

Hermeneutics: The Principles for Proper Interpretation of the Bible



Harold Camping did not apply proper principles of hermeneutics in his interpretation of prophecy.

An example of wrongly dividing the Word of truth due to breaking the principles of proper interpretation of Bible prophecy.

I'm a simple guy and like to use plain language. I never expected to ever have to use scholarly theological terms such as "dispensationalism", "covenant theology", "hermeneutics," "exegesis" and "eisegesis." However, the need to explain the origins of certain false doctrines has compelled me to use those terms. I think knowing the meaning of those words can help us to understand better why several popular doctrines embraced by millions of evangelicals today are actually false.

Dispensationalism is a big bag of false doctrines formulated by John Nelson Darby in the 19th century and propagated by C.I.Scofield in the 20th century. These doctrines include a pre-tribulation rapture and the role of physical Israel in the end-time. This is why evangelicals who embrace Dispensationalism tend to support Israel and ignore the rights of the Palestinians despite the fact many of them are Christians. Many Dispensationalists may not have even heard of the term Dispensationalism! This was true of me. I followed certain doctrines of Dispensationalism for three decades without knowing it was called Dispensationalism. The word "Futurism" which is part of Dispensationalism is more well known. Some of my friends call themselves Futurists. I didn't know that word either. And why? Because until I did my own research on the Internet, I never knew there were any alternative interpretations of end-time Bible prophecy.

The alternative to Dispensationalism / Futurism is called Covenant Theology. Think of it as plain Protestant theology before Darby. Covenant Theology is taught by mainstream Protestants such as Presbyterians, and Dispensationalism is popular among Baptists and Pentecostals. It surprises me that so many Baptist preachers teach it because the Baptists claim to teach the Bible only, not the doctrines of man. And yet John MacArthur teaches false end-time doctrines as if they were the Word of God! Covenant Theology does not agree with Dispensationalism.

Interpretation of Bible Scripture is known as *hermeneutics*. It's derived from the Greek word ἑρμηνεύω, hermēneuō, meaning to "translate, interpret". Hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of interpretation of biblical text. Below I list a set of basic principles of hermeneutics. In the

beginning, I called them “rules” but now I think using the word “principles” is more appropriate. After all, who makes rules? Man does. Who makes principles? Only God does. Why do I say that? Because a true principle will not change over time. A principle is part of the basic fabric of our God-created universe. When we follow a true principle, we benefit from it. When we ignore a true principle, we suffer consequences.

An example of a principle working either for or against you is holding on to important Internet login information to a service you are paying for. If you lose that login information, you won’t be able to renew the contract for the service. You have only yourself to blame for forgetting and losing important login information. It means you didn’t think it important enough to write it down somewhere safe to be able to retrieve it again years later. It means you violated the principle of being “diligent in business” as the Bible teaches us to be.

This list of principles is by no means comprehensive. You may think of others. The point I want to emphasize is ignorance or disregard for principles of the proper interpretation of Scripture results in false doctrines.

Basic principles of hermeneutics:

1. Let Scripture interpret Scripture. Scripture is always the best interpreter of other Scripture.
2. The meaning of a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph must be derived from the context.
3. Interpret the Scriptures knowing that the goal in interpretation is not to discover hidden, secret truths or to be unique in your interpretation. In other words, read *out of* Scripture using the method called “exegesis”, to read out of, and not put your own ideas into Scripture using the method called “eisegesis”, reading into Scripture what is not there.
4. Interpret the Scriptures literally unless you have good reason to believe that they are figurative.
5. Do not interpret Scripture in light of personal experience but interpret experience in the light of Scripture.
6. When interpreting the Scriptures, investigate the meanings of keywords in their original languages.
7. Interpret the Scriptures bearing in mind that many commands, directives, and duties were made to an individual and not all people.
8. Interpret the Scriptures bearing in mind that Biblical examples are authoritative only when supported by a command.
9. Interpret the Scriptures keeping in mind that Christians are living under the New Covenant instituted by Jesus, not the Old Covenant that God gave to Israel.

All false interpretation of Scripture is the result of breaking one or more of these principles!

Let’s apply those principles to the popular interpretation of Daniel 9:27

which is based on Dispensationalism.

Daniel 9:27 And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

The popular contemporary interpretation of Daniel 9:27 based on Dispensationalism says,

"The Antichrist shall make a treaty with the Jews, the leaders of the nation of Israel, and the leaders of Islam and other leaders of the world's religions for 7 years sometime in the unknown future. This will end the war between Israel and the Palestinians and allow the Temple of Solomon to be rebuilt which will enable the daily animal sacrifices for sin to be resumed. After 3 and a half years, the Antichrist will stop the daily sacrifice, stand in the Temple, proclaim himself to be God, set up his image in the Temple, command the people of the world to worship it, and persecute and kill all those who don't."

