



Scripture Study Course 2013 – Part 3

Daily Study – Readings and Meditations

Week 3

Interpreting Scripture Spiritually

- Morning Meditations (20-30 minutes daily): prepared by Don Schwager
 - The true bread from heaven – Psalm 78:23-24 & Exodus 16:4,15 and John 6:22-35
 - The Two Great Commandments – Deuteronomy 6:5 & Leviticus 9:18 and Matthew 22:36-40
 - Consuming Zeal for God – Zechariah 14:21 & Jeremiah 7:8-11 and John 2:13-16
 - Signs of the Return of the Lord – Daniel 9:27; 11:3; 12:11 and Matthew 24:3-28
- Readings for study (20-30 minutes daily):
 - The Spiritual Interpretation of the Bible, by Fr. Raniero Cantalemesa
 - A Guide to Discovering the Spiritual Meaning of the Scriptures, by Origen
 - Every Page of the Bible is a Hymn to Christ, by Augustine of Hippo
 - The Senses of Scripture, from the intro to the Ignatius Study Bible (2012)

The True Bread from Heaven

Exodus 16:4,15 and Psalm 78:23-25 (RSV translation)

God gave them the bread of heaven

Exodus 16:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain *bread from heaven* for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.

Exodus 16:15 When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.

Psalm 78:23-25 Yet he commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven; and he rained down upon them manna to eat, and gave them the bread of heaven. Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance.

John 6:22-35 (RSV translation)

The true bread from heaven

22 On the next day the people who remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. ²³ However, boats from Tiberias came near the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ So when the people saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal." ²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰ So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform?" ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world." ³⁴ They said to him, "Lord, give us this bread always."

35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.

Meditation questions for reflection

1. Why were the Israelites slow to understand that the manna was given to them by God as their daily *bread from heaven* (*Exodus* ?
2. Why does Jesus say "my Father gives you the *true* bread from heaven" and why does he call himself the *bread of life*?

Reflection on how Jesus interprets the Old Testament passages on the bread of heaven

NT Context: Jesus as the End-Time Manna.

Jesus' feeding of the multitude (6:1–15), which is recorded in all four Gospels and is one of the Johannine "signs" (6:26, 30), provides the occasion for his extended interchange with the crowds (6:25–58), which at some point transitions into Jesus' instruction in the synagogue at Capernaum (see 6:59). The people's immediate reaction to the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes was to recognize Jesus as the Prophet spoken of by Moses (6:14; cf. Deut. 18:15, 18) and to attempt to make him king by force (6:15). Jesus withdraws, but eventually he is found by the crowds (6:25), who engage him in further conversation.

Jesus chides people for their failure to look beyond the miracle to its "signs" character as pointing to Jesus' messianic identity (6:26–27; cf. 20:30–31). When they ask Jesus what works God requires (6:28), he responds that the only work needed is for them to believe in "the one whom God has sent" (6:29). The crowd promptly asks for a sign from Jesus that would warrant such belief, oblivious to the fact that he had just supplied such proof in the multiplication of the loaves (6:30). At this point people invoke the experience of Israel's wilderness generation at the exodus: "Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'" (6:31; see Ps. 78:24b; cf. Num. 11:7–9).

B. The OT Context of Ps. 78:24b.

The reference "He gave them bread from heaven to eat" seems to be derived from several OT passages (cf. esp. Exod. 16:4, 15; Ps. 78:23–24; 105:40; see Carson 1991: 286; Gunkel 1968: 344; Schlatter [1948: 172–73] also cites Neh. 9:15). Perhaps most relevant as a potential background for John 6:31 is the reference to the giving of manna in Ps. 78:23–24 (Menken 1996a: 47–54), where it is part of a recital of wilderness events during Israel's exodus (vv. 12–39). Verses 12–16 speak of God's gracious and wondrous deeds, while vv. 17–20 recount Israel's rebellion, balanced in ten statements each (Tate 1990: 290, citing Campbell). Verses 21–22 describe God's wrath kindled by the Israelites' lack of trust in his saving power.

Nevertheless, as 78:23–31 proceed to narrate, God still "rained" (78:24, 27) down manna, "the grain of heaven," as well as meat on the Israelites. Interestingly, in this section God's gracious provision is intermingled with his judgment on the unbelieving Israelites (Tate 1990: 291). Because the wilderness generation improperly "tested God" (78:18, 41, 56), provoking him and rebelling against him, God struck them at the very moment when they were feeding on the food they had craved (78:29–31; cf. Num. 11:33–34). This draws a stark contrast between the goodness and long-suffering nature of God and the ingratitude and sinful unbelief of his chosen people. Psalm 78 continues to recount subsequent events in Israel's history and concludes with a reference to David, the shepherd and servant of God and of his people.¹

¹ Beale, G. K., & Carson, D. A. (2007). *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (445–446). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos.

The Two Greatest Commandments

Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 (RSV translation)

Love your God – Love your neighbor

Deuteronomy 6:5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

Leviticus 19:18 You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Matthew 22:34-39 (RSV translation)

The two great commandments

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Meditation questions for reflection

1. The Old Testament law listed some 613 precepts (commandments). The first of the ten commandments states that one must worship God alone and not any false idols. Why does Moses command the people to love God with *all* one’s heart, soul, and might (strength)? How does *loving* God and *worshipping* God go together?
2. Why does Jesus link the command to love God with the command to love one’s neighbor?

Reflection on how Jesus interprets the Old Testament command to love God and love neighbour

A. New Testament Context: Matthew 22:34–39

After the Sadducees leave, a Pharisaic lawyer attempts to trap Jesus in his words (Matt. 22:34–35). He raises a question that the rabbis debated extensively in ancient Judaism: “What is the greatest commandment in the law?” (22:36). Apparently unwilling to select only one law, Jesus replies by quoting the two commandments about loving God and neighbor (22:37–39). These vertical (Godward) and horizontal (humanward) relationships sum up not just the Torah, or five books of Moses, but the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures (“the law and prophets” [22:40]). Jesus made a similar comment about the “Golden Rule” in Matt. 7:12. Unlike the other controversies surrounding Jesus’ teaching in the temple, his response here should have satisfied most of the listeners in his audience (cf. Mark 12:32–33)... The fact that love can be commanded demonstrates that it is primarily attitudes and behavior God desires, not emotions (R. A. Wright 2001).

