

Goodnews Christian Ministry



THE LANGUAGE OF GOD

"I have been telling you all this in metaphors; the hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in metaphors; but will tell you about the Father in plain words. Jn.16:25

God has hidden the mysteries of heaven behind a divine cloak. The seven seals which form this veil are composed of metaphor and for many centuries they effectively blocked every person on earth from seeing clearly the hidden truths of heaven. *"There are many prophets and holy men who longed to see what you see and never saw it."* (Mt.13:17).

Perhaps the most important difference between early Christians and Jews was the way in which each interpreted the word of God. To the Jews, the Torah was literal. They saw no secondary meaning hidden behind its words. Christians, on the other hand, because they had been instructed by Jesus, saw these books veiled in metaphor -- their true meaning hidden in a spiritual language structured in the design of God.

When John in his vision was taken by the angel into heaven he saw God there, sitting on a great throne and holding in His hand the Bible. *"I saw that in the right hand of the One sitting on the throne there was a scroll that had writing on back and front and was sealed with seven seals."* (Rv.5:1). In his vision John was shown that among all the angels and men of heaven or earth there was only one person worthy enough to break the seven seals on this book: *"...the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed, and he will open the scroll and the seven seals of it."* (Rv.5:5).

The Lion of the tribe of Judah -- the key that unlocks the scriptures -- is Jesus Christ. *"You are worthy to take the scroll and break the seals of it, because you were sacrificed, and with your blood you bought men for God of every race, language, people and nation..."* (Rv.5:9).

Opening its metaphoric curtain, Jesus released into the world the hidden language of God -- all the secret messages that unlock the gate of heaven. Yet, in doing so, he kept the screen intact. We can see this by the fact that Jesus himself talked to the people only in parables: *"In all this Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables; indeed, he would never speak to them*

except in parables. This was to fulfill the prophecy: 'I will speak to you in parables and expound things hidden since the foundation of the world.' (Mt.13:34-35). This was so that the Holy Spirit could distribute the invisible secrets of God selectively.

"The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are revealed to you, but they are not revealed to them. For anyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away." (Mt.13:11-12). It was because of the people's wickedness that God made His message a mystery. His words hold the secret to eternal life -- something the wicked cannot experience, so only those with ears to hear have been given access to their hidden meaning.

The idea that scripture could have a spiritual dimension was clear even to the writers of the Old Testament. The Book of Proverbs, for instance, opens with these words:

"Proverbs...for understanding words of deep meaning...for perceiving the meaning of proverbs and obscure sayings... the sayings of the sages and their riddles..." (Prov.1:1-6).

While their ancestors may have seen obscure sayings in the Bible, orthodox Jews today do not talk about the scriptures in such terms. In Christ's day, wide-spread disagreement raged among the leaders in Jerusalem about the nature of God and His impact on men. In those days Jewish scholars searched the scriptures for proofs of their various beliefs. We can see this in the Gospel's accounts, and especially in the widely disparate views of the Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes.

The Sadducees were more like the Jews of today, but the Pharisees believed in angels and looked forward to resurrection -- ideas that are not shared by modern Jews. The Essenes, on the other hand, seemed to follow a prophet-oriented Judaism that closely paralleled the Hassidean freedom fighter mentality of the Maccabean period.

The unification of Jewish theology occurred soon after Jesus appeared and seems to have been a response to His coming. And once it had been defined, Jewish leaders rejected the idea of a scripture underlain with symbolic hidden meanings. By blocking such metaphoric interpretation, it became impossible for Jewish scholars to see Jesus Christ. Paul called this scriptural cloud a veil and said that it had been divinely placed, *"...indeed, to this very day, that same veil is still there whenever the old Covenant is being read, a veil never lifted, since Christ alone can remove it."* (2 Cor.3:14).

This divine seal not only clouds Jewish minds, it covers the vision of the wicked as well. In fact, Jesus revealed that even the scholars would be blinded by the secrets of God's mysteries: *"I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and clever and revealing them to mere children instead."* (Lk.10:21). The only people able to understand the metaphors of God are the children of God. To all others, there is nothing but the veil -- a veil that can be removed only through the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is a significant mystery here. How God's secrets could be misinterpreted by scholars but understood by people without any education seems incomprehensible. "*As your word unfolds, it gives light, and the simple understand.*" (Ps.119:130). This defies all logic. Yet this paradox is locked in the concept and function of the Holy Spirit. The understanding of the simple is something which can only come through the power and guidance of the Spirit of God.

