



Lesson #6

**Before Reading the Bible:
Symbolic Bible Language**

Lesson #6: Symbolic Bible Language

It's no secret that the Bible is packaged with symbolic and figurative language. When you learn how to interpret the symbols and extract the underlying messages behind the words, a whole new world of understanding will be opened up to you. Certain teachings found in the Bible may fly over the heads of those who are not sincere and motivated to learn the truth.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18 (KJV)

Symbolic words, figurative language and parables serve to preserve the word of God and keeps the prophetic messages from falling into the wrong hands, at the wrong time. When the prophet Daniel was given a vision of the end of the Old Covenant world, he was told by God more than once to keep the words of the prophecy hidden, until the appointed time. The vision that came to Daniel was filled with symbolic terms and elements that had to be interpreted, to reveal the hidden message.

What did God tell Daniel, concerning what would happen before the end of the old covenant world came about. Read Daniel 12:4 and Daniel 12:9,13 (KJV)

Many generations later, in the book of Revelation, the apostle John was also given a vision of the end times, but unlike Daniel, John was told not to seal up the words.

Why was John told not to seal up the words of the prophecy? Read Revelation 22:10 (KJV) _____

The concept of keeping certain messages hidden, until the appointed times and out of underserving hands, is the main reason why Jesus spoke in parables to the people in His generation.

Read Matthew 13:13-15 KJV

In the last lesson, we looked at the word “world” and how it was the word of choice when translating several different words from the original Bible manuscripts. In this lesson we will look into the symbolic nature of the word “world” and how its symbolic meaning is one of the keys to understanding certain prophecies in the Bible.

In the beginning God created the whole literal world. The world encompasses the sky, land and everything in them. There are also subsets in the world that make up the whole literal world. For example, figuratively speaking there is a natural world, a secular world, a religious world and so on, all within the literal world. These “world subsets” group similar or related subjects together. The following text gives an example of a symbolic subset.

Read Isaiah 24:21 KJV

In Isaiah 24:21, the word “earth” symbolically represents the nation of Israel, (both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom of Judah), which were found within the literal earth; hence the “kings of the earth”, upon the earth. Notice in the following text, it is written that the “earth” is left empty, but the inhabitants are scattered.

Read Isaiah 24:1 KJV

How can the whole literal Earth be empty, but the inhabitation still be scattered about in it? Both texts from Isaiah 24 help to establish that the symbolic meaning of the word “earth” is referring to the nation of Israel.

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel entered into a covenant with God. This covenant came with a long list of commandments and ordinances that the Israelite people had to follow. Their lives were governed by the Old Covenant, to the point that

they were a people set apart from the rest of the world; almost like they were living in their own little world. It can be said that the “Jewish world” was within the literal world.

What did God symbolically liken the actual Israelite people to?

Read Isaiah 5:7 KJV _____

With Isaiah 5:7 in mind and the texts from Isaiah 24, what is Revelation 14:15 talking about? _____

As stated before, symbolic language is used in both the Old and New Testament. You will find that the meanings of these symbolic words remain consistent throughout. Just like in Isaiah 5:7, sometimes the interpretation of the symbolic word being used is provided in the same passage it is found in.

Read Isaiah 40:7 KJV

Read Matthew 13:38 KJV

There are other times when the meaning of a symbolic word is not plainly given, but the full passage gives clues as to its meaning.

Read Numbers 24:7, can you see how the term “many waters” is symbolic for “many people”? _____

Does 2 Samuel 22:17 help to confirm the meaning of “many waters”?

Use the following symbolic term list to translate

Proverbs 8:29 KJV

Earth: Nation of Israel

Many Waters: Many People

Sea: Covenant Bound People (Israel)

Read Proverbs 8:29 KJV

There are also times when the meanings of some symbolic words are not clear, until other Bible texts are used to bring in a deeper understanding of the message being conveyed. For example, look at the symbolic terms “heaven and earth” in the scripture below:

Read Matthew 24:34-35 KJV

We know that the paired terms “heaven and earth” are symbolic in nature, because the literal heaven and Earth did not pass away in that generation long ago; as Jesus stated in verse 34. Read the following texts to get an idea of what the terms “heaven and earth” is symbolic for, as it relates to the prophecy in Matthew chapter 24.

Read Hebrews 8:13 KJV

Read Matthew 5:18 KJV

Hebrews 8:13, states that the Old Covenant, made between God and the Israelite people, was ready to pass away in that generation; there is no mention of the literal Earth passing. In fact, the old covenant was the only “thing” in that generation that was dissolved after Jesus died on the cross. This is confirmed by Matt 5:18, which states that none of the old covenant laws would be done away with, until “heaven and earth” passed away.

As you read the New Testament, you will find that the Bible confirms that when Christ died on the cross, the Old Covenant laws were nailed to the cross also (figuratively speaking). So, when the “Old Covenant world” or “heaven and earth” passed away, the Old Covenant laws went away with it. With that understanding in mind, Matthew 24:34 and Matthew 5:18 do not contradict each other.

Read Colossians 2:13-14 KJV

Use the following symbolic term list to translate

Revelation 21:1

Heaven and Earth: Old Covenant World

Sea: Covenant Bound People (Israel)

Read Revelation 21:1 KJV

Just as a side note, only the Israelites were given the old covenant laws, so only the people of Israel and their households were part of the Old Covenant world. Neglecting to take the symbolic nature of the terms “heaven and earth” into account, has aided in leading many believers to think that one day the literal heaven and Earth will be completely destroyed, but this is not the case.

Read Ecclesiastes 1:4 KJV

As you read the Bible, keep in mind that certain words can be taken both literally and/or symbolically. When you come across a word that seems symbolic in nature, because of obvious reasons, or because it clashes with other texts, conduct a little research. Use a site like Biblegateway.com to search for other texts that also use the word in a symbolic fashion. If you do not have access to the internet, start a list in your Bible study notebook of possible symbolic words, along with the verse each word is found in. As you continue to read through the Bible, when you encounter the word again (used in a symbolic manor), jot the text down so that at a later point in time, you can study all of the texts to find the intended meaning of the word.

Below you will find a small list of some of the symbolic words that we covered in this lesson, along with some other helpful terms:

Earth = Nation of Israel

Heaven & Earth = Old covenant world

Sea = Covenant bound people

Many Waters = Many people

Mountain = Kingdom

Lamb of God = Jesus Christ

Sun, Moon & Stars = People in authority or high status

Grass = People in general

Green Grass = God's people

Grasshoppers = Men of war

Thorns & Briers = Trouble makers/backsliders

Wilderness = Lands outside Israel

Desert = Place where there is no knowledge of God

Stubble = Godless people

Creatures/Beasts = Evil people

Ancient Trees = People of great knowledge

Fire/Furnace = Affliction/Tribulation

Try your hand at translating the following texts...

Isaiah 10:17-19 KJV _____

Revelation 7:3-4 KJV _____

Bible Study Notes – Lesson 6:
