

BURNING BUSH NETWORK

Pastor Tumi Letoka and the Revival Team

Tips on How to Interpret the Bible

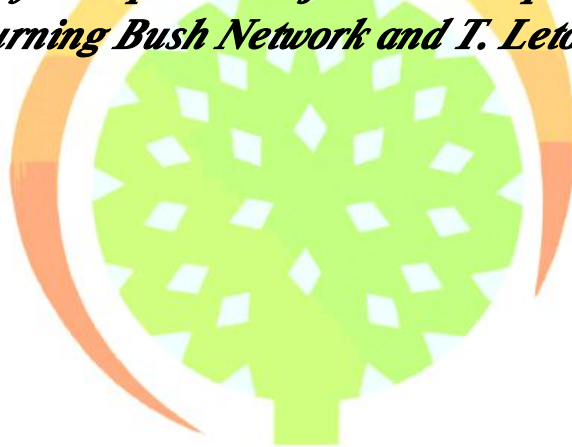
Burning Bush Media

Booklet 7

Tips on How to Interpret the Bible

A product of Burning Bush Media (A division of BBN)

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced for sale except by Burning Bush Network and T. Letoka



Introduction

The Bible is a historical book with an ever relevant message because it was inspired by a timeless God. The Bible contains 66 books written by 40 authors from different backgrounds over a period of 1500 years who were mostly strangers to each other and yet its message is coherent, the 66 books flow amiably. Some Bible writers were businessmen or traders; others were shepherds, fishermen, soldiers, physicians, preachers, kings - people from all walks of life, and their writings are one coherent unit because they were inspired by the Holy Spirit (2Timothy 3:16-17). All this shows that the Bible is a supernatural book, it is virtually a miracle.

Many unbelievers, including atheists, do read the Bible, some (if not many) for the purpose of equipping themselves to later dispute it and try by all means to discredit it. Now as

Christians we read or study the Bible for three different reasons, namely:

1. For devotions.
2. For homiletic reasons, meaning for preaching.
3. For academic reasons.

I am going to discuss biblical interpretation with regard to these reasons. For a further pursuit of this subject see my book, *A Revival of the Scriptures*. Some of the information here is extracted from that book. The manner in which I intend to better elaborate on this subject will be by interpreting specific passages.

Chapter 1

Studying the Bible for Devotional Purposes

The main rule of biblical study is to request the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Originator of the Bible, so He knew what He meant with each verse, though originally there were no verses. When studying the Bible for devotional purposes, you either are going to go at it from book to book from Genesis to Revelation or are going to do so topically - meaning concentrating on a specific topic for whatever necessity.

When reading from book to book

Most Bibles have introductory notes that give the background of the book, they may tell you about the author and his personal

circumstances and the general environment in which he was when writing plus the date of the book. The nature of his audience may also be mentioned. This is like coming across a story headline saying, 'Local doctor loses license,' the first thought would be, 'Why, what happened?' Don't ignore such notes as they are helpful in making you understand why the book was written and the circumstances which inspired the writing, thereby giving you a better chance at easily relating and applying the message to your own circumstances. The background may also help you better and more easily understand the meanings of some verses.

Example 1:

Hebrews 10:26-29

26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

27 But a certain fearful looking for of

judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

The sin that this Scripture speaks about is that of the believer who turns his back on Jesus Christ. Notice the words in this Scripture, *“He that despised Moses' law died without mercy . . . Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God. . . .”*

Background: Because of great persecution, the Hebrew Christians referred to in this passage were tempted to go back to Judaism,

but if they went back, they would have trodden under foot the Son of God. They would have counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, for they were saying that Jesus is not the Messiah; He is not the Son of God. They turned their backs on Him. This is why Paul warned them that if they did that, it would be impossible to renew them unto repentance.

You see how some understanding of the background helps in putting the passage in better perspective? Now you know why Paul warned the Hebrew believers, you have an idea of the circumstances of the audience and why the writer wrote to them.¹

So those introductory notes do come in handy don't they?

Example 2:

Jeremiah 9:1-3

1 Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep

day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!

2 Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men.

3 And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD.

Would you not want to know why Jeremiah was lamenting so painfully because of his people to the point that he wished his head was filled with water so that tears of sorrow could flow unrelentingly. What exactly was going on with them and what led to their slaying?

Background: The children of Israel were divided into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom which was known as Israel and the Southern Kingdom which was called Judah. Because of great sins of rebellion against God,

such as idolatry, God had already used the kingdom of Assyria to punish Israel, their kingdom had been destroyed and they had been taken captive. The Southern Kingdom, where the temple was, had been spared. But the Southern Kingdom was just as sinful. God brought the Babylonians to do to the Southern Kingdom what Assyria did to the Northern Kingdom.

Jeremiah was called to proclaim the last warnings and calls of repentance to the Southern Kingdom; they were as hard headed as could be. He preached for about forty years and they didn't repent at all. Jeremiah suffered persecution for his strong preaching against the sins of his day. He is called the "weeping prophet." He would cry because the people were stubborn and because the calamities coming were great. Ancient tradition and internal evidence point to his writing of the book of Lamentations (i.e. mournings or sorrowful cries).