When he spoke to His apostles Jesus anticipated this divine, invisible instruction. "*The hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in metaphors but tell you about the Father in plain words.*" (Jn.16:25). "*I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever, that Spirit of truth whom the world can never receive since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you.*" (Jn.14:16-17).

But to those outside of God Jesus said, "*Do you know why you cannot take in what I say? It is because you are unable to understand my language. That is because the devil is your father and you prefer to do what your father wants.*" (Jn.8:43-47). The entire Bible, new and old Testament alike, is written in this hidden tongue. "*Elijah has come already and they did not recognize him...*" (Mt.17:12). "*It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone...*" (Ps.118:22). "*If David calls him Lord, then how can he be his son?*" (Mt.22:41-45). "*I am going to strike the shepherd so that the sheep may be scattered.*" (Zech.13:7).

Understanding the secret meaning behind these words is at the very core of hearing God. This is why Jesus was so insistent with his apostles that they decipher his words, and not just listen to the literal stories that encapsulated what He had to say. "*If you do not understand this parable*", he once asked them, "*how then will you understand any of the parables?*" (Mk.4:13-14). Deciphering scripture requires an understanding of spiritual language, the hidden tongue that lies just beneath its surface.

The Bible is written in two languages simultaneously -- narrative and poetic. Narrative is like the text caption below a picture and poetic is the picture itself. Poetic language is deeply symbolic and filled with metaphor. Through it, one word can be transposed in the mind to conjure up a sweeping variety of meanings.

Narrative is just the opposite. Meant to be a language of precision, it demands exact meaning from its vocabulary. Because precise language requires precise definition, narrative takes a lot of words to say very little. That is why we say 'one picture is worth a thousand words'. If no words are available to describe an idea in narrative language, the idea cannot be expressed. Worse, until it can be precisely described, the idea does not even exist.

Communication and thought, therefore, are intimately related. These two forms of thinking have recently been linked to the right and left sides of the brain, showing that each is

processed by the mind in a completely different way. Narrative has become the fundamental form of expression in the western world because of its precise way of denoting ideas.

One of the most important Greek influences in the world was the shift to narrative as the basis for communicative language. Up to that time, especially in the east, people communicated in both forms -- in both narrative and poetic -- so that the two ways of speaking and thinking were interchangeable. Consequently language and thought were often mystical and arbitrary. Aristotle changed all that. Given the Greek preoccupation with the absolutes of science and philosophy, Aristotle decreed that the basis for communication be narrative, and everyone since then has agreed with him.

The epitome of narrative language is law. As its ultimate expression, law also shows us narrative's most glaring problems. Meant for precision, it can work just the opposite. Simple contracts work well in law, but complex ones are often a disaster. Narrative breaks down, even among the experts, when it comes to complex or abstract ideas.

It is because of this breakdown that Einstein had to use poetic thought in order to come to his revelations about space and the universe. He thought in terms of elevators and freight trains, and transposed what he saw in these to outer space. In doing this, he discovered there were similarities between the two which matched. In the freedom of poetic thought he could extrapolate these similarities and see new things beyond them never dreamed of before -- his mind unfettered by the restrictions of past definition. To explain his ideas to an academic world which thought in narrative however, he had to redefine his ideas back into the kind of prose his audience could understand. He did this through the intermediary of mathematics -- the ultimate expression of precision in a world which God made "*according to measure, number and weight*". Those who think only in narrative terms look at Einstein and say, 'How did he ever think of those things?' Freed from the jail of a defined narrative, he entered a process of thinking which could roam about freely outside of vocabulary.

Because poetic language and thinking have no precise definitions, the mind is free to contemplate an infinite variety of meanings. This expands interpretation to the borders of imagination, allowing the mind to explore options which are virtually unlimited. Precision is sacrificed for scope. And definition for creativity and understanding. This makes poetic a language of discovery. The two languages used together lead to deeper understanding.

The reason why this works is because God has replicated creation over and over again using similar processes, creating dualisms to all things. Einstein proved that this dualism extends to the borders of the universe. God obviously did this on purpose so that we could see one thing, and through it, understand in it many other things as well -- because all of it is pointing to one thing alone -- Jesus Christ. When we say that history repeats itself, we are implying that the same processes apply even to human behavior.

The Holy Spirit has used metaphoric dualism as a basis for all the words of prophecy. That is why an understanding of this process and the language used to describe it are so essential in removing the veil which now hides God's prophecy from our minds. Daniel, for instance, could describe an event that occurred 2300 years ago and have us see in it the mirror image of a sacrilege that still lies in the future.

