

# STREAMS of Life

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE INCARCERATED

## Dealing with Common Arguments, Opposing Literal Bible Interpretation

By Del Burkholder

In continuing our series on the Bible, I will present four common arguments against the scripture being able to be interpreted literally and some responses to those arguments.

### A. The real Scripture was lost or there is other lost scripture that has been rediscovered.

Some religions say that Gospels were written but the ones we have are not correct and the real ones have been lost. There are other large groups that claim additional Scripture has been found that adds to the Bible or supersedes the Bible.

First, we will address the position that the genuine scripture has been lost. There are scores of evidence from non-Biblical historians that verify the Gospels. Second, the motivation of these groups is to strike down Scripture that contradicts their errant positions. By adding to Scripture, they can interject their fraudulent position. Often this done in conjunction with a “new revelation” from the group leader or leaders who are questionable at best.

### B. The Greek manuscripts were not translated correctly

This a popular argument of cult groups. However, with scrutiny by both Christian and secular Greek scholars over the centuries, there is not a major dispute on interpretation of the Greek and there are no mysteries on interpretations. In fact, often those who have challenged the translations are those that have added to Scripture (Revelation 22:18, 19) to support their non-Biblical positions. There have been embarrassments to some of those groups on their shoddy interpretations of the Greek when they have been publicly proven to be in error. This line of questioning is as old as when the Serpent said to Eve in the Garden of Eden, “Has God said?” (Genesis 3:1).

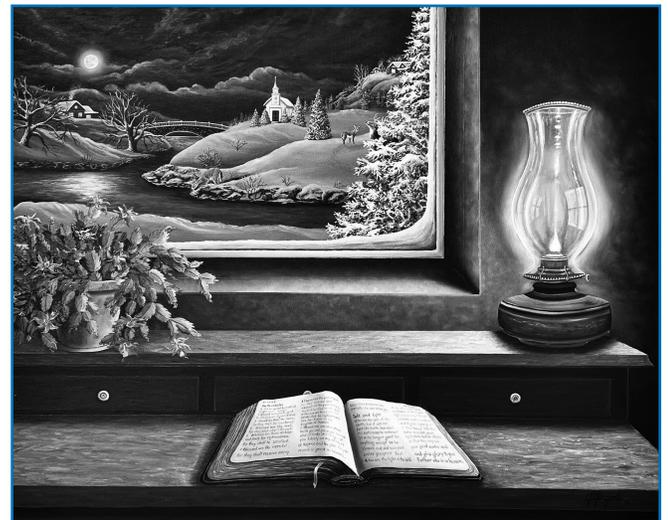
### C. Scripture cannot be properly interpreted in a literal way

This argument is usually a direct attack on the inspiration of Scripture and usually fostered by people steeped in sin who want to be exonerated from their unbiblical position.

The NIV and ESV accurately translate 2 Timothy 3:16 to say Scripture is literally “God breathed”. That is the meaning of the word “inspiration” in the KJV and NASB.

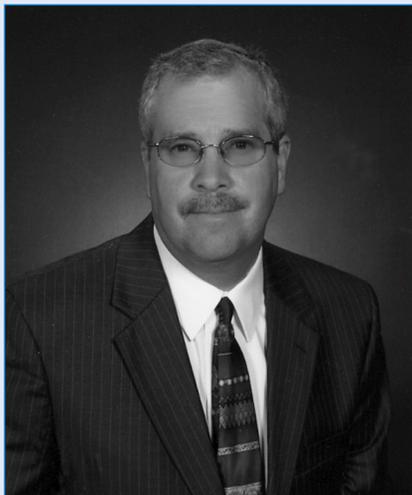
From **θεὸς** God and **πνεῦν** to breathe. God-breathed. The word tells us nothing of the peculiar character or limits of inspiration beyond the fact that it proceeds from God.

Why would there be portions that are not inspired by God? The Bible is God’s personal letter to us. We believe every word was inspired by Him. 2 Peter 1:21 says that prophets spoke as they were moved (Greek *Phero*) or carried by the Holy Ghost. In short, those who say the Bible cannot be translated in a literal way are usually those who want to twist Scripture in a way that favors themselves.