Here's how Bridgeway commentary relates the circumstances:

[In these verses (plus Jeremiah 8:20-22)], the prophet is overcome with grief as he foresees the tragic end of the nation. The people wonder why God their King does not save them. God replies that it is because of their idolatry. They now realize that they can no longer expect his salvation. Nothing can heal Judah's spiritual sickness now; the end has come. And nothing can heal the wounds of grief in Jeremiah's heart as he sees his people suffer (8:21-22).

Jeremiah is unable to express the extent of his grief. He feels he could weep for ever (9:1). On the other hand, he knows that the judgment is fitting. As he returns to consider the sinful city in which he lives, he wishes he could leave it and go to some quiet resting-place in the country (2).

So understanding the background puts the content in proper perspective.

Topical study

This is when you study the Bible by focusing

on a particular topic about which you want to know more for whatever reason. The Bible is an orderly and coherent body of text. One could say it is sort of like the human body with parts that function in coordination with each other. So one can understand a particular passage by linking passages of various books.

Example 1:

1Thessalonians 4:16-17

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first,

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

STEP 1 - The first step pertains to Jesus Christ. What did the Lord Jesus Christ Himself teach or say about the same topic

and how does it relate to the cross?

STEP 2 - What do other passages of Scripture say on the topic?

THE FIRST STEP: Jesus said and taught the following on this subject:

** Luke 21:36 - Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*

** Revelation 3:4-5 - Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.*

*** Matthew 25 - The Ten Virgins**

- They were all virgins
- They all had lamps

- They were all waiting for the Bridegroom
- The difference between them was wisdom and oil. The simple difference is that the others are called foolish because they did not take extra oil.

This tells us they are all Christians, because the world is not eagerly waiting for Jesus but Christians are.

THE SECOND STEP: OTHER PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE ON THE SAME SUBJECT (They are many, I give you only 3):

- **2Peter 3:14**

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

- **Hebrews 12:14**

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

1Thessalonians 5:23

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

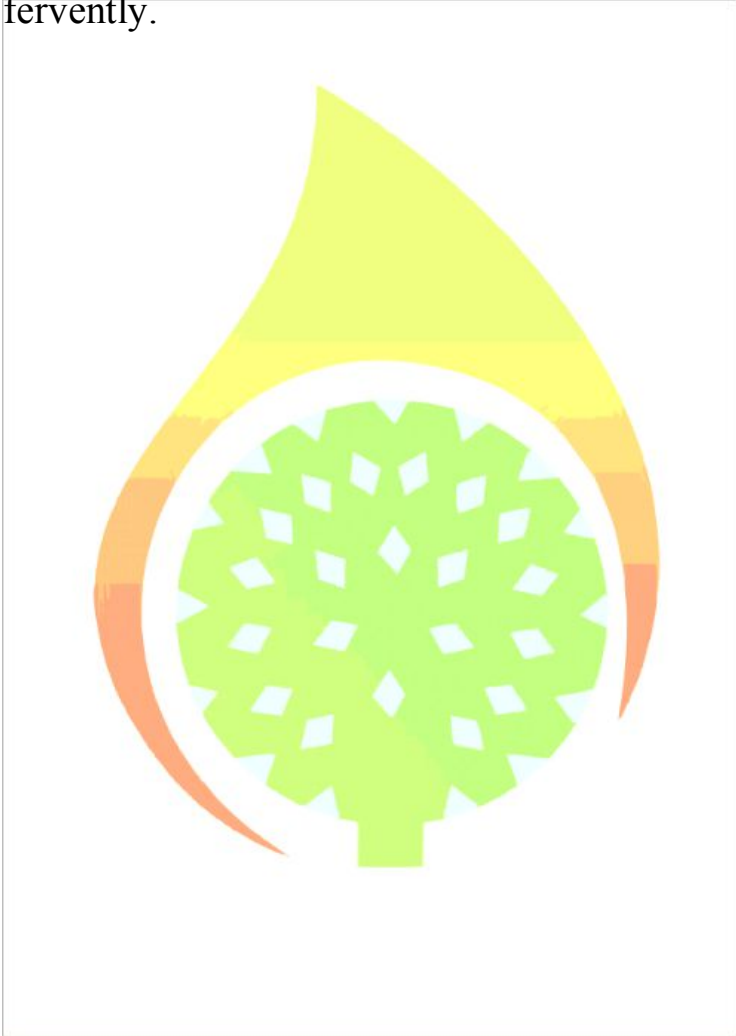
Conclusion:

People who are in Christ are going to be caught up (or raptured) to meet the Lord in the air, but NOT ALL PEOPLE WHO ARE IN CHRIST ARE GOING TO BE CAUGHT UP. Those who will be raptured are those who are diligently seeking the Lord and praying always for complete sanctification (which God will do according to 1Thessalonians 5:24) and as such will be found with undefiled garments and as such are regarded as holy and worthy by Christ.

NB: This destroys the false notion that everyone who is born again is going to be raptured.

Believers ought to know their Bibles very well in order to survive in the last days.

Discipline yourself to study the Scriptures fervently.



Chapter 2

Studying the Bible for Homiletical Reasons

When preparing to preach

There are similarities in all the purposes for which we study the Bible. Before we proceed, note that when you study for preaching, you have to understand that you are going to deal with human souls, so you have to take the responsibility very seriously. You have to treat the text you are going to use with great respect, just like you are to treat the entire biblical text with fear and trembling.

A sermon is supposed to be viewed like a normal speech in the sense of it having to have an introduction, body and conclusion. This is what I am going to use to guide this

part of Bible study. So when you have identified the aim of your sermon, meaning what you are aiming for it to achieve in the hearts and lives of your audience, you have to pick the main passage of Scripture that will be most suitable for the aim. Now that passage has to be the right one, in other words do not use the wrong passage to preach the correct message. For example, I know a very famous preacher who uses Luke 9:23 to say it means denying your own human ability to follow Jesus, and trusting only in the power of His cross for strength to follow Him. Now he is right in the idea that we cannot live for Jesus Christ with our own strength but only with the strength He provides us, but he is violating that text, because that is not what it is talking about. It is talking about the fact that when you decide to follow Jesus Christ, you have to accept that you are going to deny yourself many earthly pleasures and you are not even going to highly regard your own earthly life. You are going to live for Jesus

Christ no matter the cost, even if it costs you your earthly life.

If you pick the wrong passage, you might be misusing Scripture. You need the guidance of the Holy Spirit for all these things.

Nevertheless when you have picked the right passage to use for your sermon, the next task is to identify supporting passages which are appropriate. Then you have to follow the following sequence:

Read - Interpret - Apply. The interpretation directly affects the application so make all means to interpret the passage accurately because if you interpret it wrong, then your audience is going to apply it wrong in their lives and the consequences may be fatal. That is why James said teachers are going to be judged with a harsher judgement (James 3:1:) it is a great responsibility.

Interpretation and application cover two aspects of the message: the introduction and the body.

Introduction

The historical background of the passage you are going to teach or preach on is very important. Introduce the passage by illuminating on why it exists in the first place, what lead to it, what were the circumstances that inspired the speaker or writer. So read the text carefully and find out the facts.

Example: Sermon title: Godly Sorrow

Text: 2 Corinthians 7:9 (You might want to use the passage from verses 8-11); verse 9 says, *Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.*

Your intro goes something like: Paul established the church in Corinth during his

second missionary journey. According to Acts 18:1-4, he began his work there by preaching in the synagogue each Sabbath and working during the week at his trade of tentmaking. This was probably around the years 51-53 AD. At that time Corinth was one of the most celebrated cities of Greece, an excellent city with all kinds of splendid features and it was well situated for trade, which consequently made it very rich. We all know that often where riches abound, lasciviousness lacketh not. So Corinth was known as one of the most profligate, dissolute, immoral, and corrupt cities of its time, such that "to corinthianize" meant to be promiscuous and profligate, morally very loose, sexually and otherwise. It was the Vegas of the day. To be called a "Corinthian girl" meant you were a prostitute. Public prostitution formed a considerable part of their religion; and they were accustomed in their public prayers, to request the gods to multiply their prostitutes, and in order to

express their gratitude to their deities for the favors they received, they bound themselves, by vows, to increase the number of such women; for doing business with them was neither esteemed sinful nor disgraceful. Lais, so famous in history, was a Corinthian prostitute whose price was not less than 10,000 drachmas, which could well be around \$50 000 today. Now due to opposition from the Jews, many of the converts in Corinth came not from the synagogue, where there was a strong moral influence, but from the ungodly community at large - the Gentiles, where immorality, vice and idolatry were widespread. So the believers in the Corinthian church brought with them into Christianity some of the "Corinthianizing" that characterized the city. They were still growing you see. After Paul planted this church, and while busy with other ministry endeavours elsewhere, news was brought to him concerning the state of the church in Corinth, and it was not pretty. There was

immorality in the church. He first wrote a letter to them which was unpreserved (1Corinthians 5:9). He later heard that there were factions in the Corinthian church because people foolishly made favourites of various teachers (1Corinthians 1:10-13) and there was a case of gross sexual immorality (1Corinthians 5:1), including several other issues of serious misconduct. 1Corinthians was written to strongly rebuke the church there and call it to order. Second Corinthians, where our text is, was written to talk about the church's response to first Corinthians; and apparently the church's response had been very encouraging. That is how we arrive at our text today.

Note: From here you briefly further elaborate on the repentance that the letter induced in the Corinthian church. Then you move on to the body of the message.

Body

In the body you describe the nature of godly

sorrow and true repentance. To supplement this you appeal to your supporting texts such as Psalm 51 and the conversion of the Apostle Paul himself. You can even explain what false sorrow looks like by comparing Saul and David's attitudes after they had sinned, and the reason Saul was rejected while David was restored. Then you give application of these things in the lives of your audience while giving modern examples.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, you recap. You make final remarks by giving a brief overview of the message, repeating in passing the main points. Then you appeal for godly sorrow and repentance from things the people know are displeasing to the Lord in their hearts and lives. In all this you have to be following the moving of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 3

Studying the Bible for Academic Purposes

The following content was partly extracted from my book, *A Revival of the Scriptures*, from chapter 3 titled *Hermeneutics*:

Before proceeding, let us define terms:

Hermeneutics: The art or study of the theory or principles of text interpretation, especially of biblical texts or philosophical texts.

