

creatures. When he speaks of the sun, moon and stars, he means these bodies. When he says, 'how do the beasts groan?' he means the beasts, and not, as Hengstenberg thinks, the uncovenanted nations of the heathen world' (*Old Testament Prophecy*, p. 171) When the prophets do express themselves symbolically, the context will usually indicate it. Sometimes it is expressly stated, as it is in Dan. 8 and Rev. 17. As a rule the language of the prophets should be understood literally. Exceptions to this rule must be warranted by Scripture.

- f. The prophets clothes their thoughts in form derived from the dispensation to which they belonged, i.e., from the life, constitution, and history of their own people. . . .
  - g. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the prophets occasionally transcended their historical and dispensational limitations, and spoke in forms that pointed to a more spiritual dispensation in the future. . . .
  - h. Sometimes the prophets revealed the word of the Lord in prophetic actions.
2. Interpretation of Prophecy. . . .
    - a. The words of the prophet should be taken in their usual literal sense, unless the context or the manner in which they are fulfilled clearly indicate that they have a symbolical meaning. . . .
    - b. In studying the figurative descriptions that are found in the prophets, the interpreter should make it his aim to discover the fundamental idea expressed. . . .
    - c. In the interpretation of the symbolical actions of the prophets, the interpreter must proceed on the assumption of their reality, i.e., of their occurrence in actual life, unless the connection clearly proves the contrary.
    - d. The fulfillment of some of the most important prophecies is germinant, i.e., they are fulfilled by installments, each fulfillment being a pledge of that which is to follow. . . .
    - e. Prophecies should be read in the light of their fulfillment, for this will often reveal depths that would otherwise have escaped the attention . . . . Moreover, he should not proceed on the assumption that prophecies are always fulfilled in the exact form, in which they were uttered. The presumption is that, if they are fulfilled in a later dispensation, the dispensational form will be regarded in the fulfillment."

-- Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book house, 1950), pp. 148-153.

## B. Distinctions and Clarification of Certain Basic Conceptions and Terms

### 1. Literal and figurative uses of language

In the Bible we find various types of materials: laws, instructions, philosophical writings, poetry and songs, recorded visions and insights, parables and allegories, prophecy in the general sense of proclaiming God's Word, and prophecy in the specialized sense of prediction, together with several other categories of materials. Yet in all of these types of materials we find only two basic uses of language -- literal and figurative.