

RIGHTLY DIVIDE THE WORD

Gerrie & Martie Malan



Third Edition

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GERRIE AND MARTIE MALAN



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Third Edition, available only in PDF Format

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Malan.

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**If it is important that
we have the Bible, it
is important that we
understand it.
(Ephraim Currier, 1841)**



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PREFACE

“Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elemental forces of the world, and not based on Christ” (Col 2:8, HCSB).

The authors were born in the forties. Although both were raised in the reformed tradition, specific events in our lives launched us on a decade long journey in 1996, which saw us moving through the Pentecostal and Charismatic environments. In all the congregations we were involved with throughout the years, whether Reformed, Pentecostal or Charismatic, we had wonderful experiences and many lovely memories remain. We met beautiful people everywhere whom we shall always respect and appreciate. They include leaders of congregations and larger networks, as well as the ordinary members in the pews (so to speak). We truly appreciate the wonderful work many local congregations within the different denominations are doing in their communities and beyond.

However, times have changed. Knowledge has grown enormously since the years of our youth (the fifties and sixties). Modern information technology has changed so much of

Many who were raised in Christian homes have become outspoken atheists. We need to consider why?

what we know and do. As a result of their everyday exposure to so much more and contradictory points of view than we had been, the young people of today often ask much more penetrating questions compared to what our generation would have done. Preachers,

church leaders and others need to understand that their answers (or lack thereof) will not only establish and embed their personal integrity in the eyes of the young people, but the integrity of the Bible as well. Sadly, the information media today, whether the printed media, the Internet, or audio-visual, bears sad testimony of many whom once were Christians and are now outspoken atheists. The question one needs to consider, is why?

In his book, *Peace With God*, Billy Graham (1984:43) tells the story of a preacher friend whose son had gone to university and returned home for a visit, filled with his newly acquired knowledge. The son told his dad that his newfound knowledge brought him to a place where he could no longer go along with his father's simple, childlike faith in the Bible. Billy's friend sat looking at his son and finally answered "*Son, that is your freedom – your terrible freedom.*" One can only wonder as to what extent the son's lack of personal understanding of the Scriptures within their true and original context was responsible for his newfound worldly view. (The second chapter deals with the various and critical elements of **context in studying the Bible**).

THREE PRINCIPLES

Before continuing, we wish to underline three core principles found in the Bible. Two are found in a single verse in the book of Hosea, while the other is from Isaiah:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children (Hos 4:6; KJV).

The concept of knowledge in this sense indicates a position of intimacy, while the concept of God's law refers to God's teaching.

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men (...) (Isa 29:13: KJV).

God's children, those who believe in Him, are to know Him. This not only requires an intellectual knowledge, but an intimate relationship too (Hos 4:6a). One can also express this as an active participation with the Person who is known.

The religious leaders are responsible for teaching God's people the pure truth, which only the Scriptures and not the opinions of people, can reveal (Hos 4:6b).

Intellectual knowledge has no value in God's eyes if the heart does not support it, the emotions of the inner man. The traditions or teachings of men cannot replace God's pure truth, however impressive the biblical terminology in which they are presented might seem (Isa 29:13).

Intellectual knowledge has no value in God's eyes if the heart, the emotions of the inner man, does not support it.

The first two principles are clear. One can take valuable encouragement from the third. As we, the authors understand it, it gives believers the comfort that even if the doctrines they have been taught is in error, the position of one's heart towards God takes precedence. Just consider the example of God's love for King David, a man who committed adultery and murder. David's heart was demonstrated when the prophet Nathan confronted him about the death of Uriah the Hittite, as he responded: "*I have sinned against the Lord*" (HCSB). One should also remember that many years before when Samuel was sent to the house of Jesse to anoint David as future king, the Lord told the prophet that He looked upon the heart and not the outward appearance, however impressive that might be (1 Sam 16:7). Then it makes sense that the opposite of the principle applies equally: One may have the most accurate intellectual knowledge of biblical teaching, but unless God is real in your heart as well, it will not gain you the eternal life that is in Christ.

DEFINING THE CHURCH

Wherever the term 'institutional church' may be used in this book, it is not in the sense of any local church or the people who are attached to it. It refers to a system of institutions that people

join as members or leave, a system that exists above, beyond, and independent of the members that populate them. New members might join on the one hand, while others leave from time to time, but the institution remains and carries on with its varying programs and routine activities. It is highly structured and is run mostly by full-time professionals called ministers or clergy, with the assistance of volunteers from the laity (Viola, 2008:18).

This system already has moved through many phases during the past 2000 years as far as the interpretation and understanding of the Scriptures are concerned. Today there are about 40 000 denominations with a wide range of variations in many of their teachings although they all take the Bible as their source of the truth (Wiki.answers.com, 2014). It would be unrealistic to expect that such a fragmented approach could lead to unity of teachings between the many organisational fragments into which the modern institutional church has developed. One should take note of the research findings of the Barna Group in the United States of America (2004) that **49% of the Protestant pastors did not have a biblical worldview**. This phenomenon was found to be more prevalent in some denominations than others (the result for one being as high as 73%). Interestingly, the research found that the pastors least likely to have a biblical worldview were the seminary graduates (45%). (Should you wish to read more of this research, you will find the source reference and Internet link in the References section in the back of this book).

One can hardly escape the question: What are such leaders teaching the people?

THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

Graham (1984:29) declared, *“Truth is timeless. Truth does not differ from one age to another, from one people to another, from one geographical location to another. Men’s ideas may differ, men’s customs may change, men’s moral codes may vary, but the great all-prevailing Truth stands for time and eternity.”*

Hermeneutics is the term that describes the ‘art or science of the interpretation of literature’. In biblical context, it refers to

the interpretation or exegesis of the biblical literature. Because of all the variations in approaches that characterise hermeneutics, many different theologies developed. Instead of unfailingly serving the church with the truth, confusion has often been sown, however sincere the intentions may have been.

Something needs interpretation only when there are factors present that hinder spontaneous understanding, when there is a gap between the reader or hearer's understanding and the relevant material. Such a gap may for example be the result of historic, linguistic, geographic or biological factors.

It has been said that one cannot paint a masterpiece under artificial light. Likewise, it is necessary for the believer to endeavour to place the Scriptures under the natural light of the time, place and circumstances within which it was written. The 'natural light' that hermeneutics is supposed to provide should, for example, remove stumbling blocks due to language and literature in communication. It should also guide the believer to avoid various dangers such as the following:

It has been said one cannot paint a masterpiece under artificial light.

- textual twisting;
- reading into the text above or contradictory to what was written;
- excessive self-confidence; and
- the pressure to make a name for oneself with all kinds of 'new revelation'.

Unfortunately, this avoiding of dangers is not always applied effectively. Consequently, it is imperative for everyone to take steps personally against this and follow the example of the people of Berea that Acts 17:11 describes (and which you will find in the first chapter). Albert Mohler (2004), President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, makes out a strong case in stating that the recovery process starts at home where the parents are the first and most important educators of their children. One may well ask, what about the knowledge of the parents?

This is where the local church should enter and play its role with accurate Bible teaching.

Mohler also declares that we will believe no more than we know, and that we will not live on a higher level than that of our faith. He feels the many fronts of compromise one sees within the present generation stands in direct relationship to the biblical illiteracy in the church pews and absence of biblical correct preaching and teaching in our homes and churches.

In his letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul unequivocally stated the responsibility of the leaders among the believers to guard the true and original teachings recorded in the Scriptures, and to teach that to their flocks without compromise or corruption. **These teachings (or doctrines) are the redemptive and liberating truths and not academic or sensational ones.** They encompass matters of life or death, and therefore require personal commitment of both teacher and student (Jas 2:17; Phil 1:9). True Bible teaching accentuates true righteousness (i.e. know, be and do) and not a simple intellectual acknowledgement of so-called Bible knowledge (Stamps, 1992:1920).

This book has a limited extent in line with the basic purpose we have in producing it. The printed media so often typifies people in religious context as post-modern liberals (an expression many people seemingly align themselves with), or fundamentalists on the other hand. We do not regard ourselves as either of the two, and even less as one of the many other -isms people wish to label one by, but we are simply two people who have grown tired of all the man-made misrepresentations of the Bible, of that which seems to be false teachings that keep people in bondage, often wounding and driving people from Christ instead of drawing them near.

A last observation: Our preface thus far should leave no doubt as to the responsibility that rests upon every individual for what he or she believes. One cannot simply sit back and allow someone else to tell you what the Scriptures say. Our own research among the members of various denominations in 2005/6 (by way of a questionnaire) has shown the far majority of Christians, those in full-time ministry excluded, have not been taught

the important basic principles of Bible interpretation (Malan, 2006). Some statistics are given in the following chapter.

This concise book flows forth from our own search for the pure truth. It deals with those basic concepts and principles to help the average reader, as it did us, to discern between original meanings of Scripture and the added philosophies that have often marred clear understanding of the Bible. The limited, but important, change regarding the *mamzer* question on page 22, and which necessitated this third edition, is proof that we can never sit back in our search for the truth. (An extensive article on this topic can be found on our website).

A few important terms and expressions are discussed in the last chapter to illustrate why rightly dividing the word of truth is deemed so critical.

May this little book provide valuable assistance through the working of the Holy Spirit on your way with the lovely Word of our Heavenly Father and His Anointed One. Please do not see it as a prescriptive manual, but let it simply stimulate your own heart to search the Scriptures anew, as if for the first time.

We are grateful for still having the privilege to learn at age 73 and 72, as well as being able to share that which we learn with others.

Gerrie and Martie Malan

Hibberdene
KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
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INTRODUCTION

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15; KJV).

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:16, 17; KJV).

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, verse 5, brings the wonderful message that those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are at peace with God through Him. And according to Romans 8:1 condemnation will never come to those who are in Christ Jesus, because the law of the Spirit which gives life in the Christ has set us free from the law of sin and death.

We quote the above verses to illustrate how important it really is to make sure any teaching is in agreement with the word of truth and not merely teachings or traditions of mankind. The expression ‘rightly dividing’ that Paul uses in his letter to Timothy literally means ‘to cut straight’(Strong). It teaches one to hold a straight course in your handling of the Bible, and by implication to treat it honestly and fully in a straightforward manner (Vincent’s Word Studies). In addition one could say the Word should be divided in such a way that **truth is separated from error**. This will keep the message of truth ‘on a straight path’.

In his universally and highly acclaimed book on hermeneutical principles, Milton Spencer Terry (1883) wrote as follows:

In the systematic presentation, therefore, of any scriptural doctrine, we are always to make discriminating use of sound hermeneutical principles. We must not study them in the light of modern systems of divinity, but should aim rather to place ourselves in the position of the sacred writers, and study to obtain the impression their words naturally have made upon the minds of the first readers.