Exegesis: Literal meaning is ‘to lead out of.’ Exegesis is the exposition or careful analysis of a text by looking at different factors that

have impact upon it, all with the aim of coming to a coherent, reasonable and most possible original meaning of the text. That simply means digging deeper into a passage of Scripture to draw out the real meaning of it.

Eisegesis: Literal meaning is ‘to lead into.’ This is the interpretation of a text by reading into it one’s own ideas which are not inherently present in the text, making it mean whatever they want it to mean. A person who does this is an eisegete.

Doctrine: Teaching or instruction. Also, a belief or set of beliefs taught or held by a church, political party or any group (dictionary.com).

Simple rules for interpreting Scripture

The basis for hermeneutical guidelines is the biblical instructions to handle the truth of the Word of God properly and not to compromise its purity; as such, we should do our best to be as accurate as possible.

Firstly, there are different purposes for which we study Scripture: devotional, homiletical, academic, proof texting, etc. There are different ways in which we are to study Scripture based on the purpose. The following rules are applicable especially for the kind of Bible study in which one wants to go deeper into the Word to ascertain that they are closest to the original meaning of the text. All in all, the primary reason we study Scripture should be to discover truth, on which our relationship with Christ, our lives and worldview are to be built.

New Testament scholar and hermeneutist, Grant R Osborne, gives a simple and helpful summary of the hermeneutical process:

“First, we chart the whole of a book to analyse its flow of thought in preliminary fashion; next, we study each part intensively in order to detect the detailed argumentation; finally, we rework the thought-development of the whole in relation to the parts.”⁴

These simple rules can be helpful to all believers. Preachers especially have to work harder in the pursuit of biblical truth and making sure the Bible is appropriately handled in view of the warning that judgment for teachers of the Word will be harsher (James 3:1).

1. The guidance of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Originator of the Bible and He knows what He originally intended each passage to mean. Therefore ask for His assistance and He will guide you into all truth. The Holy Spirit is orderly and logical, contrary to popular belief, so He will not contradict Himself or bring confusion. Hermeneutics, when applied in

the study of Scripture, is a spiritual discipline.

2. Original meaning

Hermeneutists will tell you that ‘a text cannot mean what it never meant’ and the ‘purpose of the writer is to control the interpretation of the reader.’ The Bible has different literary genres: History, Narrative, Biography, Wisdom Literature, Hebrew Poetry, Letters and Apocalyptic Literature. Taking this fact into consideration helps in the application of the interpretive principles. Do not become ‘the marksman archer who shoots an arrow and then goes and paints the bull’s eye around it’; in other words, do not speak your own meaning (Eisegesis) into scriptural texts due to pre-held ideologies in order to support them. Instead, allow the Bible to speak to you. One verse does not have many different meanings. Do not read your own cultural influences into Scripture either. We must first interpret Scripture in the context of its authorial intent and

cultural setting and then apply it to our present day circumstances or culture. This means finding out what a passage of Scripture meant to the original author and to his audience. What the passage meant to them is what it still means now. This is done by looking at different factors impacting the passage: the historical and cultural setting, the genre the book belongs to, the date of the book, the nature of the author and the grammar. Although the present day application of a passage may be broader;

- 1 – its original meaning should be kept intact,
- 2 – no application should be allowed to contradict the general tenor of Scripture concerning any subject and care should be taken to ensure that the passage is not overstretched. As noted by Old Testament professor, William D Barrick, pointing out what is called ‘the fallacy of reading between the lines’: “What the Bible student must do is to focus on what

the Scriptures say, not on what he thinks the Scriptures imply. One example of this fallacy is the Trinitarian interpretation of the four living creatures' crying out "Holy, holy, holy" in Rev 4:8. The multiple adjectival declaration is actually an emphatic Semitic triplet. Other such triplets include "a ruin, a ruin, a ruin" (Ezekiel 21:27) or "land, land, land" (Jeremiah 22:29)."⁵

3. Entire Biblical context or revelation (Scripture interprets Scripture)

Do not isolate verses; and one passage has to align with the entire flow or tenor of Scripture. I stated elsewhere that the Bible is like an organism; it functions as a 'whole' made up of different parts which play their own roles in contributing vitally to the whole. When people isolate single verses, they usually end up making assertions that have no root in soil. Remember the Bible is comprehensively coherent. For instance, a man cannot decide he wants to marry many

wives simply because some respected Old Testament characters had more than one wife at a time. The sense of the whole Bible concerning marriage is clear and the issue should be looked at in that context, which is one man for one woman for life. Late University of Chicago Professor Robert M Grant advised, however, that parallelism (scripture interprets scripture), as a hermeneutical principle, must be used sparingly. He believed that the unity of Scripture should be based on comprehensive exegetical study rather than itself providing a basis. He thought that the overemployment of parallelism would impede on the “distinctiveness of certain Biblical authors.”⁶ He is somewhat right. His advice is especially relevant to formal theological endeavours; but removed from scholarly concerns, parallelism indeed, when not abused, is a very important tool in Bible Study. It helps to balance interpretations and put certain concepts in better perspective.