B. OT Context: Deuteronomy 6:5.

Deuteronomy 6:5 appears immediately after the Shema, the call to Israel to affirm monotheism as the central doctrine of Jewish theology (6:4). Deuteronomy 6 represents Moses’ recounting and summary of the law as the Israelites get ready to enter the promised land (vv. 1–3). After enunciating the command to love God with all that one has, Moses

instructs the people to take these laws to heart, impress them on their children, and live by them in everything they do (6:6–9). Again, we see three parts of the human being explicitly mentioned (heart, soul, strength) as a powerful rhetorical device for speaking about the whole person. The “heart” in the OT is actually the seat of the intellect, will, and intentions. The “soul” is the entire inner self with all its emotions, desires, and personal characteristics that make each human unique. “Strength” actually translates a word that normally means “greatly” or “exceedingly.” One might thus render the entire verse, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with total commitment (heart), with your total self (soul), to total excess.’ Loving God should be ‘over the top!’” (C. J. H. Wright 1996: 98–99).

Joshua repeats the contents of Deut. 6:5 after the first phase of the conquest of the promised land (Josh. 22:5). Second Kings 23:25 describes how Josiah turned to the Lord “with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the law of Moses.” Not surprisingly, the commandment would continue to play a central role in subsequent Jewish life.

E. Hermeneutic Employed.

Jesus’ use of the OT proves straightforward here. He has been asked to identify the greatest commandment in the law. He replies by citing two fundamental moral principles that encapsulate the original meaning of the Torah as well as any that he could have chosen. God gave his law because he loved his people, had already rescued them from Egypt, and wanted them to live by the principles of love, both with him and with each other (see Craigie 1976: 169–70). Jesus’ ethic likewise has regularly and correctly been summarized by one or both of these passages, beginning already within the NT (cf. Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8). Timeless theological truth appears in each of the two commands. As elsewhere, it is interesting to observe that Jesus does not formally distinguish the moral from the civil or ceremonial law (see Stern 1966)...Jesus is asked to summarize the law in a single command, but he cannot refrain from quoting two laws. Verse 38 appears to say that Deut. 6:5 is the single law that summarizes the whole of Torah, but 22:39 adds “a second is like it,” probably meaning that this commandment is of equal importance (see Gerhardsson 1976).

This is another timeless theological absolute that captures the interpersonal heart of the law, just as Deut. 6:5 summed up the relationship between humans and God. Both remain as crucial in the NT age as they were in the OT. The formal rabbinic technique that Jesus adopts here is “*gezera shavah* ... the association of scripture passages on the basis of a common word,” in this context, “love” (Hagner 1995: 647).

F. Theological Use. Love for neighbor is commanded to be like love for oneself.

Pathological aberrations are not in view here! This is not a formal law to love self, as has often been alleged, but rather the observation that healthy individuals care deeply about their own well-being. Jesus wants to ensure that their care for others runs at least as deep. Paul will make an even more challenging statement along these lines in Phil. 2:4. With the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus will demonstrate that even one’s enemy is one’s neighbor (Luke 10:25–37), contrasting dramatically with conventional Jewish interpretations (see above, pp. 28–29; and Luz 2005: 83–84). Finally, if love is the heart of the law, then obedience to God and friendship with fellow humans may fairly be said to flow out of love as the primary motivation. Particularly after the atoning death of Christ, believers naturally live lives that please God and care for others out of a profound sense of gratitude for what he has done for them that they could never have done for themselves (observations that have considerable implications for our understanding of NT ethics more generally [on which, see Verhey 1984; White 1979]).²

² Beale, G. K., & Carson, D. A. (2007). *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (80–82). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos.

Consuming Zeal for God

Psalm 69:9 (RSV translation)

Consuming zeal for God's house

Psalm 69:9 For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

John 2:33-17 (RSV translation)

Jesus' zeal for his Father

13 The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business. ¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

Meditation question for reflection

1. What does it mean to be zealous for God's house (his temple)? How might this be connected with the command to worship God alone and to love God with all of one's heart, mind, and strength?
2. How does the cleansing of the temple show Jesus' consuming zeal for his Father?

Reflection on how Jesus fulfils the Old Testament verse "zeal for your house consumes me"

The Jerusalem temple was a symbol of Jewish national and religious identity (see the sidebar in Köstenberger 2002b: 30). The original Solomonic temple was destroyed by the Babylonians and later rebuilt by Zerubbabel. It was renovated by Herod just prior to Jesus' coming. Both OT and Second Temple literature express the expectation of the establishment of a new temple for the messianic age (Ezek. 40–44; *1 En.* 90:28–36; *Pss. Sol.* 17:30; 4QFlor 1:1–13). It is against this backdrop that Jesus' rather striking action of clearing the temple must be understood. What may at first appear to be an impetuous outburst of uncontrolled anger is cast by John as an outflow of genuine spiritual zeal. Thus Jesus is shown to typify the pronouncement of Ps. 69:9: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

A. The NT Context of John 2:17: Jesus' Zeal for His "Father's House."

Jesus' early ministry in John's Gospel commences with Jesus calling his first disciples (1:35–51) and has as its first exclamation point the turning of water into wine, Jesus' "first sign" (2:11). After a brief stay in Capernaum, Jesus travels to Jerusalem for the Passover (2:12–13). Upon his arrival, he is dismayed to find the temple as a place of commerce rather than worship. He drives out the money changers, overturns their tables, and removes from the temple area the sacrificial animals being sold there. According to the Fourth Evangelist, Jesus' clearing of the temple stirred in his disciples the memory of the righteous sufferer of Ps. 69:9 (note the verbal parallel between 2:16, "my Father's house," and Ps. 69:9, "zeal for your house"; note also Ps. 118:139 LXX [119:139 MT]: "Zeal for your house [italicized words not in MT] consumed me [*exetēxen me ho zēlos tou oikou sou*], because my foes forget your words").