The history of the church sadly records many tragedies that have flowed from wrong doctrine because the word of truth was not rightly divided. One need only study the history of persecutions of various Christian groups to appreciate what some had done to others in the name of Christ.

In his book, *Reimagining Church*, Frank Viola quotes Mark 7:8-9 and continues to summarise the current situation as follows: “*Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men (...). You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition*” (NASB).

Religious tradition has shaped our minds and captured our hearts and framed our vocabulary to such an extent that whenever we open the Bible, we automatically read our current church practices into the text (Viola, 2008:43). While such tradition is not necessarily always bad, the unpolluted Bible needs to be the test in every instance. Understanding and applying the concepts addressed in the rest of this chapter can make important contributions to this end.

BEREAN PRINCIPLE

In Hosea 4:6 the Israeli priesthood (being the spiritual leaders of the time and the ones who were to stand before God on behalf of the people in the religious rituals) were reprimanded because they had forsaken their responsibility to equip the people with the truth. In his New Testament Epistle, James (3:1) gave similar warning that not many should be teachers, as they would receive stricter judgment. It is interesting that James’ let-

ter was not written to one congregation only, but to the Jews in the dispersion of his time. This Epistle is also apparently the oldest of all the New Testament books.

Jan Amos Commenius (quoted by Zoppelt, 2006) wrote as far back as the 17th century that “*The great number of teachers is the reason of the multitude of sects, for which we shall soon have no names left*”.

These things are accentuated to show that not one of us can transfer the responsibility for what we believe to another (whether teacher, preacher, parents, or whoever). Yes, one needs to realise that **you cannot escape your individual responsibility for what you believe.**

To this end the Bible itself gives us an important principle in Acts 17:11, which describes the fact that the Jews in the city of Berea were more open-minded (more noble) than those elsewhere. They readily welcomed (or received) the word from Paul, but then studied the Scriptures daily to check whether Paul was speaking the truth. As a result many of them, including a number of prominent Greek women and some men, became believers. Please note that the Bereans measured Paul’s word by the Scriptures and not the Scriptures by his word. That is what we, the authors, always exhort our readers or audience to do with what we write and teach – **measure our understanding by the Bible and not the Bible by our understanding.**

There is probably no greater cause for the ease in which believers are being misled by the teachings of others (however well-intended and sincere such teachings may be), than the fact that they

The Bereans measured Paul’s word by the Scriptures and not the Scriptures by Paul’s word.

have for all practical purposes never been taught how to rightly divide the word of truth themselves. The presence of so many wrong perceptions and teachings of the Bible undoubtedly flow forth from this lack of education of believers in just basic principles of Scripture interpretation. Unfortunately it also seems to include some leaders/teachers who are supposed to do this equipping (and this is not meant with any sense of hostility).

The research findings of the Barna Group on the biblical worldview or protestant pastors mentioned in the preface speaks for itself in this regard.

A research project undertaken among members of a variety of denominations in 2005/6 confirmed this unfortunate situation (Malan, 2006). According to 38% of the respondents to the research questionnaire, they had not had any education in the principles of Scripture interpretation and had not made any effort in this regard themselves. Only 9% indicated that they had made an intensive study of the biblical cultural background; 43% had undertaken a limited study, while 48% had not made any attempt to do so.

TITRATED TRUTH

In our writings and oral presentations we, the authors, often refer to titrated truth. It is a concept borrowed from the natural sciences. Titration is a process by which the examiner or scientist takes a solution and attempts to determine which percentage of a predetermined element or chemical substance is present in the solution. If he wishes to know how much chlorine is present, he slowly adds another specific solution until a reaction takes place that is indicated by a change of colour. If he is looking for chlorine, he looks for chlorine only and does not determine what the whole solution contains or is made up of. This is a good description of how people often treat the Bible. They take it and only look in it for what suits their need. In the process all kinds of verses are then strung together to prove their 'truth', and in so doing they become equipped with partial knowledge at best, which does not give the full truth. This unfortunate process is called 'prooftexting'.

Someone once said that you can prove almost anything from the Bible depending on what you do. This is precisely what the titration of the Scriptures achieves. Any reference made in this book to titrated truth means that a person is presenting a portion of Scripture in a way that suits his purpose and not within the context of the whole as it is written or what the original readers

would have understood. In today's common language one can say people have a cut-and-paste approach to reading the Bible.

People have developed a cut-and-paste approach to reading the Bible.

The youth leader of a congregation who had used drugs earlier in his life, for example, used 1 Thessalonians 5:21 to justify his previous conduct, by stating that "*the Bible said, prove (test) all things, hold fast that which is good*". If one reads the correct context of what Paul had written, you find that it dealt with the Holy Spirit that should not be quenched and prophesyings that should not be despised. It was never given as a go-ahead to test everything life presents. By reading only part of the whole, 'biblical' justification was presented for rebellious actions whereas the whole portion includes a warning to stay away from evil:

Rejoice always! Pray constantly. Give thanks in everything, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Don't stifle the Spirit. Don't despise prophecies, but test all things. Hold on to what is good. Stay away from every form of evil. (1 Thess 5:16-22; HCSB).

FIRST AND FURTHER GENERATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

By First Generation Knowledge (hereafter FGK) we mean that knowledge which was originally given by God and written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in what we know as the Scriptures or the Bible. It is undiluted and unpolluted. However, people take this FGK and create Further Generations of Knowledge (hereafter FGK1+) from it in various ways (vonAnderseck, 2005: 20). This can be explained as follows:

- The Bible (FGK)
- Theologian A interprets the Scriptures and adds his views. We no longer necessarily have an accurate record of what the Bible stated, but we have what Theologian A states that the Bible states (FGK1).
- Author B takes the Bible and something of FGK1, adds his own opinion and 'new revelation', creating FGK2.

Now we hear what Author B says the Bible says, but remember he first heard what Theologian A said the Bible stated and only then formed his opinion.

- Preacher C takes B's book, adapts it with some of his own insights for his sermon and creates FGK3. We believe you see where we are going.

Please note that this process does not necessarily result in diluted or twisted Bible knowledge. On the other hand it also does not assist presenting the accurate truth of what had been written above all doubt.

Let us illustrate with a simple old example our generation grew up with, namely the bells on Aaron's cloak and the rope around his ankle:

And thou shalt make the robe of the ephod all of blue (...) And beneath upon the hem of it thou shalt make pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the hem thereof; and bells of gold between them round: A golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe round about. And it shall be on Aaron to minister: and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto **the holy place** before the Lord, and when he commeth out, that he die not. (Exod 28:31-35; KJV. Authors' accentuation).

Perhaps the 'truth' we were taught came about in this way: A group was discussing Aaron's role in the Tabernacle. They noted the fact that he could only go into the Holy of Holies once a year for specific service. One remarked that no one else was allowed to enter for he would die. *"But remember"*, remarked another, *"there are circumstances according to the Bible in which Aaron could die in the Holy of Holies. How would the other priests have known and how would they have gotten him out?"* *"You know"*, observed sharp-witted Sammy, *"Aaron's cloak had a lot of bells. Exodus 28 says that as long as the bells could be heard it indicated he was still alive. But when the bells were no longer heard... Perhaps they put a rope around his ankle so they could pull out the body when the bells became quiet."*

And so the story developed and was later heard from the pulpit and became widely taught to the children in Sunday school. Dear reader, we were in a service as recently as 2009 where the internationally known ‘evangelist-prophet’ again referred to the rope around Aaron’s ankle. What is the truth? Let us seek knowledge from the Bible:

In the first place, Exodus 28:35 referred to Aaron’s coming duties in the **Holy place** and not the **Holy of Holies**. This outer sanctuary of the tabernacle structure contained the golden lampstand, the table of shewbread and the golden altar of incense. All the priests were allowed in this sanctuary, amongst others, twice a day to attend to the wick and replenish the oil (Exod 30:7). The lamp’s fire was never to go out (Lev 24:2).

After the death of his two sons on the day of their consecration as priests because they appeared before the Lord with strange fire that He did not command, Aaron receives the commandment that **he may only enter the Holy of Holies once a year** on a specific day, which was the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev 16:2, 29). For that purpose he was to put on a holy linen coat and linen breeches, gird himself with a linen girdle and put on a linen mitre. In other words, that one day per year that Aaron was to enter the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant with the mercy seat was, which became known as the Day of Atonement, was also the one day per year that he was not clothed in the high priestly robe with the bells. In addition, Lev 16:17 also states that no one was allowed in the tabernacle on that day until Aaron came out. For the greater part of our lives we, the authors, believed this umpteenth generation knowledge of the rope around Aaron’s ankle as truth. After all, we were taught by respected teachers and preachers. And you, dear reader, did you also recognise this example?

EMPOWERED OR DISEMPOWERED?

Believers are empowered by God if the knowledge they apply to experience His fullness is based on the First Generation Knowledge – in other words on that which has been recorded in the Scriptures by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Christian be-

lievers unfortunately often become disempowered through the application of Further Generations Knowledge rather than FGK (vonAnderseck, 2005: 20). These Further Generations Knowledge come in the form of sermons, books, television programmes, discussion documents of church synods, conferences of Christian networks, etc. They often represent human opinions clothed in biblical terminology, giving it the appearance of biblical truth. We can see and hear it all around us if we would only look at and listen to the way people proclaim their knowledge of their favourite television preacher's works. They might use words such as, "*the Bible says...*", but they are actually proclaiming what televangelist so-and-so is saying. And in this way the believer is misled.

Sadly, this does not only apply to the average church member, but even to some preachers, often those with high public and charismatic profiles on television. Please do not misunderstand us as if we are referring to the Charismatic church groups. We mean people who charm, convince and manipulate others by their charismatic personality. If that were not true, why then are local churches often only full if certain of the ministers preach? What we are saying, is that charisma is a very powerful characteristic and often a good one, but it can also have a dark side. History is filled with the fruit of charismatic leaders in all walks of life – both good and bad.

Some modern theologians (or rather 'post modern' as they prefer to describe themselves), so often compromise the biblical truth with statements that amount to titrated knowledge, as the following examples show:

- ***Biblical truth is relative and people should therefore allow for different nuances of the truth*** – according to Dr. Daan van Wyk, Jr., A minister of the Reformed Church (Hervormde Kerk) in South Africa (Jackson, 13 October 2000:15). This statement simply means people should be allowed to use the Bible according their own 'truth'. No wonder the Christian world is so very confused sometimes!

