. The senatorial provinces were not always the same, but after 27 BC there were always ten. The three that were uprooted (rebelled) may not have been senatorial, but since the part stands for the whole, we understand the vision merely to indicate that some of the Roman provinces attempted to break away in the time of the "little horn", though they were subdued again. Similarly, in Revelation the ten horns on the dragon represent the political subdivision of the empire, but the ten are put for all twenty-eight.

I know of no way to single out ten "major" provinces other than the senatorial provinces, and do not agree with Chilton or Farrar on this score. There were only three provinces that rebelled and were subdued anew in Nero's day, and these were Britain, Armenia, and Syria. Max King tried to explain the vision by saying that the three "first horns" were the first three world kingdoms (Babylon, Mede-Persia, Greece) and the little horn was Israel, but this cannot be squared with the passage, which clearly has the horns of the fourth beast in view, not the preceding world empires, and there is no way that Israel can be described as having subdued those three kingdoms. I know of no other explanation for the vision and three horns than the rebellion of Britain, Armenia, and Syria under Nero.

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SIX PROBLEMS WITH THE ‘ALWAYS LITERAL’ RULE

Principles of Biblical Meaning

Morrison Lee

BIBLICAL LITERALISM is commonly accepted as a fixed rule of biblical interpretation. However rules of interpretation are made by men. (The word ‘literal’ does not occur in the bible.) A rule is not dissimilar to a law. A law organizes all of the data under its own terms and is applied universally. For example gravity works in every case without exception. There is no exception to the law of gravity. Where there are exceptions (eg. birds flying) they can be explained by other true principles. Ie. Laws of aerodynamics.

The 17-5-17 Principle. A *literal, grammatico-historical* rule works well on the plain facts of law and history. Observation tells us that the first seventeen books of the bible are law (Genesis to Dueteronomy) and history (Joshua to Esther.) Law and history have to do with communicating the facts of law and recording the factual testimony of witnesses and causes of events.

However the next five books of scripture are poetry, (Job to Song of Solomon) followed by the seventeen prophets. (Isaiah to Malachi. Thus 17-5-17) Poetry contains, not facts and testimony, but enormously-complex artistic conventions that are not governed by a *literal, grammatico-historical* rule, but rather the opposite. The literal rule has no provenance over poetry and the picture language of prophecy. Simple common sense makes poetry nonsense.

My view is that the prophets are based on the poetic picture language of the Hebrews, and that the seventeen books of the prophets borrow the figurative picture-language used in the five books of the poets.

The Six Problems of Literalism. Literalism is insisted on in every case of biblical interpretation, however it cannot be demonstrated that in every case biblical terms are only literal, or put another way; literalism cannot demonstrate *that only literal meanings are biblical*. The ‘always literal’ rule is problematic for six reasons.

1. **Literalism overlooks figurative options.** The fact is that Jesus clearly used figurative language, as opposed to ‘plain’ language. Jn 16:25,29. The parables are all figures. If Jesus used figures, then literalism fails as an inflexible rule.

2. **Literalism not simple.** Also a rule, to be a genuine rule, must be simple. (Occam’s Razor principle) An inconsistent law that needs another law is not a valid law. Observation shows that approximately 500 chapters of scripture from Job to Malachi (Poets and Prophets) and St. John’s Apocalypse all contain non-concrete (figurative) language. This means that an ‘always literal’ law fails to save the appearances of approximately 43% of scripture (over 500 poetic/prophetic chapters) from Job-Malachi and including the Apocalypse .

