

TAKE THE CLEAREST INTERPRETATION

Two basic principles of hermeneutics are that the Bible is understandable and that each passage has only one correct interpretation (what the original writer meant the original readers to understand). But it isn't necessarily easy for us to understand the interpretation of a passage.

As you study your Bible (See #1 in this series, "How To Study Your Bible") your observations of the text often will suggest more than one possible interpretation. You should note each possibility and then study them carefully to refine your understanding. One basis for discovering the true interpretation is to **take the clearest interpretation**.

God doesn't "hide" esoteric or obscure messages in His word. If you are deciding between two or more possible interpretations, it's likely the most natural and clearest one is what the original readers would have understood, unless the context suggests something else. Examples:

James 5:14-18 deals with an illness which is God's chastening for sin. The healing comes in response to the prayers of the elders and the confession of the one who is sick. This makes much more sense than using the passage to justify the ministry of so-called faith healers, because the whole process is initiated by the one who is sick.

The **angels of the seven churches** in Revelation 2-3 are messengers those churches sent to visit John during his exile. This is in accord with the basic meaning of the Greek word *aggelos*, which is "messenger." It makes more sense than saying they were angelic beings with some kind of mystical guardianship over the churches—a concept not in the Bible.

A period of **1000 years** is mentioned six times in Revelation 20:1-7. Since nothing in the context and nothing in the background of the original readers suggests a non-literal meaning, it's natural to take it as a literal 1000 years. Many interpreters say it is symbolic of a "long time period of undetermined length," but they are reading in a meaning required by a theological system they have adopted, contrary to the clearest interpretation.

Zechariah 12:4 says the Lord's feet will touch down on the Mount of Olives, splitting it in two. Nothing in the context indicates a symbolic or "spiritual" interpretation, so that's why we expect Jesus to return to the Mount of Olives at His second coming. It's the clearest interpretation.