

Evidence for Faith Class

Nine-week course outline

- Faith and Reason
- Truth and Knowledge
- God's existence and the problem of evil
- The Reliability of the New Testament
- Jesus of Nazareth
- The Bible as God's Word
- Bible Interpretation

How to Interpret the Bible



Dr. Jeffrey Breshears,
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Many years ago I read Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart's book, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Afterward I told my wife in all seriousness that I would never want to be part of any Bible study group that didn't first take a few weeks to read and discuss this book. I was convinced that if people were not committed enough to take the necessary time to process and understand the basic principles of biblical hermeneutics (i.e., the basic principles of biblical interpretation) then any attempt at a serious and substantive Bible study would probably be an exercise in futility. Furthermore, I was convinced that if people would take the time to read and process this book, it would probably eliminate most of the theological and hermeneutical problems that cause friction among Christians.
An Introduction to Bibliology (page 1)

How to Interpret the Bible

The main things to know about God, salvation, and how to live are so accessible that a child can understand them.

The Bible is also so rich that the greatest scholar can spend his life plumbing the depths.

B. Mauser, *Reading to Grow*

How to Interpret the Bible

Skill in the word requires hard work. It is in the hard work of digging into the word that spiritual growth occurs.

Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2Tim 2:15)

For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. (Heb 5:13-6:2)

History of Bible Interpretation

- 1) Jewish Interpretation
 - a) Levites interpreted in late 6th century BC (Neh 8:7-8)
 - b) Jews honed hermeneutics in the late inter-testamental period
 - i) Hellenistic Judaism in Alexandria, Egypt mixed Platonism and thus allegorically interpreted Scripture (Philo 20 B.C.- A.D. 54)
 - ii) Qumran community sought to contemporize scriptures to fit events of their times
 - iii) Rabbinic Judaism focused on obedience to the Torah and the rabbinic traditions. Used literal interpretation—sometimes wooden literal—and the practice of *midrash* which sought deeper meanings from the text. Used cross references and analogous words and phrases, but also fragmented scripture, applying portions independent of context

Source: *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* by William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, Jr.

History of Bible Interpretation

- 1) The Apostolic Period (ca. A.D. 30-100)
 - a) Apostles fundamentally used a literal hermeneutic with an emphasis on Jesus fulfilling the Old Testament Messianic prophecies
 - b) Apostles used typological method of interpretation—seeing the events, objects, and ideas in the Old Testament as being patterns, symbols, and shadows fulfilled in substance in the New Testament (e.g., Matthew and Hebrews)
 - c) Apostles used principle/application method, applying an Old Testament passage's underlying principle to a situation different from but comparable to the original context (e.g., Hosea 2:23; 1Cor 9:9 with 1Tim 5:17-18)

Source: *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* by William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, Jr.

History of Bible Interpretation

- 1) The Patristic Period (ca. A.D. 100-590)
 - a) The Apostolic Fathers (ca. A.D. 100-150)
 - i) They occasionally used typology
 - ii) They used allegorical approach most often for Old Testament
 - iii) They occasionally used *midrashic* interpretive method similar to rabbis and the Qumran secretaries
 - iv) The traditional method emerged (correct interpretation is that which the churches had already taught)

Source: *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* by William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, Jr.

History of Bible Interpretation

- a) The Alexandrian School (ca. A.D. 150-400)
 - i) Tended to interpret all Old Testament scripture in light of one key theological idea (the person of Christ)
 - ii) Used allegorical method like Alexandrian Jewish scholar Philo
 - iii) Clement of Alexandria taught two-fold interpretation (literal and spiritual)
 - iv) Origen used three-fold interpretation (adding "moral" category)

Source: *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* by William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, Jr.

History of Bible Interpretation

- a) Church Councils (ca. A.D. 400-590)
 - i) Politics begin to exercise authority over the Church's interpretation
 - ii) Emperor pressured Church to settle its difference
 - iii) Augustine formed a comprehensive hermeneutics
 - (1) Focus on literal meaning
 - (2) When literal doesn't make sense interpret figuratively or allegorically
 - (a) Consult clearer passages
 - (b) Consult Church tradition
 - (c) Consult context

Source: *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* by William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, Jr.

