

Loose ends, Francis Schaeffer, Hermeneutics, and Acts 8:1 and 9:35

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Loose ends

1. “Ultimately, whether he’s using hyperbole or not, I think we need to ask ourselves, ‘How is the answer to this going to help me follow Jesus better.’” (From the Sunday school recording on October 7, 2018, starting at approximately 36:36) [SLIDE]
 - a. See **Luke 1:3-4** [SLIDE]
2. “Earlier when you were saying that you don’t maybe believe that the word ‘all’ really means ‘all,’ like ‘all the people’.... is it harder to write down that he healed someone, or harder to write down that all of them believed. If you’re not going to believe all the words that are written, how can you believe any of it? Well, if most of them did, then he could have written ‘most,’ or if some of them did, he could have written, ‘some.’” (From the Sunday school recording on November 18, 2018, starting at approximately 39:05) [SLIDE]

Francis Schaeffer

1. Francis Schaeffer, truth, and the freedom to disagree [SLIDE]
 - a. Selections from the SBJT article “Remembering Francis Schaeffer.”
2. But when does disagreeing with historical Christian doctrine become heresy?
 - a. Prime example: Jehovah’s Witnesses at my door, Ecclesiastes, and “soul sleep”
 - i. Ecclesiastes 9:10

Hermeneutics (science and art of interpretation)

1. From *Interpreting the Bible*, A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Bethel Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota* (highlighting for emphasis is mine)

- a. "The need for interpretation is not peculiar to the Scriptures. Any document, ancient or modern, must be interpreted. The decisions of the Supreme Court are actually interpretations of the Constitution of the United States. Philosophers often debate what Plato, Aristotle, or Kant meant by certain phrases or assertions. The archaeologist who carefully analyzes a religious writing from the Dead Sea Scrolls often finds statements that puzzle him, and he must use all the principles and skills he knows to reach even a tentative conclusion of meaning.

Whatever the documents, the interpreter must be careful not to distort the meaning. Such care is required especially in the interpretation of the Scriptures, for they involve not only history, proverbs, peoples, and institutions, but the very message or revelation of God. Timothy was commanded to exercise great care in handling this authoritative message: 'Make every effort to present [render] yourself approved [by test] to God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly handling the message of truth' (2 Tim. 2:15). To handle the message of truth rightly demands sound principles of interpretation.

Some Christians fear that an emphasis upon such principles ignores the illumination of the Holy Spirit. This fear has some foundation. Many have approached the Bible in a mechanical, rationalistic fashion. Fleeing from the extreme of mystical pietism, they have rushed into the error of regarding man's intellect as self-sufficient. They have thought that man, strictly by his own intellectual efforts, could search out and make known the true and deep meanings of Scripture. On the opposite side, there have been some sincere people who have thought that the witness of the Spirit in the heart of the believer enables him automatically to know the correct meaning of every phrase, or verse, or passage. True, the illumination of the Spirit is essential, but such illumination can be hindered by wrong approaches to the Scripture. The Christian must skillfully use sound principles in his efforts to uncover meaning." (3-4)

- b. From chapter three, "Crucial Issues"

"How easy it is for us to attribute to the original speaker or writer ideas which never entered his mind when he uttered [or wrote] the expression which is being interpreted." (56)

- c. From the section "Special Hermeneutics" and chapter eight, "Short Figures of Speech"

"Special hermeneutics deals with definitions and principles which make it easier to interpret special literary forms or to convey the meaning found in specific topical areas treated in the biblical materials. The principles of special hermeneutics are to be applied only to these special forms or themes. However,

these forms and themes appear frequently in the Bible, so that the interpreter often has need to refer to these definitions and principles.

Special hermeneutics involves the following aspects: First, figurative language - its variety and kinds....