Artist Joyce Girgenti

## Read the Word! By Del Burkholder



Del Burkholder

We are living in a microwave society of drive through windows, fast food, or if you're an inmate a Honey Bun to hold you over between meals. Everything essential to life we try to do quickly, we seem to devote as little time to the necessities of life as possible. Skipping meals also seems to be an unhealthy, yet common trait of busy Americans. This trend seems to carry over into the time, or lack of time, Christians make for the Bible. We seem to have little time for studying God's Word, or have omitted it completely. The secular opposition openly opposes Christ in the world and Christians do not store enough of God's Word in their hearts to be able combat the enemy. People want to pray and petition God for what they want, but they don't take time to listen to Him. You will find that it is usually through His Word that God speaks. The late, legendary Bible Teacher Ern Baxter told the humorous story about how he was conducting a meeting on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and he was laying on hands and praying for people to experience the particular gift they most needed. A woman came up to Ern and

asked him to lay hands on her and have God impart to her the gift of knowing the Bible, without actually studying it. Naturally, Ern told her that God had provided His Word to her to be read and studied and that was the only way she could learn the Word. It sounds absurd that a person would actually be naïve enough to ask that of a man of God. However, with the shortcuts Christians take today when it comes to the Bible, I believe some are asking for the same thing without wanting to admit it. We want to be rich in God's Word, but do not take the time to open His Book.

Here are some suggestions on Bible study habits that I have used over the years.

- Never let a day go by without opening the Word of God. Even if it is a verse, get in the habit of reading Scripture
- The very first thing I do before starting my day, seven days a week, is read the Word. All other things must be second to Bible study and prayer.
- Reading one chapter per sitting is often better than several chapters at a time. It would be better to read a few verses and have God speak the Truth into you than read large portions and retain nothing.
- Find good evangelical commentaries to help with difficult passages. Inmates, your chaplain may be able to point you to some resources. Nothing is better than a solid study Bible; there are many good ones on the market. I realize with inmates you may not have the resources to acquire and they can be too expensive for groups that send Bibles to prisons to donate.
- Find godly men on the cell block that are mature and tested in the Word to ask questions or get input on what God is trying teach you. May God enrich you in the study of His Word; let's all learn the Word, because darkness is approaching fast in our land.

In the Master's Service,  
Del Burkholder

*The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple. Psalms 119:130*

## Streams of Life Newsletter: Newsletter Specifically for the Incarcerated

**Publishing & Design:** Bock Creative • **Prison Director:** Del Burkholder • **Prison Teacher:** Delmar Weaver • **Contributor:** Jim Newsom

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## The Doors of Hope By Jim Newsom



Jim Newsom

*Jim is a nationally recognized evangelist and Bible teacher who has ministered in prisons throughout the country. Having served eight years of a 30-year sentence, Jim was released in 1980. Jim resides in Jeffersonville, IN with his wife, Diane.*

**Hosea 2:15**, states that the Lord will **“give the Valley of Achor as a door of hope.”** Achor means trouble. It was given this name from a story found in **Joshua 7**. Achan had sinned against the Lord by keeping back some of the spoils from the battle with Jericho. This act of disobedience caused the children of Israel to be defeated in their battle with Ai. As a result Achan, his family and all his possessions were brought to a valley where they were stoned and set on fire. From that day on, that place was known as the “Valley of Achor” or for our purposes the **“Valley of Trouble”**. For Achan and his family, this was trouble brought upon them by their sin. For them there was no door of hope in their **“Valley of Trouble”**.

In Hosea, the prophet is speaking prophetically about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the door that offers hope to all people no matter what valley of trouble they find themselves in or for what reason. Jesus knew that the best place to position Himself in order to ensure that all people would come in contact with Him would be in the **“Valley of Trouble”**. Because sooner or later everyone has to come through there. For whatever reason, trouble is designed to send us to God and to find His Salvation. Trouble has a way of motivating people to look for answers from sources they normally wouldn't consider. Salvation doesn't happen before trouble, but in it. This is where most people discover the **“door of hope”**.

Some people are born into this valley, others are driven into this valley, or they sow for this valley. Most people can't find the **“door of hope”** because they are too busy blaming the valley for all their troubles. They get stuck in this valley and never find the **“door of hope”** because they either deny the trouble, distort the reasons on why they are in the trouble, or dismiss the trouble, instead of dealing with the trouble.

**DENYING THE TROUBLE** **Proverbs 28:13**, says **“A man who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful. But if he confesses and forsakes them, he gets another chance.”** Confession is not telling God what you did, He knows, confession is simply agreeing with God. The Lord not only knew what sins you committed before you got saved, He knew about all the sins you were going to commit after you got saved, and the Good News is that He still saved you. All He requires is when you sin, that you confess and forsake it, and if you do, He will give you another chance.