History of Bible Interpretation

- 1) The Middle Ages (ca. A.D. 590-1500)
 - a) Depended heavily on traditional method
 - b) Allegorical method dominated (many believed a text had four meanings)
 - i) Literal (Jerusalem = ancient Jewish City)
 - ii) Allegorical (Jerusalem = the Christian Church)
 - iii) Moral (Jerusalem = the faithful soul)
 - iv) Analogical (Jerusalem = the heavenly city)
 - c) Used historical interpretation (consulting Jewish authorities)
 - d) Scholasticism (sorted out relationship between faith and reason) influenced a literal approach
 - e) Thomas Aquinas propounded literal approach as the basis on which the other senses (allegorical, analogical, etc.) rested and contained everything necessary to faith

Source: *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* by William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, Jr.

History of Bible Interpretation

- 1) The Reformation (ca. A.D. 1500-1650)
 - a) New emphasis on original languages
 - i) In A.D. 1516 Erasmus published the first modern edition of the Greek New Testament
 - ii) Exposed errors in the Latin Vulgate
 - b) A growing dissatisfaction of the allegorical method (At end of 15th century, Geiler Kaiserberg said allegorical method had made Scripture a "nose of wax"). Many rued the arbitrary, speculative nature of allegory.
 - c) Martin Luther broke with church tradition and allegory and adopted a literal and typological approach
 - d) John Calvin rejected allegory in favor of historical interpretation
 - e) Anabaptists and Mennonites rejected church tradition and allegory and emphasized the priority of the New Testament and the perspicuity of Scripture. As a community, Christians could together understand and apply Scripture toward correct theology and personal piety
 - f) Roman Catholic counter-reformation emphasized Scripture *and* tradition as authoritative. Correct interpretation was established by the popes and church councils and the Vulgate was affirmed as the authentic Bible.

History of Bible Interpretation

- 1) The Modern Period (ca. A.D. 1800-Present)
 - a) The Nineteenth Century
 - i) Unprecedented expansion in missions and repudiation of Christianity among intellectuals
 - ii) Advances in science and an evolution paradigm birthed the *historical-critical method*, led by German rationalists (F.C. Baur, Julius Wellhausen, Adolf von Harnack)
 - (1) Emphasized human reason, free of theological limitations
 - (2) Presupposed naturalistic worldview (no miracles), Bible authors were primitive compared to modern interpreters, and Bible truths were time-bound versus timeless
 - iii) Liberals critiqued effectively by J.B. Lightfoot, B.B. Warfield, W.H. Green, W.J. Beecher
 - iv) Restoration Movement of B.W. Stone and Alexander Campbell developed hermeneutical approach similar to future evangelicals

History of Bible Interpretation

- a) The Twentieth Century
- i) *History of Religions* approach (tracing history of ancient Near-Eastern religions, showed how ancient neighboring religions profoundly influenced the practice of the Israelites)
 - ii) *Form Criticism* focused on literary types and the hermeneutical methods appropriate for the types
 - iii) Karl Barth (1886-1968) critiqued liberalism and emphasized Scripture as the Word of God and the necessity of a personal encounter with God, but rejected biblical inerrancy
 - iv) Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), the father of *Neo-Orthodoxy*, used *form criticism* to question the historical reliability of the Gospels. Bultmann distinguished the "Jesus of history" (who actually lived) from the Jesus of the Christian faith. Sought to demythologize the Bible, rejecting "pre-scientific miracle claims." The Bible becomes the word of God in a subjective personal encounter with it. Believed truth was paradoxical in nature, accepting apparently conflicting statements in Scripture.
 - v) *Biblical Theology Movement* revived the theological dimension of the Bible as opposed to the historical critical matters that formerly dominated commentaries
 - vi) *The New Hermeneutic* (from Bultmann's theological children) deemphasized the text's historical meaning and focused on insights into human existence

History of Bible Interpretation

- 1) Recent Literary Criticism and Social-Scientific Approaches (as opposed to the traditional historical-grammatical analysis)
- a) Literary Criticism
 - i) Narrative Criticism
 - (1) Focuses on a plot, themes, characterizations and other features of the "surface structure" of biblical books as literature
 - (2) Often assume the texts must be viewed as fiction
 - (3) Often depreciate the religious value of a text in favor of its aesthetics
 - ii) Poststructuralism
 - (1) Ideologically linked to post-modernism, considers the meaning residing in individual readers
 - (2) Reader-response Criticism—Focuses on the diverse ways readers respond to a text versus the author's intention
 - (3) Deconstructionism—All texts, even all communication, ultimately "deconstructs" or undermines itself. Seeks subtle inconsistencies or ambiguities in a text that seem hard to resolve to claim the text has no fixed meaning

