



THE SCRIPTURE
INTERPRETS ITSELF:
IN THE VERSE—WORDS USED
MUST BE IN HARMONY

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II Timothy 3:16:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God [God-breathed], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

All of the Word of God, as it was originally revealed to holy men of God—the God-breathed Word—fits together perfectly from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21. The Word of God interprets itself in the verse, in the context, and as used before. If a scripture does not interpret itself in the verse right where it is written, we can check that the individual words are being understood according to their Biblical usage. Another thing we can check regarding the Word interpreting itself in the verse is that the words used are in harmony with the verse itself as well as with all the scripture verses relating to the subject. If individual words or phrases in a verse do not seem to fit with all the scriptures relating to the subject, then we must look more closely at that verse. Something further in the verse needs to be understood.

Let's look at a record in the Book of Exodus where some words don't appear to be in harmony with all the scriptures relating to a subject.

Moses was chosen by God to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, where they were in bondage, and back into the Promised Land. When Moses repeatedly asked the ruler of Egypt (the Pharaoh) to let the people depart, he stubbornly refused, even when a series of plagues befell Egypt. In the tenth and final plague, God gave Moses instructions for the children of Israel to sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the two side doorposts of the house and on the upper doorpost, called a lintel, so He could protect them.

Exodus 12:23,29:

For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will

pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.

And it came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle.

These verses *seem* to interpret themselves right where they are written. The Biblical usage of the individual words in these verses is clear, and the words seem to be in harmony with the verses they are set within. They *appear* to communicate that God smote the firstborn of the Egyptians. But is that in harmony with all the scriptures relating to the subject of God's true nature? The answer is no.

Let's consider some of what the Word says about God's true nature.

Psalms 100:5:

For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

I John 4:16:

And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

I John 1:5:

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

James 1:17:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Isaiah 40:28:

Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

God is good; He is love and light with no darkness or shadow of turning in Him at all. He is the Creator, not the destroyer. Exodus 12:29 does not seem to be in harmony

with these verses. So we need to enlighten our understanding to help us see how the Word fits together harmoniously.

One place we can start is to consider that this might be figurative language and not literal in meaning. So, does this verse mean that God literally smote the firstborn of the Egyptians? This apparent contradiction can be reconciled with the proper understanding of a figure of speech known as the idiom of permission. An idiom can be described as a usage of words particular to a language or a culture that has a meaning different from the strict dictionary definition. The Hebrew language has an idiom of permission, which is a unique usage of words where active verbs are sometimes used to express, not the *doing* of the action, but the *permission* of the action.

For example, when Exodus 12:29 says, “the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt,” the understanding is that “the Lord permitted all the firstborn to be smitten.” God had to permit the action, or allow it, because the Egyptian ruler did not obey His Word.

It was the destroyer, the Devil, who killed the firstborn, not God. God provided protection for His people by way of the Passover. God is good always, as the many clear verses show.

By understanding that words in a verse must be in harmony with the verse and with all the scriptures relating to the subject, we were able to navigate this potentially thorny passage, and we observed how it fits harmoniously with the rest of God’s Word. Once we recognized the idiom of permission, we could let the scripture interpret itself right in the verse.

This key, that the words in a verse must be in harmony with the verse as well as with all the scriptures relating to the subject, helps us to avoid privately interpreting a verse or section of scripture. It alerts us to check further when something appears to not be in harmony. In addition to checking figures of speech, as we did in Exodus, we can look at the translation, at Eastern manners and customs, and at other resources to make sure we understand how the Word is interpreting itself in the verse.

Applying keys to the Word’s interpretation enables us to rightly divide the Scriptures and opens our understanding of the rich truths God has for us in His Word.

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