- ***Truth is not one dimensional.*** The truth about God cannot find adequate expression in a single religion – Sakkie Spangenberg, Professor of Old Testament Studies, University of South Africa (Waldner, 19 May 2002:12). When the professor was still a member of the Dutch Reformed Church and then already denied that Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, he insisted that he was a Christian. Although he denied the deity of Christ, he stated that he aligned himself with the cause of the (ordinary, yet gifted) political rebel the Bible calls Christ, and therefore was a Christian.
- ***There are no eternal truths*** – Spangenberg (Jackson, 20 March 2004:5).

If we think about it carefully, titrated truth always comes down to the original lie: “*Did God really say (...)?*” (Gen 3:1). Through misrepresentations of the biblical truth, an

Titrated truth always comes down to the original lie: *Did God really say...?*

acceptable ‘God perspective’ of life itself and the circumstances of the community life we have to face are created. Unfortunately this process of pollution of knowledge through the titration of truth has become the order of the day in a considerable part of the institutional church. We need only look at how one value after the other is falling in the institutional church environment. Values previously rooted in the Bible by ministers and others are being uprooted and thrown out today with a so-called ‘new understanding of the Bible’.

Gene Edwards (2004:167) once wrote about the experience of someone who attended a weekend-long Bible conference with six different guest speakers. In the course of the weekend the words *Bible*, *biblical* and *Word of God* were heard, but never the names of *God*, *Jesus* or *Jesus Christ*. Edwards therefore comes to the conclusion that people who talk about the Bible a lot know the Bible well (but by implication not the God who is revealed in the Bible). The late Louis Malherbe, a South African businessman who conducted Christian seminars throughout

South Africa made a similar statement when he said there came a time he realised that he had become so busy with the things of God, that he had little time for the God of the things. You will be able to identify such people everywhere.

THE ESSENCE OF TRUTH

Truth has a number of important characteristics:

- In the first place, truth is truth – it is not dependent on any person’s acknowledgement. Large numbers of so-called progressive theologians today may deny the deity of Christ, but that will not change anything about the Everlasting Truth He is.
- Truth is truth, irrespective of whether you or I or whoever knows it or not.

Biblical truth can also be twisted by falling short of the New Testament, or by going beyond it. The first instance opens one up to legalism, the danger to be bound again in the chains of the Mosaic laws that Christ came to set people free of (e.g. Gal 4:8-9 & 5:1). The latter instance can easily lead to fanaticism – and that is how cults are created and continue.

THE MODERN MEDIA

Our modern media contribute extensively to the twisting of our Bible knowledge. The numerous popular Christian books form a major contributor. Authors use it to promote many ideas and concepts made respectable by clothing it in biblical terminology. Unfortunately they are not always presenting the truth.

The great variety of Christian television channels are also a point of concern. They provide the privilege of bringing the preaching of biblical truth to millions of viewers worldwide in the wink of an eye. Unfortunately the dark side is that twisted views of the biblical text are distributed just as quickly. Television programmes sadly often contains questionable content presented as biblical foundational knowledge.

Our own knowledge has been polluted for much too long by impressive material and ‘insights’ we gained from television programmes, books, seminars, and even formal academic studies. Bear in mind that we are not saying people should discard all media products and transform their homes into semi-monasteries. No, we are only accentuating the fact again that each one of us individually has to take responsibility for what we understand to be truth and that we should learn to measure knowledge against the Bible, not the other way round.

NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES AND VISIONS

A growing number of books and audio visual products (DVD’s) have been appearing on the shelves of Christian book stores of people who had been ‘in heaven’ or ‘in hell’. Some of the testimonies are based on near death experiences, while others are not. **We do not question the sincerity or genuineness of their spiritual experiences.** What does raise questions, is the measure in which ingrained influences and teachings could have stimulated their subconscious mind and therefore their experiences and the sharing thereof.

One such person, for example, testified of the mansions that he saw in heaven – multiple storey buildings that moved to and fro (the visual illustration almost gave the impression of a gelatine-like building). Another said he visited Paul at his cabin (and not mansion). Still another author wrote she was shown that there are angels in the church services on earth who write up in a book how much each person has put in the offering plate.

Consequently we really wish to caution all to be very careful if someone should tell you of his or her visit to heaven or hell and the testimony is not supported by the Bible. You need not reject it immediately, but it would be wise to discuss the matter with others and jointly test it against the truth of the Scriptures.

END-TIMES THEOLOGY

End-times theology has gained prominence over the past decades due to its wide distribution through all the media formats. The rapture teachings have enjoyed so much prominence

that it inspired the late Reverend Jerry Falwell to declare that the book *Left Behind* has had the greatest influence on the Christian world apart from the Bible.

All the various and differing end-times teachings seems to be clear evidence that somehow the word of truth has not always been rightly divided. If it had, there would not be so many differences and unfulfilled predictions. Consider the following, for example:

1. A lady we have known for a good number of years anxiously called us one day. The very well-known senior pastor of the congregation she attended had just presented his annual end-times series at the time. Her banking card had been damaged at the time and when she collected the replacement from the bank, she was told that it contained the most up to date computer chip. She was so afraid that she had now accepted the mark of the beast (Revelation 13). We will not be touching on the specific theology here, but simply wish to underline how wrong of incomplete knowledge can even induce fear in people.
2. How can we forget all the publicity and frenzy among many in 2011 and 2012? First we had the group who awaited the end of the world on 21 May 2011. Afterwards they moved the date to 21 October 2011, with all kinds of explanations. In the process there were people who suffered great financial loss. Then 21 December 2012 took the spotlight with the end prediction of the so-called Mayan calendar.
3. In just the authors' lifetime there have already been more than 40 such end-time predictions, while the history of Christendom has had more than 200. The fact that there are so many and widely differing end-times theologies raises many questions. [Readers who wish to delve deeper into this matter might find our two concise ebooks, *Daniel Without Make-up And Long Toes*, and *The End-times Prophecy Of Jesus* stimulating reading. Detail can be found in the back of this book].

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS AND VERSIONS

People sometimes ask us which Bible version we recommend. Christians are confronted with a growing stream of versions nowadays. There are already more than 50 translation versions in English, with even more study- and other versions based on them. One cannot discuss the basis of them all here and also not all the intrigues and events relating to Bible translation through the centuries. You should really do some personal research in this regard.

Different Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek source texts or compilations are used in the translation of both the Old and New Testament. Bear in mind that the translators do not have the original writings, but copied manuscripts and fragments. Although New Testament translations are made from Greek source texts, for example, there are a growing number of scholars who feel that these also were simply translations of original Hebrew writings. Whichever approach one takes, whether they were originally written in Greek or not, all the authors except for Luke were Hebrews. One can hardly expect their cultural background would not have had a strong influence upon their work.

There are many minor differences between source texts, but also some major ones. In addition, it is almost unavoidable that translators would translate their interpretations into the text. In the case of Study Bibles the notes and articles will also reflect the doctrinal basis of the compilers. It is therefore recommended that you use more than one Bible version. Also try to ensure that they are not all based on the same group of source texts. Many Christian bookshops have comparative tables to help the buyer in his/her selection.

Let us consider a simple example from Deuteronomy 23:2 to illustrate this situation:

A bastard [Heb. *mamzer*] shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the LORD (KJV 1611).

No one of illegitimate birth may enter the LORD's assembly; (...) (HCSB).

A person begotten out of wedlock (...) (The Amplified Bible).

According to Strong (H4464), an explanation we previously accepted, the specific word – *mamzer* – referred to someone with a Jewish father and heathen mother in the Hebrew cultural understanding. Answering an enquiry in this regard, a Jewish Rabbi indicated that it also referred to someone born out of incest or adultery. Such a person incurred the penalty of *koret*, which meant that his/her soul was cut off from God.

Our more recent in-depth study of the topic shed more light on the matter. The incest matter at hand applied only to Jews (Israelites). Traditional Jewish sources further indicate that a child born out of an adulterous union which involved a married Jewish woman, was also regarded as a *mamzer*. We have not been able to find credible support for Strong's explanation.

It certainly does not refer to **the child of two young unmarried people in the modern western-minded sense** that popular seminars and teachings would have one believe. The reality once again shows how one can be misled by subjective translation if you do not make sure of what the truth is. People are wounded in the process by well-intended, but less than correct Bible interpretation.

Bear in mind that there are different approaches to translation as well. We have the more direct translations such as the King James and 1933 Afrikaans versions. Others follow an approach based on what is called dynamic equivalence. In these cases the translators try to provide the original meaning in comprehensible language. A third approach is the paraphrase such as *The Living Bible* or *The Message*. These should only be used to aid your Bible study and not be your main source. Versions created according to the other approaches should also be read with caution as far as translation interpretations of the compilers are concerned. Even a version such as our personal choice, the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, for which a so-called optimal equivalence approach was used – the application of both literary and idiomatic translation – does not relieve us of our personal responsibility to ensure that our understanding is accurate.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

You will no doubt understand that such a concise chapter cannot even remotely provide a complete picture of why it is so important to accept personal responsibility for thorough Bible study. It need not be in the form of formal courses, and it also need not be based on every possible deep academic principle. One problem of the formal hermeneutics is that it is supposed to be a means to an end, an aid. Unfortunately it has seemingly often become elevated to an end in itself. There are a number of specific and basic principles that will go a long way towards placing you in a reasonably safe position to rightly divide the Word of Truth.

In the following chapter we consider the first of these principles that have been a great help to us in our own search for the truth in Scripture and which we are convinced will they prove to be valuable guidelines to you too.

FIRST PRINCIPLES

“And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly” (Deut 27:8, KJV).

“And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it” (Hab 2:2, KJV).

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

The two verses above already establish a principle of clarity. This principle is found throughout the Bible. God gave His Word through humans that His chosen people (initially) and later all peoples could understand it. See the following, for example: Matthew 24:15-16 (in which the words “*whoso readeth, let him understand*” is in brackets and might be the Gospel writer’s accentuation); 1 Cor 4:6; 1 John. 2:21; and Rev 1:3. In these we see that the reader should understand, that people should learn not to think above what is written, and that they should know the truth very well. The verse in Revelation also indicates a clear expectation of understandability in the seven churches to which letters were to be addressed.

Jesus of Nazareth also maintained this principle of clarity. When his disciples asked Him why he spoke in parables, He answered that people (which included the spiritual leaders) would otherwise not understand what He was saying (Matt 13:13 & Mark 4:11. **Note:** In some translations Luke 8:10 may sometimes be misread to present just the opposite, in other words that the intention was they should not understand).

Let us continue now with the same expectation of clarity in the meaning of the Scriptures and consider sound basic principles to help us in our search for the unphilosophised truth in our Bible.