The biblical materials which pertain to these areas are constantly encountered by the careful Biblical student. Because of the importance of these materials, the student cannot afford to use a haphazard procedure.” (178)

“These chapters on figurative language will deal rather with the various kinds of figurative language. *By literal meaning the writer refers to the usual or customary sense conveyed by words or expressions.* This view of literal meaning is not to be confused with the idea that language, like the multiplication table, is made up of units that always have the same value. This is far from the truth. *By figurative meaning the writer has in mind the representation of one concept in terms of another because the nature of the two things compared allows such an analogy to be drawn.* When Jesus says: ‘I am the bread of life’ (John 6:35), he uses this metaphor because he is to man spiritually what bread is to man physically - the source and sustenance of life.” (179)

Figures Involving an Intensification or Reversal of Meaning:

“Hyperbole is conscious exaggeration by the writer to gain effect. The last verse in the Gospel of John contains a classical example: ‘But indeed, there are many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I do not suppose *that the world itself could contain the books being written*’ (John 21:25). John states here that his Gospel, like the others, is a selection of incidents and sayings from the life of Jesus. Hyperbole drives home the point.” (193) [SLIDE]

Acts 8:1 and 9:35

1. “And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” **Acts 8:1** [SLIDE]
2. “And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.” **Acts 9:35** [SLIDES]
 - a. It’s important to realize that these commentators come from a variety of theological perspectives, ranging from Arminians to Calvinists, and very conservative to not-quite-so-conservative, and from living to long-dead.

Despite their differences, they all, without exception, agree on this verse and the meaning of “all.”

- b. “The reference to all being converted is a Lukan hyperbole for a significant number coming to the Lord.” Darrell L. Bock, 377
- c. “The news of Aeneas’s cure spread throughout the neighborhood and all over the coastal plain of Sharon. Many of the people in that area came to see him, and the result was a further access of believers. Since much of this territory was semi-Gentile in population, a further widening of the range of the saving message is implied.” Bruce (1988), 198
- d. “A mass movement to the believing community on the part of the Jews in this district is implied.” Bruce (1990), 248
- e. “His meaning is, that the miracle was published abroad, and was known throughout the whole city. For when the Scripture saith *all*, it doth not comprehend every one how many so ever it noteth; but it putteth *all* for the more part, or for many, or for the common sort of men. Therefore, the sense is, that whereas there was but a small number of godly men there, a great part of the people became members of the Church. And in this clause is expressed the fruit of the miracle, because they embraced Christ and his gospel.” Calvin, 397
- f. “News of Aeneas’s healing spread throughout Lydda and into the Plain of Sharon to the north. Rather hyperbolically Luke says that ‘all those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.’ The Plain of Sharon is the largest of the maritime plains of northern Palestine, stretching from Joppa to Mount Carmel and with Caesarea on the coast as its geographic center. So, Luke tells us, there was a further widening of the Christian mission within the Jewish nation, preparing the way geographically and ideologically for the accounts of Peter’s ministry at Joppa...and at Caesarea...” Longenecker, 381
- g. “...the cure was accomplished by the name of Jesus, and this led to many conversions among the local people when they saw the healed man. Luke’s *all the residents* is his way of indicating a large number...” I. Howard Marshall, 179
- h. “Many unbelievers -- in Lydda and the surrounding coastal plain of Sharon -- turned to Jesus as *Lord* (here and in v. 42), acknowledging his divine authority and saving power through the actions and words of his apostle.” Peterson, 321
- i. “...both miracles redounded to *the glory of Jesus*. When Aeneas was healed, *all those who lived in Lydda and Sharon* (the coastal plain) *saw him and turned to the Lord* (35). Not that we need interpret the ‘all’ as meaning literally every single inhabitant, for, as Calvin wisely comments, ‘when Scripture mentions *all*, it is not embracing, to a man, the whole of whatever it is describing, but uses “all” for many, for the majority, or for a crowd of people’. Similarly, when Tabitha was restored to life, *this became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord* (42). In accordance with the purpose of the signs, which was to authenticate and illustrate the salvation message of the apostle, people heard the word, saw the signs, and believed.” Stott, 183-184