History of Bible Interpretation

- a) Social-Scientific Approaches
- i) Two categories: Research that illuminates the social history of the biblical world and the application of modern theories of human behavior to scriptural texts
 - ii) Liberation hermeneutics—experience takes precedence over theory. Focuses on the financially poor, seeks imposing social justice through economic and political reform versus voluntary giving. Often deemphasizes spiritual salvation
 - iii) Feminist hermeneutics
 - (1) Evangelical feminism believes scripture teaches full equality of the sexes and does not delineate any unique timeless roles for husband versus wife or male versus female
 - (2) Non-evangelical feminism agrees with more traditional Christians that parts of the Bible promote patriarchy and bar women from certain roles within the family and church
 - iv) Homosexual hermeneutics
 - (1) Evangelical homosexual hermeneutics teaches that scripture does not forbid homosexuality per se.
 - (2) Anti-Christian homosexual hermeneutics agree with more traditional Christians that the Bible condemns homosexuality

How to Interpret the Bible

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics (1982) is a continuation and elaboration of the meaning of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978), particularly of Articles XIII, XIV, and XVIII. It is a fuller statement on the relation of inerrancy to hermeneutics, especially of the meaning of the "grammatico-historical exegesis" mentioned in Article XIII of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy which reads:

We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture. We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

How to Interpret the Bible

The basic approach of all interpretation takes into consideration both grammar and history (known as the grammatical-historical context of a passage) to aid in understanding.*

The literal sense of each passage should be sought by the *grammatical-historical method*, that is, by asking what is the linguistically natural way to understand the text in its historical setting. (Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics)

*B. Mauser, *Reading to Grow*

How to Interpret the Bible

You should first approach the Bible (or any text) with the grammatical-historical approach, i.e., using the normal rules of grammar and historical analysis, which is the literal/natural reading, the way we normally think and speak and write to each other. (Start off assuming the writer was trying to communicate something—and not writing in secret code as a joke or riddle)

There is some level of meaning/understanding you will receive from approaching the text this way. Even with the book of Revelation, one can immediately observe by using this method that this book is written in a different style because of its images that don't correlate literalistically with the real world—and John's own interpretation of some of the imagery.

How to Interpret the Bible

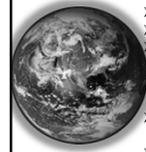
From that meaning, you can understand the literary genre of the text you're reading (e.g., Timothy is clearly a letter written to Timothy by Paul, not the recounting of the history of the early church)

By knowing the literary genre, you can enhance your understanding by applying additional rules that apply only to that genre, thus **ENHANCING** your understanding.

But you can't start with genre. To identify the genre, you need a more fundamental hermeneutical method: the grammatical-historical approach.

How to Interpret the Bible

Some preunderstandings necessary to understand the Bible



- The reality of the physical world outside of our minds
- That our senses are generally reliable (even to see/hear the words of the Bible)
- The difference between things (e.g., earth, man, tree, stars)
- The basic laws of logic
- A correct concept of God (e.g., Does God literally have wings and feathers [Ps 91:4]?)
- That the Bible has an objective meaning the author(s) intended
- That the Bible was written/translated in a language we can understand
- The correct use of history and language
- The correct starting method of interpreting the Bible (this cannot come from the Bible)

How to Interpret the Bible

1. First Principles: The self-evident reality of the external world and the undeniable first principles of logic, truth, and language provide a point of contact between the writer and the reader which allows objectivity in interpretation and a correct understanding of the biblical text.

Thomas Howe, *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation*

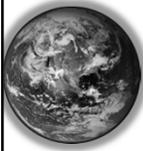
How to Interpret the Bible

2. Hermeneutical spiral: Changeable aspects of the interpreter's pre-understanding can be adjusted by interacting with the truths of the text and adjudication between conflicting interpretations can proceed by reference to unchangeable first principles.

Thomas Howe, *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation*

How to Interpret the Bible

Some unchangeable preunderstandings that allow objectivity in interpreting the Bible



- The reality of the physical world outside of our minds
- That our senses are generally reliable (even to see/hear the words of the Bible)
- The difference between things (e.g., earth, man, tree, stars)
- The basic laws of logic
- The correct starting method of interpreting the Bible (this cannot come from the Bible)