TIMELINE OF NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

As noted in the Preface, the two of us were raised in the Reformed Tradition. Round and about our 50th year we moved to the Pentecostal world and later to the Charismatic church environment. We are currently unattached in terms of denominational environment. On our faith journey and search for the fullness of God's Word we have experienced varying views and teachings. But in all of this nobody taught us how important the timeline of New Testament books were. Perhaps it is due to the fact that all grew up with and had become accustomed to the sequence in which these books appear in the Bible. As children, the ability to name (or recite) all the books in their correct sequence of appearance in the Bible was a basic demand in Sunday school (or Children's Church).

In the process important insights remained obscured to us over many years. It was only recently, when we began to ask questions about specific end-times teachings that the importance of the timeline (or time of writing) of the New Testament books became clear to us. Paul's letter to the Romans, for example, takes up first place in our Bibles, although it should only be placed sixth in true chronological sequence. The letters to the Thessalonians only have eighth and ninth position in the NT sequence, whereas they should be placed second and third after Galatians in the first place according to their date of writing.

To illustrate why the correct sequence of the letters are so important, let us consider 1 Thessalonians 4:17 as an example. This is one of the most foundational verses in the rapture teachings and therefore a matter of life or death for all people. Still, Paul does not build on it in his later letters. His most voluminous letter is the one to the Romans, written some 6-7 years later. Though it is regarded in theological circles as the systematic theological textbook of the New Testament, it has nothing of the

kind. His first letter to Timothy and the one to Titus follow 13 years later. These are generally known as the pastoral letters. If Paul had been teaching such a life or death teaching, he would surely have continued with and even built out the understanding in this regard. Is it possible that this raises some important questions about the truth of the rapture teachings?

The integrity of the popular end-times teachings are determined absolutely by one's acceptance of whether the book of the Revelation had been written in 95 AD or earlier in approximately 68 AD. A timeline of the New Testament books is available free in pdf format on our website and we strongly recommend that you download a copy. From it you will notice that we regard The Revelation as a work from approximately 68 AD – and this view is one that we formed only after intensive research in the available literature. That would place the historical context in the time of Nero, whereas the later dating would put it in Caesar Domitian's time. [If you wish to read up more on the date of the Revelation, you can download Frans du Plessis' free ebook, *Dating The Book Of Revelation* from http://thekingdomplatform.com/author1_book7.html].

Therefore, always bear in mind what the correct sequence of New Testament books should be and when the originals were written according to available evidence. Even the Old Testament books have not necessarily been included in the Bible in the correct sequence of events. Other considerations were applied here. Fortunately one can obtain valuable timelines of the Old Testament history by searching the Internet.

SIX IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Five W's and one H

The Bible should be read selectively, by which we mean that

**Who, what, where,
when, why & how?**

one needs to focus on specifics instead of just reading randomly without any structure. There are six questions to use for the basic structure:

who, what where, when, why and how? (Hendricks & Hendricks, 1991:91-96; Krejcir, 2000: intothyword).

Who?

Consider firstly **who** the people in the text are. Study what is said about a person or group, as well as what this person or group is/are saying. For example: The angel Gabriel speaks to Daniel and informs him that “...*seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city (...)*” – therefore very clearly the people of the nation of Judea and not even the whole of the original nation of Israel! One should remember that after Solomon the kingdom of Israel was divided into two different kingdoms, and it was the people of Judea who were taken into exile by the king of Babylon. The northern kingdom (10 tribes) was known as Israel after the split (with capitol Samaria). They were overrun by Assyria in 722 BC (136 years before the Babylonian exile of Judah) and dispersed throughout the known world. The Jewish environment still describes them today as the ten lost tribes.

By simply considering the ‘**who?**’ one can already position yourself on a good foundation against misunderstanding and be able to guard against deceit.

What?

Several aspects are important in this regard. We should look at what exactly is happening – **what** are the events? **What** did they do? Study the order of events. Consider **what** is happening to the characters, and **what** the arguments are all about? Hendricks & Hendricks also suggest looking for **what** is wrong in the picture, for example Saul’s disobedience to the Lord in 1 Samuel 15.

Where?

The ‘where?’ questions focus on the location involved. It is so important to study a map of the location, as it helps one to focus on **where** the event is taking place. Have you, for example ever considered why that little piece of partly barren land called

Israel would be the Promised Land? Only by studying a map of those times together with the historic situation does one realise that it was the geographical, economic and political power crossroads of the known world of the time. The nation who controlled that spot was ideally positioned in many ways to introduce the rest of the nations to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – which was God’s purpose according to Exodus 9:16 and Ezekiel 5:5, to name but two Scripture portions.

Ask **where** the characters come from and **where** they are going? **Where** is the scene or event taking place? Try to add some more ‘**where**’ questions to your study. These types of questions are of core importance when one studies portions of the Scriptures that has and ‘end’ or ‘end-times’ connotation.

When?

‘When?’ questions help us to determine the context that time provides in the part of Scripture we’re studying. **The correct time frame is often of critical importance**, whether it refers to a time of day, a specific day, a season or even an age. Many variances in teachings have begun because the time focus was not always given its rightful attention. Some ‘born again’ teachings, for example, teach an instantaneous event when someone prays the so-called ‘sinner’s prayer’, while others believe one is ‘born again’ only one day at the future resurrection as they understand that event.

To stimulate your focus in this regard some more: Is it possible that futuristic end-times teachings are due to the fact that the context of time was not given proper attention, or were the answers due to a titration of the outcomes by manipulation to reflect preconceived expectations? Does history not show that every generation tries to apply the end-times prophecies to their time-frame?

Some questions to ask are, **When** did it take place?, **When** will it take place?, or **When** can it happen?

Why?

There are many ‘why?’ questions one should ask the text you are studying. You can ask **why** someone said something, **why** he did something or **why** he/they went to a certain place. One can even ask **why** the specific text has been included. Hendricks & Hendricks state that the ‘why?’ questions really are questions that dig for meaning! The ‘why?’ questions probe the text more than any of the other questions.

A variation of the question could be, So what? What difference does it make? This variation is especially important to give direction to the practical application of Scripture in our lives.

How?

Ask **how** something happened or was going to happen. How was something done, for example, how did the Bereans react to Paul’s message (Acts 17:11)? On the other hand, how did the Thessalonians react (Acts 17:4-9)?

CORE ASPECTS FOR DETERMINING MEANING

Books on Scripture interpretation (hermeneutics) can be overwhelming. Milton Terry’s book of 1883/5 comprises almost 800 pages. Not everyone has the stomach or patience to work through such a book and everyone does not really need to. There are a number of core aspects and underlying principles that are essentially valuable to assist the average reader in understanding the Scriptures correctly, and to protect one against all kinds of deception so easily distributed by the modern media.

Form a good overview

Krejcir (2006) recommends that after prayer and before one starts to study Scripture, the next best step is to take a look at the whole Bible book involved instead of just portions or a topic and form an overview, or ‘big picture’. Therefore, just read the book first from start to finish (even in an easy to read version such as *The Message*). Then carefully read chapter by chapter.

Remember that the sources from which our Bibles have been translated did not have chapters and verse numbers. These were

creations of the 13th and 16th century respectively (Barna & Viola, 2008:228-229). In other words, the original readers did not study verses, but considered the books and letters as a whole. They did not take verses out of their context to string together in order to prove a ‘truth’.

After forming the overview, one can start considering the detail of a portion of Scripture, and then the following core aspects become important to ensure that your focus remains on the right place.

Content

Study the book in its entirety. Follow the same approach when you consider part of a book. The events building up and relating to Matthew 24, which contains the end-times prophecy of Jesus for example, already starts in Matthew. 20 and carries through to Matthew 26. Always remember that there is a direct cause-effect relationship between the content and its meaning. The moment one ignores parts of the content you run the risk of misinterpretation of the whole.

Context

This principle is probably the most damaged or neglected one, even when preachers or authors maintain that they are considering a verse in context. Context describes the relevant environment in which the text appears. Simply stated, context is what precedes a portion of Scripture and what follows. But it does not imply one or two verses before or after. One needs to see the complete context. Once again, bear in mind that the original readers considered a book or letter in its entirety. Unfortunately the true or real context is often either neglected or even titrated to serve preconceived expectations and manipulation.

Context is a highly damaged or neglected principle in Scripture interpretation.

what precedes a portion of Scripture and what follows. But it does not imply one or two verses before or after. One needs to see the complete context. Once again, bear in mind that the original readers considered a

Hendricks & Hendricks note that **every major cult is built on a violation of the principle of context.** They accentuate the

fact that there are different kinds of context, making it imperative for us to understand each one correctly:

- Literary;
- historical and time;
- cultural;
- geographical; and
- theological context.

One can, for example, not deny the impact of culture on communication and this alone makes it imperative to accurately consider the cultural background of the specific portion of Scripture you are studying at any moment.

The theological context on the other hand is relevant to the author or other people's knowledge of and relationship with God. It serves to illustrate where and how the specific portion or book fits into the unfolding or revelation of the Scripture.

Be on the lookout for words such as '**therefore**' and '**but**', which can often be a determining factor to see the true context. As you can see, both words refer to something which preceded them. English teachers sometimes say that if one sees the word 'therefore', you need to determine what it is there for.

Recently, for example, following one tragic shooting incident at an American school in which several children died, someone wrote to a newspaper that she concluded those children were not among God's favourites, because her Bible states that "*(...) there shall not a hair of your head perish*" (Luke 21:18). The context of that portion of Scripture entailed **Jesus' discussion with His small group of disciples about the great tribulation that would come in their lifetime**. In verse 16 He stated that some of them would be killed, yet then followed with the statement that not one hair on their head would perish. Clearly we have something completely different in this context than that which the letter writer applied it to.

Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture

Good interpretation of Scriptures will always be in harmony with the rest of the Scriptures. Therefore, Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture. When people ignore this principle one often finds misrepresentations and confusion. Consider the Matthew 24 Olivet discourse of Jesus with His disciples, for example. In verse 29 the Master stated that, *“Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:”* He then continued in verse 34 that all those things would happen in their lifetime.

Because people are waiting for such physical events which have not yet taken place, they explain it by adapting the meaning of verse 34 to be the Jewish nation (or race) without a specific time connection. The simple reality is that the relevant word, generation, is used in the rest of Matthew (and elsewhere) to mean the people of that time. The ‘physical events’ described was a well-known **image** of the time to describe God’s presence (and we will discuss the Hebraic usage of concrete images to describe abstract events with). Matthew. 24:29 & 30’s reference to the physical events and the Son of Man who would come upon the clouds of heaven, for example, is similar to the prophecy over Babylon in Isaiah 13:10, 11 and over Egypt in Isaiah 19:1, as well as Ezekiel 32:7 & 8:

For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity;(…) (Isa 13:10-11).