- j. “Like most Synoptic miracle stories, this narrative ends in v. 35 with the response of the crowds -- ‘All those who lived in Lydda and the (plain of) Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.’ Here the use of *pas*, as elsewhere in Acts, should not be taken literally but is an example of rhetorical hyperbole, intended to indicate a large response and to impress the hearer. Luke has no qualms about the idea that miracles can have an evangelistic value and effect.” Witherington, 330

Background and Context of Acts 9:35

1. C. S. Lewis and Chronological Snobbery

- a. **Chronological snobbery** is an argument that the thinking, art, or science of an earlier time is *inherently* inferior to that of the present, simply by virtue of its temporal priority or the belief that since civilization has advanced in certain areas, people of earlier time periods were less intelligent. The term was coined by C. S. Lewis and Owen Barfield, first mentioned by Lewis in his 1955 autobiographical work, *Surprised by Joy*. (Wikipedia)

2. Lydda or Lod

- a. From *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume Three*:

“A Benjaminite town located in the picturesque plain of Sharon 18 km. (11 mi.) SE of Joppa. The name’s earliest appearance is in the inscription of Thutmose III (1482-1450 B.C.) at Karnak, which lists it among the Palestinian towns held by Egypt. In 1 Chronicles 8:12 the construction of the Israelite town of Lod, along with Ono, is attributed to Shemed of Benjamin. After the Babylonian Exile, families from Lod, Ono, and Hadid, numbering about 725 exiles, returned to their home towns in 521 B.C. (Ezr. 2:33; Neh. 7:37, 11:35).

Lod was located at the intersection of the highway between Babylon and Egypt with the main road between Jerusalem and Joppa. It was therefore of great military and commercial importance. In the Maccabean period it was known as Lydda. Under Syrian rule it was part of Samaria, but in 145 B.C. it was one of three Samaritan districts that were annexed to Judea by King Demetrius II at the request of Jonathan Maccabeus....According to Josephus, Lydda ... was granted by Julius Caesar to John Hyrcanus and the Jews. After Caesar’s death, however, the inhabitants of Lydda and certain other towns were sold into slavery by Cassius for failing to pay the taxes he had demanded. Subsequently they were released by a decree of Marcus Antonius. Lydda suffered severely under Cestius Gallus, who in A.D. 66 burned the city while its inhabitants were celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem....

In NT times Lydda was the site of an early Christian community. It was during a visit to this community that Peter healed the paralyzed Aeneas (Acts 9:32-35) and was summoned to nearby Joppa upon the death of Tabitha (v. 38)."

3. (Plain of) Sharon

- a. The region (or Plain) of Sharon refers to the central coastal region of Judea or Palestine, and ranged from Joppa in the south to Mt. Carmel in the north, the Mediterranean Sea on the west and the foothills of Samaria on the east, and included the city of Caesarea, which at that time (**Acts 9:35**) had an estimated population of 125,000 people.

If (literally) "all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him [Aeneas], and they turned to the Lord," then that would have included Cornelius and the other estimated 125,000 residents of Caesarea.

The take-away for us?

1. Why are some people resistant to the idea of biblical authors, such as Luke, using hyperbole?
2. Conclusion of the SBJT article "Remembering Francis Schaeffer," "The Final Apologetic"

Resources

1. *Acts*, Darrell L. Bock
2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, F. F. Bruce, 1990
3. *The Book of the Acts*, F. F. Bruce, 1988
4. *Acts of the Apostles*, John Calvin
5. *The Acts of the Apostles*, Richard N. Longenecker
6. *Acts*, I. Howard Marshall
7. *The Acts of the Apostles*, David G. Peterson
8. *The Message of Acts*, John Stott
9. *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ben Witherington III
10. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronological_snobbery
11. "Remembering Francis Schaeffer,"
http://equip.sbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/sbjt_062_grooms.pdf