3. **Literalism is artificial.** Literalism imposes modern meanings on ancient language. The science of Lexicography (dictionary writing) tells us words change over time, and that word meanings change according to the state of knowledge at the time, because knowledge changes over time. The authoritative Oxford English Dictionary gives multiple dates to show when the word first entered English and its meaning at the time. Eg. In the C.1st ‘*earth*’ did not mean *the third planet orbiting the sun tilted at 23.5 degrees*. The term ‘*world*’ did not include the undiscovered countries of: Alaska, America, South America and Australia. The term ‘*sea*’ could not mean ‘*ocean*’(‘*a body of water that separates continents*’) before the Age of Discovery in the C.15th when the first continent was discovered by Columbus. Dictionaries are written according to the state of knowledge at the time and meanings vary through time. Literalism wishes to give one modern concrete meaning for every bible word. This is too arbitrary, and opposes the cumulative nature of meaning as well as the cumulative nature of revelation. (Is 28:10,13.)

4. **Literalism is too inflexible.** It ignores legitimate biblical usage and bible meanings, where a city might be a dish (2Kgs 21:13) or a king a razor. (Is 7:20)

5. **Literalism imposes extra biblical meanings.** Literalism ignores implicit language conventions unique to biblical authors and imposes its own external meanings. (Jn 3:3-6)

6. **Literalism is inconsistent.** Literalism needs other “special rules” to explain clear exceptions to a literal rule. Jesus Himself said; “These things I have spoken to you in figurative language...” Jn 16:25ff.

A More Balanced View. A more balanced view holds that; *biblical terms have both 'biblical' as well as 'plain' meanings.* These meanings roughly follow six principles. The significations of Biblical terms:

1. May be *plain* (literal /concrete) or *figurative*. (ideas /principles) - Jn 16:25,29
2. Are unique to the bible authors
- 1 Cor 2:12-15
3. Are discoverable by comparison through biblical induction (research) - Acts 17:11
4. Are to be understood according to the state of knowledge at the time - eg. Josh 9:27; 15:63; 16:10; 23:9; 1 Kgs 8:8; Lk 2:1.
5. Are best understood by '*an analogy' between the nation and nature.*' (Newton, I. *Observations on Daniel and Revelation*. Isaac Newton. P.16, cf. Theological MSS. *On the Language of the Prophets* p.120. also Maimonides 1135-1204 A.D. *Guide*. Bk 2 ch.28-29.) - Matt 13:24-26
6. Cannot be made to follow *personal* definitions that are changed by each following generation. (I.e. bible meanings are altered by the next generation; C. 15th C.16th 17th or C.21st generation. This makes SELF the center of meaning –like the old Ptolemaic astronomy – and organizing principle of biblical facts; self as center of biblical meaning.

Rather than continually *generationally-personal*, bible meanings are fixed and defined according to the usage of the time. Biblical Hebrew and Greek are 'dead' languages (the meanings cannot change) and their meanings may be derived from a study of biblical documents.

In Summary

The 17-5-17 principle:

First 17 books (Genesis – Esther) law and history -> mainly plain facts

Next 5 books (Job-Songs) poetry -> mainly figurative

Next 17 books (Isaiah-Malachi) -> mainly figurative.

The always literal rule has six problems:

Literalism overlooks figurative biblical options.

Literalism is not simple.

Literalism is artificial.

Literalism is too inflexible.

Literalism imposes extra-biblical meanings.

Literalism is inconsistent with itself.

A more balanced view of biblical meaning follows six principles:

May be *plain* (concrete) or *figurative*. (ideas /principles) - Jn 16:25,29

Are unique to the bible authors
- 1 Cor 2:12-15

Are discoverable by comparison with OT usage through biblical induction - Acts 17:11

Are best understood according to the state of knowledge at the time

Are best understood by '*an analogy' between the nation and nature.*' - Matt 13:24-26

Cannot be made to follow a *generationally-personal* theory of meaning or interpretation.
- 2 Pet 1:20-21

Conclusion

Jesus Himself spoke in figurative language. "*These things I have spoken to you in figurative language...*" Jn 16:25, 29. This is problematic for an *only literal* viewpoint, which ignores the original usage in the Old Testament. A more balanced view uses biblical induction to locate the 'biblical' meanings of words in the Old Testament.

-ooOoo-

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