4. Word studies

Define your terms and do not alter the meanings of words. Remember the Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek (some bits in Aramaic), so sometimes you may have to look into the meaning of the words in the original languages for a better grasp of the strength of the Word, thereby further illuminating the passage. With modern technology, this should be easy in most of the civilized and even developing world. For example, I use a Bible app on my mobile device that basically is a lexicon; it has a D-B-D, Thayer and Strong's concordance link option next to every word plus several commentaries. Osborne makes a seemingly obvious but very necessary point which I cannot bypass. After acknowledging the importance and impact of the rest of Scripture upon a passage, he notes that:

“The immediate context is the final arbiter for all decisions regarding the meaning of a term or concept. There is no guarantee that Paul uses a term the same way in Philippians 1 as he does in Philippians 2. Language simply does not work that way, for every word has many meanings and a writer’s use depends upon the present context rather than his use of it in previous contexts.”

He further says that “other passages help us to determine the semantic range (the different things the word might mean), but only the immediate context can narrow the possibilities to the actual meaning.”⁷ Example: The Hebrew word for ‘burnt offering’ (ola) etymologically means ‘ascending’ (cf. the verb ala, ‘ascend’)... and any attempt to link it, say , with the ascension of Jesus in the New Testament, as has been done, can lead to confusion.⁶

Context is a combination of the surrounding words and phrases, the genre (or literary form) of the particular book, the life situation of the author and the original readers, etc.⁸

5. Literalism

“When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; Therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths indicate clearly otherwise,” advised Dr David L Cooper.⁹ That is simply to say, adhere to the literal sense of a passage unless it does not make sense when taken literally. To interpret Scripture literally, in the words of Bernard Ramm, is to consistently “understand it in its plain, normal, natural, obvious sense, much like we would read and understand the newspaper, a book, a poem, an essay or

other types of literature.”¹⁰ For example, take it that Jesus literally walked on water as a miracle worker (not ‘He swam’, ‘was seen on the shore’ or ‘the water level was low’ as some liberal critic would most likely suggest). However, when Jesus said “I am the Bread of Life,” this obviously is metaphorical though having a literal application from another dimension of explanation. I have to highlight the problem raised by liberal scholars concerning this principle. They charge that it creates a moving target and thus makes biblical statements or claims unfalsifiable. 20th century Bible scholar James Barr, who was critical of conservative evangelicalism or ‘Fundamentalism’ as he called it, said that fundamentalists do not really take the Bible literally and will metaphorize or figurate it whenever necessary for them.¹¹ He pointed out that they are more concerned with safeguarding the doctrine of biblical Inerrancy. I want to give a brief response by

giving some examples to deal with the point he made; he does have a point. One of the facts that assuages the impact of his charge is the way conservative Evangelicals look at Bible narratives like that of the flood, that of Jonah or of Balaam's talking donkey. We are not ashamed to say we believe that the big fish really swallowed Jonah. We never try to symbolise these events despite the fact that liberals and atheists often throw them at us as proofs that we are indeed anachronistic 'pie in the sky nuts.' We hold that, if the biblical God really exists, these events in view of who He is are trivialities indeed. I want to look at it by addressing the old issue of the statements the Bible makes on the nature of our solar system. This has been used by some to claim the Bible teaches geocentrism and we Christians keep shape-shifting on the issue to align our beliefs with scientific discoveries:

Psalms 104:5 *“Who laid the foundations of*

the earth, that it should not be removed forever.”

There are about four questions that could be raised in regard to this verse:

- a) Does the Psalm teach that the Earth rests on pillars or foundations?
- b) Does the Bible teach geocentrism; is it claiming that the Earth is stationary while the planets revolve around it?
- c) Does the story of Joshua commanding the sun (not the Earth) to stand still not confirm the assertion that says this verse states that the Earth does not move?

Similar verse: *“... the world also is established, that it cannot be moved”* (Psalm 93:1).

I understand that since I am not making my observations from a liberal or secular perspective, my remarks would automatically make my observations objectionable to liberal critics, just as theirs

would probably be to me. What I have to say to that is that I am simply laying down the case from my conservative side for everybody to weigh out and decide what they want to believe, based on what best logically represents reality.

Again, in approaching the Bible, one has to understand that it is essentially a theological book that has bits of scientific, geological, and of course a lot of historical content. Since it is theology and not science – though I believe its scientific content is fairly accurate – one who is willing to approach it objectively will agree that to understand the meanings of its text, they have to accept the overall hermeneutical principles which help to effectively bring forth those meanings. I say this because people often rush to make wild claims. Yes, the Bible is history in the modern sense of that expression (i.e. facts independently verifiable by two or more sources); howbeit, it is history with a very

specific overarching objective, a theological objective. It is not just historical records to inform future generations of past events, it carries a message.