The fact that in the inaugural scenes of the Gospel Jesus is referred to as the "Messiah" (1:41), the "Son of God" (1:49; cf. 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7; cf. Ps. 89:26–29), and the "King of Israel" (1:49; see at

12:13 below) makes it plausible that observing Jesus' clearing of the temple would invoke in his disciples the memory of David's words in Ps. 69:9. This, in turn, is in keeping with Jewish expectations, current in the first century, that the Messiah would purge and reconstitute the temple (*Pss. Sol.* 17:21–22, 36; cf. Mark 14:57–61; see Daly-Denton 2004: 123). This would follow, and transcend, the pattern of great national deliverance last experienced by the Jews when Judas Maccabeus rededicated the temple in December of 165 BC, after it had been desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes IV (cf. 10:22–39; see also Jesus' discussion of true freedom from sin in 8:31–38).

B. The OT Context of Ps. 69:9.

Psalm 69 (which is quoted here and in 15:25; see also 19:28) and Ps. 22 (quoted in 19:24) share Davidic typology and the theme of the righteous sufferer (Tate 1990: 196; Mays 1994: 229). Psalm 69, attributed to David, is part of Book 2 of the Psalter, a collection titled "The Prayers of David the Son of Jesse" (Ps. 72:20). The psalm presents the psalmist as one who has borne reproach for God's sake (69:7): "For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me" (69:9). Verse 9 is part of the psalmist's plea in 69:7–12, with 69:7–8 and 9–12 as subunits (note the use of *kî*, "for," in 69:7, 9). Verse 8, the text immediately preceding the verse quoted here, says, "I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons," which underscores the psalmist's alienation even from his own kin. This is in addition to the numerous and vicious enemies who are mentioned in 69:4 (quoted in 15:25; see commentary there).

The precise nature of the psalmist's zeal for God's "house" is not made clear in the passage. There may be a royal as well as a prophetic component: as a king, he may have devoted attention to the upkeep and protection of the temple; as a prophetic figure, he may have advocated the importance of proper conduct within the confines of the temple area (Tate 1990: 196). For someone living subsequent to the fall of Jerusalem (69:35–36), zeal for God's house would connote a desire to see the temple rebuilt (Rogerson and McKay 1977: 96). Beyond this, concern for God's "house" may extend also to God's "household" more broadly conceived—that is, the condition of God's people (cf. Jer. 12:7–9; Tate 1990: 196), extending the scope of the passage to "not only the tabernacle, but the congregation that used to assemble there" (Tholuck 1858: 290). The nature of any zealous action on the psalmist's part is left unspecified, but in context a contrast seems to be drawn between some in the community who act as the psalmist's and God's enemies and the psalmist himself. In fact, the suppliant has engaged in fasting and praying out of concern over the situation (69:10–11).

The psalmist is "consumed" (69:9a), both literally, in that he is at the point of death, and figuratively, in that he is passionate about God's house and his people (Dahood [1968: 158] suggests that the image conveyed by *'ākal*, "consume," is that of "a devouring flame," and by *nāpal*, "fall," of "burning coals" falling on someone; cf. Ps. 120:3–4). The psalmist's passionate concern for God's people is all the more striking as it is these same people who mock and humiliate him (69:10–12). In all his righteous suffering, the psalmist prays to the Lord and in faith looks to him for help and deliverance (69:13–18). In the end it is the psalmist's firm hope and assurance that "God will save Zion" and that "those who love his name shall dwell in it" (69:35–36).

Historically, the characterization of one consumed by zeal for God's "house" does fit King David, whose son Solomon built the temple. Destroyed by the Babylonians and rebuilt subsequent to the exile, the temple served as the center of Israelite worship, as the place where God had taken up residence among his people. The characterization of the righteous sufferer in Ps. 69:9 and the designation of the psalmist as God's "servant" in v. 17 (cf. 2 Sam. 7:5) are also congruent with the depiction of Yahweh's faithful servant in Isaiah (cf. esp. Isa. 50:4–9; 52:13; 53:12; see Tate 1990: 197; see also commentary at 12:38 below). Further possible associations are Elijah (1 Kings 19:10; cf. Sir. 48:2) and the flames consuming the victim acceptable to God in the OT sacrificial system (Daly-Denton 2004: 122).³

³ Beale, G. K., & Carson, D. A. (2007). *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (431–433). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos.

Vision of the Son of Man and the Return of the Lord

Daniel 7:13-14 (RSV translation)

Vision of the Son of Man with the clouds of heaven

¹³ I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Matthew 24:1-8, 15-22, 29-30 (RSV translation)

Signs of the Lord's return

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.* ² But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down." ³ As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" ⁴ And Jesus answered them, "Take heed that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: ⁸ all this is but the beginning of the sufferings.

¹⁵ "So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; ¹⁷ let him who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house; ¹⁸ and let him who is in the field not turn back to get a coat. ¹⁹ And alas for those who are with child and for those who are nursing in those days! ²⁰ Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. ²² And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

²⁹ "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; ³⁰ then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; ³¹ and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Meditation questions for reflection

1. The title which Jesus most frequently uses to describe his mission is "Son of Man". This title comes from the prophecy of Daniel. How does Daniel describe the role of the Son of Man and his relationship with the Ancient of Days (a title for God)?
2. How does Jesus fulfil the role of the Son of Man?