God has created a world in which the patterns keep repeating because we live in a place where two opposite spirits are warring for our soul. Satan does not change and neither does God, and so the conflict between them which is carried out in our own flesh always impacts in the same way. Sin always leads to catastrophe. When the experts warn that 'the Big One' is coming, most people look to the San Andreas fault, but we can also use the same expression for Armageddon. This kind of poetic dualism can be seen in all things because sin is bringing the world to an end. Disaster has an ultimate focus -- so all the catastrophe's are related. They tell us that God is near -- at the very door.

Despite the drawbacks to narrative, and the need for poetic thought to counterbalance it, western society has virtually drummed poetic language out of existence. Our world has become too disciplined to tolerate any imprecision in thought or communication, even for creative purposes. In today's format every concept must be narrowly defined. We can see this in a simple example. The Declaration of Independence says that 'all men are created equal'. This, of course, is a poetic expression meant to include all mankind, but in narrative thinking it has excluded women and children. "*What about us?*", they ask.

Because we have excluded it from our minds and communication, poetic language is no longer understood or tolerated by much of the population -- showing that the part of the brain which deals in this kind of thought has been shut down in many people. That is why we have seen these kind of questions pop up in recent years. Especially in relation to the Bible -- a book filled with poetic language.

When God gave Moses authority to write the Bible, there were no restrictions governing the way ideas should be expressed. Consequently, the Bible was produced in both narrative and poetic language simultaneously. The easiest way to see this is in scripture's liberal use of metaphor -- all the parables, for instance.

In eastern religions, poetic language is known as mysticism, but in Christianity it's mystery has been solved and so we refer to the Bible's poetic language as spiritual, not mystical. Because the Bible is written in two kinds of language, its concepts must be understood in both ways.

The Jews see Moses in the strict definitions of narrative law, but God has interpreted that law in poetic terms: Jesus was the underlying focus of the Old Testament from the beginning as far as God was concerned. Yet this was a truth that could only be seen poetically. The fact that God had hidden a poetic language even in the narrative of Moses shows that not just the parables, but every word in the Bible must be understood both

literally and metaphorically.

These two types of language, narrative and poetic, are interwoven together so that they envelope every sentence in the Bible. In this way the Holy Spirit has combined both precision and infinite thought together in the one document. God has allowed scripture to be fulfilled both ways, but His primary objective was that it be understood poetically (spiritually). That is because it is not the Bible itself that instructs us, but God. The Holy Spirit is our teacher and the Holy Spirit simply uses the words in the Bible to show us the ultimate truths about God.

Therefore it is not the writer's intention that is the primary object of the literature, it is the message that God has hidden for us inside the writer's description that is of paramount importance -- a message that can only be understood by means of the Spirit.

Paul was showing us our need to see God in poetic terms rather than in the narrative of the world when he said, *"We teach, not in the way that human philosophy is taught, but in the way that the Spirit teaches us: we teach spiritual things spiritually. An unspiritual person is one who does not accept anything of the Spirit of God: he sees it all as nonsense; it is beyond his understanding because it can only be understood by means of the Spirit."* (1 Cor.2:13-14).

God is unseen and cannot be proved. Neither can heaven nor hell. No one has seen a soul and no one can prove its existence. Even the angels are invisible to us. The only way we can know that any of these things exist is through poetic thought. Faith, then, is the ability to see spiritual things spiritually.

Since we tend to interpret the Bible in strict narrative terms (law), we usually see God as a severe judge, holding a Damascus sword, and just waiting for us to make a single small mistake so that He can slice off our heads. Theology, of course, as our narrative definition of the Bible, defines the mistake that God seems to be looking for. Each person's narrative defining something different.

This is why we have so many diverse theologies on earth forming all the various churches. Each of them are convinced that God wants us to obey an array of man-made rules, most of which were expressed in one way or another in the narrative of Moses. They all say they are structured in the mercy of Jesus Christ, yet they all tie strict and uncompromising man-made narratives to his Gospel -- narratives ranging from magic incantations to complex human regulations.

This obsession with their own legality is why all the various churches are so intolerant of each other. It not only explains why Mormons and Protestants and Catholics cannot interact, but why all of these major divisions have produced a vast array of warring subsets within themselves. Each of them utterly convinced that their own legal interpretation of scripture is the correct one and that all the others are wrong -- and therefore, probably fatal.

This occurs because we think only in narrative terms -- in the terms of this world's language.

The 'creeds' of our various churches are the ultimate examples of the way in which our theologians transpose Christ's poetic expressions into narrative. For this reason, law and faith always go together. God intended it this way because both languages in the Bible are true.