Writer	The rules and/or starting methodology	What it meant originally	What it means to us/me today
Roy Zuck	Observation	Interpretation	Application
Robert Stein	Subject matter—the stuff of the Bible like marriage customs, military tactics, etc. (unbelievers as capable of understanding as believers)	Meaning (why the author wrote) (unbelievers as capable as believers to get a correct mental grasp)	Implications (author determined but author is unaware) and Significance (reader determined, reader's response to meaning, Holy Spirit needed)
Louis Berkhof	Hermeneutics (science or theory) (the rules of proper interpretation) Hermeneutics needed to exegete	Exegesis (art or practice) (includes integration/harmonization)	
Gordon Fee		Exegesis	Hermeneutics
Klein Blomberg Hubbard	Hermeneutics (science and art) essential to understanding what it meant and what it means (hermeneutical pre-understanding can change as we interact with the text)		
D.A. Carson	Hermeneutics—the nature of the interpretive process (techniques and pre-understandings) Hermeneutics serve exegesis	Exegesis—actually interpreting the text ("the text means such and such")	
Chicago Statement	The study of the right principles for understanding the biblical text (both theoretically and spiritually/experientially)	Exegesis—extracting what the writer meant to his envisaged readers, and Integration—gaining full meaning by correlating it with other relevant biblical passages	Application—applying the exegeted teaching for the correcting and directing of our personal thought and action (requires spiritual commitment to God)

How to Interpret the Bible

With no consistent terminology, my definitions are the generally more common and consistent with the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics

- Hermeneutics--the rules for interpreting the Bible—to be used throughout the entire process of:
- Exegesis—what the author meant to his readers, and
- Application—what it means to me today

The rules and/or starting methodology	What it meant originally	What it means to us/me today
Hermeneutics-- rules of interpretation used throughout exegesis and application. The Holy Spirit influences through entire process of correct mental grasp (meaning) and significance--but is essential in the latter. Must start with proper hermeneutic of grammatical-historical. Hermeneutical spiral built on unchangeable pre-understandings.	Exegesis— extracting what author meant to his envisaged reader	Application— involves discerning implications and significance for today

How to Interpret the Bible

In order to exegete, you must start with the historical-grammatical (h-g) hermeneutical method. Any other starting method (like allegorical interpretation) is arbitrary and subjective. The h-g method, if applied consistently, will help you identify figures of speech, allegories, etc., (as we correlate that meaning of the text with our knowledge of the real world--e.g., we know trees cannot clap their hands because they have no hands, so we see that phrase as a figure of speech). So the h-g method does not tie you down to a wooden-literal approach. But notice the hermeneutical foundation that was used to discover this figure of speech was the h-g method, which is the way most people naturally tend to read things. And you can't get your hermeneutics from the scripture itself, because you could never have any confidence that you properly understood the hermeneutical principles from the Bible unless your antecedent, extra-biblical hermeneutical principles used to understand the Biblical principles were correct to begin with. (Getting your hermeneutics from the Bible is like sawing the limb off that you're sitting on. The spiral needs a foundation.) This h-g hermeneutical foundation keeps you out of a nonsensical vicious circle--similar to how our epistemological self-evident truths and first principles save us from infinite regress or circular reasoning.

How to Interpret the Bible

Gordon Fee talks about reading between the lines to get the implications from the text. Caution is called for here. Radical departures from the plain reading of biblical text are not justified by extra-biblical sources.

Extra-biblical sources can enhance our understanding, but they should never radically altar our interpretation, such that we are eisegeting (reading things into the text that *aren't* there) versus exegeting (extracting from the text what *is* there). After all, if an extra-biblical "fact" causes you to distort the meaning of inspired text (e.g., liberation theology, feminist hermeneutic, homosexual hermeneutic), you are trusting some other source more than you are the Bible.

The text is God's inspired, inerrant word. No extra-biblical sources have that authority. The Bible must judge all other sources when a conflict arises, not the other way around. Adding to, taking from, or distorting a text is never sound exegesis, no matter what you think you know from other sources.

How to Interpret the Bible

C.S Lewis' *Fern-Seed and Elephants*

All this sort of criticism attempts to reconstruct the genesis of the texts it studies; what vanished documents each author used, when and where he wrote, with what purposes, under what influences... This is done with immense erudition and great ingenuity. And at first sight it is very convincing....What forearm me against all these reconstructions is the fact that I have seen it all from the other end of the stick. I have watched reviewers reconstructing the genesis of my own books in just this way. ...My impression is that in the whole of my experience not one of these guesses has on any one point been right; that the method shows a record of 100 per cent failure.... These men ask me to believe they can read between the lines of the old texts; the evidence is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves. They claim to see fern-seed and can't see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight.

How to Interpret the Bible

We may have hints and helps from extra-biblical sources, but the *surest* way we have of determining the intent of the biblical authors is by reading what they wrote.