Reflection on how Jesus interprets the Old Testament prophecy from Daniel 7 in Matthew 24

Jesus' pronouncement that God is abandoning the temple leads naturally to his prediction of its literal destruction (24:1–2). The disciples, equally naturally, question Jesus about this (24:3); the eschatological Olivet Discourse forms his response (24:4–25:46). Daniel, like the disciples, had asked about the timing of the end (Dan. 12:6). The Mount of Olives is a theologically appropriate place for Jesus' address, given the upheavals that it was to experience when the Messiah came to judge his enemies (Zech. 14:4). The warfare that "must take place" (Matt. 24:6) may echo a similar phrase used of God's eschatological kingdom in Dan. 2:45 Θ . For people rising up against people (24:7a), compare 2 Chron. 15:6; for kingdom versus kingdom (24:7b), see Isa. 19:2; and Dan. 7:23–24. For the persecution of God's people (24:9), compare Dan. 7:25. The necessary endurance (24:13) may echo Dan. 12:12 Θ .

The "desolating sacrilege" in 24:15 clearly alludes to the horror prophesied in Dan. 9:27 and repeated in 11:31; and 12:11, with Jesus explicitly mentioning the prophet's name. In the OT it occurs first in the context of Daniel's famous but notoriously difficult prophecy about seventy "weeks of years" (i.e., 490 years [9:24–27]). Seven times seven times ten almost certainly represents a symbolic number for a perfect period of time, and the abomination is related to something "set up on a wing," presumably of the temple, since Jerusalem and its sanctuary are said to be destroyed (Dan. 9:26; for the meaning of this text, see Baldwin 1978: 168–72)...

Jesus is envisioning a similarly horrifying event accompanying the destruction of the temple in the first century; indeed, Roman troops did again desecrate the building as they virtually razed it to the ground in AD 70 (cf. Luke 21:20). The disciples comment on the temple that they can see from the Mount of Olives. Jesus then predicts *its* destruction. Luke explicitly takes it this way. Nothing in the context supports the notion that a temple rebuilt centuries later, only to be destroyed again, is in view. The disciples would have naturally associated the destruction of the temple with "the end of the age" (24:3), even if Jesus goes on to separate the two in his sermon (see Carson 1984: 488–95). Foretelling the destruction of the temple, of course, places Jesus in a long line of prophets (cf. Mic. 3:12; Jer. 7:8–15; 9:10–11; 26:6, 18; see Davies and Allison 1988–1997: 3:335)...

OT Context. Daniel 7 depicts the prophet's bizarre dream about four beasts, each representing successive empires and culminating in the awful "end-times" empire at the end of human history. This final empire is the most destructive, the most opposed to God and his people, and the one that God will ultimately most condemn. Within this overall picture appear several glimpses of heaven that remind Daniel of God's sovereignty and judgment despite the manifestations of godless terror on earth. In 7:9–10, "thrones were set in place" (using a dual Hebrew form that led to much Jewish speculation about who could sit on a heavenly throne in judgment next to Yahweh). Recent studies suggest this was a crucial text for creating a flexibility within monotheism that allowed Jesus to be viewed as fully God within *Jewish* Christianity (see Hurtado 1988, esp. pp. 71–92). God is depicted as "the Ancient of Days," like a judge in his court, opening the books that presumably contained a comprehensive record of human behavior. In 7:13 Daniel sees "one like a son of man"—that is, appearing to be human—who comes on the clouds of heaven and is led into the very presence of the Ancient of Days. This is quite some special man! Moreover, he receives authority, glory, and sovereignty over all the people of the earth, an everlasting dominion and an indestructible kingdom (7:14). It is difficult to see how anything but the most exalted of men, depicted in language otherwise reserved for God himself, could be in view here. Longman (1999: 186–88) notes parallels both inside and outside the OT to the "divine cloud-rider"—language consistently used for deity itself. Likewise, S. Kim (1985: 69) sees both Daniel and Jesus depicting a divine Son in the use of this text...

Hermeneutic Employed.

Because no formal introduction alerts the reader to a specific use of Scripture, we may speak simply of Jesus using scriptural language to describe his return. On the other hand, the context of Dan. 7:13 is clearly that of prophecy. Daniel was given a dream or vision of the future and a partial explanation of it after he awoke. Nothing remotely like this has occurred, even to this day, that could be said even to partially fulfill Daniel's prophecy. Therefore, it seems appropriate to speak of direct predictive

prophecy, fulfilled only when the future events that Jesus describes come to pass. When he returns, he will come on the clouds of heaven as the messianic Son of Man, arriving to reign over the whole earth. However, to the extent that Dan. 7:13 depicts an invisible scene in God's throne room, we may speak of typology between that portrait and Christ's. And the allusion to Zech. 12:10 earlier in 24:30 sets up an a fortiori relationship between the OT and NT uses (Carson 1984: 505), so perhaps a similar relationship is implied with Dan. 7:13. The Son of Man's return may be even more glorious than his original ascent to his Father.

Theological Use. Christology and eschatology come together in this radiant portrait. Jesus is the exalted, even divine Son of Man and Messiah, who will one day return from heaven just as he would soon ascend into heaven (cf. Acts 1:1–11). When that happens, the chain of events culminating in Jesus officiating at the final judgment of all the peoples of the earth will have been set inexorably into motion. Then all will weep—his people with joy, and his enemies with sorrow because they will now recognize that their fate is sealed (see Hagner 1995: 714). Despite numerous false prophets throughout the history of the church, whom Jesus himself predicted (Matt. 24:23–24), no one can ever know when that time will be, so all must be prepared. It could come at any time!⁴

⁴ Beale, G. K., & Carson, D. A. (2007). *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (89–90). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos.

Study Reading Assignments for Week 3

Guide to the discovery of Scripture

by Origen, c. 185-254

By what principle ought one to read and interpret the Scriptures? It is a fact that a number of errors have had their origin in an inability to understand a sacred text in the right way.

For example, many Jews have not believed in our Savior, because they have been attached to the literal meaning of the prophecies made about him and have not seen them physically fulfilled. They have not seen the prisoners set free, (Isa. 61:1) nor the city of God built in the way they imagined it, (Ezek. 48) nor the chariot cut off from Ephraim, nor the warhorse from Jerusalem, (Zech. 9:10) nor butter and honey being eaten and the good chosen without prior knowledge of evil or preference for it (Isa. 7:15).

