



**Operation Barnabas, Gal 2:13; Clarification of the Basic Principle: Tyndale & Ramm;  
Credibility of the Basic Principle: All Prophecy Is Fulfilled Literally**

In listing twelve controlling principles of Augustine, Ramm includes the following:

(ii) Although the literal and historical are not the end of Scripture we must hold them in high regard. Not all of the Bible is allegorical by any means, and much of it is both literal and allegorical. Augustine's great theological works indicate that the literal method was employed far more than he admitted on paper.

(iii) Scripture has more than one meaning and therefore the allegorical method is proper. The supreme test to see whether a passage was allegorical was that of love. If the literal made for dissension, then the passage was to be allegorized. Besides this he had seven other somewhat farfetched rules for allegorizing the Scripture. He did work on the principle that the Bible had a hidden meaning, and so in his allegorical interpretations he was frequently as fanciful as the rest of the Fathers. (Ramm, p. 36.)

At this point, I must issue the warning that Richard Lenski gave of the bad influence that the Apostle Peter had on Barnabas. Remarking on Galatians 2:13 ("And the rest of the Jews joined Peter in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy."), Lenski states:

Barnabas is a warning to us. The church is full of great names that are still constantly quoted in support of some false doctrine, false practice, false principle, false interpretation. Their very names stop lesser men from testing what they advocate and so they, like Barnabas are carried away. [R. C. H. Lenski. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians.* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1946), p. 98.]

## 6. Clarification of the Basic Principle

1. Clarification of the basic principle of literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutics is the subject of Dr. Radmacher's next paragraph:

The father of the English Bible, William Tyndale (1494-1536), gave a striking statement after fifteen hundred years of writers wandering in the wastelands of allegorical interpretation with pitifully little interruption. The Reformation leaders protested the medieval exegetes who, following Origen, regarded the literal sense of Scripture as unimportant and unedifying. With the sound of antiquity, William Tyndale declared:

You shall understand, therefore, that the Scripture has but one sense, which is the literal sense. And that literal sense is the root and ground of all, and the anchor that never fails, whereunto if you cleave you can never err nor go out of the way. And if you leave the literal sense, you can not but go out of the way.



Nevertheless, the Scripture uses proverbs, similitudes, riddles, or allegories, as all other speeches do; but that which the proverb, similitude, riddle, or allegory signifies is ever the literal sense, which you must seek out diligently. [Quoted by J. I. Packer. *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1959), p. 103.]

Behind every figure of speech is a literal meaning, and by means of the historical-grammatical exegesis of the text, these literal meanings are to be sought out. As Ramm states:

The literal meaning of the figurative expression is the proper or natural meaning as understood by students of language. Whenever a figure is used, its literal meaning is precisely that meaning determined by grammatical studies of figures. Hence, figurative interpretation does not pertain to the spiritual or mystical sense of Scripture, but to the literal sense. [Ramm, *Interpretation*, p. 141.]

The Syrian school of interpretation in Antioch in the early centuries of the church asserted that literal interpretation is both plain-literal and figurative-literal. The plain-literal sentence is one of straightforward prose and a sentence such as "The eye of the Lord is upon thee" is a figurative-literal sentence. [Ramm, *Interpretation*, p. 49.] According to the Alexandrians the literal meaning of this sentence would attribute an actual eye to God. But the Syrian school denied this to be the literal meaning of the sentence. The literal meaning is about God's omniscience. In other words, literalism is not the same as letterism.

## 7. Credibility of the Basic Principle

1. In this section Dr. Radmacher offers examples of how those from the allegorist camp confess that if the Bible is taken literally then there will be future earthly fulfillments of prophecies to the Jews.
2. This paragraph required us to define the three approaches to biblical eschatology with specific reference to the Rapture, Tribulation, Second Advent and Millennium. We defined these three views from:

Douglas, J. D. (gen. ed.). *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 36; 794; 799:

**AMILLENNIALISM.** The amillennialist denies a thousand-year reign of Christ. He stresses that the Apocalypse (the book of Revelation) normally treats numbers symbolically. Some amillennialists hold the expression to refer to the Church's rest from spiritual conflict beyond death. Most apply it, however, to her present victory over Satan in Christ crucified and exalted. Many Reformed and Lutheran theologians hold this view, and elements of it can be traced in Augustine. (p. 36)

**POSTMILLENNIALISM.** An optimistic type of theology which predicts a "golden age," a Christianized millennium of predominantly human achievement **before the Second Advent** and the subsequent eternal realm. The prophetic form of it is devout, the liberal form purely humanistic. (p. 794)

**PREMILLENNIALISM.** The view that asserts that Christ will come a second time before the 1,000 years of His millennial rule and places the rapture of saints, the tribulation, and Second Advent **before the Millennium** in prophetic time sequence, with the brief release of bound Satan and the Last Judgment afterward. This view was held by early Church Fathers until Origen and Augustine modified it, and it has been revived in the modern era by J. N. Darby and C. I. Scofield, among others. (p. 799)



3. With these definitions in mind we can address the question with which Dr. Radmacher opens this paragraph of his paper: "When one applies the principle of literal interpretation consistently to prophecy, what is the result?"
4. He answers his question by quoting from the writings of a postmillennialist, Loraine Boettner \bet' ner\:

It is generally agreed that if the prophecies are taken literally, they do foretell a restoration of the nation of Israel in the land of Palestine with the Jews having a prominent place in that kingdom ... . [Loraine Boettner, "A Postmillennial Response," *The Meaning of the Millennium*, p. 95.]