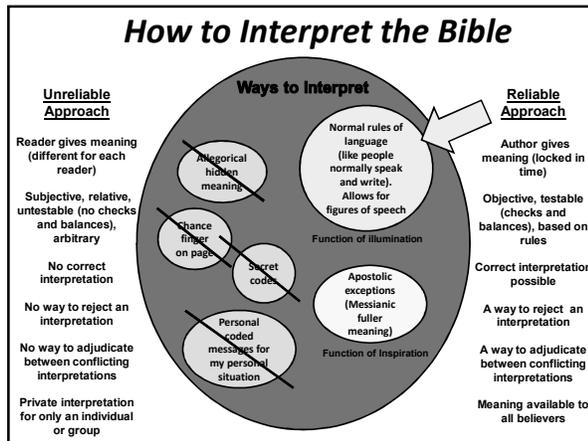
Meaning can reside then, in all three places at the same time: it can be in the mind of the author as the *meant*, it can reside in the text as *meant*, and it can reside in the reader as *meaning*.

How to Interpret the Bible

Insisting on having to read between the lines of the text (for authorial intent) in order to know the author's meaning is a self-defeating exercise.

If you have to know the hidden intention of the author to understand his text, even if the author was here writing it down (or speaking), you would have to question his hidden intent before you could understand his explanation, etc. and you could never understand his words because he would always have to explain his words by more words.

This is an infinite regress in which no meaning can be communicated.



How to Interpret the Bible

Fallacies to avoid

Psychoanalysis fallacy—We have to get into the mind of the author and know *why* he wrote it in order to know *what* he wrote. Speculative and commits infinite regress error.

Word Study fallacies—giving a word the wrong meaning based on its root meaning, ignoring the word's wide lexical range and its context and grammar.

Allegorizing—going beneath the text for the “deeper” real meaning. This method is arbitrary, subjective and self-refuting.

Spiritualizing—discarding the earthly, physical, historical reality for a spiritual analogy (Jesus stilling the storm is “stilling the storms of life”. Arbitrary, subjective, and self refuting.

Moralizing—Drawing moral inferences, making descriptive passages prescriptive. (Jesus told Peter, “Feed my sheep”. Our response, “We have a task.”

B. Mauser, *Reading to Grow with some edits*

How to Interpret the Bible

Fallacies to avoid

Focusing on “the facts”—focusing so much on the historical aspects that the meaning of the text is missed

Imitating Bible characters—taking on an unscriptural imitation of a Bible character, confusing biblical description (of what certain people did) with prescription (how we ought to be)

Confusing the role of the Holy Spirit—assuming the Holy Spirit bypasses ordinary means (of study, etc) for us to understand a text (i.e., using the Holy Spirit as a shortcut for diligent study which the Holy Spirit commanded [2Tim 2:15])

Outline from B. Mauser, *Reading to Grow*

How to Interpret the Bible

Practices to follow

1. Observe (Ask who, what, where, when, and how)
2. Find the meaning
 - a. A culture/time/language/geography gap exists between Bible times and the 21st century. (Grammars, lexicons/dictionaries, concordances, commentaries, Bible handbooks, and other works can help us understand the language and culture of the ancient world)
 - b. Different kinds of literature and figures of speech are being used in the Bible. Different genres are to be interpreted differently. You wouldn't interpret the poetry books like you would the historical books. Bible writers used figures of speech as we do, so a literalistic interpretation would be detrimental to understanding the author's meaning.
 - c. Context is king. Always read and apply verses in their context. Word meanings are largely determined by their context in sentences. Except for the proverbs perhaps, sentences are understood by their paragraphs, which are understood by their books, which are understood by the entire Bible.

Outline from Jonathan Morrow, *Welcome to College*

How to Interpret the Bible

Practices to follow

d. Pay attention to the words, grammar, and syntax used. (Grammars, concordances, commentaries, dictionaries/lexicons, and other works can help)

e. Scripture helps interpret scripture. If the Bible is God's word, it doesn't contradict or err in any way. Seeking to harmonize passages without exegetically distorting the text will lead to a proper interpretation. For example, James (James 2:24) must be speaking of a different type of justification than Paul (Romans 4:4-5). And since their use of different parts of Abraham's life in their respective contexts bears this out, this is a reasonable harmonization.

Outline from Jonathan Morrow, *Welcome to College*

How to Interpret the Bible

Practices to follow

3. Application
 - Is there an example for me to follow?
 - Is there a sin to avoid?
 - Is there a promise to claim?
 - Is there a prayer to repeat?
 - Is there a verse to memorize?
 - Is there a command to obey?
 - Is there an error to mark?