So then the reason for so many mistaken ideas about God consists solely in the inability to interpret Scripture in a spiritual sense. It has been taken in its literal sense only.

Those who receive the Word, even the most literal-minded, know that some truths revealed in the sacred Books are full of mysteries. Wise and humble people recognize that they cannot explain them. What do we say, for instance, about the prophecies? They are packed full of obscure words. And who has not been struck by the unspeakable mysteries contained in the revelation made to John?

The literal-minded person finds edification in the sacred Books. He finds the bare bones, so to say of the Scriptures. But the person who has made some progress attains to the soul of the Scriptures. The one who is perfect, then, discovers the spiritual law.

(Translation by Thomas Spidlik, *Drinking from the Hidden Fountain: A Patristic Breviary*, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, MI - Spencer, MASS, 1994)

Every page of the Bible is a hymn to Christ
by Augustine, c. 354-430

You have heard the account of the two disciples who met the Lord on the road to Emmaus and yet did not recognize him. When he met them, they had lost all hope of the redemption that is in Christ, they were convinced that the Master was dead like any other man, they did not realize that Jesus inasmuch as he is Son of God was still alive. According to them he had left this life without being able to return, like one of the many prophets.

Then the Lord revealed to them the meaning of the Scriptures. Beginning with Moses and quoting one prophet after another he showed that everything that he had suffered had been foretold.

After that, he appeared to the eleven disciples and they thought they were seeing a ghost. So Jesus let them touch him, the one who had let himself be crucified. He was crucified by his enemies and touched by his friends. He healed them all, the former of their wickedness, the latter of their unbelief.

Yet the Lord did not consider it was sufficient to allow them to touch him. He wanted to appeal to the Scriptures to confirm their hearts in the faith. He saw us in anticipation, who had not yet been born, who do not have a chance to touch Christ but do have the opportunity to read about him.

The Apostles believed because they had touched him. But what can folk like us do? By now Christ is ascended into heaven and will only return at the end to judge the living and the dead. On what base shall we build our faith, unless it be those Scriptures with which the Lord wanted to confirm the faith of those who touched him?

He revealed to them the meaning of the Scriptures and showed how it was necessary that the Christ should fulfil all that had been written about him in the books of the Law of Moses, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms. The Lord went through the whole Old Testament. He seemed to span it all in his embrace.

The Scriptures are in fact, in any passage you care to choose, singing of Christ, provided we have ears that are capable of picking out the tune. The Lord opened the minds of the Apostles so that they understood the Scriptures. That he will open our minds too is our prayer.

The Word of God Is Living and Active – Hebrews 4:12



The Spiritual Interpretation of the Bible

by Raniero Cantalamessa

“The letter brings death, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6)

I should like to begin this meditation by adopting St. Francis of Assisi's opening words in his Letter to all the Faithful: "I am the servant of all and so I am bound to wait upon everyone and make known to them the fragrant words of my Lord"¹ He calls Christ's words "fragrant," thereby implicitly comparing them to sweet-smelling, newly baked bread, and we shall see in this meditation that this is exactly what God's words are: fragrant with the Holy Spirit.

1. Scripture divinely inspired

In the Second Epistle to Timothy we find the famous statement: "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim 3:16). The expression translated as "inspired by God" in the original Greek is one single word, *theopneustos*, which combines two words, "God" (*theos*) and "Spirit" (*pneuma*). This word has two basic meanings, one well known and another habitually neglected yet no less important than the first.

Let us begin with the well-known meaning. This is the passive meaning, emphasized in all modern translations: Scripture is "inspired by God." Another passage in the New Testament explains what this means: "Human beings [i.e., the prophets], moved by the Holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God" (2 Pet 1:21). This is, in a word, the classic doctrine of the divine inspiration of Scripture, which we proclaim in the Creed as an article of faith when we say that the Holy Spirit is he "who has spoken through the prophets."

This doctrine carries us back to the very source of the whole Christian mystery, which is the Trinity, the unity of and distinction between the three divine Persons. The Holy Spirit accompanies the Word just as, in the bosom of the Trinity, the breathing of the Holy Spirit is bound up with the begetting of the Word. As, at the incarnation, the Spirit enters Mary so that the Word will become flesh within her, so, in an analogous though not identical way, the Spirit works within the sacred writer, so that he can welcome the Word of God and "incarnate" it in human language. This in itself mysterious event of inspiration we can represent for ourselves in human imagery: with his divine finger (i.e., his living

energy), which is the Holy Spirit, God touches that hidden point where the human spirit opens to the infinite, and from there that touch (in itself very simple and instantaneous, as is God who produces it) is diffused like a sonorous vibration through all the human faculties (will, intelligence, imagination, emotion), translating itself into concepts, images, and words. Human beings "moved by the Holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God": the mysterious transition occurs from divine motion to created reality, which can be observed in all the ad extra works of God: in creation, in the incarnation, in the production of grace.

The result thus obtained is a theandric reality, fully divine and fully human, the two intimately fused together, though not "confused." The magisterium of the Church (the encyclical letters *Providentissimus Deus* of Leo XIII and *Divino afflante Spiritu* of Pius XII) tells us that the two realities – divine and human – are maintained intact. God is the principal author of Scripture since he is responsible for what is written, determining its content by the activity of his Spirit. Nevertheless, the sacred writer is also the author in the full sense of the word, since he has intrinsically collaborated in this act by means of a normal human activity which God has used as an instrument. God, the [early church] Fathers used to say, is like a musician who by touching the strings of the lyre makes them vibrate; the sound is entirely the work of the musician but it would not exist were it not for the lyre-strings. In the case of Scripture, the mystery consists in the fact that God moves not inert, inanimate strings, but free ones (the will, the intelligence) which are capable of moving themselves. Only he can move such strings as he pleases while still maintaining their freedom intact and therefore acting through them.