The burden of Egypt. Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt (…) (Isa 19:1).

And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I

make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God. (Ezek 32:7-8).

First mention

This principle simply requires us to go back to where a certain description or teaching appears in Scripture for the first time and then to study it in the same sequence in which it was included in the Scriptures. However, bear in mind aspects such as the correct sequence of the New Testament books. It will enable you better to understand a specific description's inherent meaning. The first mention is often the simplest or clearest form, making it easier to understand any further application or appearance. That first mention thus dominates the further application or usage of a concept or description or doctrine.

Single meaning

Milton Terry (1883) already accentuated that it should be regarded as a basic principle in grammatic-historical interpretation of Scripture that words and sentences can have only a single significance in one and the same context. The moment we neglect this principle we drift away on a sea of uncertainty and conjecture. Bernard Ramm added that interpretation (or meaning within context) is one matter, but applications may be many. There does not seem to be anything wrong with that reasoning. Yet, one need only look around you to see how this simple principle is violated, inter alia by adding futuristic meanings to the historical meaning of texts (Thomas, 2001:33-47).

We recently – and at the request of an acquaintance – viewed a DVD and in the course of it the minister stated that while biblical prophecy was given for a specific situation and has been fulfilled, the prophecy then continues into the (our) future. There are no biblical grounds for such a view

Consultation of secondary sources

While the Bible remains our primary source, one can make use of secondary resources such as Interlinear Bibles, history books, concordances, Bible dictionaries, Bible handbooks, atlases, Bible commentaries and books/magazines covering certain

topics. The computer has made these resources readily available, often without cost (e.g. the e-Sword programme). The Internet provides massive libraries of free online books, especially classical scholarly literature.

We were surprised by the large numbers of books written during the last two centuries and even much longer ago, on end-times topics, for example, that are available on the Internet. In them we have often found similar views and understanding to ours, but there were also those that differed from us. In the process we have been enabled to weigh our interpretation of important events and teachings very circumspectly.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In this chapter we described a small group of basic principles and ‘tools’ that certainly helped us a lot to consider the Scriptures anew and unpolluted by the views and Bible interpretations of others. We believe it can do the same for you.

In the process we have referred to the importance of a measure of knowledge of the biblical cultural backgrounds. We specifically accentuate that they are backgrounds because the Bible has been compiled of 66 books written over a period of approximately 1400 years, by some 40 persons on three continents and in three languages. The Old Testament had been a stable unit for at least 300 years before the birth of Christ – long before the Synod of Jamnia in 90 A.D. when all the books of the Old Testament were officially listed for the first time.

By the third century AD it was realised that something had to be done to protect the church against heresy. It became necessary for Christians to know exactly what it was that they had to defend with their lives. The basic test lay in the apostolic origin of a book and value of the text, whether it indicated that it had been taught by Christ Himself or had been inspired by Him.

In the next chapter we will be looking at a number of basic aspects of the Hebrew (and Greek) language and culture.

BACKGROUND ASPECTS OF THE BIBLICAL LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

“Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old”
(Matt 13:52).

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

In the previous chapter we referred, inter alia, to the principle of **single meaning**, but we also underlined the fact that there might be **many applications**. An application can, however, not be twisted to take on a new meaning or so-called ‘new revelation’ of the original portion of Scripture.

Robertson (e-Sword) states the following in respect of the Matthew 13:52 quoted above: This refers to a scribe who has become a learner in the kingdom of heaven – therefore a follower of the Messiah. The traditional rabbinic scribes produced only the old and stale. One who has become a disciple of the kingdom is always fresh-minded, yet knows how to value all old spiritual treasures of Holy Writ, or Christian tradition. We understand that it refers to the renewal brought about by the Messiah’s appearance. Such a scribe (or Bible student) understands the principles and values of the Old Covenant and he will recognise the roots of the New Covenant in them.

In our search to rightly divide the Scriptures and to find the truth in the jungle of doctrinal variations, we realised we could

not do so without consulting Hebraic resources, including Jewish rabbis and teachers. While we believe the Scriptures as recorded in our Bible had been inspired or given by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16), it remains historical fact that all the writers except for the proselyte Luke, were born and bred Hebrews. It is unavoidable that the background and literary roots of their writings would mainly come from the Hebrew culture, irrespective of whether they wrote in Hebrew or Greek.

One cannot get away from the fact that Jesus of Nazareth firmly rooted His teaching and methods in the known culture of His time. After all, it was through His people, the Hebrew nation, that God's Name (and therefore His whole Being) was revealed to the world (Exod 9:16). It is our opinion that many of the errors and heresies in teachings can be traced back to an unwillingness of people to consider the cultural, historical and literary context of the time period in which specific parts of the Scriptures had been written.

CONCEPTUALISED IN HEBRAIC THOUGHT AND LITERATURE

It is almost impossible to truly understand the biblical concepts without considering their Hebraic background and mindset. We do not imply following Judaism and their religious concepts and traditions, but an understanding of the cultural and historical legacy of which Jesus of Nazareth was part beyond any doubt. We must be able to determine what the readers or hearers of the oral tradition would have understood.

Seventeenth century theologian, Bishop John Lightfoot wrote as follows in his 1658 Commentary of the New Testament:

For first, when all the books of the New Testament were written by Jews, and among Jews, and unto them; and when all the discourses made there, were made in like manner by Jews, and to Jews, and among them; I was always fully persuaded, as of a thing past all doubting, that that Testament could not but everywhere taste of and retain the Jews' style, idiom, form, and rule of speaking.

And hence, in the second place, I concluded as assuredly that, in the obscurer places of that Testament (which are many), the best and most natural method of searching out the sense is, to inquire how, and in what sense, those phrases and manners of speech were understood, according to the vulgar and common dialect and opinion of that nation; and how they took them, by whom they were spoken, and by whom they were heard. For it is no matter what we can beat out concerning those manners of speech on the anvil of our own conceit, but what they signified among them in their ordinary sense and speech.

Hebrew was a God-centred language spoken by a God-centred people. Whereas Greek was the language of humanism, the language of facts and reasoning, the thought patterns of the Hebrews were lively, rich and colourful. They changed abstract thought into concrete ideas. In this way all the trees of the field could clap their hands and the mountains could jump like rams. No wonder then that Martin Luther realised while in the process of translating the Hebrew Bible into German just how difficult it was to convey so much in so few words in another language.

The Hebrew wants to know **what** happened, while the Greek (and therefore the modern Westerner) wants to know **how**? Whereas the Hebrew understands/accepts that God created the universe in six days, the Greek or Westerner wants to know how that can be possible (Lawrence, 2013).

THE TEACHING METHODS OF JESUS

Hebrew educational process

School teachers are mostly people who have been wonderfully equipped to work with children, but have you perhaps sat during your school days under a not-so-good teacher? If that is so, you would of course have appreciated the value of those who had mastered good teaching methods.

Now Scripture does not reveal specifically that Jesus received any formal training to teach. Yet He taught very effectively and with authority. To the Western mind His teachings are often difficult to understand because we tend to look at them

from our Western context. But when we place them within the context of the Hebrew communities and culture of the Bible times, His teaching methods and the content of those teachings often take on a whole new meaning.

The tradition of Jewish education goes back to biblical times. One of the basic duties of Jewish parents is to provide for the instruction of their children. This obligation to teach your children was set forth in Deuteronomy 6:4-7: *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thine soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”* It was an accepted rule that children should not be kept from their lessons by other duties. Because the synagogue had a limited number of scrolls only, the Hebrew children did not have the privilege of ‘school-books’ at home and were therefore taught to memorise portions of the Torah, so that they could answer any question from such Scripture. Randall Smith (2002) explains that the Hebrew child would memorise the whole Torah within three years.

An understanding of this ancient Hebrew educational process or system is necessary to understand and appreciate the teaching methods of Jesus, which in turn is necessary to fully understand many of the biblical concepts.

Christ’s goal in teaching

The purpose of Christ’s incarnation (or coming in the flesh) was not to die on a cross. That was His destiny! His purpose was (and is) the answer to the ‘**why?**’ question. It is well summed up in John 3:16-17, as well as Galatians 4:4-5:

For God so loved the world [humanity] that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world [humanity] to condemn the world [humanity]; but that the world [humanity] through him might be saved.

(...) but when the completion of the time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, so that we could receive adoption as sons (NJB).

Consequently Jesus' teaching ministry was directly related to this ultimate redemptive purpose (McClaflin, 1992:218, 219). Within the Hebrew educational culture Jesus first needed to be made credible in the eyes of those for whom His sacrifice was intended, if they were to recognise and accept the sacrifice He would eventually make. To do this, He had to demonstrate His character on a daily basis and under all circumstances, through both His life and His words. Furthermore, He had to demonstrate His knowledge and understanding of the Torah, and also of the Hebrew prophecies.

Although His teaching was superior to those of anyone else in changing the lives of people, as well as the course of history, Jesus used the known rabbinic teaching principles and methods of His time (Smith, 2002).

Jesus used the
known rabbinic teach-
ing principles and
methods of His time.

The *remez* or 'hint'

Like other rabbi's, Jesus often quoted only part of a Hebrew Scripture. The principle involved was that any portion of a portion represented the whole. Because of the educational approach to Hebrew children, they were expected to know and understand the whole. As Jesus spoke to His disciples about the time of the end and mentioned the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel (Matt 24:15), they would consequently have assimilated the whole of Daniel's seventy sevens prophecy with Jesus' discourse.

The rabbinic parable or *mashal*

A parable is a short illustration drawn from the physical world to explain spiritual matters. The teacher uses familiar concepts or ideas to illustrate unfamiliar concepts in terms the learner understands.

The Greek word for parable (*parabole*) literally means ‘to place beside’ or ‘to put things side by side’. Although Jesus made the parabolic form of teaching popular, it was a well-known teaching principle of His time. Jesus' parables put the substance of faith into concrete form. He used what was around Him as teaching resources and aids. Even if the object was not at hand, He described situations involving such with which the

Any normal kind of setting was good to teach eternal truths.

people were familiar, for example normal agricultural incidents. Any normal kind of setting was good to teach eternal truths.

Two important rules were involved in parabolic teaching: Keeping the main thing, the main thing, and the string or chain concept. Luke 15 provides a good example of the application of these rules. The usual perception is that Luke 15 describes three separate parables, while it actually forms a single chain or string with three different illustrations. The main message is about joy:

- Luke 15:4-6: A sheep is lost and then found – the result is joy.
- Luke 15: 8-9: A coin is lost and found –the result is joy.
- Luke 15:11-32: A son is lost and found – the result is no joy for the elder brother.

Jesus was teaching that joy was one of the great marks of spiritual maturity (Smith, 2002).

