

The Bible uses figures of speech, as every book does. Usually it is quite clear what are figures of speech. I like to think of figurative language like putting salt into a dish that is cooking. A little adds a great deal to the flavor, but if we pour on a whole bucketful the food is ruined. To take large sections of the Bible as allegorical or figurative reduces them to nonsense and makes it a book in which anything can mean anything. It is dealing dishonestly with the Bible and is certainly dishonoring to our Lord.

I wonder whether you have ever heard tapes of my lectures in the course in Old Testament Introduction. I gave it two years ago and expect to be giving it again this coming fall. In that course I spend quite a bit of time dealing with the precise meaning of inspiration and exactly what the Bible claims. Many people have considerable misunderstanding on these points. It is unfortunate when we take an unrealistic attitude, but it is far worse when we take an attitude that is dishonoring to God's Word and that fails to place in it the confidence and trust that it deserves.

As to the concept of "limited inspiration," it is certainly contrary to the whole New Testament attitude toward the Old Testament. Jesus called the disciples "fools and slow of heart" for failing "to believe all that the prophets have spoken." He did not limit it to some specific spiritual area that we should be able to distinguish from other areas.

Your question about Joshua 10:11-14 is a difficult one. Many people have been content to seize a few words out of the middle of the passage and to build a complete interpretation upon these few words. I feel that the whole passage must be interpreted as a unit.

Verse 14 says that there never was a day like that before or after, "that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel." Verse 11 states that God cast down great stones from heaven and "they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword." Thus the major activity of God in this connection would seem to be the sending of the hailstones which wrought such havoc among the Canaanites.

In its comments on the Book of Joshua The New Bible Commentary suggests that after the Israelites "went up from Gilgal all night" and attacked just before dawn, Joshua prayed, not that the sun would not set, but that the sun and moon would not give light and thus hinder the defeat of the enemy. There is much to be said for this suggestion. The fact that the Lord killed more with hailstones than the Israelites killed with weapons would suggest the presence of a storm which would certainly have produced a great darkness and made the sun and moon silent, and thus might be a reasonable explanation of the passage.

Dr. Robert Dick Wilson considered the passage to be a description of an eclipse. He presents some very good reasons. Yet personally I am not sure exactly how to take it. These three verses are in the middle of an account in which the great emphasis is on the Lord's fighting for Israel by causing the hailstones to wreak havoc among the enemy.