

Is The Bible To Be Taken Literally?
“Thy word is true from the beginning.”
(Psa. 119:160 KJV)

Is the Bible to be taken literally? That is, do we take the text at face value whenever it's plain meaning makes sense? We all know that it makes no sense to believe that Jesus is a gate or a lion; these are figures of speech and, like parables, we interpret them spiritually rather than literally. By literal, I mean that when the plain sense of the text makes sense then we accept it at face value. We simply believe it.

If we don't take the Bible literally then obviously there can be any number of interpretations for each passage. Someone could say that a passage means this and someone else could say it means something entirely different. This would result in each of us having our own, personal version of what God is saying. We would all have our own 'truth' with no standard to guide us into God's absolute truth.

The Bible is attacked right from its beginning. Many people don't believe that God created in six literal days. However, there are Hebrew scholars, who themselves do not believe in God or Creation, but say that the writer of Genesis clearly meant for us to understand that God created in six literal days. Still, many Christians won't believe this so from the very beginning a shadow of doubt is cast over God's inspired Word. Discrediting just one part of the Bible leaves it all open to question. Who sets the guidelines when God is sidelined? So, let's look at some of the problems resulting from not taking God at His word.

Regarding Creation, if the six day Creation account is not taken literally then we can just as easily say that Adam and Eve were not literal creations either. Some believe that they were evolving apes or mythical figures. The full extent of this error becomes apparent when we realise that a mythical man can't choose to sin so the Fall becomes a myth also, making Jesus' death for sin meaningless. Also, it means that Jesus, our Creator, was badly mistaken when He said that from the *beginning* of Creation God made men and women to unite in marriage (Mark 10:2-8). If Jesus was mistaken about this then there is no good reason to believe anything else He said. So, a non-literal view of Creation makes the Bible of no more value for salvation than a fairy tale.

Believing in a literal hell is a problem for some despite the many references to it. To eliminate its reality, some individuals dismiss various passages as being “incompatible with a God of love” but what is to stop others from dismissing passages on love because they are “incompatible with a God who is a consuming fire?” If someone can reject the passages on wrath and hell because they don't suit their view of a God of love then, using the same reasoning, someone else can reject the idea of a loving God because of the suffering in the world. By using this method of interpretation we can easily eliminate all of God's attributes making Him as characterless as a blow-up doll.

Regarding the word eternal, Matt. 25:46 says, *“Then they [the unrighteous] will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”* In this verse, everyone believes that eternal life literally means living with God eternally but not everyone believes that eternal punishment is eternal. What this amounts to is that the word eternal is taken as being literal in the good news part of the verse and non-literal in the bad news part of the same verse. This leads to the unsettling conclusion that if eternal punishment is not eternal then we can't be certain that eternal life is eternal either.

From these few examples, we can see that things can get very messy very quickly and leave us without any solid ground to base our beliefs on. If God has left it up to us to pick and choose what we believe then He has no grounds to condemn anyone. A sinner could rightly argue that he didn't really know what to believe as there are an endless number of possible meanings for each and every passage so he just believed what best suited him.

A non-literal approach to the Bible only results in chaotic theology with everyone believing what is right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). When we stand before God, I don't believe for a moment that He will say to the literalist, "You really should not have taken me so literally. How could you have been so naive?" Rather, I believe He will say, "Well done! You took Me at My Word."

Let everyone trust the Psalmist who said, "*Thy word is true from the beginning*" (Psa. 119:160 KJV). Amen.

This article can be downloaded as a PDF or an MP3 from -
<http://www.christianissues.biz/downloads.html>

The video of "Is The Bible To Be Taken Literally?" can be seen on YouTube at-
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpG_valYX7k

Christian Issues' blog can be subscribed to at -
<http://www.christianissues.biz/blog/wordpress/feed/>

Mick Alexander
leeandmick@gmail.com
<http://www.ChristianIssues.biz>