Yet God has tempered the inflexibility of the Law with mercy -- transforming it from letter to spirit. In this transformation, the spirit of the law became the higher authority. Unable to fathom the poetic, it is inconceivable for us to come to grips with a God who has developed a sliding scale -- to a God who said, for instance, "*To him whom more is given, more will be expected*". (Lk.12:48).

This kind of variable judgement is not acceptable in a contemporary human court where we say 'ignorance of the law is no excuse'. As a result, these two languages represent a collision between two entirely different ways of thinking. That is what happens whenever God comes into contact with man.

What Jesus' words show is that God is not going to judge us on our own narrative terms. He does not care whether we go to church on Saturday or Sunday or even Wednesday for that matter. He does not care whether we are Protestant or Catholic or Mormon or fat or thin or black or white. He does not care whether we eat meat or dance or wear beads. God wants us to be holy -- simply to put Christ's commandments into practice in our own lives.

We can see this in the poetic expression of Jesus, but it is invisible to us in the strict legal narrative of Moses. God keeps the Law of Moses because He is righteous, and no one who is righteous breaks the law, but He has given up His Son to a death on the cross so that our sins with respect to that Law could all be forgiven. In that one instant, he removed us from the Law and made us responsible to Him only in terms of our obedience and faith to Jesus Christ. The poetic concept of this is almost beyond our prosaic mind to grasp. We still think of God in the simplistic precision of man-made restrictions -- the kind of precision that rules our vocabulary and thinking. That is why we step right over the top of Jesus and go on to look for the 'true' church -- the perfect creed -- which we are sure lies just over the next horizon.

Since narrative operates only in absolutes, when the Bible is viewed in that language alone, it has no component except the exact meaning of the vocabulary itself. We call this absolute, the 'letter of the law'. Its opposite poetic component is the 'spirit of the law'. The spirit of the law has no meaning in a contemporary courtroom where only narrative thinking exists. That is because narrative thought is always empirical. A lawyer has no time for what is 'right' or what is 'true', only for what can be proved.

Scholarship and science are the same, existence only relates to what can be seen, proved

and described. The problem is, God has many things to reveal to us which do not fit into any of these categories. Most of God's creation is invisible, unknown, cannot be proved and no words exist to describe it. Therefore there is no way for Him to speak to us on the literary terms we have set.

By blocking poetic expression -- the vocabulary of the Spirit -- we have made language choices which lock us into a legalese which God has great difficulty penetrating. The only way He can communicate ideas about His invisible and spiritual world is through a spiritual language which most of us have rejected and therefore cannot speak or understand. *"Do you know why you cannot take in what I say? It is because you are unable to understand my language."* (Jn.8:43). This is why a barrier exists between mankind and God.

And even if we did have a vocabulary for all the ideas God wants to express to us, it would take so many words to define these ideas that we would be left, not with a Bible, but with an entire encyclopedia. As John said, *"The world itself, I suppose, would not be enough to hold all the books which would have to be written."* (Jn.21:25).

By speaking to us in poetic terms, God has used an economy of language to bring many different concepts into a single form which could unfold as our understanding grows -- ideas that would have been impossible for God to divulge in pure narrative terms. Precise definition does not lend itself to an unfolding revelation. That is because the descriptive narrative has to be entirely re-written with each new discovery. This explains why the schools use new textbooks every year. But we cannot go back and re-write the Bible. Everything that God needed to say to us, had to exist in one form from the beginning.

This is a fundamental reason why God structured the Bible in the fluidity of poetic terms. As our understanding of the world evolves, so must our perception of scripture. That is why Jesus told his disciples that he had many more things to tell them which they were not yet prepared to hear. (Jn.16:12).

When we view the scriptures only in its narrative language, deeper understanding is lost and an unfolding revelation is impossible. When we tie our religious definitions to our knowledge of this world, we cannot tolerate scientific discoveries, or any other contrary opinions for that matter, to cloud these definitions.

Because our knowledge of this world is going to change, any definitions we tie to it must change as well. Cemented in strict and uncompromising definitions, the whole narrative structure is completely interdependent. Any slight change makes the whole document invalid -- requiring that we re-write the entire book from scratch.

This is why the Roman hierarchy was so intolerant of Kepler and Copernicus when they looked out into space and saw that the earth revolved around the sun. We would think today, 'who cares?', but that one discovery blew an entire theological narrative. It meant

that a whole Vatican theology had to be re-written -- right down to the core.

This is what happens to us when we compartmentalize God and try to make Him fit into our faulty narrative knowledge. Our entire faith can be shattered in a single discovery. This is why when Jesus appeared to Cleopas on the road from Jerusalem, he explained the second language of scripture to him -- the hidden language behind the narrative.

