

## TWISTED SCRIPTURE?

### E. Methods Used in this Study

#### E1. Perspective: Strict Hermeneutic

We can take solace in God's word. The more we study His word, the more we realize that from the beginning His plan was revealed<sup>i</sup>. From the beginning God has told us the end<sup>ii</sup>, that we may know Him<sup>iii</sup>. With this assurance of things to come, God has given us His word to present His plan before it comes to pass. We gain additional insight from Amos 3:7,

*“Surely the Lord God does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.”*

So it is, that we should not be surprised of the consistency of Scripture telling us of these things to come. For, God's word will be fulfilled without fail. Therefore, we should take His word very seriously.

In our venture to study Revelation, as with the rest of Scripture, we quickly realize that to take God's word seriously we must decide how to best deal with the writer's use of literal and figurative language. If we take the text too literally, we run the risk of interpreting nonsense. For example, from the context of Exodus chapter 32, we can tell that the people were being obstinate, unwilling to follow God's way. But, God does not describe them using only the word for hard: 'Qasheh'. He adds a more colorful and descriptive expression for the people. God calls them

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<sup>i</sup> GEN 3:15, I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; *He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.*"

<sup>ii</sup> JUDE 1:14-15, Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, *the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints,* <sup>15</sup>*to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.*"

<sup>iii</sup> ISA 48:2-3, they call themselves after the holy city, And lean on the God of Israel; *The Lord of hosts is His name:* <sup>3</sup>*I have declared the former things from the beginning; They went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass.*

stiff-necked<sup>iv</sup>: ‘Qasheh `oreph’. So, we must ask if this means that the necks of the people were literally hard in Exodus 32:8-9,

“They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' " <sup>9</sup>And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and *indeed it is a stiff-necked people!*”

For, we find the same Hebrew word, Qasheh, is used to describe the hardened heart of Pharaoh in Exodus 7:3,

*“I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.”*

God further describes the people as being so hardened that the very sinews of their necks are as stiff as iron, in Isaiah 48:4,

*“Because I knew that you were obstinate, And your neck was an iron sinew, And your brow bronze”*

Obviously, taking the words ‘Qasheh `oreph’ literally describes the people as suffering from some medical condition stiffening their necks, or perhaps grotesquely transforming them into metal golems. Nonsense either way, therefore, this must be a figure of speech describing the immovable stubbornness of the people.

In contrast to an ‘all literal’ interpretation of Scripture, our tendency is to take the text too figuratively. But if Scripture can be twisted, as Peter warns us<sup>v</sup>, to the point that the followers face destruction, then we should take extreme caution in allegorizing the Bible beyond God’s intention. For, the more we lean toward figurative interpretation, the further we get from a clear picture, because a passage could mean one thing to one person and be interpreted differently by another. It is

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<sup>iv</sup> קשה = Qasheh, kaw-sheh', Strong# 7186: 1. hard, cruel, severe, obstinate; 1a. hard, difficult; 1b. severe; 1c. fierce, intense, vehement; 1d. stubborn, stiff of neck, stiff-necked; 1e. rigorous (of battle).

עֹרֵף = `oreph, o-ref', Strong# 6203: 1. neck, back of the neck, back; 1a. back of the neck; of fleeing foe; of apostasy (fig.); 1b. stiff of neck, obstinate (fig.).

<sup>v</sup> 2PET 3:15-16, consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation-as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, <sup>16</sup>as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which *untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*

prudent, therefore, to recognize the precedents set by the people in Scripture interpreting God's word for us. Jesus does this in Luke 20:34-38,

“Jesus answered and said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. <sup>35</sup>“But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; <sup>36</sup>“nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. <sup>37</sup>“But *even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised*, when he called the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ <sup>38</sup>“For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.”

Thus, Jesus illuminates our understanding to a passage we may have read hundreds of times and not realized the deeper meaning of the text. We can have confidence in Jesus interpreting Scripture for us, as he is the Messiah. Explained for us in John 4:25-26,

“The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, *He will tell us all things.*” <sup>26</sup>Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

Indeed, if more ‘Christ-ians’ systematically learned all that Jesus said, realizing that his authority<sup>vi</sup> is from the Most High, there would be less confusion regarding Scripture<sup>vii</sup>, and thus less division between us.

There are others in Scripture we can find interpreting God's word for us, too. For example, those who understood prophecy by reading from Jeremiah. One such person is Daniel, who records his reaction in Daniel 9:1-2,

“In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans- <sup>2</sup>in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by

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<sup>vi</sup> JOHN 12:46-50, “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. <sup>47</sup>“And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. <sup>48</sup>“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. <sup>49</sup>“For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. <sup>50</sup>“And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.”

<sup>vii</sup> EPH 4:17-21, This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, <sup>18</sup>having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; <sup>19</sup>who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. <sup>20</sup>But you have not so learned Christ, <sup>21</sup>if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus.

*the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.”*

Daniel’s interpretation of Jeremiah prophecy is a literal 70 years. He knew that this time was nearing completion, which moved Daniel to record his most earnest prayer. The reason for the exile was to fulfill God’s word, which was also given to Jeremiah, and explained for us in 2 Chronicles 36:20-23,

“those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, <sup>21</sup>*to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah*, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.”

The end of the 70 years of exile was dramatic as the Persians were able to take Babylon without a battle. Again the words written by the prophet Jeremiah are fulfilled in the proclamation made by Cyrus, as found in Ezra 1:1-2,

“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, *that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled*, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, <sup>2</sup>Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah.”

The literalness of Jeremiah’s prophecy is surprising. Yet, when we consider that Cyrus is called by name in the Book of Isaiah<sup>viii</sup>, we are astounded by the perfect attention to detail in God’s word.

We also find in the New Testament that Jeremiah had written concerning these times, as well. However, we realize that not all prophecy is as so clearly literal as the examples above. For, we learn in Matthew 2:16-18,

“Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to

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<sup>viii</sup> Isaiah 45:1-3, Thus says the Lord to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held-To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: <sup>2</sup>I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. <sup>3</sup>I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, *That you may know that I, the Lord, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel.*

the time which he had determined from the wise men. <sup>17</sup>*Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:* <sup>18</sup>"A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more."

Without study and instruction, we might miss the passage quoted from Jeremiah as being prophecy. Having the knowledge of the literal location of Ramah and being informed of the literal Rachel would not help us in our understanding, either. For, without the Holy Spirit's help in the interpretation, we would miss the subtleties of God's wording and use of idioms here.

There are dangers in going to either extreme: either reading Scripture as all literal or as all figurative. For, neither extreme is correct. Instead, all that is literal should be taken literally, and all that is figurative should be taken figuratively. Stating this should be unnecessary and merely be common sense, but good sense is no longer common. Therefore, those who take the Bible seriously will begin to recognize the figures of speech incorporated in the text and recognize when a literal interpretation becomes nonsensical. A crucial part of studying Revelation, then, is becoming familiar with the use of the idioms found there. For, throughout Scripture, idioms – or, figures of speech – are conspicuous due to their consistency of use and meaning. This remains true despite the culture and language differences over the many years of the composition of the Bible. So, as we study Revelation, it is imperative that we learn the context in which the figures of speech were originally used, and how to best interpret them, that we may better our understanding of God's complete word.