Of this marvellous work of God, only one effect is usually emphasized: the inerrancy of Scripture, that is to say the fact that the Bible contains no error (if by "error" we mean the absence of a truth humanly possible in a given cultural context and hence one to be demanded of the writer). But biblical inspiration is the basis for much more than the mere (negative) inerrancy of the Word of God; positively, it is the basis for its inexhaustibility, its divine force and vitality, and what St. Augustine called its *mira profunditas*, its marvellous depth.

So now we are ready to investigate that other, lesser-known meaning of biblical inspiration. In itself, grammatically speaking, the participle *theopneustos* is active, not passive, and if it is true that tradition and theology have alike always explained it in a passive sense ("inspired by God"), it is also true that the same tradition has found an active significance in it too. Scripture, said St. Ambrose, is *theopneustos* not only because it is "inspired by God" but also because it "respires God," because it breathes God.² It is, St. Francis would say, the fragrance of God. Speaking of the creation, St. Augustine says that God did not make things and then turn his back on them, but that they "are from him and also in him."³ The same is true of God's words: having come from God, they remain in him and he in them. Having dictated Scripture, the Holy Spirit is, as it were, contained in it, lives in it, and enlivens it unceasingly with his own divine breath. The conciliar constitution *Dei Verbum* also picks up this thread of tradition; it says that "the sacred Scriptures, inspired by God [passive inspiration!] and committed to writing once and for all time, present God's own Word in an unalterable form, and they make the voice of the Holy Spirit sound again and again in the words of the prophets and apostles" [active inspiration!]."⁴

Once again we ought to recognize the wonderful relationship between the mystery of the Eucharist and that of the Word of God. In the Mass – through the epiclesis and consecration – the Holy Spirit gives us the Eucharist, and then, in Communion, the Eucharist gives us the Holy Spirit. Once and for all time, the Holy Spirit inspired Scripture and now, each time we open the book, Scripture breathes the Holy Spirit! There are inspirations that move our will to the good, illuminations that clear our mind, our deepest emotions. . . . To what can we compare the word of Scripture? St. Gregory the Great wondered, and then replied: It is like a flint, cold to the touch, but when struck by the steel it gives off sparks and lights the fire. The words of Scripture stay cold if one limits them to their literal meaning, but if, inspired by the Lord, one strikes with an attentive mind, they will give vent to the fire of mystic meanings.⁵

I once heard a man give this testimony in public: He had reached the last stage of alcoholism; he couldn't hold out for more than an hour or two without a drink; wherever he happened to be,

travelling, in the train, or at work, his first thought was where could he get some wine. His wife, who was there too, said she had reached the brink of despair and could see no way out for herself and her three children, except death. Someone invited them to some Bible readings. There was one word in particular which, heard by chance, made a deep impression on him and which for many years served as a rope to draw him up from the abyss. Each time he read it over, it was like a fresh flood of heat and strength, until he was completely cured. When he tried to tell us what that word was, his voice broke and he was so overcome with emotion that he could not manage to complete the sentence. It was the verse in the Song of Songs (1:2) which says, "More delightful is your love than wine." It would have been easy for any "expert" on the Song to show him that the verse had no bearing on his situation and that he was deluding himself, but the man went on repeating, "I was dead and now I am alive. That word gave me back my life!" So, too, the man born blind replied to those who questioned him, "How that may be, I don't know. All I do know is, before I couldn't see and now I can see" (cf. John 9:25)...

3. "The Spirit gives life"

When we don't use a limb for a long while, it needs to undergo rehabilitation exercises before it can be used properly again. For all too long, Christians have been without the use of this vital "limb," the Bible, and now they need to be retrained in how to use it. For some people, retraining will consist at first in picking up the Bible and reading it, since perhaps they have never seriously approached it before, or not at full length. For others who know the Bible and have even perhaps studied it for some time, retraining will consist in reaccustoming oneself to that *spiritual* interpretation of Scripture which throughout the patristic and medieval periods constituted the main source of the Church's wisdom and spirituality...

But it must be said that the [early church] Fathers, in this field, only applied (with the imperfect instruments then at their disposal) the straightforward lesson of the New Testament. In other words, they were not the initiators but the bearers of a tradition which had for its founders John, Paul, and Jesus himself. These latter had always not only practiced a spiritual interpretation of the Scriptures (ie., a reading with reference to Christ), but had even provided the justification for reading the Scriptures like this by declaring that all the Scriptures speak of Christ (cf. John 5:39), that "the Spirit of Christ" was already at work in them, expressing himself through the prophets (cf. 1 Pet 1:11) and that everything in the Old Testament is said by way of allegory, with reference to the Church (cf. Gal 4:24).

However, by "spiritual interpretation" of the Bible we do not mean an edifying, mystical, subjective or, even worse, a fanciful interpretation, as opposed to a scientific interpretation which would, by contrast, be objective. Not at all: the spiritual interpretation is the most objective there can be, since it is based on the Spirit of God and not on human wit. The subjective interpretation of Scripture (based on free examination) has run riot precisely when spiritual interpretation has been given up and most blatantly abandoned.

Spiritual interpretation is very precise and objective; it is interpretation done under the guidance, or by the light, of the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures in the first place. It is based on an historical event, that is, the redemptive act of Christ, who by his death and resurrection completes the plan of salvation, fulfills all types and prophecies, unveils all hidden mysteries, and offers us the true key for interpreting the whole Bible. Anyone choosing to read the Scriptures after Christ's life while disregarding his act would be like someone persistently reading a musical score in the key of G when the composer has already moved into the key of B; every single note after the shift would sound false and out of tune. The New Testament calls the new key "the Spirit," while it defines the old key as "the letter," saying that "the letter brings death, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor 3:6). **Reading the Scriptures without the Holy Spirit would be like opening a book in the dark.**