One of the things to be considered, for example (the verse in discussion being a case in point), is the intent of the author (or speaker) expressed under the spectrum of the constraints (or even liberties) found in the nature of the language of his day. Another important fact to consider is that there indeed exists some significant difficulties in Scripture, but instead of being rash, I believe we are to accept these as instances currently having unknown explanations since they do not at all have bearing on the overall consistency and coherence of the overarching theological message that Scripture exists to convey; a message undergirded by overwhelming accurate and coherent record than supposed problems. Now to examine the text:

We can, based on the following factors, attempt to draw conclusions:

- The historical setting of the passage and the impact of the ‘inspiration dynamic’ on the interpretation of the text.
- The major theme and therefore context of the entire passage.
- The language dynamic or grammatical issue, in consideration of the fact that these words are found in the poetry genre. Admittedly the poetry genre does allow for a greater degree of interpretative flexibility.

Explanation:

* The historical setting in which the Psalm was composed is unknown. Some versions, such as the *Vulgate*, *Septuagint* and *Syriac*, attribute it to David. It is not known on what authority that this is the case, but there is also nothing to justify a refutation of the claim. The contents of the psalm would fit any historical era.¹² Howbeit, ancients had their own limited views of the universe. Though David was inspired, it is not always

fair to expect that that inspiration would furnish him with an accurate knowledge of the makeup of the universe. Inspiration works to convey a specific message, flowing through an earthen and finite vessel. Nevertheless, even though the scriptural revelation shows us that God permitted the presence of human frailty in the production of Scripture, we should expect Scripture to get fundamental facts about existence right. I do not see, as I will show, that David got anything wrong in this Psalm.

* It is a poetic expression of the wisdom of God. It poetically describes the order in creation in praise of God.

* The language has phrases such as, v2 – “*Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment, who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain.*” And v3 – “*...who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind.*” These phrases are symbolic but carry a certain literal message.

* The words in this Psalm are by and large the same as those spoken directly by the Lord himself in Job 38. In Verse 4 the Lord says to Job, *“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.”*

The psalmist says God *“laid the foundations of the Earth, that it should not be removed forever.”*

The symbolic language of the preceding verses tells us that this verse gives a poetic image; not designed even in the use of the words “foundation” (mâkôn = fixed place, established place) and “removed” (mô = shake, which is also used in Psalm 55:22) to give any strict description of the actual manner in which the Earth is sustained. Otherwise the next word “forever” (ôlâm ôlâm) would have to be interpreted literally as meaning never ending perpetuity, but we know the biblical revelation does not teach

that the current earth will last forever.

Instead, the psalmist is comparing the firmness of the earth to the structure of a building that has a foundation which makes it firm. He does this to convey a deeper message which is that God has made and established the earth in such a way that it cannot be destroyed or removed from its position by anything forever, that is, until He is done with it. It means it is stable, whether rotating and orbiting or geocentric. In other words, the verse has nothing to do with the detailed scientific workings of the solar system; it is talking of the earth as a symbol of stability and perpetuity in honour of God's power and wisdom. Some stars explode and cause black holes and such but the earth is strong and stable. The Bible does not teach geocentrism. I did not metaphorize the verse to my own ends.

On the event of Joshua 'freezing the sun'; I have no desire to enumerate the propositions of theologians in their grappling with the

passage. I will just give a possible explanation. The book of Joshua is a historical narrative based on the simple observations of the narrator in the context of the scope of the knowledge of his day. Howbeit, despite what Joshua knew or did not know concerning the solar system, the narrator is not making a dogmatic, doctrinal or scientific statement; he is simply telling what happened. We can look at this from the perspective of modern colloquialism where we talk of ‘the sun rising and setting.’ Now there are those who would contend that this story sounds like a fairy-tale; that now would be an issue of one’s worldview. I will simply say that the fact that God ‘stopped the earth’ without any complications resulting from the act is a triviality on his part. He made the universe, and the very existence of the universe and life is a miracle, even on materialistic grounds, but aren’t these real?

On the historicity of Genesis:

There is much debate on this matter in Evangelical Christianity. Some Christians believe Genesis 1 and the rest of Genesis should be interpreted literally with the conclusion being that the Earth is about 6000 – 10 000 years old. Some believe that Genesis 1 is poetic and the word ‘day’ (yom) in all or some of the verses of Genesis 1 and 2 is not to be taken as referring to literal 24 hour days – considering factors such as that the sun was created several ‘days’ after the existence of the light God created – but should be taken as meaning indefinite periods of time. The latter interpretation aligns with scientific (or geologic) evidence, which says the Earth is about four-billion-years-old; the evidence being disputed by Young Earth Creationists as being very shaky and premised on philosophical presuppositions and flawed dating mechanisms. There are interesting arguments on both sides of the debate (Old

Earth vs Young Earth). Some Old Earth creationists adhere to the concept of Theistic Evolution, which is that God used evolution for the development of life; this view brings with it some difficulties relating to the historicity of Adam; Difficulties because genetic evidence suggests that evolution does not work by starting with a single pair but instead goes back to an original “breeding population” of between 5,000 and 10,000 people. This was stated by Theologian Tremper Longman in an article on the historicity of Adam.¹³ This has inevitably led to the reinterpreting of Adam by some biblical scholars. For example, some hold that Adam is a personification (or a ‘teaching model’ as it has been put) to highlight the universality of human sinfulness. Other views affirm Adam’s historicity as an archetypal figure. They view Adam as ‘first’ in the sense that, at a subsequent point in human history, God set him apart as a representative from among a

considerable number of already-existing human beings for his dealings with humanity initiated at that point.¹⁴

