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## HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE

### Step #6 – Interpretation (Conclusion)

**Let Prophets Interpret Their Own Prophecies** – What a wild romp some modern prophecy buffs can have as they claim to find predictions of jet planes, automobiles in Jerusalem, the Watergate Scandal, etc. in the ancient Hebrew Prophets. However, in most cases, they have manhandled the Scriptures pretty badly to attract an ignorant modern audience.

I am not going to claim that I have a clear understanding of exactly how to understand everything that Daniel or Zechariah predicted, but I do have some solid boundaries that should keep you from going too far off-track.

(1) Always allow OT prophets to interpret their own prophecies as far as they will, before you engage your imagination (and newspaper). Consider Daniel 8, a prediction of the interaction between the Persian Empire and the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great. Persia invaded Greece twice (490 & 480 B.C.) and Alexander the Great, in his conquest (336-323 B.C.), saw himself as bringing revenge on the Persians. While I have seen attempts to apply the predictions of Antiochus IV's assault on Judaism (170-142 B.C.) to some (end-of-the-Church-Age) future “antichrist,” Daniel clearly identified the events he was predicting as coming during the Persian-Greek portion of the Intertestamental Era (Daniel 8:20-21).

(2) Always give priority to the explanations of the meaning of Old Testament Prophecy given by Jesus and His Apostles, for their explanations are the only “inspired” interpretation you will get. Psalm 2 speaks of a conspiracy against God and His Messiah, God placing His Messiah on the throne anyway, then a warning for the world to honor the Son before judgment. This was interpreted for us as a prediction concerning the Jewish/Roman opposition to Jesus that led to His crucifixion (Acts 4:24-31).

(3) Always allow NT Prophets to interpret their own prophecies, where they will. When you read the book of Revelation, be sure to listen when John explains his own symbolism, such as Revelation 1:16,20; 11:3-6,8; 12:9; 17:9-13,18,10; 19:10. Then, consider parallel terms and phraseology in other parts of the Bible as an aid to understanding the symbols and pictures – what city was most often called a “harlot” by the Old Testament Prophets and what city is consistently identified as the one that is known for killing saints and prophets in the rest of the New Testament Writings (Revelation 17-18)? What did Paul say about “the mystery” in his writings that may help us to understand Revelation 10:7? What items did John associate with the sounding of the seventh angel's trumpet that might help us to identify the time/events he is thinking of (Revelation 10-12)?

(4) Finally, Keep in mind how the NT writers summarized the general thrust and focus of OT Prophecy (Luke 18:31-34; 24:25-26,45-47; Acts 3:18-26; 1Peter 1:10-12)

**Pondering the Proverbs** – The Biblical proverbs offer one line joined with another to form a poetic couplet, with the result of increasing the force of the moral. One of the first things that the reader will notice about the Proverbs is that much of the action is in how the two lines relate to each other. The key to understanding a proverb is in realizing the relationship between the two “parallel” lines.

The first type of relationship between lines is *synonymous*, where both lines are saying the same thing (ex. 12:28; 16:28; 20:18). When the two lines sound very similar, don’t try to discern some difference between them – the whole point of wording variation may be to make sure that you catch the one intended point. The alternative wording is used somewhat like we use illustrations – to explain the point in a different way. On the other hand, in the *antithetical* proverb couplet the two lines are illustrating an intended contrast to each other (ex. 10:1,5; 14:31; 15:1).

Emblematic proverbs use an emblem, illustration, type, or example where one line illustrates the other line (10:26; 11:22; 25:18,19; 27:15). Some proverbs present a “lesser to greater” lesson (15:11), while others offer a “better this than that” message (16:16; 21:9,19; 17:1). Occasionally, you will encounter what appears to be a contradiction, such as in 26:4,5 (the message - some fools you answer, some you don't)!

Keep your eyes open. From time to time, new information becomes available that really changes how we should look at something. The King James translation first came out in 1611, but for all of its poetic beauty, it was produced without the aid of the earliest and best manuscript evidence.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the KJV has actually gone through a number of changes from the 1611 original and still reads awkwardly as we move further and further away from English as it was spoken at that time.

If you compare the earliest versions of the NIV with later ones, you find that a change was made in how Acts 2:38 was rendered. Originally, the NIV translated Acts 2:38 as “repent and be baptized *so that* your sins may be forgiven,” but this changed in later editions to the traditional “*for* the forgiveness of your sins” (probably because it created too many problems for those theologies which don’t include baptism amongst the essentials associated with salvation).<sup>2</sup> The original rendering was very accurate to what was being said, but denominational theology and practice has often influenced translation. This is why the Greek word *baptidzo* has traditionally been *transliterated* into the English word “baptize” rather than *translated* as “immerse/dip.” Thus, Reformation theologies that had inherited the Roman Catholic move to validate sprinkling and pouring as “baptism” (1311 A.D.) could keep their practices as they were and define the term as a “watery initiation ceremony” instead of the specific verbal action that the Greek word indicated.

Finally, keep your eyes open and get into the Hebrew and Greek texts as much as you are able. However, a good translation will communicate God’s message – if you just read it carefully and think clearly!

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<sup>1</sup> See Jack P. Lewis’ [The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation](#) (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), pp. 41-48.

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Terry Clark for suggesting that these points should be mentioned