

# Can I Read the Bible Incorrectly?

Truth in Love Apologetics Conference

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**“You don’t take the  
Bible *literally*, do you?”**

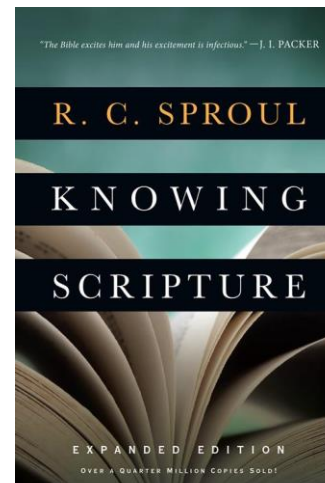
- the typical skeptic

How would *you* respond to this?

# What does it *really* mean to “interpret the Bible literally”?

- ▶ *Literal* comes from the Latin word *litera*, meaning “letter”
- ▶ To interpret it as *literature*
- ▶ To interpret according to the “meaning which the writer expressed. Interpretation according to the literal sense will take into account all figures of speech and literary forms found in the text.”

-RC Sproul



# What does it *really* mean to “interpret the Bible literally”?

- ▶ To acknowledge that at times the Bible’s authors intended their words to be interpreted figuratively, allegorically, or metaphorically, just like any other work of literature.
- ▶ **To properly interpret the Bible is to correctly understand the inspired human author’s meaning of the text.**

# Can I Read the Bible Incorrectly?

## A couple examples:

- ▶ Luke 14: 12-13 - “When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.”
- ▶ Luke 14: 26 - “ If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”

# Can I Read the Bible Incorrectly?

What does the Bible, itself, say?

- ▶ 2 Tim 2:15 “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”
- ▶ 2 Peter 3:16 - “Paul’s letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.”

# How *should* we read our Bible?

- ▶ Identify what type of genre is being read: historical narrative, poetry, prophecy, etc.  
Are literary forms such as metaphor, hyperbole, or allegory being intended by the author, or not?
- ▶ Seek to understand the historical and cultural context of the scripture
- ▶ Allow scripture to interpret scripture

# What is the genre being read?

## ▶ Historical Narrative

Is it clear that the inspired human author was recording the event as a true historical account?

What is the the meaning that the writer is expressing?



# Historical Narrative Example: The Resurrection

- ▶ Acts 1:3 He presented himself alive to them (the apostles) after his suffering *by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days* and speaking about the kingdom of God.
- ▶ Acts 2: 24 God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.... *This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.*
- ▶ Acts 4: 33 And with great power *the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,* and great grace was upon them all.

# Historical Narratives and Metaphor

- ▶ John 10:7, 9 - “Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep... by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”
- ▶ John 15:5 - “I am the vine, ye are the branches.”

# What is the genre being read?

- ▶ Poetry - (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, etc)

Example from Proverbs:

Proverbs 10:4 - “Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth”

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Example from Psalms:

Psalms 93:1 - “The Lord reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself: the world also is stablished, *that it cannot be moved.*”

# Historical Narrative or Poetry?

- ▶ Not always clear!
- ▶ Example: Genesis 1



# What is the historical and cultural context?

Example:

"There is no God." -Psalm 14

# What is the historical and cultural context?

Example:

Luke 14:12-13 revisited

“When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.”

# What is the historical and cultural context?

Example:

Proverbs 22:28 -

“Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.”



# Allow scripture to interpret scripture

- ▶ Interpret challenging, difficult, or obscure scriptures in the light of other Scriptures that are clear and consistent.
- ▶ An example:  
Luke 14:26 Revisited - “ If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children...

# A Summary: How *should* we read our Bible?

- ▶ Identify the genre
- ▶ Determine the historical and cultural context of the scripture
- ▶ Allow scripture to interpret scripture