There are those Christians, like British theologian Leslie Mcfall, who believe the following way, in his own words:

“Here, for the benefit of the Christian, I will explain how I read the Genesis Creation account. Genesis 1:1 is a statement about the origin of all life, in all aeons, of the heavens and the Earth. It is a blanket statement that covers everything. Genesis 1:2, however, is a statement of the state of the present heavens and Earth before they were created. It tells us either that (1) the previous creations BECAME ‘waste and void’; or

(2) that the ‘waste and void’ state was a preparatory state to the present creation. It is unlikely to be the latter because the present creation is not that old. The rise

of human beings has been dated anywhere from half a million to two million years ago. The revelation given by God Himself is that He created the first pair of human beings – Adam and Eve. There are only 77 generation links between Adam and Jesus; this would not place Adam much beyond 10,000 BC. Yet, given that Genesis and geology cannot be in dispute, the best explanation is that fossil life pre-dates Adam and Eve and that they (the fossils) belong to a previous creation or creations. The present creation is contained in Genesis 1:3-31 and that is all God is concerned to reveal to us as being needful for us to know.”¹⁵

Another theological view is that, since sin is spiritual and is an entity which goes beyond man in its effects and is not confined to man, meaning it affects the natural universe (‘the creation groaneth’), the effects of sin could

have aged the Earth such that it appears much older than it really is. If the supernatural dimension as recorded in Scripture is real and affects the natural in defying time as is shown, such as when Jesus “baked” over five thousand loaves of bread in “five minutes” to feed the multitudes, then perhaps sin’s degenerative force could actually corrode and age the Earth to look like it is four-billion-years-old in only about 6,000 years’ time. This idea explains away uniformitarianism, the idea that the processes that we observe now give us light on how old the Earth is in that if they have always been this slow, then they obviously push the age of the Earth way beyond 6,000 years. But what if sin actually sped up the aging process of the earth?

The fact is, we are all grappling with the truth about origins in this case and trying to establish which description of this is most plausible. On that note, did ‘nothing’ really

suddenly bang and eventually result in our current universe with natural laws and life? The suggestion that such happened is not pure science, it is a worldview. Theologians are at least trying to make sense of what Genesis meant with the plausible belief that an Intelligent Designer did it because that is what happens in normal daily experience; intelligent beings design things, and the world looks too much more like it was designed than not; so the Genesis account (of a Designer) is consistent with daily reality, which is our 'natural' experiment. Naturalist scientists want to come to the discussion table with an unexperimentable 'big bang' that just banged, together with some geologic evidence and make dogmatic statements about there having been no Intelligence and how stupid Jews, Christians and billions of other people are to believe in such. Now if indeed, according to general relativity, there was a big bang 13.7 billion years ago, it is not unreasonable to suggest

that it was my God who slightly ‘snapped his fingers.’ I am aware that the big bang does not mean an ‘explosion,’ but allow me to imagine it that way in consideration of the poetic name. Am I supposed to ditch God for the ‘nothing banged’ theory just because somebody says so, or, says geological experiments, show the earth is old? Most of these geological experiments, as much as I respect science, have to be looked at with a grain of salt by Christians considering they are usually conducted by people with an already established worldview, worsened by the fact that that particular worldview is based on the assumption that ‘nothing banged’ or a nonsensical ‘nothing permits anything’ notion and then this resulted in everything. Nobody has ever seen ‘nothing’ bang, although everybody has seen intelligent design.

Theories that suggest these types of things,

such as that chance or natural unguided processes designed the cell and produced intelligence, should not only be looked at askance, but their adherents too should be looked at with suspicion when they come touting supposed evidence. Data is often subjected to worldview based interpretation. Clearly naturalists often interpret nature in such a way as to avoid something. If Christians are going to trust the reports of the ‘bangers,’ why not also seriously consider the experiments and cosmological propositions of Young Earth creationists such as Dr Russell Humphreys and others? Considering what naturalists believe, it is not necessary at all for Christians to feel embarrassed by anything in the Bible; there is nothing embarrassing, the Earth might actually be very young but ‘aged quickly’ by the effects of sin and God’s judgments, such as the deluge; and who actually knows for sure? It may be old; its Creator, Jesus Christ, is the one who has conclusive

knowledge of the actual facts. What should be embarrassing is to be an atheist, an infidel with no rational basis for morality, meaning and hope; and no wonder Voltaire, Wilde, Nietzsche, Stalin and others of their ilk died crazy or confused. But then “who originated your god?” often charges the atheist. Everything that is created has a beginning; the first words of Genesis, “*In the beginning God...*” indicate that God is outside of time, creating time, which means he has neither beginning nor end himself.

