

(Appendix II) Explanation of "Spiritual Interpretation of Scripture" by Caleb Huang

Many theologically trained preachers and believers view "spiritual interpretation of Scripture" with considerable disapproval, equating it with "arbitrary interpretation." They not only steer clear of it themselves but also advise others to avoid it.

In reality, the Bible contains numerous prophecies, types, parables, symbols, and allegories that often cannot be interpreted literally but require spiritual interpretation. If one rigidly adheres to the principle of literal interpretation and refuses to seek the deeper meanings God has hidden within the written text, one misses out on a wealth of spiritual insight and revelation—a truly regrettable loss!

Of course, "spiritual interpretation" must never be arbitrary—a matter of interpreting the Bible haphazardly based on mere whim. For instance, critics of this method often cite the example of someone interpreting the name "Delilah" (Judges 16:4) based on a Chinese homophone—suggesting it implies she "violently pulled" (*dà lì lā*) away the source of Samson's strength. Using such a flawed example to reject the entire practice of spiritual interpretation reflects an attitude of "throwing the baby out with the bathwater"—an approach we certainly should not adopt.

If "spiritual interpretation" adheres to sound exegetical principles, it not only avoids the pitfalls of arbitrary interpretation and the risk of being led astray by heresy (Ephesians 4:14), but also enables a richer understanding of God's inspired Word and yields greater instruction and correction (2 Timothy 3:16). Why, then, should we not embrace it?

Here, I outline the principles of "spiritual interpretation" that I follow, offered for the reader's reference and to address any concerns:

(1) The outcome of any "spiritual interpretation" must never contradict clearly revealed biblical truths—particularly those concerning the orthodox Christian faith, such as the nature of the Triune God (e.g., one must not interpret Jesus Christ as merely a "lesser god") or the

fundamental doctrines of salvation (e.g., one must not add to or subtract from the conditions for salvation).

(2) The outcome of any "spiritual interpretation" must never violate or lower the standards of righteousness and morality—such as, for example, condoning open homosexual activity within the church due to a misunderstanding of the concept of love. (3) The results of any "allegorical interpretation" must never contradict the explicit statements of Scripture; for instance, since the Bible clearly states that "no one knows the day or the hour" (Matt. 24:36), one must not attempt to predict the date of the Lord's return.

(4) The results of any "allegorical interpretation" must be internally consistent and must not contradict interpretations established elsewhere in the same passage; for example, since the Lord Jesus personally explained in the Parables of the Kingdom that "birds" represent "the evil one" (Matt. 13:4, 19), one cannot interpret the "birds" mentioned later (Matt. 13:32) as representing "people of the world" (cf. Ezek. 31:6).

(5) The results of any "allegorical interpretation" must not disregard clear biblical explanations in favor of forced or arbitrary interpretations; for instance, since the Bible clearly defines "leaven" as "teaching" (Matt. 16:12) or "wickedness" (1 Cor. 5:7–8), one cannot interpret the "leaven" in the two loaves of the wave offering (Lev. 23:17) or the leaven hidden in the three measures of flour (Matt. 13:33) as representing the "Holy Spirit."

(6) Of course, some things in the Bible allow for interpretation from both positive and negative perspectives—such as the distinction between "living water" and "dead water" (cf. John 4:13–14) or between "good trees" and "bad trees" (cf. Matt. 7:18)—so one cannot always apply a single, sweeping rule. In such cases, one must consider the context and other relevant scriptures to arrive at a proper interpretation. Take, for example, the question of how to interpret the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:2. Some, citing the Lord's statement that angels "neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Matt. 22:30), conclude that the term does not refer to angels but to the descendants of Seth, while the "daughters of men" refer to the descendants of Cain. However, this interpretation fails to reasonably explain: (1) why the sons born of their union would become Nephilim; and (2) why God, had He intended to destroy Cain's descendants, would not have done so much earlier rather than waiting until that specific time. It must have been the violation of the principle established by God at Creation—that each should reproduce "according to its kind" (Genesis 1:13, 21, 25)—that prompted God to take decisive action. Therefore, the "sons of God" can also be interpreted negatively, referring to "angels who did not keep their proper domain" (cf. Jude 6–7). — Caleb Huang