

Time periods and interpretive principles

If your interpretive principles are incorrect then it follows that whatever you are trying to clarify will also be incorrect. The first principle and most important of all biblical interpretation is **context**. The context principle can be subdivided into a group of principles, which are all interrelated.

- (1) The first mention principle
- (2) The comparative mention principle
- (3) The progressive mention principle
- (4) The complete mention principle

These four together constitute the 'context principle' the most important of all hermeneutic principles. The next group of principles here are referred to as the Theological Group. They are as follows:

- (1) The election principle
- (2) The covenant principle
- (3) The ethnic–division principle
- (4) The chronometrical principle
- (5) The breach principle
- (6) The Christ–centric principle
- (7) The moral principle

These principles are grouped together because they each arise out of the interpretation of the purposes of God as revealed in Scripture. The principles all assume the practice of allowing the whole of God's revealed purpose to affect the interpretation of the parts of His revelation. In using these principles, the interpreter will be causing the interpreted whole to affect the interpretation of its individual parts. The third group of principles is spoken of as the Figures of Speech Group. They are as follows:

- (1) The symbolic principle
- (2) The numerical principle
- (3) The typical principle
- (4) The parabolic principle
- (5) The allegorical principle

Any reader of Revelation will soon discover that it has numerous symbols woven throughout its chapters. Symbolic objects, creatures, actions, numbers, names, colours, directions and place are part of the language of Revelation. It is impossible to interpret Revelation without

a proper understanding of that which is symbolic in the book. This specialised group of principles may be grouped together because they deal with figures of speech or extensions of them. Of course, these do not comprise the entire figures of speech group used in scripture. These are included as principles due to their prominence in scripture, and the difficulties that they present in interpretation. Also, the interpreter realises that he cannot interpret the Book of Revelation without using some of these principles.

In this group each of them uses symbols. There are symbols used in types, parables and allegories. These symbolic elements have to be interpreted first in order to properly interpret the literary style of the passage of Scripture in which they may be used.

Rather than define and explain each of these guiding hermeneutic principles, it will suffice to demonstrate how eccentric an interpretation can become without them. For this purpose, we will use the continuous historic interpretation, which by its very premise is riddled with inconsistencies.

Example (1) Taken from *Christadelphian Studies*, a supplement to logos magazine.

‘In scripture, one day prophetically represents one year (Ezek.4:5). One day is also typical of one thousand years (Psa.90:4). If (a) one day equals (b) one year and (a) one day equals (c) one thousand years, then (b) one year also equals (c) one thousand years. In other words, if $a=b$ and $a=c$, then $b=c$. **This is elementary logic.**”

This may well be ‘elementary logic, but only if you are working on *an algebra problem, NOT for interpreting scripture!*

The substitution of years for days is a fundamental question as Graham Pearce concedes in his book; *The Revelation – which interpretation*. He devotes a complete chapter to justifying the substitution of 1260 years for 1260 days. Arguing that Revelation is a book of symbol, he states: ‘It is not permissible to arbitrarily select some items and make them literal when the basis of the book is symbol’.

In this we would all agree, we cannot arbitrarily decide whether something is symbolic or literal. It is the *context which decides*. (The first hermeneutic principle) The whole Bible is a book of symbol and often we automatically conclude whether something is meant literally or symbolically without even conscious acknowledgement.

The context of the 1260 days, 3½ years or 42 months is that of the *witnesses*, whose ministry is based on that of Jesus Christ, **the Faithful Witness** (Rev.1:5) and that of Elijah whose

ministry was *also* 3½ years. (James 5:17 compare Rev.11:6). The context demands that 1260 days = 3½ years (or 42 months). When something is obviously symbolic (like the holy city that G.P. uses as an example) it is stated as such, ‘coming down from God out of heaven’ (Rev.21:1); the measurements for the holy city could never be mistaken as literal, *for the context discounts this*. To take a verse out of context (Ps.90:4 a Psalm of Moses) and use it as a general principle of interpretation is utterly absurd.

In context the verse means that God is timeless, whereas Moses, who knew he was going to die shortly (and not enter the land) could ask God to:

*‘.....teach us **to number our days**, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom’.* (Ps.90: 12)

If we follow this *reductio ad absurdum* how can we know that 1260 days = 1260 years and not for example 1,260,000 years? (a day = a thousand years – Ps.90:4). Or do we assert (as Graham Pearce says) that the ‘decorum of the symbol’ would not stand for such a long time period. **This is a classy way of saying if it doesn’t fit, we won’t use it!**

Example (2) ‘*The man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron*’ (Rev.12:5). This is understood to be Constantine, the man-child, as the champion of the Christians defeats his pagan rivals, and is the sole ruler in the ‘heaven’ of the Roman world. The context of this quote, which is from Ps.2:9 demands that it can only be used of Christ (or by proxy, of his ecclesia – see Rev.2:27) especially since this Psalm was extensively quoted by the apostles during their witnessing campaign in the first century. (Acts 4: 26-27 note the words *thy holy child Jesus* = man child). Have our senses become so dulled with dogma that we no longer recognise passages that speak of our Lord?

‘I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep and am known of mine.’ (John 10:14)

This is no longer exegesis but **exit Jesus**. If proper hermeneutic principles are not adhered the interpretation is not valid.

A day for a year; more bad examples

This verse is supposed to establish the “day for a year Principle” but does nothing of the sort:

And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, **The days of the years** of my pilgrimage *are* an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. (Gen 47:9)

This is the equivalent of saying everyday of every year of my life. It is a figure of speech **not an interpretative principle**. In literature the device is known as a *pleonasm* (so Bullinger in the companion Bible) that is a redundancy where what is said is, immediately after, put in another way or the opposite way to make it impossible for the sense to be missed - **The days of the years** in other words *each and every day* (of his life). On this verse Jewish professor of literature (Robert Alter in his Genesis Commentary); “Jacob’s sombre summary of his own life echoes with a kind of complex solemnity against all that we have seen him undergo”. Just because the words DAY and YEAR occur in the same sentence does not mean that they are interchangeable or that some sort of chronological “principle” is being established.

The next verse sometimes quoted:

After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, *even* forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, *even* forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise (Num 14:34).

From this we are meant to derive a **universal principle** that whenever scripture mentions days, we can exchange that for years (whenever we feel like it). Of course, it will be said that it must fit the “decorum” of the symbolism which is just circular reasoning. The verse explicitly says that they will be punished for 40 years because their (40 day) mission failed. God is not giving them a universal interpretive principle but rather a punishment that is a scaled-up version of their rebellion. **It is a logical fallacy to extrapolate from the specific to the universal**. When scripture wants us to understand days as years it specifically says so:

And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year. (Ezek 4:6)

Ezekiel is instructed to lay on his side for 40 days because it represents 40 years of iniquity. When God intends days to symbolise years, he clearly SAYS SO. God does not leave the people of Judah (or us) guessing as to whether he means days or years.

The Annual Jewish calendar (see page 10: http://www.biblaridion.info/Digressions/rev_feasts.pdf) is used to calculate the Time Periods in Daniel ---
<https://www.biblaridion.info/daniel/danhtml/dch14.html#P233>