Outline from Jonathan Morrow, *Welcome to College*

How to Interpret the Bible

Practices to follow

As for Application

1. Always do exegesis before application. You can't know how to apply a passage until you know what the author meant. You learn what the author meant by studying the text itself.
2. Always ask who is saying what to whom
3. All scripture is for us but not all scripture is to us

See my paper, *The Continuation and End of the Mosaic Law*
<http://studies.travisechols.com/The%20Continuation%20and%20End%20of%20the%20Mosaic%20Law.pdf>

How to Interpret the Bible

How Not to Interpret the Bible



In Frank Turek's podcast, *There are No Verses in the Bible*, he starts with asking how you would interpret a sentence from the newspaper, "After the strike, the team will celebrate." Is this talking about fishing, baseball, bowling, union, marksmen? What does that mean? You need context. There are very few independently standing verses in the Bible. Also google Greg Koukl, *Never Read a Bible Verse*.

A biblical passage can't mean now what it didn't mean then. You can't pour your own meaning into it. You are wanting to read *God's* word, not *your own* word. Exegesis is getting the meaning out of the text. Eisegesis is reading your meaning into the text.

You can't apply a passage properly to yourself until you know what it means. (Exegesis must come before application)

How to Interpret the Bible

How Not to Interpret the Bible



1. Don't read one verse and ignore the context
2. Don't always point the compass to yourself

If you were lost in the woods, how helpful would your magnetic compass be if instead of it pointing north, it always pointed toward yourself? Don't make a passage about you unless it applies to you.

For example, Jeremiah 29:11 is the text of a letter that Jeremiah wrote to the Jerusalem elders exiled to Babylon.

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."

Why not claim Jeremiah 44:11 to those exiled to Egypt?

"Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will set My face against you for catastrophe and for cutting off all Judah."

How to Interpret the Bible

How Not to Interpret the Bible



3. Don't assume God approves everything recorded in the Bible (everything described in the Bible is not prescribed to us)

4. Don't assume God approves of behavior that Jesus didn't explicitly prohibit
"Jesus never said anything about felony home invasion."

As home invasion is in the category of stealing, homosexual activity is in the category of fornication. Furthermore, Jesus endorsed the entire Bible, promising to reveal more to his apostles and lead them into all truth.

5. Don't spiritualize/moralize historical texts. For example, Jesus calming the storm showed that he had power over nature. It doesn't mean he will calm the trouble in your life. Some liberals even moralize away the resurrection of Christ.

6. Don't literalize figurative texts. Phenomenological language is used, for example "the sun setting". Metaphors are also used. For example, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins." (Acts 22:16)

How to Interpret the Bible

Practices to follow

In Frank Turek's latest book, *Stealing from God*, he suggests using the acronym S.T.O.P. to discover the meaning of any given biblical text. It is as follows:

S-Situation? What's the historical situation? What do you need to know about the people and events in the story? What's the larger context?

T-Type? What's the type of literature? Is it historical narrative? Poetry? Prophecy? Law? Wisdom? Epistle? What literary devices are being used: Hyperbole? Parable? Metaphor? Apocalyptic Imagery?

O-Object? Who is the object of the text? Everyone? Specific people? Ancient Israel? Is it the Old or New Covenant?

P-Prescription? Is this passage prescriptive for us today or merely descriptive of an historical event?

How to Interpret the Bible

Example of a faulty hermeneutic in the Infant Baptist interpretation

"Noting the similarities between physical circumcision and baptism and yet ignoring the dissimilarities can create a false parallelism of the two rituals, revealing a faulty hermeneutic. This supposed one-to-one correspondence is invalidated by observing the great differences between Old Covenant circumcision and New Covenant baptism. Under the Abrahamic Covenant, *all male descendants of Abraham, as well as servants, both adults and children, whether believing or not, whether from believing parents or not, were to receive the bloody ritual of foreskin removal* (Gen 17:1-14, 20, 25-26). *Applying water to male and female infants of only believing parents is not consistent with either the Old or New Covenants.*"

<http://studies.travisechols.com/Baptism.pdf>

How to Interpret the Bible

Hermeneutical difference in two major views of eschatology:
Covenant Amillennialism versus Premillennial Dispensationalism

Covenant Amillennialism

The New Testament often reinterprets the Old Testament in a non-literal manner. A non-literal interpretation of many OT prophecies is necessary due to their reference by New Testament apostles (e.g., The temple is now Christ [Jn 2:19] and the Church [1Cor 3:17; 1Tim 3:15]; Israel is now Christ [Gal 3:16] and the Church⁴).

A future literal fulfillment would subvert the progressive advancement of redemption, reverting back to the inferior shadows of the Old Covenant (e.g. priests and animal sacrifices) which have already been fulfilled in Christ and the church (Heb 7:12; 8:13; 10:1-10, 18).