5. An amillennialist, Floyd Hamilton concurred:

Now we must frankly admit that a literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the premillennialist pictures. [Floyd E. Hamilton. *The Basis of the Millennial Faith*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), p. 38.]

But does such a consistently literal approach to prophecy have any strong support in Scripture? The late professor of Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary, Martin J. Wyngaarden, in his study of the scope of "Spiritualization" in Scripture, begins his first chapter with the "Wonders of Jehovah's Prophecy". He asks the question, "Were any Old Testament prophecies fulfilled literally?" and then proceeds:

Few things can so stimulate one's faith in the revelation of God as the fulfillments of prophecy. Here we have, first of all, those fulfilled in Christ's ministry, in his sacrifice and resurrection. But there are also many others fulfilled in the history of great cities and mighty nations, in a most remarkable manner. The fulfillments are so precise, unmistakable, important, and far-reaching as to recall the words of Isaiah, addressed to those inclined to reject Jehovah's predictions in:

**Isaiah 41:21** - "Present your case," the Lord says. "Bring forward your strong arguments," the King of Jacob says.

**v. 22** - Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place; as for the former events, declare what they were, that we may consider them, and know their outcome.

... and then we find many literal fulfillments of prophecy, in connection with Israel as the theocratic nation, and in connection with the surrounding nations referred to by the prophets serving under the theocracy—the Old Testament kingdom of Jehovah. *Now the very remarkable thing is that those fulfillments are so exceedingly literal.* [Martin J. Wyngaarden. *The Future of the Kingdom in Prophecy and Fulfillment: A Study of the Scope of the "Spiritualization" in Scripture*. (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), pp. 13-14.]



It would seem that, without theological predispositions, one would conclude that the prophecies which have been fulfilled are to form the pattern in the interpretation of prophecy that has not yet been fulfilled. If we have seen that so long as we have the history of the Jews to compare with the prophecies concerning them—that is, up to this time—a certain mode of interpreting those prophecies is rendered indispensable, then why not simply continue that same mode of interpretation, when we have prophecy alone not yet illustrated by history?

If prophecies concerning the Jews, delivered two or three thousand years ago, be proved, by the history of the interim up to our own days, to have been fulfilled in the literal sense, and, therefore, to demand a literal interpretation, upon what principle can it be alleged that other prophecies, delivered in similar language by the same prophets, are not to be similarly interpreted after our days?

Allow me to paraphrase this last paragraph for you: If the pattern of prophetic fulfillment has been literal so far why would the fulfillment of those that remain not also be literal?

The logic resulting from a study of the history of fulfillment is obvious. Why then would anyone depart from it? Albertus Pieters states:

No one defends or employs the allegorizing method of exegesis. Calvin and the other great Bible students of the Reformation saw clearly that the method was wrong and taught a now generally accepted "grammatical-historical" interpretation, so far as the Scriptures in general are concerned. That they retain the spiritualizing [notice the word game] method in expounding many of the prophecies was because they found themselves forced to do so in order to be faithful to the New Testament. [Albertus Pieters, "Darbyism vs. The Historic Christian Faith," *Calvin Forum* 2 (May 1936), pp. 225-8.]

One might question here whether it is faithfulness to the New Testament which forces this deductive principle of spiritualization (i.e., allegorization), or whether it might more correctly be stated that it is faithfulness to a particular theological interpretation of the New Testament. If the latter is the case, then one might certainly question the wisdom of overthrowing the literal interpretation which is a proven biblical principle, for the unproven deductive principle of spiritualization.

At any rate the use of a dual hermeneutic which applies the literal hermeneutic to the great majority of Scripture and the spiritualizing hermeneutic to a *portion* of prophecy, namely, that portion which is future only and not even all of that, has its dangers. It is easy to see how such a method of interpretation could easily get out of hand. For example, while the evangelical believes that the prophecy of the second coming of Christ will have a future literal fulfillment, the liberal theologian applying the spiritualizing principle erases any hope of a literal return of the Lord to the earth for his saints.

Because of this possibility, therefore, the evangelical who posits a dual hermeneutic protects its excessive use by certain regulative principles in addition to his deductive spiritualizing principle. Hamilton states:



But if we reject the literal method of interpretation as the universal rule of the interpretation of all prophecies, how are we to interpret them? Well, of course, there are many passages in prophecy that were meant to be taken literally.

In fact a good working rule to follow is that the literal interpretation of the prophecy is to be accepted unless (a) the passages contain obviously figurative language, or (b) unless the New Testament gives authority for interpreting them in other than the literal sense, or (c) unless a literal interpretation would produce a contradiction with truths, principles, or factual statements contained in the non-symbolic books of the New Testament. [Hamilton, *Basis*, pp. 53-4.]

If one examines each of these suggested regulative principles carefully, he will discern that none of them is necessitated by a proper understanding of literal interpretation.