



## **Allegorical Interpretation vs. Literal Interpretation of the Word of God**

*By Sherry Cumby*

Allegorical interpretation is setting aside the literal interpretation and eisegetically, or putting ones thoughts and interpretations into the message God intends for the reader.

Origen did not invent his interpretive techniques. It has been amply demonstrated that allegorical interpretation originated, or at least saw its first extensive development, in Hellenism, or perhaps Greece proper, in an attempt to bring the ancient and honored mythology and poetry into line with prevailing philosophical opinions. History, and thus "literal" interpretation, was a phenomenal matter and therefore not of great importance. Therefore one could either use a currently available myth and allegorize it, or one could, like Plato, make up one's own myths.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob inspired the Word and moved upon approximately forty godly men over the course of 1500 years to pen the Sacred Scriptures to record a message from His heart to the very heart of anyone who will read and listen. His purpose was to introduce Himself as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit to the inhabitants of the earth by recording His redemptive plan for eternal life; thereby, to reveal His glory throughout the ages. The message was recorded in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. With the many language groups scattered throughout the earth all needing to know the truth, a literal, grammatical, historical discipline of Biblical hermeneutics is a must in order to preserve what God has said for future generations, should the LORD tarry.

The born-again interpreter of the Bible, immersed in the Word of God and taught by the Holy Spirit, has a passion based on Proverbs 1:7, 9:10: "The fear [reverence] of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge..." and "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...". Therefore, in all probability

through the study of the Word, the interpreter will follow a consistent literal hermeneutic. However, throughout the ages until modern day, Biblical interpreters, following allegorical, spiritualization, and/or genre hermeneutics, have their own ideas that have been perpetrated in literature and upon those who will listen.

A literal interpretation bears witness that God has revealed Himself to mankind in a general/natural way through Creation fashioning man (male and female) on the sixth day according to Genesis 1:27,31; in a special way by the Sacred Scriptures; and, in a personal way through His Son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit illuminates the Word of God for those who believe His literal message and warns of a wrong hermeneutic; such as, evolution.

Literal exegetical hermeneutics accepts historical and orthodox inspiration of God's Word in the verbal, conceptual, and plenary senses. The authoritative, infallible message of God is consistently read by the interpreter in a normal fashion using the same rules of grammar and language used to read any other book, magazine, letter, or newspaper, to discover the message the LORD wants to communicate with the audience. The respect for the Word of God guards the message so that eisegesis does not occur; i.e., putting words into what is actually being said in the Bible which may alter the meaning.

However, allegorical interpretation uses language to reveal an underlying secret "spiritualized" take on Scripture rather than accepting the obvious meaning. The principle began with the Greeks who had no respect for the Bible yet interpreted their own religious writings allegorically. The idea was suggested to the Jews and subsequently to the Christians who were fascinated by the Greek philosophy.

It seems that the warning the LORD had John to write in Revelation 22:18 at the close of the Bible should have kept the first generation to practice this method from doing it. God says:

*"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; 19. and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book."*

The clear message of I Samuel 15:23 says, "...rebellion is as witchcraft..." which should cause the allegorical interpreter to rethink his hermeneutic.

Bernard Ramm points out that Philo, a first century Jewish allegorist, held that the literal interpretation of Scripture was the immature level of

understanding for the immature person; the allegorical, for the mature. In contrast, the literal hermeneutics and dispensational theology, based on the interpretation from the original Greek and Hebrew, rather than mystical Greek, enables those who have a deep hunger and thirst for the Word of God to know what God is speaking in His Word.

The allegorists lacked an understanding of the historical exegesis and wanted to make the Old Testament a Christian document. The dispensational literalists have held that the promises and covenants God made with Israel are irrevocably theirs and that the Church was not born until the Day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, recorded in Acts 2. Jew and Gentile believers will see the fulfillment of the covenants in God's appointed time.

The literal interpreter expects the imminent return of Christ for the Rapture of the Church and after seven years, the Second Advent. However; many allegorist are unable to know the difference between the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ to rule and reign upon the earth for a 1000 years.

A spiritualization hermeneutic of Revelation, as Mal Couch points out in *Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics*, causes many to believe that Revelation should be interpreted figuratively or metaphorically because they see that John was writing the book of Revelation about a spiritual conflict rather than an actual, physical experience. In contrast to the spiritualization interpretation of Revelation, Lockhart, a literal interpreter, shares two rules he uses to determine if a word should be used literally or figuratively: sense and usage. If the literal meaning makes good sense, it's literal; if not; figurative. John's writings must be understood from a literal interpretation that holds to a premillennialist view that Christ will surely come for the Church and the Second Advent will follow.

The Catholic Church has maintained the validity of an allegorical or spiritualization hermeneutic. Rather than accepting the sixty-six books written originally in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek in the canon of Sacred Scripture literalists regard as the Word of God, a spiritualization of interpretation allows for the Latin Vulgate to be the authentic version of Scripture and includes the apocryphal books.

Genre, a French term, meaning kinds or species, is applied to Biblical hermeneutics as the interpreter deals with different types of literature; such as, law, prophecy, epistle, poetry, etc. Biblical studies has allowed for the categorization to let Bible interpreters consider that certain genres are to be understood from the standpoint of a given type. Charles Ryrie says that literalism "does not preclude or exclude correct understanding of types,

illustrations, apocalypses, and other genres within the basic framework of literal interpretation.”<sup>1</sup> The problem arises in “genre override” in interpreting “apocalyptic literature” of Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation. Rather than a literal interpretation of prophecy within the books, genre hermeneutics allows for a dual hermeneutic treating prophecy as non-literal and the rest of Scripture literal.

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The dispensational literal interpreter reads the historical, orthodox prophecies of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation from the category of “apocalyptic literature” to unveil or disclose the future prophetic plans of God. Since the Greek word *apokalypsis*, from which apocalyptic is derived, means “to unveil or disclose”, the literal interpreter understands the message God wants us to know. In contrast, modern evangelical interpreters have used the genre hermeneutic category for “apocalyptic literature” to place Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation in the category with books not included in the canon of Sacred Scripture. This should cause the Church to rise up and hold firmly to that which Satan does not want the Body of Christ to know at such a time as this.

