

How to Study the Bible  
(Lesson 11)

Introduction:

1. The Bible teaches in Ephesians 3:4 that it can be understood when it is read.
2. To properly understand the Scriptures we must "rightly divide" them (2 Timothy 2:15).
3. One of the challenges in rightly dividing the Scriptures is recognizing and interpreting "figurative language."
  - a. Figurative language is "language in which the words have other meanings than their usual meaning but in which there is some similarity between the common meaning and the special meaning."
  - b. An example of figurative language is found in Matthew 5:29-30.

Discussion:

- I. THE BIBLE CONTAINS VARIOUS KINDS OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE
  - A. Parable: "a story by means of which something in real life is used to teach a spiritual lesson" (Luke 18:9-14).
  - B. Allegory: "similar to the parable, except that real facts of history are used to teach a lesson" (Galatians 4:21-5:1).
  - C. Fable: "has the same form as the parable, but involves events which could never happen" (Judges 9:7-15).
  - D. Simile: "a simple statement of comparison rather than being given in story form. The words 'like' or 'as' are used and are the signs of a simile" (1 Peter 1:24).
  - E. Metaphor: "identical to the simile except that the words 'like' or 'as' are omitted" (John 10:9).
  - F. Metonymy: "a figure of speech in which one word is replaced by another which is closely related to it" (1 Corinthians 11:26).
  - G. Hyperbole: "a figurative statement in which the actual facts are somewhat exaggerated for sake of emphasis" (Luke 2:1).
- II. INTERPRETING FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE
  - A. Some helpful guidelines:
    1. As with all Scriptures, figurative passages must be interpreted:
      - a. in their contexts
      - b. without preconceived ideas and beliefs.
    2. Look for the "similarity between the literal meaning of the words and the idea to be conveyed by their figurative use."
    3. Figurative statements must not be interpreted so as to contradict literal passages.
    4. Figurative passages must not be over-interpreted.
    5. Comparing figurative statements with other similar statements is helpful.
  - B. A practical exercise:
    1. A portion of Peter's sermon on Pentecost is recorded in Acts 2:16-21.
      - a. In vs.19-20, he mentioned some great wonders that God would show in heaven.
      - b. Is this literal or figurative language?
    2. Additional references help us understand Peter's statements:
      - a. Joel 2:28-32 (1:6, 15; 2:1, 11)
      - b. Isaiah 13:10 (vs.1, 6, 17-19)
      - c. Ezekiel 32:7 (vs.1-3, 11-12)
      - d. Matthew 24:29-30
    3. What do these passages have in common that will help us understand Acts 2:19-20?