The standard Protestant interpretation of Daniel 9:27 based on Covenant Theology says,

Jesus Christ, the Messiah, shall confirm the Covenant of grace God made with Abraham with the people of Israel for 7 years from the beginning of Jesus's ministry which began in 27 AD to the stoning of Stephen in 34 AD which was the start of persecution of Christians by the Jews. In the middle of the 7 years, Jesus was crucified and became the Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrifice for sins. This meant the need for further animal sacrifices and oblations ended. Jesus will cause the Roman army to destroy both the Temple and Jerusalem to put an end to the Jews' Christ-less religion as punishment for Israel's rejection of their Messiah.

Wow!!! What a difference in interpretation! How can they be so different? Could it be that the Covenant Theology interpretation is following the principles of hermeneutics and the one based on Dispensationalism is not? Let's find out!

Daniel 9:27 starts out,

"And he..."

Who is "he"? Rule #2 of the list of principles of hermeneutics says, "The meaning of a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph must be derived from the context." A pronoun can only be identified from the context it is used.

Daniel 9:25 Know therefore and understand, that from the going

forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the **Messiah the Prince** shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.

26 And after threescore and two weeks shall **Messiah be cut off**, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.

The context talks about the Messiah. Nowhere in the verses preceding verse 27 talk about the Antichrist. The interpretation based on Dispensationism broke principle #2.

"...confirm the covenant with many..."

What is "the covenant"? The context of the chapter of Daniel 9 tells us!

Daniel 9:4 And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping **the covenant** and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;

From the context of the entire Bible, the covenant of verse 4 refers to the covenant that God made with Abraham and his seed.

Genesis 17:9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep **my covenant** therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.

Notice that both verses 4 and 27 in Daniel chapter 9 use the definite article "the" before covenant. Modern translations use the indefinite article "a", and many of them don't use the word "confirm" but say "make" instead. The modern translation and interpretation of Daniel 9:27 is based on eisegesis, meaning reading into God's Word what the translator *thinks* it means! The Holy Spirit-led translators of the King James version used the words confirm and the definite article for covenant because they knew the standard Protestant Covenant theology of the verse. Jesus in His ministry to Israel confirmed the covenant of grace through belief in God's Word that God made with Abraham.

We can see that the modern interpretation of "the covenant" being a treaty made in the unknown future is breaking the first two principles of hermeneutics, namely, let Scripture interpret Scripture, and the meaning of a word must be derived from the context. It's also breaking principle #6 which says, "investigate the meanings of keywords in their original languages." The Hebrew word used is *gabar*, which means to strengthen or confirm, not make.

...in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to

cease...

This is talking about daily animal sacrifices in the Temple during the time of Jesus. Dispensationalism says this is talking about the *resumption of sacrifices* in a *future* temple rebuilt in the end-time. Nowhere in the Bible is there any mention of a *resumption* of animal sacrifices in the Temple! And nowhere does it say the Temple which was destroyed in 70 AD will ever be rebuilt. There is no prophecy anywhere in the Scriptures about that. Christians who follow Dispensationalism are only *assuming* it must be rebuilt! They say, "How can the Antichrist stop the daily sacrifice unless the Temple has been rebuilt and the ceremony of animal sacrifices have been resumed?" You see, they are basing their end-time doctrine on false assumptions. This is breaking principle #3.

Covenant Theology says Daniel 9:27 is all about the Messiah, the first advent of Christ, and Christ's death on the cross was the final sacrifice for sins. This interpretation is in accordance with principle #1 which says, "Let Scripture interpret Scripture." What Scripture confirms the Covenant Theology interpretation? Plenty! Here's one:

Hebrews 7:27 Who **needeth not daily**, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for **this he did once, when he offered up himself**.

...and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

Dispensationalists say this is talking about the Battle of Armageddon, Christ against the Antichrist. Again, this is a violation of principle #3. Covenant Theology says this is talking about the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem and in accordance with principle #2 which says, "Let Scripture interpret Scripture." Verse 26 and Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 all clearly talk about the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem by the Roman army in 70 AD. And why did God allow that to happen? To show the world that Judaism as a religion is over! The blood of animal sacrifices is not sufficient to cleanse away all our sins!

Hebrews 10:8 Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law;
9 Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.
10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of **the body of Jesus Christ once for all**.

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