Understanding the typological nature of the Old Covenant, the apostles gave many OT concepts a different meaning than their Old Covenant meaning.⁶ The OT prophets did not clearly see their true spiritual meaning as did the apostles (Luke 24:45; 1Peter 1:9-12; 2Cor 3:14-16).

<http://studies.travisechols.com/Eschatology--two%20major%20schools%20of%20interpretation.pdf>

How to Interpret the Bible

Hermeneutical difference in two major views of eschatology:
Covenant Amillennialism versus Premillennial Dispensationalism

Premillennial Dispensationalism

Old Testament prophecies are to be interpreted literally. A literal interpretation takes verses to mean what they say on their face as they would have been normally understood by the original writers and readers--otherwise verses have no meaning in the specifics (e.g., Eze 40-48) or can be subjectively interpreted to mean most anything.

Furthermore, the truthfulness of God to Israel is called into question if their scriptures mean something completely different. A consistent literal interpretation of the OT points forward to a glorious, earthly messianic rule with temple worship and unsaved heathen under the rule of Messiah. The apostles' application of OT prophecies that sometimes expands and adds to their literal natural meaning, does not negate their literal fulfillment. Luke 1:31-33, Matt 19:28, Acts 1:6-8, Romans 11, and Rev 20 are New Testament (NT) verses that together corroborate the expectation of a future earthly kingdom. More New Testament corroboration is not needed because of the prophecies' clear and repeated mention in the OT scriptures which are equally authoritative.

<http://studies.travisechols.com/Eschatology--two%20major%20schools%20of%20interpretation.pdf>

How to Interpret the Bible

Bringing the Old Testament into the New Testament

1Cor 9:13 Do you not know that those (Levites) who minister the holy things (various temple services) eat of the things of the temple (tithes and offerings from the land), and those who serve at the altar (the Levitical priests) partake of the offerings of the altar (burnt offerings above the tithe which also including the best tenth from the Levites' tithe)? 14 Even so (in a similar manner or for a similar purpose) the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel (dedicate their lives to it) should live from the gospel (be compensated for their work in ministering the gospel). "Even so" cannot mean "exactly in the same manner" because of the great differences of the Old and New Covenant administrations, as I'll describe later in my comments.

One of the most difficult tasks as a Bible student is determining how to interpret the apostles' quotes and allusions to OT scriptures. How much of the OT custom is the apostle transferring to the New Covenant? For the hermeneutical reasons I gave regarding the first paragraph, I tend to lean toward restraint. In other words, I don't want to read between the lines something that is not clearly said by the apostle.

<http://studies.travisechols.com/Comments%20on%20The%20Tithe%20in%20the%20New%20Testament.pdf>

How to Interpret the Bible

Bringing the Old Testament into the New Testament

Because the New Covenant is consistent with but not a continuation of the Old, I'm more comfortable generally stopping at what is said and going no further. This approach is justified, I think, by the many cases where Jesus and the apostles used the Old Testament to make a point that the OT writer most likely never had in mind (God did of course) or that could never carry the full meaning of the context in which it is found in the Old Testament.

For an example, Roy Zuck says, "When Jesus read from Isaiah 61:2, as recorded in Luke 4:18-19, He stopped in the middle of verse 2 of Isaiah 61, not reading the words, 'and the day of vengeance of our God.' This was because His carrying out of the day of vengeance is yet future and was not relevant to His first advent."

Therefore, I do not believe 1Cor 9:13 is commanding tithing of New Covenant believers, because Paul never mentions it. He is commending preachers of the gospel to be compensated, as were the Levites under the Old Covenant.

<http://studies.travisechols.com/Comments%20on%20The%20Tithe%20in%20the%20New%20Testament.pdf>

How to Interpret the Bible

Interpreting verses out of their larger context

Some think tongues are for private prayer. The Bible never says that tongues are a devotional prayer language. Praying in tongues in private would not be a sign to unbelievers. This confusion is based partly on a misunderstanding of 1Cor 14:2-4. When a person speaks in a language unknown in the church, he speaks only to God because men cannot understand him. Thus he only edifies himself, not the church. 1Cor 14:2-4 is a rebuke for speaking in unknown tongues--not an encouragement to do so (1Cor 14:1-20). The subject under consideration in 1Cor 12 through 14 is the use of spiritual gifts in the church--not private prayer. In every case in Acts where tongues are spoken, they are spoken in public. Never is it private prayer.