**DISTORTING THE TROUBLE** Adam & Eve first tried to hide their transgression, when they found that they couldn't, they then tried to excuse it. Excuses come in every shape imaginable. Sometimes we make them because we simply don't want to do something. Other times, we use them to cover our tracks after a mishap. Occasionally, when we're asked to do something we think is beyond our abilities, we excuse ourselves to avoid failure.

**DISMISSING THE TROUBLE** This is an attempt to trivialize the trouble that you are in or causing. You will hear people say, **“no big deal, everyone is doing it”** or **“I don't really have a problem. I can control it, I can handle it.”** The reason they can so easily dismiss the trouble is because they have yet to reap the consequences of the trouble. **Ecclesiastes 8:11** says, **“When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong.”** Because nothing immediately happens to them, they are deceived into thinking nothing is going to happen to them. What they need to understand, is that though the sentence isn't quickly carried out, it is always ultimately carried out.

**DEALING WITH THE TROUBLE** You can't put something behind you, until you face it. I do not believe in a God that will allow you to escape the consequences of your actions. I do believe in a God that will minimize the damage of those consequences and maximize the good as you face and deal with them.

There is an old story about the time Emperor Frederick the Great visited Potsdam Prison. He spoke with the prisoners, and each man claimed to be innocent, a victim of the system. One man, however, sat silently in the corner. The ruler asked him, **“And you, sir, who do you blame for your sentence.”** His response was, **“Your majesty, I am guilty and richly**

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The story is told of a woman who was very ill and asked her pastor to come to her bedside to visit her in her last days. When he arrived, she asked the pastor if he would read from her personal Bible that lay on the bedside table. He noticed as he picked it up there were many pages with large portions cut out. The pastor was perplexed and asked her why her Bible had so many portions cut out of it. The woman replied, "That is because when you preached you kept saying, "That doesn't belong in the Bible." I just kept cutting out those portions and that is all that is left of it."

#### **D. Only a church leader or "those trained" can interpret Scripture**

This is an erroneous belief that sometimes occurs within groups where the leader's influence becomes greater than the Bible to the people. This has brought forth many cult groups over the last 200 years where the leader's words become more authoritative than Scripture. Then they protect their errors by devising a system of false reasoning and people to uphold the error. Jim Jones, leader of the People Temple cult, was a tragic example to the extreme degree of this, causing the mass murder-suicide of over 900 people in Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978.

I have seen even Biblically-sound pastors get caught in this trap when they are insecure. I have witnessed church parishioners with gifts that were suppressed by domineering or insecure pastors. Often they may not say it, but the leader is thinking, "They don't have a seminary degree." We must not forget it was common people who ignited the Gospel of Jesus Christ; they were fishermen such as Peter, John, and Andrew. In fact, the disciples as a whole were not steeped in education. Be a Berean!

*The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Acts 17:10-11*

We need to be like the Bereans who went to the Bible to search the Scripture (as the King James Version states). While this does not give a free pass to usurp everything a Bible teacher says, it does hold a teacher accountable to scripture. Galatians 1:6-9 says if someone comes to us with another gospel, we need to make sure what he is saying is true according to Scripture.

One of our former pastors at my home church in Hinkletown, PA, was Jerold Martin. In his early days of ministry at our church, he led the youth group and was teaching them one Sunday morning. The youth group admired and respected his Bible teaching greatly. He started his teaching that morning and without any warning started teaching doctrines that didn't line up with Scripture. Whether groggy from a young person's Saturday night out, or just out of respect for their revered teacher, I don't know but they just sat there saying nothing while Pastor Jerold gave one false teaching after another to the group. Finally, one youth raised his hand and challenged Pastor Jerold. Then Pastor Jerold gave the rest of the group a polite reprimand about not allowing anybody—whatever they are (including himself)—to teach false doctrine to them.

*But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! Galatians 1:8, 9*

<sup>1</sup>Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament, Volume 4, Commentary on 2 Timothy 3:16

**The Doors of Hope:** Continued from page 3

**deserve my punishment."** Surprised, the emperor shouted for the prison warden: **"Come and get this man out of here before he corrupts all these innocent people."** Through honesty and taking responsibility, this man was freed and the same thing can happen to you.

The door can't change your circumstances, but it can change you. If you admit that you are in this valley because of choices you've made, and if your desire is not to seek an escape from it, but a way through it, then a **"door of hope"** will be made available to you.