

## THE UNITY OF THE MEANING OF SCRIPTURE

Each passage of the Bible has one and only one correct interpretation. **The interpretation of a passage is what the original writer (inspired by the Holy Spirit) expected the original readers to understand.** No interpretation is correct if the original recipients would not have understood it that way. It's foolish to ask "What does this mean **to me**?" until you have answered the basic question "What does this **mean**?"

To discover what a passage means, you must pay attention to the grammatical context and the historical context. The grammatical context deals with the meaning of words and the structure of the language. The historical context deals with the cultural frame of reference in which the communication took place.

When you write something down, you don't intend for people who read it to assign a variety of meanings. You know what the words signify and how you intend for them to be accepted, even if you use technical language or figures of speech. You have specific people in mind, and you write so as to be sure they understand your thoughts. *Scripture should be interpreted with this same understanding of God's intent to communicate specific thoughts to specific people.*

Here are two common abuses of this concept you're likely to encounter:

**Allegorizing** is the faulty system of interpreting the Bible which discards the literal meaning as irrelevant and searches for the "spiritual" meaning. For example, a preacher once said the city of Jerusalem represents the human heart. Its broken walls represent the ravages of sin on the heart. Nehemiah represents the Holy Spirit, and his coming to Jerusalem to repair the walls represents the coming of the Holy Spirit into the heart to bind up hurts of the heart. If you had heard that sermon, you would have wondered why you couldn't understand that "deep" meaning. The reason is that it **isn't there!**

**"Pious Personalizing"** is my term for the practice of people who open their Bibles and expect direct, specific, personal guidance tailor-made to their situation. Contemplating a trip, someone might read "*Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away*" (Acts 13:3) and decide "God gave me this verse" to tell me to go. When someone says "God gave me such-and-such a verse," it is an admission that he or she doesn't understand interpreting the Bible. God gave us **all** the Scriptures, understood in context, for our guidance.