

Rule 10: Similitudes

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Hermeneutics: How to Read and Understand the Bible

RULE #10: The Prophets Used Similitudes.

- I. Prophetic language is usually symbolic. Avoid literalism carefully. Look for figurative words.
 - A. Scripture plainly teaches prophecies were generally given by signs or figures, not literal or express statements easily known (Hos 12:10; Rev 1:1; John 12:33; 21:19; 1 Pet 1:11).
 1. **Similitude.** A person or thing resembling, or having the likeness of, some other person or thing. The form, likeness, or image of some person or thing. A sign or symbol; the symbolic representation of something.
 2. A similitude is from *simile*, a comparison of one thing with another in rhetoric.
 3. **Signify.** To be a sign or symbol of; to represent, betoken, mean.
 4. To signify is from *sign*, something to convey an intimation or communicate some idea. When you signify something, you are not stating it expressly.
 5. These five references are of great importance in our prophetic hermeneutic.
 6. Metaphors are multiplied in prophetic language; we should expect and see them.
 - B. Consider the first prophecy in Scripture. God warned Satan of enmity between him and the woman, and between their seeds (Gen 3:15). Consider the symbolic language used to create a word picture of a nuisance versus a mortal wound, requiring interpretation.
 - C. Consider the prophecies about the land to Abraham and their various fulfillments.
 1. The land of promise was never literally inherited by Abraham, but by his family.
 2. The land of promise was understood by Abraham as heaven (Hebrews 11:8-16).
 - D. Consider a land flowing with milk and honey promised to Israel in Egypt (Exodus 3:8).
 1. Should we do a chemical analysis of milk and honey to look for hidden truth?
 2. Should we back up the food chain from honey to bees and see a fearful place?
 3. Or should we take the metaphor as a word picture of a delightful land?
 - E. An emphasis on the literal interpretation of prophecy, such as by Dispensationalists and Scofield Fundamentalists and Futurists, is patently foolish in light of these Scriptures.
 1. Lions and lambs in Isaiah 11 are assumed to be a new animal kingdom! Even when clearly describing the gospel dispensation of peace brought by our Lord.
 2. Shaking heavens and earth in Haggai must be a literal vibration of the universe!
 3. When they read Elijah in Malachi 4:5, they can only think of the hairy prophet!
 4. "Great and dreadful day of the Lord," also Mal 4:5, must be the final judgment!

5. The thousand years in Revelation 20:2 must be exactly one thousand years!
- F. Cataclysmic events in a social, political, or religious realm will be shown by a description of such events in the natural realm.
1. Apocalyptic language is more figurative and metaphorical than most prophecies.
 2. Consider Isaiah 13. The “day of the Lord” considered here is God’s judgment upon Babylon by the Medes and Persians. This is the political overthrow of the greatest empire in the history of the world, and so the prophet describes it in spectacular fashion as the overthrow of the natural universe. Consider the “stars of heaven” (v.10), the “sun” (v.10), the “moon” (v.10), the “world” (v.11), the “heavens” (v.13), and the “earth” (v.13). Consider also the absolute and spectacular expressions used to describe the force, pain, consternation, and irremediable judgment of the kingdom.
 3. Consider several passages that refer to the sun, moon, and stars with figurative and symbolic senses pertaining to His saints (Eccl 12:1-2; Is 5:3,30; 58:8-11; 59:9-10; 60:15-20; Jer 4:23-28; Amos 5:18-20; 8:9; Micah 3:6-12; Zep 1:14-15).
 4. Consider several passages that refer to the sun, moon, and stars with figurative and symbolic senses pertaining to pagan nations (Isaiah 34:1-6; Ezek 32:7-8).
 5. Consider Acts 2. The “day of the Lord” was the coming destruction of Israel and Jerusalem by Roman armies. But prior to this event God was going to begin the overthrow of Old Testament worship and replace it with New Testament worship. A significant event included here was the pouring out of the Holy Ghost upon men. The prophet Joel described this tremendous religious upheaval by using “heaven” (v.19), “earth” (v.19), “blood, fire, and vapour of smoke” (v.19), “sun” (v.20), “moon” (v.20), and “blood” (v.20). Peter expressly tells us these terms described the day of Pentecost and what followed (2:16).
- II. Use older prophecies to gain understanding for interpreting more recent or future prophecies.
- A. Many older prophecies have their fulfillments described in Scripture, so that we can readily ascertain the proper interpretation of various symbols. By studying Daniel in light of the fulfillment of its prophecies, we have a great head start on understanding Revelation. To even attempt Revelation without a good understanding of Daniel is folly.
 - B. Many older prophecies have their fulfillments described in secular history, as Josephus so well shows the fulfillment of prophecies pertaining to the destruction of Jerusalem. By studying these prophecies and their fulfillments, we can learn more about the proper interpretation of prophetic symbols.
- III. Remember that the purpose of prophecy is to confirm or reprove us when the event occurs, rather than give us a vehicle for speculation (Is 48:5; John 13:19; 14:29; 16:4).
- A. The Futurists have created a blight on Christianity for their wild and fanciful schemes of coming events from obscure passages of the Old Testament and the book of Revelation.
 - B. William Miller of the Adventists disgraced Christianity with his “Great Disappointment” in 1844, when he had promised the coming of the Lord.
 - C. The speculations about the number of the Beast and the date of Christ’s coming are Legion, with the

Russellites leading the way with the most false predictions of all.

D. A wise Bible student will love the purpose of prophecy to glorify God (Is 14:24-27; 41:21-26; 42:8-12; 43:8-13; 44:6-9; 46:5-13; 48:1-8).

IV. We only accept double-fulfillments where the Scriptures plainly declare them or justify them.

A. Abraham's seed includes his descendants, but Jesus Christ is the chief aim (Gal 3:16).

1. Note the plural pronouns referring to the singular seed (Genesis 15:13-16).

2. It is our duty to see both descendants and Christ by reading wisely (Gen 22:17).

B. David's seed includes both Solomon and the Lord Jesus Christ (II Samuel 7:12-17).

1. David knew that his seed included prophecies of the Messiah (Acts 2:30).

2. But we also see a seed that was established before his very eyes, Solomon.

C. If we allow or promote double-fulfillments, then why not encourage triple-fulfillments?

D. If we allow or promote double-fulfillments, then we can create any fulfillment we wish.

E. If we allow or promote double-fulfillments, the intent of the prophecy will be neglected.

V. What about Matthew 24:27-31 and the graphic expressions contained in our Lord's prophecy?

A. Many divide this prophecy at varied places to speak of 70 A.D. and the second coming.

B. But, our Lord limited the fulfillment of His remarks to that generation (Matt 24:32-35).

C. But, the symbols used can be found in other prophecies pertaining to similar judgments.

D. But, Joel and Peter used similar language to describe the same events (Acts 2:16-21).

E. But, limiting it to Jerusalem's end fits other similar prophecies by Jesus (Matt 16:28).

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