To erect an antithesis between "letter" and "Spirit" does not mean erecting one between Old and New Testaments, as though the former merely represented the letter and the latter only the Spirit. It means, rather, to make an antithesis between the two different ways of reading either the Old Testament or the New: between the way which disregards Christ, and the way which, by contrast, evaluates

everything by the light of Christ. This is why the Church prizes both Testaments, for both speak to her of Christ. When the Word of God is read like this, a sort of transfiguration of Scripture occurs, analogous to Christ's transfiguration on Tabor. The Spirit hidden within the Scriptures sets them ablaze from within, making him known whom they were foreshadowing. So, spiritual interpretation confers new and hitherto unknown force and influence on the Old Testament, but this only comes about once we realize that it is talking about something else; that besides having a concrete and literal meaning, it also has a symbolic one leading us beyond it. In other, more traditional, words, the text becomes powerful once we discover that it is speaking "by allegory" (Gal 4:24). St. Augustine says,

Anything that is suggested by means of symbols strikes and kindles our affection much more forcefully than the truth itself would do if presented unadorned with mysterious symbols. .
. Our sensibility is less easily kindled when still involved in purely concrete realities, but if it is first turned towards symbols drawn from the corporeal world, and thence again to the plane of those spiritual realities signified by those symbols, it gathers strength by the mere act of passing from one to the other and, like the flame of a burning torch, is made by the motion to burn all the brighter.⁹

Something similar happens for the Christian in passing from the Old Testament to the New, from prophecy to reality. In this passing, the mind "flares up" like a moving torch. The description of the sufferings of the Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 53 has its own way of speaking to us about the passion of Christ, which no historical narrative in the Gospels can replace... The Old Testament is not scorned in spiritual interpretation; on the contrary, it is exalted to the utmost. When St. Paul says, "The Spirit gives life," this has to be understood as meaning: gives life to the letter in the Old Testament as well.

See related text: [The Letter Kills, the Spirit Gives Life: The Spiritual Reading of the Bible](#), fourth in a series of Lenten meditations titled "The Word of God Is Living and Effective", by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, given in Rome, March 2008.

Notes:

1. Francis of Assisi, *Letter to all the Faithful* (St. Francis of Assisi, *Writings...*, p. 93)
2. St. Ambrose, *De Spiritu Sancto*, III, 112.
3. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, IV, 12, 18.
4. *Dei Verbum*, 21.
5. cf. H.G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen 1960.
6. St. Augustine, *Epistula* 55.11.21 (CSEL 34, 1, p. 192)

The Senses of Scripture

[from the INTRODUCTION TO THE IGNATIUS STUDY BIBLE]

You are approaching the “word of God”. This is the title Christians most commonly give to the Bible, and the expression is rich in meaning. It is also the title given to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, God the Son. For Jesus Christ became flesh for our salvation, and “the name by which he is called is The Word of God” (Rev 19:13; cf. Jn 1:14).

The word of God is Scripture. The Word of God is Jesus. This close association between God’s *written* word and his *eternal* Word is intentional and has been the custom of the Church since the first generation. “All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and this one book is Christ, ‘because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ’ ” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 134). This does not mean that the Scriptures are divine in the same way that Jesus is divine. They are, rather, divinely inspired and, as such, are unique in world literature, just as the Incarnation of the eternal Word is unique in human history.

Yet we can say that the inspired word resembles the incarnate Word in several important ways. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate. In his humanity, he is like us in all things, except for sin. As a work of man, the Bible is like any other book, except without error. Both Christ and Scripture, says the Second Vatican Council, are given “for the sake of our salvation” (*Dei Verbum* 11), and both give us God’s definitive revelation of himself. We cannot, therefore, conceive of one without the other: the Bible without Jesus, or Jesus without the Bible. Each is the interpretive key to the other. And because Christ is the subject of all the Scriptures, St. Jerome insists, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ” (CCC 133).

When we approach the Bible, then, we approach Jesus, the Word of God; and in order to encounter Jesus, we must approach him in a prayerful study of the inspired word of God, the Sacred Scriptures.

Inspiration and InerrancyThe Catholic Church makes mighty claims for the Bible, and our acceptance of those claims is essential if we are to read the Scriptures and apply them to our lives as the Church intends. So it is not enough merely to nod at words like “inspired”, “unique”, or “inerrant”. We have to understand what the Church means by these terms, and we have to make that understanding our own. After all, what we believe about the Bible will inevitably influence the way we read the Bible. The way we read the Bible, in turn, will determine what we “get out” of its sacred pages.

These principles hold true no matter what we read: a news report, a search warrant, an advertisement, a paycheck, a doctor’s prescription, an eviction notice. How (or whether) we read these things depends largely upon our preconceived notions about the reliability and authority of their sources—and the potential they have for affecting our lives. In some cases, to misunderstand a document’s authority can lead to dire consequences. In others, it can keep us from enjoying rewards that are rightfully ours. In the case of the Bible, both the rewards and the consequences involved take on an ultimate value.

What does the Church mean, then, when she affirms the words of St. Paul: “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16)? Since the term “inspired” in this passage could be translated “God-breathed”, it follows that God breathed forth his word in the Scriptures as you and I breathe forth air when we speak. This means that God is the primary author of the Bible. He certainly employed human authors in this task as well, but he did not merely assist them while they wrote or subsequently approve what they had written. God the Holy Spirit is the *principal* author of Scripture, while the human writers are *instrumental* authors. These human authors freely wrote everything, and only those things, that God wanted: the word of God in the very words of God. This miracle of dual authorship extends to the

whole of Scripture, and to every one of its parts, so that whatever the human authors affirm, God likewise affirms through their words.

The principle of biblical inerrancy follows logically from this principle of divine authorship. After all, God cannot lie, and he cannot make mistakes. Since the Bible is divinely inspired, it must be without error in everything that its divine and human authors affirm to be true. This means that biblical inerrancy is a mystery even broader in scope than infallibility, which guarantees for us that the Church will always teach the truth concerning faith and morals. Of course the mantle of inerrancy likewise covers faith and morals, but it extends even farther to ensure that all the facts and events of salvation history are accurately presented for us in the Scriptures. Inerrancy is our guarantee that the words and deeds of God found in the Bible are unified and true, declaring with one voice the wonders of his saving love.

