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## HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE

### 6. Interpretation (cont'd)

#### *Collect and Compare*

If you are interested in the meaning of a word or phrase, check out how the same author uses it and find everything he says about it. For instance, if you want to understand being “born again,” collect all of the appearances of the phrase and see what you can learn from all of these occurrences (cf. John 1:12,13; 3:3-7; 1Peter 1:3,22-2:3; 1John 2:29). Note how different writers handle similar ideas – John and Peter wrote about being “born again,” while Paul discussed the same idea in terms of being spiritually dead in sin and then being “made alive” with Christ (Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 2:13).

When New Testament writers quote Old Testament passages, locate the OT passage and go back and read it along with material before and after – sometimes the New Testament writer was citing a verse to remind their readers of a much larger section of which that verse was a central part. As examples, consider Matthew 3:3 as pointing to the larger Messianic section (Isaiah 40:1-11).

If you want to understand what the Bible says about a topic like baptism, use a concordance to collect all of the accounts/discussions of baptism and all of the times it is mentioned/discussed, then read all of them and note what you find in each passage. Finally, draw conclusions from what you learned from all of the discussions and you will gain a pretty good understanding of what it truly means and involves.

Paul, especially, discussed many of the same ideas in a number of his letters, but he used slightly different language in each account and, by comparing these, you can get a much clearer idea of what he meant (Ephesians and Colossians have numerous parallels). Look for similar topics discussed in different letters and summarize everything you find.

#### *Understand the “Synecdoche”*

When it comes to a topic like salvation, one of the major problems facing us today is the wide variety of beliefs and favorite proof-texts used to “summarize” the doctrine. Some people believe that salvation is based on “faith/belief” alone and they cite John 3:16 or Acts 16:30,31. Or, you could make a case for “repentance” alone as the alternative to perishing (Luke 13:1-5; 24:46,47; Acts 3:19; 2Peter. 3:9). Or why not Baptism alone (Acts 22:16; 1Peter 3:21), since this is the only item mentioned in those verses? Then you run into different combinations of two

items as necessary to salvation - “confession and belief” (Romans 10:9,10), “belief and baptism” (Mark 16:15,16), or “repentance and baptism” (Acts 2:37,38). Were the New Testament writers confused and contradictory on the matter of salvation?

Simply, No! The early church was not confused on what was involved, because they understood the “synecdoche” – a figure of speech in which any crucial item or combination of items can be mentioned and the listener or reader is supposed to think of that in context with all of the other elements stated elsewhere - the larger “understood whole” on that topic. New Testament readers were expected to learn from all that the Apostles taught and mentally understand the larger picture, rather than try to make any one verse “say it all” and argue “this-only”! Salvation involves everything that Jesus’ authorized spokesmen associated with it and, in fact, you will find over twenty different elements involved in our salvation as you search the New Testament writings.

### ***Pay attention to words and grammar***

Individual words and grammar are important! The meaning of a word or a grammar issue may be the key to the meaning of a passage - really. Sometimes, translators of Bible versions can get into a traditional way of handling something that makes it harder to catch the probable meaning. I have long believed that this has occurred with Acts 16:29,30. It has become common to translate the Greek word *kurioi* as “sirs” in verse 29 and *kurion* as “Lord” in verse 30, but this masks what I think is the heart of the conversation. When we consider the ease with which many Greek minds associated miracles with a visit by the gods (cf. Acts 14:8-15), the events (Acts 16:23-27) and how they affected the jailor in Philippi may have been very similar to what happened in Lystra. While “sirs” is a permissible translation, I think the jailor was calling them “lords (gods?)” and they corrected this in the same way they did in Lystra – “we are not Lords, but believe in the Lord Jesus and you can be saved.” I don’t think “faith only” was the message at all, but “believe in Jesus as Lord, not us!” Then, they go on to teach the jailor and his family about this Jesus (Acts 16:32-34) and how to “believe in God.”

When the topic of “end times” comes up, many are “all agog about Gog and Magog” (Russell Boatman’s phrase), but they await things that I don’t think are ever going to happen in the sense they have come to believe. Popular notions about the “tribulation” view it as a seven-year period at the end of the Church age just prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. However, the Greek word *thlipsis* (pressure) appears in places where it sounds like a larger and more general reality throughout the church age (cf. John 16:33; Acts 14:22). The NIV uses several English words to translate this one Greek word, thus making it a little harder to trace down other NT comments about it. The clincher that most people miss is in Revelation 1:9, where John plainly said (at least in Greek) that he and his readers were “fellow-partakers” in “the tribulation and kingdom” – and there is a definite article there. Whatever “the tribulation” is, John said it was a present reality in the later first century A.D. and that he and his readers were already participating in it. (to be continued)