The Hebrew Scriptures

The third principle in rabbinic teaching that Jesus applied was a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Gospel accounts show that He regularly quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures, well knowing that His audience would understand the messages He was communicating.

Relationship

The Gospel records furthermore show that Jesus spent by far most of His teaching time in the presence of His close disciples.

In the small group He could build a special relationship with them. Here they could interact with Him instead of being passive listeners (like, for example, our modern day television audiences), and so they were devoted to Him and wanted to be like Him.

An important quality of Jesus' teaching methods was that He lived what He taught. He stated that His purpose was to do what pleased the Father (John 8:29) and provided an example of the life that pleased God throughout.

HEBREW CULTURE

Idioms

Idioms are words one cannot take literally and expect to grasp its true meaning. People in every culture grow up using the idioms of their culture to colour their speech and express themselves. These phrases are adapted into the language over the years to a point where it becomes part of the normal of regular, day to day speech. Although idioms are actually word pictures that describe situations vividly, they are often confusing to someone on the outside of the cultural setting in which the idiom had been created (Rendelman, 2007). “*I want something badly*”, for example, does not mean that it is bad. When idioms are hidden by literal reading, or reading from a different cultural mindset, confusion often sets in. We need to study the presence and true meanings of Hebraic (and Greek) idioms in the content.

Poetic parallelism

The Bible books are rich in poetic expression. Unlike English poetry, Hebrew poetry has a different structure and does not use rhyming ends of verses of the poem. Instead of repeating the same sound, it repeats or echoes the same or opposing thoughts in different ways (Bivin & Blizzard, 1994:89). It is called parallelism and five variations are commonly encountered in the Bible, which have a determining influence on accurate understanding of many passages. Even though documents may have been originally written in Greek (which is often disputed today) one

must remember that they were still inspired and created through the Hebrew culture and mind. The five variations are:

1. **Synonymous parallelism:** A second line repeats the first, just in different words (e.g. Matt 11:30 – “*For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light*”).
2. **Antithetical parallelism:** A second line states the opposite of the first (e.g. Luke 6:25 – “*Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger*”).
3. **Constructive parallelism:** Two or three line construction is used to build up ideas (e.g. Mark 12:11 – “*This was the LORD’S doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes*”).
4. **Chiastic parallelism:** In this form of parallelism the same idea is presented in the first and fourth lines (or first and third) in a different vocabulary, while the second and third (or second and fourth) lines parallel each other, also in different words (e.g. Matt 3:12 – “*...He will...[a] gather His [b] wheat into the barn; but He will [*
5. *a] burn up the [b] chaff with unquenchable fire*”). In this example the two instances of [a] both indicate an action, while the two of [b] indicate the focus of the action. Clearly, the first action is a life giving one, whereas the second is destructive. So we have an illustration of two opposites.
6. **Stairlike parallelism:** In this form the idea moves down on the page, but upward in memory as each line adds a thought to the former (e.g. Luke 4:18, 19 – “*He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord*”).

If you look closely you will find that the first two variations (synonymous and antithetical parallelism) especially, are easy to spot if one knows about them and that it then helps to understand the expressions and avoid misrepresentations. Take Luke 1: 46-47 as an example of the principle of synonymous parallelism. Mary exclaims her emotions twice: “*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior,(...)*” (HCSB).

Watchman Nee (1968), however, explained these two verses as if Mary first received joy in God in her ‘spirit’, which then communicated with her soul causing the ‘soul’ to give expression of her joy through her body. Wow! Nee not only changed the sequence of the two expressions, but his interpretation was coloured by his view that the spirit (good) and soul (negative) are two separate parts of the human.

[If you wish to read more about the biblical view of the soul and spirit concepts and important popular misrepresentations in this regard, consider reading Gerrie’s book, *The Lamp Of The Lord*].

Prophecy and apocalyptic literature

People often elevate biblical prophecy to the mere status of predictions for the future. While they do include such, they are more important in the warnings and directives they bring from God. Consequently all the ‘w’ questions and the one ‘h’ question need to be addressed all the time.

Apocalyptic literature is also prophecy by nature, but it is highly symbolic and full of strong and intense imagery which is well known to the originally intended readership and audiences. Unfortunately the many modern end-times teachings prove that it is also fertile ground for all kinds of speculation and manipulation. We will say more on this as we discuss specific apocalyptic portions and books in the chapters that follow.

Eastern character of customs and concepts

This might be one of the major areas of wrong teaching and preaching. Take Matthew 7:9-11 as an example – the portion asking which man would give his son a stone when he asks for bread? One preacher on television made the remark that he could in any case never understand why any father would go out and pick up a rock if his son asks for bread. The true position is simple. In Eastern countries they baked a number of round bread loaves simultaneously. These were then stacked upon each other on a flat, round stone which was approximately the same size than the bread. The bread was rubbed over with *ghee* first

(something like our butter). Lastly, a similar stone was put on top. In time the two stones absorbed the *ghee* and started to look a lot like the bread. A small child could consequently easily be mistaken, but not the father, who knew the difference (Pillai).

Another example of misrepresentation by the same preacher is Isaiah 40:2, “*Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins*”. In the sermon it was explained that Israel received double blessings despite her sins. However great the message might seem, that is not what is written. In the ancient East a letter of debt was posted in the city gate for public knowledge in respect of someone who did not pay his debt. If the debtor or someone on his behalf paid the debt (e.g. a family member) the letter of debt was folded double, showing that the debt was met. Please read the verse again – it is about debt that has been paid (redemption) and not about being blessed despite their transgressions (Pillai).

You can see that it is important to make sure of our correct understanding instead of just reading past the true meaning without any ado. **Our preachers and Bible teachers have a non negotiable responsibility in this regard.**

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

We stated earlier that our purpose with this chapter as well as the previous one, cannot be to provide a complete module on Bible interpretation. A much more exhaustive work would be necessary and our intended reader group would probably not wish to work through such a book. What we are trying to provide is a good core of techniques and principles for the average non academic reader wishing to understand the Bible correctly and to guard against the masses of misrepresentations we are often subjected to albeit by and from people with good and sincere intentions.

It astonishes one to see to what extent preachers, teachers and others in the church environment use seemingly simple terms and expressions while just accepting that their audiences

have exactly the same understanding as they do. In this regard we think of general terms such as faith, believe, soul, spirit, salvation and rebirth, to mention just a few.

We once had an opportunity to attend a Bible study gathering with six other people. They were all people who read/studied the Bible daily. Our discussion started with each person giving a concise explanation of his/her understanding and it produced seven different understandings or nuances of the topic! Sadly, this is also how the evening ended. That is why we cannot accentuate enough how important pure and clear definitions of Bible concepts should be regarded. This is illustrated some more in the next chapter in which a number of core Biblical concepts such as 'end', 'world' and 'the Antichrist' are considered.

CORE CONCEPTS FROM THE BIBLE

“And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? Therefore I speak to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (Matt 13:10, 13).

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

In the preceding chapters a number of factors were mentioned and discussed which negatively impact our ability to rightly divide the Word of Truth. Matters of translation in our Bibles are important factors, but even where the translation seems to be correct, problems may enter through twisted exegesis by popular authors, preachers and others.

In this chapter some light will be shed on a limited number of terms or expressions that have been subject to regular twisting in the modern church environment and which have led to all kinds of false interpretations and teachings. Often one finds that meanings and intentions are read into the text according to the author or preacher’s own views and needs. This is the order of the day in some end-times teachings, for example, which are presented in different ways and are distributed very quickly through our modern technology. The purpose is not to discuss the modern end-times teachings as such in this booklet. However, to illustrate once more why the correct interpretation of the Bible should be regarded as so important, one can accentuate once more the fact that over 200 unfulfilled ends of the world

have come and gone the past 2000 years. Just in the authors' lifetime there have been more than 40 such predictions, as we noted before.

The problem of incorrect or unclear translation aside, terms and expressions are also often interpreted by people in a way that supports their views. Because John writes in the first verse of the Revelation that it was to happen quickly or soon, for example, people soon adapt the word 'quickly' in all sorts of manner to take on a distant futuristic meaning (This word is discussed later on).

The most important intention with the discussion of the following small group of terms is to illustrate how easily we have been deceived in the simple matters through the years with incorrect interpretations of biblical terms. And sadly, this process is an ongoing one.

SELECTED TERMS AND EXPRESSIONS

World

This is one of various words used freely and which commonly creates misperceptions. Unfortunately the word's misrepresentation is often rooted in wrong or insufficient translation of the original terms in the source texts, and where meanings other than those the original readers and audiences would have understood is translated into the text. The following are examples:

(...) the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall the sign of thy coming, and the end of the world [Greek: *aiôn*]?(Matt 24:3).

(...) I am with you always, even unto the end of the world [*aiôn*] (Matt 28:20).

For God so loved the world [Greek: *kosmos*], that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world [Greek: *oikoumene*] for a witness unto all nations; and then shall

the end come (John. 3:16). It is the same word used in Revelation 3:10, for example.

In these examples we have three different Greek words that have all been translated ‘world’ in some (especially older) versions of the Bible. Unfortunately it is reality that the average reader of today would understand the meaning as the known world of today – many would even replace it with ‘earth’. And herein lays the confusion which is certainly being helped along by so many authors and preachers. In reality, the words have different meanings within their written cultural context and time. Not one coincides with that which the modern Westerner would understand under the word ‘world’.

- ***Kosmos*** refers to the orderly arrangement of earth’s inhabitants, or in the context of John 3:16, humanity. Thus, God so loved humanity that He gave His only begotten Son... (also in Matt 24:21; Rom 1:8, Col 1:6, and 1 Tim 3:16, for example).
- ***Oikoumene*** broadly speaking means the inhabited earth, but in the New Testament context it was used more specifically as indicating the Roman Empire (as used in Matt 24:14; Luke 2:1 and Rev 3:10). When Jesus said that the gospel would be preached in all the world before the end would come, the Roman Empire of that era was the framework of reference. See the list of ‘all nations under heaven’ in Acts 2:5-11.
- ***Aiôn***: This word, that is used 129 times, refers to a period, an era, or a dispensation. In other words, the disciples were asking Jesus in Matt 24:3 about the events that would bring a completion or end to the Mosaic dispensation and not the destruction of the earth or modern world that popular preaching, books and films would often have us believe.

If then you come across the word ‘*world*’, you need to make sure what original word or concept really applies and also within the specific context.

The end; the time of the end; the latter days or last days

Dubov (2009) states that the expression ‘end of days’ has always been regarded as a reference to the Messianic era in Hebraic thought. In other words, the people within whose cultural, historical, geographical and literary context the Old Testament had been written have always understood the concept to be relevant to the Messianic era. By studying their writings there can be no doubt that the time of the end referred to by the Scriptures has pointed towards the coming of the long awaited Messiah.