The guarantee of inerrancy does not mean, however, that the Bible is an all-purpose encyclopedia of information covering every field of study. The Bible is not, for example, a textbook in the empirical sciences, and it should not be treated as one. When biblical authors relate facts of the natural order, we can be sure they are speaking in a purely descriptive and “phenomenological” way, according to the way things appeared to their senses.

The Senses of Scripture Because the Bible has both divine and human authors, we are required to master a different sort of reading than we are used to. First, we must read Scripture according to its *literal* sense, as we read any other human literature. At this initial stage, we strive to discover the meaning of the words and expressions used by the biblical writers as they were understood in their original setting and by their original recipients. This means, among other things, that we do not interpret everything we read “literalistically”, as though Scripture never speaks in a figurative or symbolic way (it often does!). Rather, we read it according to the rules that govern its different literary forms of writing, depending on whether we are reading a narrative, a poem, a letter, a parable, or an apocalyptic vision. The Church calls us to read the divine books in this way to ensure that we understand what the human authors were laboring to explain to God’s people

The literal sense, however, is not the only sense of Scripture, since we interpret its sacred pages according to the *spiritual* senses as well. In this way, we search out what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us, beyond even what the human authors have consciously asserted. Whereas the literal sense of Scripture describes a historical reality—a fact, precept, or event—the spiritual senses disclose deeper mysteries revealed through the historical realities. What the soul is to the body, the spiritual senses are to the literal. You can distinguish them; but if you try to separate them, death immediately follows. St. Paul was the first to insist upon this and warn of its consequences: “God ... has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:5–6).

Catholic tradition recognizes three spiritual senses that stand upon the foundation of the literal sense of Scripture (see CCC 115). **(1)** The first is the *allegorical* sense, which unveils the spiritual and prophetic meaning of biblical history. Allegorical interpretations thus reveal how persons, events, and institutions of Scripture can point beyond themselves toward greater mysteries yet to come (OT) or display the fruits of mysteries already revealed (NT). Christians have often read the Old Testament in this way to discover how the mystery of Christ in the New Covenant was once hidden in the Old and how the full significance of the Old Covenant was finally made manifest in the New. Allegorical significance is likewise latent in the New Testament, especially in the life and deeds of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. Because Christ is the Head of the Church and the source of her spiritual life, what was accomplished in Christ the Head during his earthly life prefigures what he continually produces in his members through grace. The allegorical sense builds up the virtue of faith. **(2)** The second is the *tropological* or *moral* sense, which reveals how the actions of God’s people in the Old Testament and the life of Jesus in the New Testament prompt us to form virtuous habits in our own lives. It therefore draws from Scripture warnings against sin and vice as well as inspirations to pursue holiness and purity. The moral sense is intended to build up the virtue of charity. **(3)** The third is the *anagogical* sense, which points upward to heavenly glory. It shows us how countless events in the Bible prefigure our final union with God in eternity and how things that are “seen” on earth are figures of things “unseen” in heaven. Because the anagogical sense leads us to contemplate our destiny, it is meant to

build up the virtue of hope. Together with the literal sense, then, these spiritual senses draw out the fullness of what God wants to give us through his Word and as such comprise what ancient tradition has called the “full sense” of Sacred Scripture.

All of this means that the deeds and events of the Bible are charged with meaning beyond what is immediately apparent to the reader. In essence, that meaning is Jesus Christ and the salvation he died to give us. This is especially true of the books of the New Testament, which proclaim Jesus explicitly; but it is also true of the Old Testament, which speaks of Jesus in more hidden and symbolic ways. The human authors of the Old Testament told us as much as they were able, but they could not clearly discern the shape of all future events standing at such a distance. It is the Bible’s divine Author, the Holy Spirit, who could and did foretell the saving work of Christ, from the first page of the Book of Genesis onward.

The New Testament did not, therefore, abolish the Old. Rather, the New fulfilled the Old, and in doing so, it lifted the veil that kept hidden the face of the Lord’s bride. Once the veil is removed, we suddenly see the world of the Old Covenant charged with grandeur. Water, fire, clouds, gardens, trees, hills, doves, lambs—all of these things are memorable details in the history and poetry of Israel. But now, seen in the light of Jesus Christ, they are much more. For the Christian with eyes to see, water symbolizes the saving power of Baptism; fire, the Holy Spirit; the spotless lamb, Christ crucified; Jerusalem, the city of heavenly glory.

The spiritual reading of Scripture is nothing new. Indeed, the very first Christians read the Bible this way. St. Paul describes Adam as a “type” that prefigured Jesus Christ (Rom 5:14). A “type” is a real person, place, thing, or event in the Old Testament that foreshadows something greater in the New. From this term we get the word “typology”, referring to the study of how the Old Testament prefigures Christ (CCC 128–30). Elsewhere St. Paul draws deeper meanings out of the story of Abraham’s sons, declaring, “This is an allegory” (Gal 4:24). He is not suggesting that these events of the distant past never really happened; he is saying that the events both happened *and* signified something more glorious yet to come.

The New Testament later describes the Tabernacle of ancient Israel as “a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary” (Heb 8:5) and the Mosaic Law as a “shadow of the good things to come” (Heb 10:1). St. Peter, in turn, notes that Noah and his family were “saved through water” in a way that “corresponds” to sacramental Baptism, which “now saves you” (1 Pet 3:20–21). It is interesting to note that the expression translated as “corresponds” in this verse is a Greek term that denotes the fulfillment or counterpart of an ancient “type”.

We need not look to the apostles, however, to justify a spiritual reading of the Bible. After all, Jesus himself read the Old Testament this way. He referred to Jonah (Mt 12:39), Solomon (Mt 12:42), the Temple (Jn 2:19), and the brazen serpent (Jn 3:14) as “signs” that pointed forward to him. We see in Luke’s Gospel, as Christ comforted the disciples on the road to Emmaus, that “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lk 24:27). It was precisely this extensive spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament that made such an impact on these once-discouraged travelers, causing their hearts to “burn” within them (Lk 24:32).

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