

THE LITERAL-GRAMMATICAL-HISTORICAL METHOD OF INTERPRETATION OF THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

*“Strive to present yourself approved to God, a teacher not put to shame, accurately and skilfully exegeting the Word with reference to its truth.”
II Timothy 2:15*

Interpreting the Christian Scriptures using of the Literal-Grammatical-Historical Method means that all interpretation is strictly based on the authority of the words as they were originally written by men inspired directly by God. In order to gain an accurate understanding of what these writers meant to say, their words must be interpreted according to the strict rules of academic and literary study.

In fact, in order to gain an accurate understanding of any writing, it must be interpreted according to the normal and practical rules of language and literature. Although the Bible is a supreme and unique book, the method of interpretation is no different, since it conveys divine thought about history and God’s plan for humanity through the medium of words. Therefore, one can only expect to correctly ascertain the teachings of the Bible by systematically examining the literal meaning of the words, sentences and paragraphs found in its books.

In providing us with a written record of His Word, it is only logical that God clearly and most certainly intended for us to understand its meaning and thereby gain a knowledge of the divine viewpoint about history and life recorded therein. Our objective, therefore, in any study of the Word of God, is to ascertain what it actually and literally means, rather than what we would like it to mean. To literally interpret the Scriptures means to explain the original sense of the writer according to the normal, customary and proper usage of words and language. Although it is common for words to have various meanings and senses, a word in a certain grammatical context should normally possess only one intended sense or meaning.

We can accurately interpret the Bible only through careful study of its contextual and historical settings. As with any responsible study of literature, knowing the background and circumstances of the writings is vital to understanding the author’s intended meaning. As a result, scholars must study the life and times of both the author and audience. Knowing this principle leads us to the logical conclusion that examining the Scriptures also demands a thorough and conscientious study of the historical backdrop in order to gain a full understanding of God’s inspired Word.

Using these guidelines to study and gain an understanding of the Scriptures requires discipline and objectivity. The Literal-Grammatical-Historical Method demands that the exegesis, explanation and interpretation of the text, must be as free as possible from preconceptions. When the student forsakes the literal, grammatical and historical context of Scripture, he unavoidably pollutes the true meanings with inaccuracies based on human viewpoint, modern tradition and religious taboo. Only by carefully and scrupulously measuring each word and phrase against the literal meaning, grammatical context and historical background, can the scholar truly gain an understanding of the Bible. Studying the Scripture out of context leads students to false interpretations which cannot be supported academically.

The Literal-Grammatical-Historical Method applies the scholarly science of literary interpretation in order to gain a clear understanding of the original meaning intended by the writer. Only by ascertaining the Biblical writer’s true message, may we understand the sense of the message of God to mankind recorded in the written Word of God -the Bible.

“And they read aloud clearly in the Book of the Law of God, and they gave the sense, and caused (them) to understand the reading.”

Nehemiah 8:8