If we believe today that Jesus of Nazareth was and is that Messiah, how can we take the relevant concepts such as ‘the time of the end’, ‘the last days’ or end of the dispensation (Matt 24) and redefine them to suit modern, man-made end-times teachings? There is no biblical justification for such action and simply boils down to a manipulation of the contextual aspects of these portions of the Scriptures. Please also see the discussion of the term ‘antichrist’ below.

Ephraim Currier (1841) is only one of many theologians who in the past centuries wrote about the concepts of the end and the last days. He referred to the concept in ancient Hebraic thought and concluded that in the same way ‘end of the world’ referred to the end of the Jewish [Mosaic] dispensation, the concept of ‘the last days’ was to be understood as the end of that era. The one was no more futuristic than the other.

In 1 Corinthians 10:11 Paul wrote to the congregation: “*Now all these things happened unto them [the ancestors] for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*” Paul was clearly referring to his generation.

The correct translation of the Greek in this case would be ‘age’ or ‘dispensation’ and most definitely not ‘world’ or ‘centuries’. A parallel paragraph is found in Hebrews 9:26 which refers to the ‘*end of the ages*’ (e.g. The Complete Jewish Bible.

The King James Version is in error with ‘world’). The idea is of one age or dispensation that is a preparation for the next one, into which it then progresses. Here, with the Messianic era the ends of all the preparatory dispensations have arrived in the time of their generation (Vincent).

The sign of the Son of man in heaven

The Son of man is in heaven, not the sign. “*Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God*” (Luke 22:69). The events pertaining to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple are the sign that the Son of man was indeed who He said He was – the Son of God, the Messiah seated at the right hand of the Father (and therefore in heaven).

The ‘Antichrist’

This word (*antichristos*) is found in only four verses in the Bible, viz. 1 John 2:18, 22 and 4:3, as well as 2 John, verse 7. It is not used in any other book of the Bible, not at all in the Old Testament and also conspicuously, not in the Revelation. If we consider the sense in which John uses the word, he declares very specifically that the antichrist **had already been around at the time of his writing**, and he **also does not limit it to a single person**. The presence of antichrists in his time has John writing that “...*whereby we know that it is the last time [eschatos].*” The word *eschatos* indicates the extreme, the furthest point in terms of place and time.

Unfortunately so many try to connect this expression with the prince mentioned in Daniel 9:26 and who would allegedly be making a peace treaty with the nations of the world. As we do not discuss that teaching in full here, you should really test it yourself. Verses 26 and 27 of Daniel 9 form a unit. In verse 26 two role players are mentioned. One is an individual, the Messiah. The next is a group, namely the people of the prince who would destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. Then we have a reference to a ‘he’ who would confirm (not make, which is wrong translation) a covenant. The grammatical context shows that ‘he’ can only be the previously mentioned Anointed One (Messiah)

as it cannot be applied to a group. To apply it to the prince (whose people would destroy the city and sanctuary), is to force into the grammatical context what it does not naturally state.

It is also important to see that in his first letter John calls on believers of his time to walk in the light, and then describes four conditions which will characterise someone as walking in the light. To be on guard against the antichrist's influence is the fourth of these conditions.

Note too, that the 1933 Afrikaans version of the word 'anti-christ' in 1 John 2:22 is written with a capital letter. Of the ten English versions consulted, among which are the interlinear versions of Green and Marshall, the word is written in lower case in nine. Only the lesser known translation of William Barclay uses a capital letter. It goes to show once more the role that the views of translators play and how it can lead to wrong understanding by readers.

'This generation' (Matthew 24)

It is ironic to see how much more thorough unbelievers or so-called sceptics do Bible study than does the average Christian. Because Jesus' statement about 'this generation' is interpreted in so many ways and more specifically to suit the popular end-times teachings, we devoted considerable attention to it in our own studies. One of the most significant documents we came across was a study by a sceptic (atheist) on this expression (and of course with the purpose to show how lost Christendom is). In his article Mark Smith (2000) quotes 52 Bible translations, 5 lexicons, 25 Bible dictionaries, 6 Bible encyclopaedias, 16 Bible commentaries, the works of 21 academics/authors to show that the Greek word *genea*, in the context of Matthew 24:34, meant that physical generation of the apostles. There are no grounds on which to apply it in the sense of a race or nation in the way that popular end-times prophets are doing. Unfortunately people like him then apply this insight to 'prove' that the Bible is a book of myths as there had not been a physical second coming of Jesus. [If you wish to study the real context and meaning of Jesus' end-times prophecy in Matthew 24, Mark 13

and Luke 21, we recommend our book *The End-times Prophecy Of Jesus*. Detail can be found in the back of this book].

The understanding of the word as ‘race’ or ‘nation’ is not altogether wrong, but it is used of **the Jews living at that very specific time** and not of many or an indeterminate number of generations over a prolonged period of time.

The biblical concept of a generation is 40 years. Recently it has been adapted by some authors and televangelists to imply 70 or even 100 years in order to suit certain teachings.

The new heavens and new earth

An acquaintance recently gave us a DVD with teachings that call for a return to Torah (or Mosaic law) observance. In the discussion one presenter accentuated the fact that one should take the Hebraic roots of the Bible into account to correctly interpret or understand it. But then he went on to neglect this himself in using Matthew 5:18 to prove that Jesus declared heaven and earth would pass away before one yod or tittle of the law would, until all prophecy was fulfilled. “We are still here”, he said. “So, has the heaven and earth passed already?”

Bear in mind that the Old Testament holds the key to interpretation of prophecies in the New Testament, and also that the New Testament is God’s inspired commentary on the meaning of the Old. Brown (1853) and other well-known scholars have shown through centuries that people acquainted with expressions of the Old Testament would understand that the dissolution of the Mosaic and establishment of the new dispensation was regarded in the Hebraic mind as removal of the old heaven and earth and creation of the new. Lightfoot (1658) accentuated that the destruction of Jerusalem is often expressed in the Scriptures as if it represented the destruction of the whole world. One should always bear in mind that **Jerusalem was regarded as the centre of the world in Hebraic thought** (Ezek 5:5).

Jerusalem was regarded as the centre of the world in Hebraic thought (Ezek 5:5).

The dispensation inaugurated with the crucifixion of Jesus the Christ, His ascent to heaven, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD is what has been regarded in Hebraic cultural context as the establishment of the new heaven and earth.

The concept of ‘soon’ or ‘quickly’ in the Revelation

These simple words have been subjected to all kinds of twisting and titration to take on a meaning people want it to do. In his authoritative work on the interpretation of Scripture, Milton Terry (1883:495-496) took on a strong stance that wherever a writer in the Bible indicated that something was about to happen or would soon happen, it was against all good sense to imply that the event lay in the distant future. According to him it was unacceptable application of language to suggest that words such as ‘immediately’, ‘near’, ‘at hand’ would mean ‘millennia later’. He regarded such usage as even worse than the theory of double meaning.

The lamb and lion that would lie together

A friend once asked us, “But what about the lion and lamb that will lie together?” In our search for the correct interpretation we found that there is no such thing in the Bible! And we think of all the lion and lamb paintings and of Elvis Presley singing these words in the lovely song, *Peace in the valley*. Then we realised once again how wrong teachings can be absorbed into all kinds of media, and then keep our understanding of the Bible in bondage.

The Bible makes no mention of the lion and lamb that would lie together.

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Isaiah 11:6 states that **the wolf shall dwell with the lamb**. It is a prophetic image of a strong, cruel nation living in peace with a small, weak nation. The first paintings might have had a different meaning such as portraying the two characteristics of the Messiah, i.e. the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb of God. Today, however, these paintings are consistently being interpreted as the lion and lamb that would lie together.

Streets of gold

Beautiful, popular songs have us singing along with statements such as “*we will dance on the streets that are golden, (...)*” without giving it much thought. And in this way wrong knowledge becomes embedded in our minds through the combined power of the words and melody..

In the first place, Revelation 21:21 does not mention ‘streets’: “(*...*) *and the **street** of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.*” The next verse states that the city does not have a temple, because God and the Lamb are the temple of it. Therefore we need to consider the context of the temple in the city, because the temple in earthly Jerusalem was the place of God’s presence.

Within the temple context, the image in all probability arises from the realities of temple design of those times, in both heathen and Hebraic environments. The Greek word translated as ‘street’, is *plateia*. It means a broad place; an open (public) square, but can also be translated ‘street’ in the correct context.

Temple design of those times included a public square where the ‘ordinary people’ could worship. They were not allowed inside the temple. The square was not necessarily a square in the sense that our modern conception would have it. If you have studied illustrations of ancient Jerusalem, you might have noticed how large an area the temple comprised. Look at such an illustration again and notice the large area that surrounded the temple. Keep in mind that when Herod rebuilt the temple he wanted to make sure it would stand as a monument of excellence to himself – and that included the public worship square. As far as we could ascertain this square was larger than that of any other temple and certainly gave the impression of a street.

It would have been on this square where Jesus turned over the tables of the dealers and money exchangers, as they were hindering the people in their worship.

The Revelation therefore sketches the ‘public square of gold’, the **perfect place for all to worship** the Lord God and His Lamb (John 4:21-26).

Lucifer, the Satan

Despite what many people seemingly believe, the name Lucifer which appears in the old King James Version does not appear in the source texts and the Hebrew Tanakh also does not have it. It has been corrected in newer versions (New King James; Modern King James). Then one may ask, where did this name come from?

Lucifer was a Latin translation error of the fourth century – in other words, not even an accurate translation of the Greek Septuagint. Jerome was asked by Pope Damasus to revise the various different Latin versions. The eventual revised Latin version that came about was used throughout Europe for the next 1000 years. In fact, the word ‘lucifer’ (in lower case) appeared in one place of Jerome’s New Testament version and that was 2 Peter 1:19 where it referred to Christ.

While the name Lucifer was a titrated translation by Jerome who was of the opinion that Isaiah 14 referred to Satan, it eventually and erroneously became the popular name for Satan. Isaiah 14 is a continuation of chapter 13 and it appears in the larger context of prophecies against various nations, e.g. Assyria (14:24-27), the Philistines (14:28-32) and Moab (15 & 16), to mention just a few. Isaiah 13:1 – 14:23 is a prophecy against Babylon and their king, and not a description of Satan and his fall. The prophetic announcements were steeped in sarcasm due to their pride and arrogance.

In the same way Ezekiel 28 is not a description of Satan as a proud cherub, but Godly prophecy clothed in sarcasm against the proud prince of Tyre. You need not blindly accept our understanding of these portions of Scripture, but we do plead that you read it yourself without trying to read old views into it. Make use of the tools we provided in the previous chapters to help you.