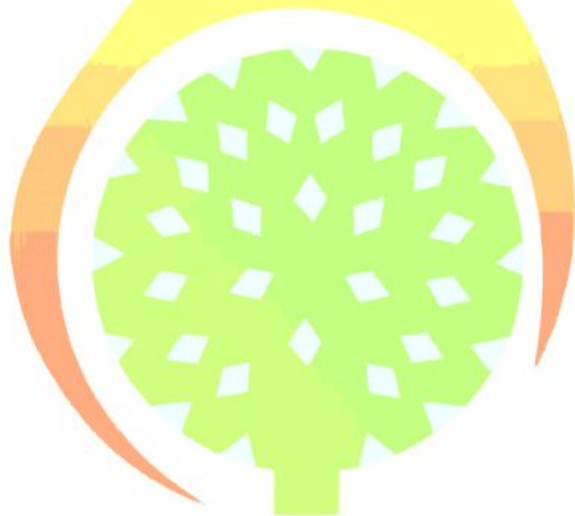
Scripture reveals that he just ‘*is*’, even though it mentions these terms, there is technically neither ‘was’ nor ‘will be’ in his existence. At the same time, Scripture does reveal that God, in some way, does also work inside of time. We live within time and comprehend everything in that respect, we do not know what it means to exist beyond time but we can make some sense of it to whatever extent. To say “Who

created God?” is to assume that he has a beginning and Scripture and reality do not present him to us in that way. And if we assume God was created, we then have to answer as to who created God and who created the one who created God and so on ad infinitum; that would not make sense. The biblical description of the Creator is a much better explanation of reality than ... you know ... nothing ... then ... “kaboom!”

6. Christocentricity

It is very advantageous to make the Lord Jesus Christ the key or centre of our interpretive understanding of Scripture in the sense that we can find in Him the point of reference by which to gauge, balance and compare all that we come across in the Bible. Although we should take into consideration authorial hermeneutics (where the inner, original intentions of the original authors determine the meaning of any text), the Bible does have the ultimate, pre-eminent

and central point of reference which serves as the anchor or pillar by which all Scripture stands. That point of reference and pillar is Jesus Christ: his nature, teachings, life and ministry, death, resurrection and exaltation. I recommend for further investigation of this subject Dr Christopher Peppler's article titled *The Christocentric Principle*.



Also Available:

Booklet 1: Christian Beginnings

Booklet 2: The High Cost of Following
Jesus Christ

Booklet 3: The Case for Sinless Perfection

Booklet 4: The Doctrine of the
Nicolaitans is Still Here and Damning
Church Souls

Booklet 5: The Precursor: Today's False
Prophets and the Great Delusion

Booklet 6: God Will Never Leave Himself
Without a Witness

Booklet 8: “REVIVAL”

Booklet 9: What to Pray for in the Last
Days

Booklet 10: Christ's Sheep Among
Wolves: The Mystery of Demons in

Human Form

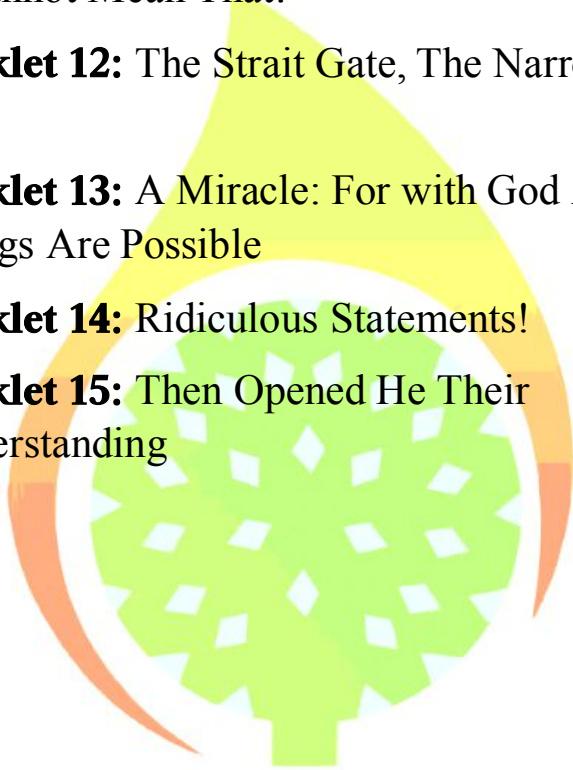
Booklet 11: Whatever Romans 9 Means,
It Cannot Mean That!

Booklet 12: The Strait Gate, The Narrow
Way

Booklet 13: A Miracle: For with God All
Things Are Possible

Booklet 14: Ridiculous Statements!

Booklet 15: Then Opened He Their
Understanding



To order support Burning Bush Network financially call:

+27 81 311 9055

+27 61 408 9915

+27 61 400 6225

+27 76 953 2763

Email: revivalisttumi@yahoo.com

Visit our church **Holy Ground Revival Center (A division of BBN)** at 2 Devenish Street (M-Tech building), Polokwane, South Africa.

Order your copy of booklet 8

“REVIVAL”



**Burning Bush Network
P.O Box 3880
Mokopane
0600
South Africa**

Blessings To You