Furthermore, if tongues are useful in praying to God, why would God only give this gift to some members of the church? Doesn't God desire for all believers to pray with the Spirit's power? Wouldn't God desire for all his children to speak to him in His language, the heavenly language? If God desires for believers to pray in tongues, why is the rest of scripture completely silent about this when prayer is discussed? In Romans 8, the Bible tells us how the Spirit helps us in prayer--and it is not through uttered languages--it is with groanings which cannot be uttered. Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (Rom 8:26). If tongues are to be a sign to unbelievers, then speaking in tongues among only believers is also pointless.

<http://studies.travisechols.com/Tongues.pdf>

How to Interpret the Bible

The Need for Consistency and Thoroughness

Ignoring similarities or differences can create an out-of-balance continuity or discontinuity in your theology.

A need or desire to relativize New Testament texts to ancient customs in spite of the enduring underlying reasons given by a prophet or apostle reveals a bias that should be reevaluated.

The important thing is to take in all the relevant data and be careful to apply a consistent hermeneutic. Arbitrarily "cherry picking" some verses to accept or apply while not others--for no reason other than their doctrinal implications (i.e., they don't fit your presuppositions or desired conclusions)--reveals a lack of objectivity and a vulnerability for error in interpretation.

A consistent hermeneutical approach will keep your biases in check. Hermeneutical inconsistency always reveals an error in your approach to the text, and is often exposing a doctrinal error.

The Bible is God's word and we should handle it carefully and honestly, whether we like what it says or not.

How to Interpret the Bible

Evaluating Meta-narratives

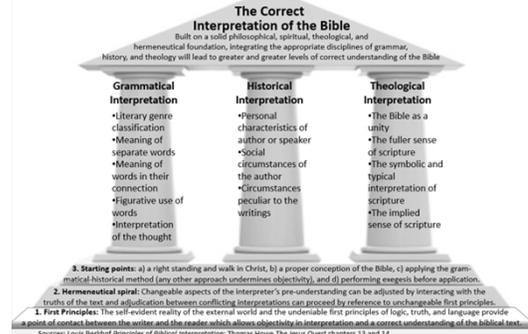
Be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater when weaknesses are discovered in a particular system. It may be that only a certain component of the system is wrong and not the entire construct. Evaluating a system component by component, premise by premise, will prevent you from prematurely positionalizing yourself, either for or against it.

Read widely within the Bible believing community from the strongest proponents of the various positions.

The strength of any position/system is not so much in whether a convincing string of texts and arguments can be assembled in favor of it; it is how well it holds up when all the pertinent evidence is brought to bear under fire from opposing views.

How to Interpret the Bible

The Three Pillars of Bible Interpretation



How to Interpret the Bible

Reasons we may disagree on interpretation (from scripture)

- A. Some things God has not revealed
- B. There is nothing wrong with the Bible
- C. The problem is with us

1. No indwelling Holy Spirit.
2. Sinfulness.
3. Not enough diligent study.
4. Too much independence.
5. Too much dependence on others.
6. Not seeking the truth.
7. Fear of controversy.
8. Pride.

<http://studies.travisechols.com/Why%20Christians%20disagree%20on%20spiritual%20matters.pdf>

How to Interpret the Bible

Reasons we may disagree on interpretation (from scripture)

- D. We all need to continually grow in our understanding

Wayne Grudem gives the following qualifications for understanding scripture:

1. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not all at once.
2. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without effort.
3. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without ordinary means.
4. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without the reader's willingness to obey it.
5. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without the help of the Holy Spirit.
6. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without human understanding.
7. Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but never completely.

How to Interpret the Bible

Summary

The text of the Bible communicates objective truth that can be understood. Some parts are difficult to understand, but not impossible. Continued growth in understanding comes through praise, prayer, humility, study, and obedience. Also, since God used human writers to pen his word in human language to communicate to human beings, valid principles of human language interpretation and application should always be observed.

How to Interpret the Bible

Some Recommended Resources

[Accordance Bible Software](#)

[Olive Tree Bible Study App](#)

[Bill Mounce New Testament Greek](#)

[S Lewis Johnson Commentary](#)

[S Lewis Johnson mp3 podcasts](#)

Caveat: I don't agree with S. Lewis Johnson's Calvinist statements

[Reading to Grow: A Field Guide to the Bible](#)
Book by Bernard James Mauser

[Exegetical Fallacies](#)

Book by D. A. Carson

[Basic Bible Interpretation](#)

Book by Roy Zuck

[Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation](#)

Book by Thomas Howe

[Introduction to Biblical Interpretation](#)

Book by William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard

Links at www.travisechols.com