The name Lucifer is not found in the source texts or the Hebrew Tanakh (Old Testament).

The teaching (doctrine) of the apostles

Acts 2:42 tells us that the believers persevered in the teaching of the apostles. This teaching would have been in accordance with the Master's great command (Matt 28:19) to make disciples of all nations and to teach them to observe all things He commanded them.

While the teaching of the apostles would no doubt have included everything they learned from Jesus such as the beatitudes of Matthew 5, there should also be no doubt that their teaching would have included the Master's end-times prophecy recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. The New Testament is steeped in admonitions to the people of that generation of a near eschatological event, e.g. Romans 13:12, 1 Corinthians 10:11, Hebrews 9:26, Hebrews 10:25 en 1 Peter 4:7, to mention just a few. To project the content and time indicators of these references to distant future is not only to read into the text above what was written, but it does violence to the text.

The concept of time

Translation deficiencies also create wrong understanding of important portions of Scripture in which time is a central word. It is again due to the fact that different words and expressions have simply been translated as 'time' or 'times'.

In the ancient Hebrew mindset (that is also represented by various Greek words) there were especially two important views of time. The first was a continuous timeline, being the Greek word *chronos*. One can indicate this concept with a straight line. Galatians 4:4 is an example of this usage: "*But when the fullness of the time [chronos] was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, (...)*"

The word 'fullness' here simply means a completion. A prophetic point to which the history of the nation of Israel was moving, had arrived.

Then we also have the idea of *kairos* – e.g. Ephesians 1:10, where Paul writes of the "*(...)fulness of times(...)*". In this instance the word refers to a season and one can present it as a circle. Israel's history starting with the exodus out of Egypt can be

indicated by a straight line (*chronos*) and is comprised of many seasons (*kairoí*) in which one was the preparation for the following one. The period in the desert was one *kairos* and the exile in Babylon another. But in Christ the point of completion of all the prophecies of which each consecutive *kairos* made up a specific part, was reached.

We need to make sure we know accurately which concept of time (and there are others) is relevant to the text we are studying. If we do not, we open the door to misrepresentation and.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In this chapter we have really just concisely considered a handful of well-known terms and expressions, You will understand that most of them should be discussed in greater detail, but the purpose was, as we noted in the introduction, to illustrate just how easily we have been misled in the course of time with wrong meanings that have been and are attached to biblical terms. Even if you do not agree with us on the different meanings, it will already be reward enough if at least it inspired you to take greater care and responsibility to study the Word in depth instead of simply accepting what others present to you.

Whatever we believe and how we understand the biblical writings, is our individual responsibility. We trust that the tools we make available for free download in pdf format from our website (Timeline of New Testament books and Bible Study Sheet) will be invaluable to support your own desire to rightly divide the Word of Truth. You will find them in the *Articles and Study Tools* page. In addition, we strongly recommend that you use a map of the Roman Empire in the apostles' time and compare the content of Acts 2:5-11 with it.

Let us conclude with a very relevant example of a tragic train accident provided in one of H.A. Ironside's works: A train with young people returning home from school developed problems and was stalled on a suburban railway line. Another train was expected to arrive on the same track shortly and so a flagman was sent back with a red flag to warn the engineer of the oncoming train to avert a rear-end collision.

The passengers were at ease that all was well. However, the oncoming train crashed into the train in front with horrible effect. The engineer of the second train saved his own life by jumping and some time afterwards he was brought to court to account for his part in the calamity. In answer to the question as to why he did not stop, he replied that he saw the man waving the **yellow flag** and decreased speed as was required. The flagman was then questioned and he insisted that he waved a **red flag**, requiring the second train to stop.

Both insisted their testimony was true. The truth only became apparent when the flagman brought his flag before the court. It was then realised that **the flag had once been red, but with years of use all the red had bleached out and it was but a dirty yellow**. Ironside observed that people are sent to their doom with all kinds of false theories instead of being stopped in their downward journey.

If we do not clear the garden of our doctrine of all the theological and philosophical weed that spoil it, we might one day vainly look for any flowers in that garden. (A.W. Tozer)

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THE AUTHORS



Gerrie and Martie Malan were married in 1970. Shortly afterwards he entered a new career in the South African Correctional Services, where he served for 25 years. They were transferred many times and also had to relocate twice annually between Pretoria and Cape Town for eight years when Gerrie was a member of the Correctional Services' Parliamentary staff. Although Martie could take up employment for short periods in those years, she mostly found herself in the role of home maker, raising their three children – often under difficult circumstances.

Shortly after he was released on pension in 1995 following severe burnout, Gerrie became a lecturer in Correctional Management at the Technikon SA, which later merged with the University of South Africa. It was in this time that they left the Reformed church in which they were raised to go on a journey through the Pentecostal and Charismatic environments in search of biblical truth.

Martie, in the meantime, had taken on studies in biblical counselling, with Gerrie soon joining her. While she focussed on

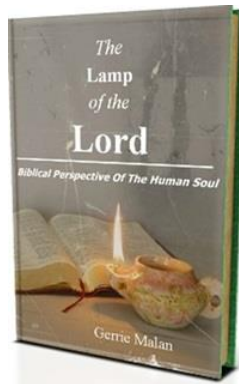
the area of emotional healing, Gerrie's focus was on spiritual warfare. He continued afterwards with studies in the ministry environment and eventually completed a doctoral thesis in Systematic Theology. For his thesis he studied Christ's 'born again' and Paul's 'in Christ' concepts. On their journey they had wonderful experiences and met precious people, church leaders as well as ordinary church members. But as they studied the Scriptures, more and more questions arose about specific traditional church teachings.

A home group of five in April 2001 soon grew to a weekly meeting of some 50 people. The group quickly grew into a formal congregation (Hosea Christian Family Church), which later joined with another where Gerrie and Martie took up the leadership of the Bible College. Today they are not attached to any denomination as they focus on the search for biblical truth on many questions that developed during their journey through the Reformed, Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions. Unlike so many others who in similar processes have turned their back on the Bible, they feel that they have developed a much better understanding of the simple biblical truths when it is stripped of centuries of philosophising and pollution which robbed humanity of the kingdom life that was and is in God's heart for His people.

This book is part result of their search to distinguish the truth from fiction in the midst of, inter alia, all the end-times matters which Christians are being confronted with so continuously today.

You may contact them through their website,
<http://www.hoseaconnection.org>

MORE BOOKS BY THE AU- THORS



THE LAMP OF THE LORD
(Biblical View of the Human Soul)
Gerrie Malan

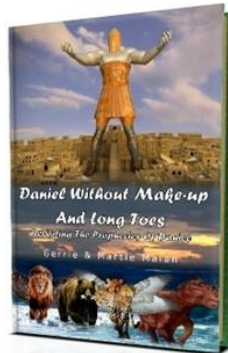
The Bible does not give a clear and precise definition of the soul. The same is true of the expressions 'spirit' and 'spiritual'. Considering the influence of pagan philosophy and Greek philosophical techniques on Christian thought throughout the centuries, and adding the modern variety of approaches to interpretation, it is no wonder that confusion reigns in this regard. In their efforts to fill this void Christian teachers and writers have been presenting teaching filled with assumption and confusion, albeit clothed in biblical terminology. This book is presented as an at-

tempt to facilitate accurate understanding of the concepts that are used widely in popular seminars pertaining to matters such as spiritual deliverance and emotional healing.



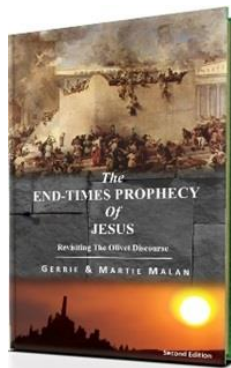
SNY DIE WOORD REGUIT
Gerrie & Martie Malan

This is the Afrikaans version of *Rightly Divide The Word*..



DANIEL WITHOUT MAKE-UP OR LONG TOES
(The Prophecies Of Daniel Revisited)
Gerrie & Martie Malan

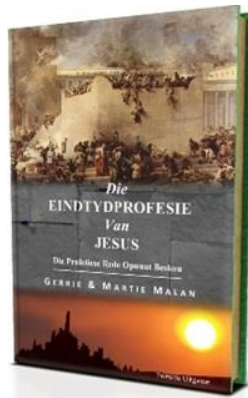
End-times prophecies have been brought to the people's attention by the electronic media to an extent never thought possible a few decades ago. And most of these are rooted in some measure, in the biblical book of Daniel. Even if you should eventually decide that you do not agree with the authors' view, you will find the search for the simple truth in the book of Daniel stimulating. They tried throughout their study to strip the Daniel message of the pollution by all kinds of philosophy through the centuries (the make-up) and also specifically identified artificial insertions (the long toes of the so-called 'church age'). Throughout, they weighed the Daniel prophecies against recorded history. In the process important distortions in modern end-times doctrines are exposed.



THE END-TIMES PROPHECY OF JESUS
(The Olivet Discourse Revisted)
Gerrie & Martie Malan

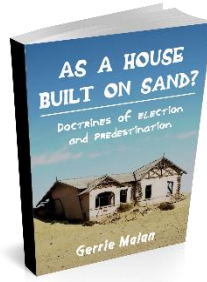
The electronic and other media have had a profound impact on the distribution of knowledge throughout the world. Knowledge of Bible teaching in various formats has been experiencing the same impact. One can specifically highlight the biblical end-times, in view of the numerous contemporary books and films or DVD's on such topics and man's natural interest in this regard through the centuries. Because Jesus of Nazareth is on record as

God's ultimate prophet, it is inevitable that His end-times prophecy would assume an important place in all the sermons, teachings, books and multimedia that have been created on these topics. With this book the authors have revisited the end-times prophecy of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. They have focused on studying every section of the prophecy within the context that the original readers and audiences would have understood to be involved. At the same time their focus remained on presenting a relative concise book with the average reader as priority instead of a voluminous academic one. It is a book that is certain to stimulate a willingness to search for the biblical truth, especially in view of the many attempts to question the reliability of the Bible. The outcome might surprise many.



DIE EINDYDPROFESIE VAN JESUS
(Die Profetiese Rede Opnuut Beskou)
Gerrie & Martie Malan

The Afrikaans version of *The End-times Of Jesus*.



Theologian Millard J. Erickson points out that the doctrine of predestination is probably one of the **least understood and most puzzling** of all Christian doctrines. Many regard it as obscure and even bizarre, while others simply accept that it is beyond human understanding. Erickson accepts more jokes may have been made about this doctrine than about all other Christian doctrines combined. In this book the author records his understanding of the biblical position after an extensive study of the topic.