The difference between these two languages can be seen in a simple example. In one language the Bible says '70 years', a fixed definition which has been precisely defined for us by astronomers and scientists, but in another it says 'a day can be like a thousand years', and that erases the fixed definition and brings us to poetic interpretation. It brings us to the second language.

We can see exactly the same process again today with the discovery of the process of evolution. An entire wing of the Christian church is up in arms over this concept because it does not fit into their narrative perception of the world. They have taken the poetic expressions of the Old Testament and interpreted them in a strict legal narrative little different from what Roman theologians had done before the telescope was invented -- tying their belief in God to a single point in the world's unfolding knowledge.

And again, just as the discoveries of Kepler and Copernicus did before him, Darwin's findings have altered the world's knowledge. And again like Kepler and Copernicus, it has done so in such a way that appears to contradict religious traditions born out of literal interpretations of the Old Testament. Yet the One who made creation also guided scripture, so Darwin had no way of discovering a world that proved the Bible wrong. Instead, Darwin's findings show that those who interpreted scripture in narrative terms alone were dealing with only a fraction of God's message.

Had they been listening, they would have known that two thousand years ago Jesus described Darwin's revelation in spiritual terms. In his parable Jesus said that the kingdom of God was like the angels throwing a net into the sea and bringing in a catch of all kinds. When it was full, the angels sat on the bank and sorted through it, keeping the good and throwing the bad away. This represents survival of the fittest (faithful) by supernatural selection. It is God's way of paraphrasing Darwin, showing that what Darwin actually discovered was a dualism that proved the truth of Christ -- it shows that God made this world in such a way that it would point to the Gospel's truth on every level. All Darwin discovered was the earthly equivalent of God's own rules.

The same kind of dualism can be seen in Kepler's discovery as well. This world revolves around the sun because we revolve around the Son of God. Man is not the center of the universe, God is. Because we have made ourselves the center, we have reversed reality. That is why so many of us tend to see God in anthropomorphic terms -- with hands and legs and arms and such. The Bible said that God made man in His own image and instead of comprehending that in poetic terms, we switch it into narrative and make God into our

image. So instead of seeing ourselves in the image of God, we make God into a man. This turns it upside down and locks us into a theological narrative which is not true and never was true.

These are spiritual images that can only be seen by means of poetic thought. When we keep going back to viewing the Bible only in the strict and uncompromising terms of narrative language, we instill into it our own biases and lock ourselves out of seeing the larger truths behind its words. Jesus tried to tell us this when he implored his apostles to try harder to understand the hidden meanings behind his parables. (Mk.4:14). His metaphors held the key to eternal life and he was trying to tell the people who listened to him that they must learn to understand his language in terms of its poetic (spiritual) meaning. Once they did that, the veil of scripture would be removed and the hidden meanings of the entire Bible would be opened to them.

God is above the universe and beyond even what lies behind it. We can see this in the words of John: "*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared now and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, and the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven...*" (Rv.21:1-2). Through poetic understanding we can see God's invisible kingdom in a place that lies even beyond the sky -- far beyond anything our telescopes can probe. This leads to concepts which are incomprehensible to narrative thought -- concepts that can only be seen through metaphor -- and it means that the future can never leave Jesus behind, because whatever science discovers, Jesus made.

It does not take a genius to listen or think in the poetic. It doesn't even take a lot of education. Jesus proved this with his parables -- parables that small children could understand. God spoke easily to those who did not meet this world's criteria for intellect. In fact as we have seen, it was the educated who were misled by these parables, not the children.

When Jesus described God's process of creating the world and mankind, he said, "*How it came to be no one knows. First came the shoot, then the ear, and then the corn in the ear.*" (Mk.4:26-29). In these words, Jesus illustrates God's prudence of language, as He leads us past what is not important and focuses our attention, instead, on what is important. How it came to be is not important. It is the end of things that holds all the meaning.

The entire creation was formed to lead first to Jesus, and then to judgement. When the time was appropriate -- when the corn appeared in the ear -- Jesus suddenly came to earth to offer mankind reconciliation with God before the judgement could destroy us. In his reconciliation, Jesus removed us from man's terms and put us squarely before God alone. The judgement will be entirely spiritual. Theology will not be involved. Only the spirit of the law will matter. The terms of God's judgement will be based entirely on the Gospel Jesus preached. (Jn.12:47-48). And this is the paradox. There is a narrative for judgement, but it is God's narrative, not man's.

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